

A Comparative  
History of Literatures  
in European  
Languages

# modernism

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## MODERNISM

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HISTOIRE COMPARÉE DES LITTÉRATURES DE LANGUES EUROPÉENNES  
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**Volume XXI**

**Modernism**

Edited by Astradur Eysteinnsson and Vivian Liska

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Anke Brouwers, Vanessa Joosen, Dirk Van Hulle,  
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## Preface

This book was conceived and developed as one of the volumes in the ICLA series “Comparative History of Literature in the European Languages,” which covers post-Renaissance literature written in the European languages from a broad international perspective and a multiplicity of approaches. The comparative dimension and the wide scope of this series provided the appropriate context for a volume on the ways modernism is viewed at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Recent years have seen numerous critical forays develop from different paradigms and result in studies that attempt at once to recast and revitalize our understanding of modernism in theoretical, cultural and historical terms. As a consequence, the very limits of modernism have been shifting and expanding, including an ever greater variety of registers, stylistic forms, genres, participating agents and locations. Our aim, from the outset, has been to conceptualize a book that does justice to these developments.

The present volumes trace manifestations of literary innovation linked to major cultural and social changes on a global scale. Many of these have barely, if ever, been explored in conjunction with more familiar sites of modernist literature. Simultaneously, many established and canonized modernist authors are presented here in unusual contexts and from new perspectives. The contents and the structure of the book, in and of themselves, gauge the current status of modernist studies. The titles of the eleven sections of the book correspond to the main areas of research and capture the different perspectives from which modernism is currently being studied and revised. The first two sections are primarily concerned with terminological, methodological and theoretical issues, while the third focuses on the boundaries of modernism in terms of recent discussions in literary history. The fourth and fifth sections address ways in which modernist literature has opened up new experiences of reality and subjectivity. Sections six and seven explore new perspectives on the relationship between literature and other artistic and scientific manifestations of modernity. The subsequent two sections probe new approaches to interactions between modernist literature and its social, political and cultural contexts. Section ten investigates different modes of literary and cultural exchange that left their mark on modernist literature. Finally, section eleven presents case studies on some of the major locations where modernist literature has thrived. While this last section, even less than the previous ones, does not claim to be exhaustive, it reveals the great diversity and wealth of literary modernism that came into being at different times far beyond the Anglo-American sphere to which it has often been confined in critical discourse.

This book contains articles by sixty-five contributors writing from many countries, with experiences in many different languages. A book of such magnitude has its own history and genealogy. The project for a volume on modernism originated in the late 1980s, when Jean Weisgerber, former president of the ICLA coordinating committee and author of the volume *Les Avant-gardes littéraires au XXe siècle* in the same series as the present book, invited Jean-Paul Bier of the University of Antwerp to undertake this endeavor. Upon Professor Bier's retirement, he handed his draft of a project of nearly encyclopedic dimensions over to the present editors. In the intervening years, modernist studies had undergone a sea-change: the growing influence of an ever greater diversity of literary theories, the demise of totalizing approaches to literary history and its attempts to

conclusively fix and define its periods, as well as the rise and fall (or fragmentation) of postmodernism as concept and theory—all of these developments called for a complete reconceptualization of the volume.

The present book is the result of years of enjoyable and fruitful collaboration, and it is not without significance for these volumes that the collaboration took place between two very different sites, Belgium and Iceland, connecting geographic locations in the center and on the periphery of Europe through a radically international enterprise. The selection of contributors is the product of commissioned articles by international scholars and a call for papers in which we encouraged our contributors to probe the boundaries of the field and explore new frontiers. It could not have been completed without the help of many colleagues and collaborators. The ICLA coordinating committee's support, advice and suggestions for contributors accompanied us throughout the extended work in progress. The University of Antwerp and the University of Iceland materially facilitated our travel and the making of this book. We wish to thank the many silent helping hands behind this enterprise: Manfred Engel and John Neubauer have given us invaluable counsel when it was most needed. Dirk Van Hulle and Katrien Vloeberghs contributed to the editing process and provided us with helpful comments and corrections. Vanessa Joosen spent innumerable hours copy-editing, formatting and proofreading these pages. Thomas Crombez, Liesbeth Haagdorens, Arvi Sepp, and particularly Anke Brouwers contributed significantly to the completion of the bibliographies and the last versions of the manuscript. Katrien Vloeberghs accompanied the project through all its stages and helped lend the manuscript its final shape. Many thanks to Björn Thor Vilhjálmsón for his painstaking proofreading job. And of course, we want to thank our contributors for their patience and their readiness to respond to our editorial queries, and for their commitment to this extensive symposium exploring the state of modernism at the outset of the twenty-first century.



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## Introduction

### Approaching Modernism

ASTRADUR EYSTEINSSON AND VIVIAN LISKA

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Modernism constitutes one of the most prominent fields of literary studies today. It is, however, a field that stands in a very ambiguous relationship to the present literary and cultural situation. Perhaps this is indeed one reason for the current vitality of modernist studies that can be observed on both sides of the Atlantic. Scholars and critics are seeking to draw a balance sheet with modernism, but there is still a great deal of basic disagreement about how to “settle” it as a historical category.

One may even ask: has modernism come to an end? There are certainly those who do not hesitate to answer this question affirmatively, pointing out that the central modernist literary works are by now “modern classics,” that term being indicative of the way in which modernism now belongs to the past, to tradition. There are even critics—perhaps primarily those speaking from within a British horizon—who would say that modernism came to an end around 1930 (see the historical parameters of the seminal 1976 anthology *Modernism: 1890–1930*, edited by Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane). For others this is not the case at all. To state that it is “dominant but dead,” to quote a famous remark made by Hal Foster ([1983], ix), may be seriously misleading. There are several indications in the present volumes that modernism is alive and kicking. The intense activity within modernist studies over the past decade and a half, and the diverse ways in which this activity has absorbed and shaped developments in literary theory—feminism, poststructuralism, trauma studies, postcolonial and cultural studies—are proof of its vitality and its continuing potential for disturbance. Far from having become a dominant master discourse, modernism continues to reveal its oppositional and subversive powers through the various shapes of its newer figurations. The broadening of modernism as concept, canon and characterization and the recent recontextualizations in its philosophical, historical and cultural environments, have multiplied the places and spaces, the forms and contents with which it contests established orders and continues to challenge mainstream manifestations of aesthetic, social and political culture. If the idea of a “dominance” of modernism has any meaning at all, it is in the sense that it is a pressing issue, and not only because individual modernist works are felt to be important, but also because the concept of modernism is considered a vital link to salient aesthetic, ideological, and historical issues which have still not been closed.

Of course, this is something that at one level holds true for all key concepts and period demarcations that scholars manoeuvre as they reevaluate for contemporary purposes the many shapes and contents of history and tradition. The problem may be that modernism has not become a tradition in a traditional sense. In an essay surveying modernist studies in 1992, Marjorie Perloff concludes by

stating that modernism “after all, now has the charm of history on its side even as it remains, at the end of the twentieth century, our Primal Scene” (Perloff [1992], 175). If modernism remains our primal scene, then it is an arena of struggle, of an ongoing generational tension, and we are bound to confront some highly significant questions concerning the legacy of modernism: what message has it sent us; who will show up to claim, or bid for, the lot of modernism? And the question “What was modernism?” with its casual and distanced attitude, quickly turns into “What *is* modernism?”—and, in some cases, into: What is the “modernism” in the concept “postmodernism” that so eagerly wanted to announce the death of its predecessor (see Eysteinnsson [2003])?

Present questions about the real or imagined “end of modernism” are being asked at a time when we may be experiencing the end of postmodernism. But while many scholars shy away from the concept of postmodernism and it appears to be on its way out, it may be difficult to silence the term or sweep it under the carpet. Even if scholars reject it, it has gradually been trickling down into anthologies, historical accounts, and various other pedagogical and institutional tools. “Catch me quick,” it seems to say to flocks of pupils eager to grasp and summarize the key concepts of learning. But what a key concept it is. The room or space it opens up, as noted above, may seem as large as that opened by the term “contemporary” and it may even be the same space. To get her bearings, the pupil will quickly need other, more specific terms. One of them, almost inevitably, and ironically, will be the concept of modernism.

But why have critics been so eager to close the category of modernism? In part because we tend to make sense of historical phenomena by seeing them as things that have come to an end. Locating an ending, as Frank Kermode (1966) points out in his classic study of the phenomenon, is a fundamental sense-making operation. One way to round off the end of modernism is to see it as an elevation followed by a drop-off, often with the assumption that we are still sitting in the slump. Indeed, postmodernism is sometimes described as an excremental cultural site, but even when this is done along celebratory lines (see Kroker and Cook [1986]), it tends to make modernism look impossibly clean and sober, a sheer and gleaming cliff rising above the cultural wasteland of the second half of the twentieth century. This is how Franco Moretti made sense of modernism some twenty years ago, claiming that the modernist masterpieces “constituted the last *literary season* of Western culture. Within a few years European literature gave its utmost and seemed on the verge of opening new and boundless horizons: instead it died” (Moretti [1983], 209; italics in the original).

This view has been expressed in various ways by many critics and it has given rise to monumetalist notions of modernism, often implied in the rather dubious term “high modernism”. It is usually hard to tell whether “high modernism” is supposed to refer to a period of modernist breakthroughs (the twenties in the “big” European countries; but this ignores the fact that modernist breakthroughs came considerably later in some national literatures)—or if it is to be taken as a label for certain prominent canonical modernist writers and works. Often it seems to have a vague double reference in this regard (something like: “Joyce, Eliot, Pound, and the modernism of the 1920s”). This “highbrow” understanding of modernism inevitably touched off a critical reaction, frequently in the name of a postmodernism which is portrayed as a radical, subversive and “deconstructive” cultural practice. Occasionally, the discussion has taken the form of a comparative study of writers, but then it generally proves difficult to draw a borderline between modernist and postmodernist writing. Already in the late 1960s, Kermode talked about “modernisms,” using the plural, which was to become a popular practice thirty years later. But he concluded by stating that “there has been

only one Modernist Revolution, and that it happened a long time ago. So far as we can see there has been little radical change in modernist thinking since then. More muddle, certainly, and almost certainly more jokes, but no revolution, and much less talent" (Kermode [1968], 24; see also Eysteinsson [1990], 103ff).

This remains a highly problematic statement. First, even though we accept the notion of a modernist "revolution," or paradigm shift, did it really "happen" with a bang? Kermode's view seems shaped by a post-World War II academic embracing of literary modernism, and thus fostered by a history of reception in which it can be difficult to disentangle aesthetic and critical strands of modernist "thinking," but which can be drawn upon to depreciate contemporary or even supposedly epigonal writing. But it may not be very interesting or useful to compare the "talent" evident in the writing of, say, Franz Kafka, Ezra Pound, and Virginia Woolf on the one hand, with that of Bohumil Hrabal, Günter Grass, Thomas Pynchon, Adrienne Rich, Harold Pinter, or Toni Morrison on the other—to select a few canonical writers each of whom has contributed to the modernist "revolution" in his or her own way. This does not mean that the second group of (contemporary) writers should necessarily be put under the umbrella of *modernism* rather than that of *postmodernism*. Such decisions depend on the contexts and premises with which we are working. Those who wish to highlight the radical aesthetics of recent art as opposed to the "modern classics" may pursue a division between their key characteristics along the line of Ihab Hassan's list of 33 pairs of antithetical terms in "Postface 1982: Toward a Concept of Postmodernism" (Hassan [1982], 267), that inaugurated a whole range of more or less nuanced attempts at drawing a line between modernism and postmodernism. Others feel that such lists miss the point and that they cast modernism unjustly as conservative, whereas the experimental fervor of modernism in the early twentieth century did in fact have such a radically open horizon that we have had a hard time "closing" it in order to imagine, not to mention construct, a new one. In a seminal essay on this issue entitled "The Postmodernity of Modernism," Sanford Schwartz points out that "the prevailing division between modern and postmodern is simply 'modernism cut in half,' and what we call the postmodern is nothing other than the forgotten side of modernism" (Schwartz [1998], 16). But Schwartz also rightfully rejects the dissolution of the boundaries between the two terms. Instead, he argues that the complex relationship between the two can be made productive.

Observed from certain vantage points, the two terms may seem quite incompatible. The issue tends to be obfuscated, among other things, by the charged relations between aesthetic modernism and the various technical, social and theoretical vehicles of Western modernity. While critics who focus on literature often see modernism as a cultural formation that moves counter to the analytical-referential models of dominant Western rationality, other scholars, especially those within the social sciences, but also many historians and philosophers, in fact use the concept of "modernism" to label precisely these master narratives and social models. Critical attempts to dismantle such narratives and models—which in literary studies and some other branches of the humanities used to be called *poststructuralist*—are termed "postmodernist" in these camps and seen as disruptive in much the same way as aesthetic modernism tackling social modernity. To make matters even more complicated, literary studies, which initially used "postmodernism" as an aesthetic category, have increasingly opened the term to the aforementioned meaning, that is, it is now being used also as a term for critical and philosophical currents (and as such it has in a sense swallowed up the concept of poststructuralism).

There has, arguably, been a new “modernist revolution,” hesitant as one may be to word it that way, this time in scholarly investigation and critical inquiry—and to some degree this unrest has opened up the borders between aesthetic creation and critical pursuits. This is not the place to delve further into this highly complex (and no doubt self-disruptive) story. Suffice it to say that starting with poststructuralism, several works by thinkers from a broad spectrum of scholarship maintain that whether or not there has been a postmodern turn in literature, there has at least been a radical change in cultural inquiry, one that has allowed for a broader vision of culture than seemed to be generally possible before. In 1982, in a widely-read book, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*, Marshall Berman stated: “Virtually no one today seems to want to make the large human connections that the idea of modernity entails” (Berman [1983], 33). It may be debated whether Berman was fully entitled in saying this at the time, but such a statement would not be justified if it were made now, more than twenty years later. Large human connections have been the business of numerous cultural critics in the 1980s and 1990s, and into the new century, even though they may have approached them sceptically, and even when they have sought to deconstruct them in one way or another.

Our contemporary points of view inevitably shape our approach to a modernism that now has the “charm of history” on its side as Perloff puts it. There is much in the whole enterprise of recent critical activity indicating that modernism is indeed an extremely important gateway between history and the present. The space opened up by this inquiry encourages us to review the aesthetics and cultural poetics of literary modernism in similarly broad terms, observing, precisely, the large human connections and disruptions that characterize the modernist contribution and objection to modernity. The present volumes are a contribution to such a review, which has been going on, with considerable fervor, in recent years. There has, for instance, been a good deal of canonical revision, in which critics call attention to neglected modernist writers. The contribution of women, both as writers and as instigators, editors, and patrons of the modernist “revolution,” was not much acknowledged until recently (see for instance Benstock [1986]; Scott [1990], a book dedicated to “the forgotten and silenced makers of modernism”; DeKoven [1991]; Dickie and Travisano [1996]; and Liska [2000]). And there is an increasing emphasis on the multiplicity of modernisms (in an emphatic plural—the first convention of the new Modernist Studies Association, held at Penn State, Pennsylvania, in October 1999, was, significantly, entitled “The New Modernisms”).

Such an endeavor frequently involves a direct or indirect awareness, whether critical or not, of a “high modernism.” This term, briefly mentioned above, often refers to a group of “towering” modernist works (and their writers), and notions of monumentality generally loom in the background, if they are not directly uttered. Of course, from a certain point of view, some modernist works are monumental in scope: *Ulysses*, *Pilgrimage*, *Die letzten Tage der Menschheit* (The Last Days of Mankind), *The Waste Land*, *À la recherche du temps perdu* (In Search of Lost Time), *The Cantos*, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (The Man Without Qualities). Such works, at least the most securely canonical ones, often appear to be heroic feats in the literary world. At once overwhelming, ascetic, and monadical, they seem to stand like ivory towers in a landscape of more mundane affairs, and this appreciation (whether expressed in positive or negative terms) tends to carry over into modernism as a concept (or perhaps primarily into “high modernism”?). Such works have been compared to boxlike skyscrapers designed by functionalist architects. It is high time to question this architectonic conception of modernist aesthetics and to take a closer look at the space of modernism. As Deleuze and Guattari put it in their description of Kafka’s writing, rejecting the notion that he took

refuge in it: “A rhizome, a burrow, yes—but not an ivory tower. A line of escape, yes—but not a refuge” (Deleuze and Guattari [1986], 41). In his book *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre states:

The fact is that around 1910 a certain space was shattered. It was the space of common sense, of knowledge (*savoir*), of social practice, of political power, a space hitherto enshrined in everyday discourse, just as in abstract thought, as the environment of and channel for communication; the space, too, of classical perspective and geometry, developed from the Renaissance onwards on the basis of the Greek tradition (Euclid, logic) and bodied forth in Western art and philosophy, as in the form of the city and town. (Lefebvre [1991], 25)

This brings to mind Virginia Woolf’s famous statement that “in or about December, 1910, human character changed” (Woolf [1966], 320), whereby she seems to have in mind new conditions in human relations as well as in the mediation of human experience. That space is (was) the sphere of the socially conditioned human character who relied on a protective but transparent pane separating inner and outer realities; the pane that also encloses what Lefebvre calls the space of common sense, of social practice and of classical perspective. Are we, at the turn of the millennium, experiencing the birth of a new space? Perhaps Western modernity has been pregnant with such a space all along; perhaps we have been going through one long apocalypse since about 1910. What has been referred to here as the cultural “space” of postmodernism certainly has faces that look toward the opening of such a new horizon for humanity (although this horizon often turns out, when studied closely, to be “global” in a rather limited sense). But our contemporary cultural activities and inquiries are also heavily preoccupied with the legacy of modernism; and this legacy need not be understood as the monumental body of a *dead father* (to recall Perloff’s reference to the primal scene as well as Donald Barthelme’s “postmodern” novel of that title). Is it not possibly a bunch of burrows, or rhizomes that have grown in various directions, many of them extending deep into our contemporary glories and worries? Or does it perhaps appear more like the mobile, small and protean creature Odradek, in Kafka’s story about the worries of the “Housefather” that confounds scholars who want to establish and fix his origin and name, who roams around in the garrets and hallways of a bourgeois house owned by the *pater familias* who is greatly disturbed by his elusiveness and resilience and who in the end fears that Odradek might outlive him (Kafka [1995], 30–2)?

In spite of the seeming monumentality of this book, we believe that its *genius loci* resides in Odradek rather than the House Father. Just as Odradek is made of fragments of wool and wood, just as he has ends of thread trailing after him, just as it is suggested that he will live on, the concept of modernism suggested throughout these volumes is one of “unfinished business.” Someone might suspect that Habermas’s notion of modernity as an unfinished project is somewhere at the back of these reflections (see Habermas [1983]). But one might agree that this project is “unfinished” without being at all sure how it could possibly be finished; hence, “ends” must not be understood so much as “aims,” but rather as roots that are winding their way through a soil that proves variously fertile and barren.

But this means that the rhizomes of modernism’s legacy are among the elements that characterize contemporary themes and aesthetics. Modernism is still a part of contemporary literary, cultural, and critical activities. This is certainly not a matter of smooth interfaces, however, but rather of an arena of issues and questions that challenge contemporary readers, critics, and not least writers as well as other artists. One of the issues that need to be dealt with is the fact that modernism, at least in



its prominent versions, has been understood in *intertextual* terms that are quite different from those of postmodernism, which is seen as cutting radically across various cultural borders, to the point of closing the gap, as Leslie Fiedler (1975) famously put it, between “high” and popular brands of culture. Modernism is now increasingly being reassessed in such “postmodern” terms, and for a good reason, since even many of the canonical works of modernism turn out to be riddled with interests in the popular and the quotidian, along with their inclination to aesthetic subversion and cultural otherness.

Renegotiations of modernism and its cultural space(s) may, for instance, entail reassessments of the most insightful critical and theoretical works on modernism, with a view to their sometimes limited understanding of aesthetic scope. We are thinking not only of New Critical approaches to modernism, but also of the restrained understanding of the politics of aesthetics that characterizes for instance Theodor Adorno’s *Ästhetische Theorie* (1970), one of the most important books ever written about modernism. However, in drawing on more recent critical developments, such as cultural studies and new historicism, such renegotiations may, conversely, also risk ignoring the aesthetic challenge of modernism, a challenge that has deep socio-cultural implications.

These implications, this challenge is still to be felt in contemporary literature, where we can frequently see the rhizomes of modernism emerging, reminding us that we still live in modernity’s shattered space. But this is not to say that the scholars working in the field of modernist studies—or even “only” the 65 scholars contributing to these volumes—agree on how to read and map this space. Far from it: the editors are very much aware that several scholars who have helped to bring this book into being may indeed disagree with some of the views expressed in the above parts of this very introduction. That is only as it should be. If these volumes are as significant a contribution to modernist studies as we find them to be, it is in part because they encompass a multitude of voices and views, disagreements, cross-currents and critical conflicts in their evaluation both of modernist literature and art and of its critical reception. There is no way this introduction can be used to summarize such a collection in other than the following general terms.

This project aims to present an account of modernism based on explorations from several different angles; theoretical, conceptual and social—and cultural, with an emphasis on relations between literature and the other arts and cultural spheres, and generally on the interfaces of modernism and a multitude of twentieth-century cultural and historical concerns. One of the premises of the volumes is that modernism is a vital concept for literary-historical developments in the various European languages and that it is therefore necessary to present a fairly broad, although necessarily eclectic, international account of modernism. In spite of a number of efforts to present modernism as an international phenomenon—notably Bradbury and McFarlane’s anthology, already referred to above, and more recently Peter Nicholls’s book *Modernisms* (1995)—the English concept of modernism has tended to be confined to the Anglo-American sphere. While the Swedish version of the concept has been in use since the 1940s, and the Spanish one for even longer than that (perhaps with somewhat different inflections), it is the English concept that has been the most formative, even beyond the linguistic borders of English, and its focus has frequently been on a select group of (“high modernist”) English, Irish, and American writers.

At present, there is a growing awareness of the need to understand modernism as a more diverse field, characterized by an aesthetic and ideological challenge that goes beyond a narrow canon of writers and works. Since the cultural diversity of modernism is not limited to a single linguistic area,

the problems involved in limiting modernism to Anglo-American culture become all the more troubling and the need for revaluation all the more pressing. The fact that the term modernism, strictly speaking, has (until perhaps recently) not been regularly used in several European languages, does not mean that there has not been an aesthetic upheaval in the literatures of these languages, a disruption analogous to that perceived in Anglo-American literature. This is not to say that the modernism recognized in these “other” cultures will be measured by a pre-established yardstick. Those who work with the concept of modernism certainly need to be aware of the controversial historical and aesthetic implications of the term in English as well as of the multiple overlappings, divergences and interrelations with other terms used for post-realist activity in various languages and cultural contexts. The “English” term will no doubt also be affected by such cross-cultural encounters. Indeed, modernism in an international framework may change our view of what some of us have gotten used to under the rubric of the term. Present and future work in this field will require flexibility in terms of cultural differences, relations to tradition, periodization, and so forth. For instance, while some see a modernist paradigm consolidating already in the second half of the nineteenth century, there are European countries where modernism does not make a crucial breakthrough until around or after the mid-twentieth century.

In other words, the “modernism” (“modernisme,” “Modernismus,” “módernismi,” and so on) of other languages may be different, but we feel the concept has a role to play that extends beyond any single linguistic or cultural confines. At the same time, we are aware of debates and disagreements, for instance about the distinction and interaction between the concepts of modernism and the avant-garde, or about the often tenuous border between modernism and postmodernism. Such differences need to be discussed in view of a modernist arena that allows for considerable diversity. However, there is also the risk that modernism may dissolve into a random and arbitrary catchword that, instead of providing a critical focus through connections and differentiation, signifies nothing but indifference. While we question the notion of aesthetic autonomy, we also want to prevent modernism from turning into an amorphous cultural concept. It is the challenge of this project to open up the concept of modernism to recent inquiries into cultural politics while preserving its force as a term for a major *aesthetic* phenomenon of our recent history. If the concept is to remain vital, it has to be grasped in its troubled and crisis-ridden connections between aesthetics, culture and socio-historical factors. Once it begins to represent everything that is taken to stand in a charged relation to modernity, it can no longer be distinguished from modernity itself. The overall aim of the project is to pursue the concept both in its potential as a heuristic tool for the exploration of familiar and foreign ground, and in its flexibility in absorbing discoveries and new perspectives and its readiness to be reshaped by them.

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## Chapter 1

### De-limiting Modernism

The most general critical enterprise common to current revisions of modernism consists in reevaluating the reach and bearings of the concept itself. Such reevaluation was fuelled by a widespread dissatisfaction with the dominant scope of reference, felt to be too narrow and restrictive, excluding many innovative forms of artistic expression. The need to insist on a broadening of the modernist horizon has, in part, been instigated by a number of theories of postmodernism which have painted modernism as a paradigm that had reached and revealed its limits, often described as elitist, exclusionary and conservative. Insights into this dynamic, even though no attempt is made to present them in a summary form, inform many essays as well as the general perspective of these volumes and manifest themselves in a variety of critical assessments.

The resistance against casting modernism into a confined and outdated mold is explicitly formulated in the first section of this book. Its four articles contain different attempts at widening the boundaries of the concept and exploring the terrain that opens up in the process. Moreover, they reflect on the process of this expansion and the consequences for the field of modernism, while also being aware of the dangers of diluting the concept and rendering it ineffective. This awareness results in a double movement of extension and containment that can take various shapes, as reflected in the section's title: "De-limiting Modernism."

**Edward Mozejko** reviews several established notions of modernism and evaluates them in terms of their relevance for an international understanding of the term. He insists on an interactive relationship between modernism and the avant-garde and a loosely defined and flexible temporal framework. In order to prevent this broadly conceived notion of modernism from losing its contours, Mozejko invokes a common denominator at several levels, encompassing both formal and thematic dimensions. This common ground is in turn continuously challenged by destabilizing forces inherent in the concept of modernism as a marker of innovation which cannot come to rest.

**Susan Stanford Friedman** revisits the concept of modernist internationalism and questions its established borders. Beyond a concern for the experience of expatriate modernists, the evocation of foreign lands and languages, or the fascination for the exotic or primitive Other, Friedman calls into question the assumption of "the West" as the center of modernism's cultural production and suggests possibilities for a broadening of the concept and canon of modernism, a widening that avoids the traps of projecting its established parameters onto "the Rest." In order to do justice to the developments of modernity and the various modernisms produced in other parts of the globe on their own terms, Friedman suggests the development of transnational strategies that conjugate the local

specificities of aesthetic production and socio-historical contexts, paying special attention to inter-cultural crossings and encounters. The aim of “cultural parataxis,” the critical practice proposed by Friedman and illustrated in her article with analyses of works by authors from different parts of the globe, lies in replacing a centralizing and hierarchic topography of modernism with a conceptual structure resembling a web of mobile and interactive agents.

**Andreas Huyssen** proposes that modernist studies needs to meet the challenge of contemporary globalization and pursue its inquiry beyond national cultures. Like Możejko, he has a vision of a new internationalisation of modernism. The earlier blurring of the boundaries between “high” and “low” art, which helped open up the concept of modernism to a greater variety of cultural expressions in the Anglo-American context, gains a new function in the context of globalizing perspectives on modernism in that it allows for an inclusion of artefacts stemming from more hybrid contexts. The simultaneity of global dispersion and concern for local manifestations of modernism requires critical tools flexible enough to meet new constellations. Beyond its capacity to widen the field, it brings back into focus the imbrication of aesthetic and political relevance.

The last article of this section participates in the dismantling of narrow conceptualizations of modernism, but it proposes a different angle from which its impact can be reassessed. Revisiting canonical texts from the Anglo-American sphere, **Charles Altieri** shifts the locus of meaning from the aesthetically contained artefact to the interface between a site of experimentation and a reader called upon to activate and affirm its potential of signification. The focus on the modernists’ modes and motives of constructing in their works an imaginary reader capable of responding to its experimental character reveals the psychological and affective spaces opened up by modernist innovations. Altieri suggests that these spaces of a constructed readership constitute a legacy of challenge for the successors of the modernist paradigm — as readers and writers.



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## Tracing the Modernist Paradigm

### Terminologies of Modernism

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#### Introductory Comments

In his seminal essay “How Useful is the Term ‘Modernism’ for the Interdisciplinary Study of Twentieth-Century Art?” (1995), Ulrich Weisstein posed a question which has engaged many scholars in the past and yet regardless of whether it was dealt with on the turf of literature or of visual arts, it most often left them with a certain sense of perplexity if not frustration (Weisstein [1995]). In search of an answer to the above query, Weisstein concentrates mainly on arts, but his remarks also contain a discussion of the term “modernism” in its diachronic range much relevant to the critical discourse on modernism in literature. This discussion is helpful in our effort to understand cultural variants of the term, as well as the difficulty of defining its ever illusive meaning. As I shall explain more fully below, my objective in this article is somewhat different, in that I am limiting myself to literature only and do not intend to trace the historical evolution of the term throughout the ages, but to make an attempt to propose a typological classification of some major apperceptions of modernism ensuing from diverse cultural traditions or ideological stands, and then to derive from it a more consistent and coherent comprehension of modernism as a long-drawn and complex literary period. Indeed, among many literary problems and terms which attract the attention of Western scholars, literary modernism (for a comprehensive bibliography of studies devoted to modernism, see Fokkema and Ibsch [1987], 2–3) today occupies one of the prime topics, and it can be said without any exaggeration that the number of articles, studies, books and special editions of learned journals may successfully compete with the multitude of research material devoted to feminism, post-structuralism, cultural studies and even postmodernism. Understandably, in all these discussions the Anglo-American point of view clearly gains the upper hand and most often it is limited to the linguistic expanse of the English language.

A new tendency, however, emerged in recent years when the term modernism was applied in a broader comparative and international perspective, reaching beyond the borders of Great Britain and North America. This process of “internationalization” of the meaning of the term and the scope of its inquiry is of a twofold nature: in search of new examples which would support their claims, Anglo-American scholars seem to be inclined to go beyond the confines of English and American literature; on the other hand, research conducted outside of this cultural sphere displays a tendency or is close to adopt the comprehension of modernism in the sense established by Anglo-American literary tradition. As far as the former tendency is concerned, one can quote a collection of articles

on German literature edited by Andreas Huyssen and David Bathrick (1989), and in the latter case special attention should be given to the Polish theoretician and historian of literature Ryszard Nycz, whose book *Język modernizmu* (The Language of Modernism) from 1997, clearly suggests that the upper border-ground of Polish modernism (usually locked between the years 1887–1903) ought to be expanded beyond the early years of the twentieth century. To rationalize this postulate, Nycz introduced the notion of modernism as a *literary formation* which reached its crystallization around 1910 but “still had before itself a long lasting future” (Nycz [1997], 15). It comes as no surprise then, that in 1996, also a year before the publication of Nycz’s book, Michał Legierski entitled his monumental monograph on Witold Gombrowicz as *Modernizm Gombrowicza* (The Modernism of Gombrowicz), a title that would be unthinkable to associate with the author of *Ferdydurke* (1937) in Polish literary criticism fifteen or twenty years ago. The most evident example of the above mentioned transformation in critical evaluation of modernism proved to be the international conference organized in 1993 by the University of Antwerp in Belgium (selected papers published by Berg et al. [1995]).

However, the real interpretative break-through, aimed at a broader view of modernism, occurred considerably earlier with the publication of the book *Modernism*, edited by Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane in 1976, and reedited several times since then. In this publication, under the sign-board of “modernism” one can find a discussion of various artistic currents (such as symbolism, impressionism, expressionism, futurism, dadaism, imagism) which came into existence at the turn of the nineteenth century. Some analytical remarks are also included about writers who seemingly remain so far apart in their literary practice as, for example, Vladimir Maiakovskii and T. S. Eliot. Obviously, according to the authors of this book, the above mentioned artistic currents can be treated as manifestations of national variants of the same phenomenon, that is, a modernist invariant which is characterized by the rejection of the aesthetics based on mimetic principles (subversion of realism), perpetual fixation on formal attributes of literature (and the arts in general), extreme subjectivism in the perception of the outer world and the introspective urge to explore subconscious and mysterious layers of human psyche which obviously concurs with or in some instances is outright inspired by Freudian theoretical concepts. As for its chronology, this term, when applied to literature, would encompass a long stretch of time—the last decade of the nineteenth century and up to the end of World War II or the mid-fifties. However, *Modernism*, as understood and interpreted by its editors, looks like a mechanically formed conceptual cluster rather than a coherent movement with some definable aesthetic laws of its own. In their introductory chapters, the editors of the volume do not show any predisposition for a theoretical explicitness in their stance nor do they try to postulate any consistent comparative method to investigate the problem in question. This kind of approach is taken by Astradur Eysteinnsson in a very informative and excellent book entitled *The Concept of Modernism* (1990). Among newer publications on the subject one should mention an interesting study by L. Surette called *The Birth of Modernism* (1993).

Eysteinnsson’s study is based on solid, erudite and evidential material which gives an excellent survey and account of various interpretative possibilities of the term. The author distinguishes himself by far-reaching caution in formulating opinions of his own yet at the same time hints rather than proclaims himself to be in favor of a broader understanding of modernism. If the Eysteinnsson study is of *intramedial* nature limited to literature only, Christopher Butler in his book *Early Modernism*.

*Literature, Music and Painting in Europe 1900–1916* (1994) crossed the boundaries of literature and followed an *intermedial* approach to the subject, that is, he made an attempt to give a syncretic view of modernism by taking into consideration literature, music and painting. What I find particularly interesting in Butler's approach is that he expands the term modernism over the artistic practice of the entire European continent.

The interest shown by scholars in modernism is highly understandable on all accounts. First of all there exists the need to describe if not define the modernist period as such, and to delineate its boundaries. It seems, however, that the difficulties of defining its essence, of marking out its territory and chronology reflect in a metaphorical manner the pluralistic nature of art in the twentieth century, which is characterized by an hitherto unprecedented multidirectionality (multidimensionality), and its ambiguity caused by the progressing disintegration of traditional ethic and aesthetic values. In their introductory article "The Name and Nature of Modernism", Bradbury and McFarlane (1976) maintain that since the time of romanticism, the ever growing novel and experimental tendencies in art have reached their culmination in modernism and attained in it the state of crisis, that is, the frittering away and lack of consensus, the inability to accept one common point of view. To support this claim the authors refer to W. B. Yeats's well-known formulation: "Things fall apart, the center cannot hold" ("The Second Coming"). Consequently, it can be said without any shade of exaggeration that as far as the search for a constructive solution is concerned (that is, finding a formula), which would lead to rapprochement of various interpretative procedures and definitions of modernism from a comparative point of view, no other period-term has ever posed to critics, historians and theoreticians of literature so many difficulties as modernism. There is yet another reason for the great interest modernism has provoked: the powerful wave of postmodernism and the incredible number of publications devoted to it caused the need, even necessity to discuss the preceding period—modernism. We can find a good exemplification of this sort of interdependence in the well known and interesting study of postmodernist fiction by Brian McHale in which he writes the following:

Postmodern is not post modern, whatever that may mean, but post modernism; it does not come after the present (a solecism), but after the modernist movement. Thus the term "postmodernism" if we take it literally enough, à la lettre, signifies a poetics which is the successor of, or possibly a reaction against, the poetics of early twentieth-century modernism, and not some hypothetical writing of the future (McHale [1987], 5).

Following these considerations, McHale formulates two different dominants for modernist and postmodernist fiction. The first one is of an epistemological nature and in the second, ontological features clearly prevail. In other words, the transition from modernism to postmodernism implies a shift from the question of *cognition* to the problem of *existence*. It is not my aim to discuss McHale's thesis. The reason I refer to it is to demonstrate how the attempts to deal with postmodernism constitute a prerequisite to examine the period which preceded postmodernism. In what follows, the objective is to concentrate on two issues: first, to discuss literary modernism from the point of view of a comparative perspective and to examine the possibility of finding some common and coherent points of convergence which may help to establish both its chronological space and substantive condition; and second, to describe those major constituents of this powerful artistic period which in my view determine its specificity.

## The Meanings of the Term

We are fully aware of the dangers and traps which lie in wait for the daredevil who ventures to raise the above questions because one can immediately express doubt: is it not obvious what we have in mind when we speak of modernism? Or: are we not falling again into endless and fruitless terminological disputes concerning incongruities which in the past divided historians of literature, for example, in relation to the definition of “romanticism” or “realism”? It should be noted that these terms evoked heated debates and even today scholars are not entirely in agreement as to their scope and interpretation (Nemoianu [1984] questions the view that countries of Central and Eastern Europe ever went through the period of full-fledged romanticism, for polemic views see Możejko [1991] and Możejko & Dimić [1998]), but by and large, literary scholars agree on at least some of their modal and substantive properties. Obviously there may occur chronological shifts within the limits of various national literatures, but this does not change the understanding reached on an international scale.

As for modernism, no such agreement is even near. Therefore, any suggestions and inferences which one intends to present with regard to its historical mode of existence may appear to be arbitrary and not necessarily sufficiently substantiated, but we hasten to emphasize that we are not about to offer any “ultimate” solutions because such solutions do not exist. Rather, our intention is to set forth a theoretical scheme which would most probably require further considerations and complementary clarifications, but in the end it may yield a better understanding of the problem in question.

The principal point of departure in any discussion of modernism must be the fact that the term appears in all European literatures. However, as mentioned above, there is no consensus as to its meaning: when applied to isolated (single) national literatures it refers most often to chronologically different (longer or shorter) literary currents or groups, and often it determines somewhat distinct or at least seemingly incomparable artistic phenomena. The latter point requires a qualification: while the pool of poetic devices, generic structures and aesthetic attitudes in them is similar or outright identical, the stress put on their importance and functions ascribed to them within the framework of national literatures may vary. This creates the false impression that these “modernisms” remain apart to the point of being incomparable. On that score, “modernism” occupies an exceptional position in literary terminology. Even without making special effort, one can enumerate six, seven or even more applications of the word “modernism,” which are used as a literary term in different national literatures (see Możejko [1983], 30; Wyka [1959]. Bobrownicka [1973], and others). In some instances it denotes small literary currents, groups or trends; in other it signifies vast artistic movements, determined mainly by the specificity of a given cultural tradition. We are primarily interested here in the latter case. It seems that one can distinguish five cultural spheres in which this term is used in a more all-embracing and generalized sense.

First, “die Moderne,” as a concept created and developed in the German literary tradition that went through various stages of evolution (for instance Junge Deutschland, Naturalism). Eugen Wolff applied the term in relation to literature in “Die Moderne, zur Revolution und Reform der Literatur” (Modernity: Towards Revolution and Reform of Literature) in 1887, and Hermann Bahr in *Zur Kritik der Moderne* (On the Criticism of Modernity) from 1890 expanded the meaning of the term to all newer artistic currents such as impressionism, symbolism, and decadence, which

opposed naturalism. Literature and art came to be understood not as so-called reflections of outer reality but as a manifestation of psychological feelings, an indicator of the soul's quandary and expression of vague, at times contradictory moods, tinged with melancholy, pessimism and resignation. With some modifications this concept of modernism influenced the evolution of literature in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe at the turn of the nineteenth and the twentieth century.

Second, the Latin-American and Spanish "modernismo," whose initial stage of development coincided more or less with the German "Moderne" (here I have particularly its Latin-American offshoot in mind) and which came to a close shortly after World War I. It represented a reaction against the monotony of naturalism and became a means of pursuance for the renewal of literature by freeing it from the one-sided influence of the "mother-country" Spain by a broader opening to other European artistic currents, particularly those of French literature. In Spain the term "modernismo" came into full bloom somewhat later than in Latin America, and it was associated with the appearance on the literary scene of the "generation 1898" which proclaimed an extreme individualism coupled with a strong social protest directed against what it considered to be a profound crisis of the country (see Davidson [1966], still an irreplaceable source of information about Hispanic "modernismo"). To overcome this state of affairs, they advocated the image of the individual who was detached from odious reality and who expressed his protest in poetry. Freedom and candid subjective inner experience ought to create a new relation between language and objects. This new sensibility found its most pronounced realization in the works of Antonio Machado, Juan Ramón Jiménez and Ramón del Valle-Inclán. In his essay *The Dehumanization of Art* (1925), J. Ortega y Gasset gave one of the first and most penetrating descriptions of the modernist aesthetics.

The third interpretation of modernism as a long-lasting period in art and literature of the twentieth century grows out of the Anglo-American experience which took place between the years 1910–1940. Sometimes its beginnings are shifted, and its *caesura* is moved up to 1945 or even beyond 1950.

Fourth, modernism is seen as a decline of bourgeois culture. In this case the interpretation of modernism follows not so much out of cultural specificity as it does from an ideological and social world-outlook inspired by rigid Marxist philosophy which expounds the thesis about the dualistic nature of art in the twentieth century, consisting of the perpetual clash and opposition of two global artistic attitudes — realism and modernism.

A prominent exponent of this approach was Georg Lukács ([1969], 17–92), and it found its official approval and institutionalization in the Soviet Union where the term "modernism" was reduced to a negative concept, summarizing under one label all possible "isms" as manifestations of decadent bourgeois culture (even in the period of advanced "perestroika" one wrote there about modernism as a manifestation of decadent bourgeois art; see Vanslov & Sokolov [1987], 9–27). Thus this term became a part of newspeak, a lexical cluster without precise semantic boundaries, devoid of meaning and used as a tool of ideological propaganda. It is worth adding that also in pre-revolutionary Russia (and then later in emigration) many prominent Russian writers nourished a rather unfavorable opinion about modernism. Aleksander Blok, for example, maintained that it was an outgrowth artificially implanted on Russian soil, alien to its national culture (see Weidle [1976], 18–30).

The fifth concept of modernism is to be sought in Adorno's aesthetic theory, formulated in his book *Ästhetische Theorie* (1970). For Adorno, modernism is an ideological signifier which denotes an entire epoch from the mid-nineteenth century to the modernism of the late 1950s and 1960s.

Adorno's position is inspired by Marxist thought and bears close affinity to Walter Benjamin's ideas expressed in his articles "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" and "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire." However, it runs contrary to the Lukàcsian theory of reflection which is based on the premise that the formal means of expression correspond with the appearance of outer reality, that is, they imitate both its forms and the agreeable logic of thinking. Adorno takes exactly the opposite stand: art "opposes the empirical through the element of form" (Adorno [1996], 5). This, in its turn, asserts the autonomy of art but puts it in an awkward position in relation to society. Art gains its self-determination yet at the same time it remains *fait social*. The first sentence of the *Aesthetic Theory* renders succinctly the ambiguity of the status of art in modern society: "It is self-evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident anymore, not its inner life, not its relation to the world, not even its right to exist" (1996). In fact, the entire theoretical thrust of Adorno's aesthetics derives from modernist premises of artistic practice and his analysis is based on the status of modernism within the capitalist mode of production. Adorno ties the origins of the new, that is, modernism, with the rise of high capitalism in the mid-nineteenth century, when artworks acquire their identification with consumer goods. This generates the principle of perpetual newness—or to use more adequate words—it calls for incessant "modernization" and "freshness" of the product. To maintain its marketable value, novelty becomes the dominant imperative in the sphere of cultural creativity. According to Adorno, this is the cause of the conflict between society and the artist who wants now to ensure his/her independence and rejects the "practicality" of creative endeavor. The tradition of realism with its insistence on understanding literature or art in general as a "reflection" or representation of reality reaches a point of crisis. Modernism substitutes the idea of *representation* with the concept of *negation* (see Larsen [1990], 6–7), conditioned by what Adorno identifies as "dissolution of the subject in collective society." The author of *Aesthetic Theory* indicates the affinity between Edgar Allan Poe and Charles Baudelaire, but clearly projects the French poet as the one who "codified" this transition to modern times. Indeed, if we recall Baudelaire's statement that to be a useful man was always something rather hideous (see Arendt [1969], 4), then one could acknowledge this as the initial banner of modernism.

It seems that with reference to literature there are both some similarities and differences between the usage of the term by Anglo-American criticism and Adorno's position. The former clearly shuns a socio-philosophical explanation of modernism's sources and shifts its beginnings to the first decade of the twentieth century, with a stress on imagism as its early exemplification. Although Adorno mentions the crucial importance of the year 1910 in European literature, for him, the roots of modernism reach as far back as the second half of the nineteenth century and begin to grow with the poetry of Charles Baudelaire and Arthur Rimbaud. Considering the impact which French symbolism had on T. S. Eliot and other Anglo-American poets, this developmental line of early modernist poetry seems to be sustainable. Irrespective of the above mentioned differences, both positions are by and large in agreement as far as the upper caesura of the period (late 1950s and 1960s) is concerned. More important, however, is the fact that among the five possible designations of modernism, both Anglo-American literary criticism and Adorno's aesthetics, in spite of all their differences and distinct points of departure, conform in treating it as a long term period or epoch of "great-modernist break-through."

However, the genuine problem immediately springs up when one asks the question of what kind of solution can be found by a comparatist who wants to apply this term in a broader, all-embracing,

let's say, synthetic sense similar to that of Adorno's or Anglo-American literary criticism? In other words, how helpful would the term "modernism" be if it is to encompass more expansive territorial boundaries within the realm of comparative literature studies, and in conjunction with the intention to characterize its aesthetic premises in order to achieve international consensus with regard to its status as a literary-aesthetic category, denoting at the same time a long-lasting artistic period, if not an epoch? Is it possible? The answer seems to be prudently affirmative, provided that one takes two somewhat more thorough investigative measures: first, one should examine more closely the relationship between the end of the nineteenth century, often referred to as symbolism (or neo-romanticism) and what is defined in Anglo-American criticism as the "great modernist breakthrough" of the twentieth century; second, one can achieve a certain degree of assent if we introduce a more accurate usage and transpose the employment of some critical literary terms—an issue I shall address below. In the first instance, one would have to revise the quite prevalent view (at least in the past) which treats experimental, avantgardist currents existing prior to the First World War (expressionism, imagism, futurism), exclusively as a reaction against decadence, individualism, symbolism, the slogan "art for art's sake" and so on. On this score some interesting comments can be found in Butler, who suggests that early modernists (of course in the Anglo-American meaning of the word) further developed the principle of art's autonomy formulated before them by symbolists. At the same time they adopted their conviction that creative artistic activity was based on subjectivism and that it ought to be of an expressive nature (Butler [1994], 3). In such an interpretation, the modernist movement begins to stand out as a great, that is, broader and long lasting artistic (and literary) epoch which progresses through various stages of creative evolution. Of course, this problem requires a more detailed analysis which exceeds the limits of this article, but it comes close to the conception formulated in 1966 by the late Danish poet and critic Poul Borum in *Poetisk modernisme* (Poetic Modernism), which constitutes a turning point in the study of literary modernism. It appeared in Copenhagen four years before Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*, but does not pursue his socio-genetic explanation of the modernist phenomenon. Its analytical material is drawn exclusively from various literatures written in European languages. The book was published in Danish and most probably because of that it went unnoticed among the larger community of scholars, but it can certainly be considered to be the first true comparative literary study of modernism. According to Borum, the sources and forerunners of modernism are to be found in the mid-nineteenth century—in the writings of such poets as Charles Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud, Stéphane Mallarmé. It is interesting to note that he lists among this group the Polish poet Cyprian Kamil Norwid. Borum characterized him as an early modernist who paved the way for the mature modernist poetry of the twentieth century. One should mention here that in Russia the buds of modernism can be traced as far back as the poetry of Feodor Tyutchev, whose poem "Silentium!" (1833) contains this famous line: "Pronounced thought is a lie" (Tyutchev [1973], 43).

To Borum modernism is a historic-literary term comparable to renaissance, baroque or romanticism, terms that also denote great literary periods and imply "novelty" or "renewal" of art and literature. The beginnings of its lower boundary go back to the mid-nineteenth century, and the upper caesura reaches as far as the 1950s-1960s. Modernism does not express a single idea or style; it is a complex of simultaneously existing and mutually complementing but at the same time opposing styles of expression and views. Borum takes up Baudelaire's claim that modernism was an expression of *modern* society which began to take shape in Europe after 1848 (he makes reference to two



of Baudelaire's articles: "Salon of 1846" and "The Painter of Modern Life," about the paintings of C. Guys) and lays the ground for his own point of departure in *Poetic Modernism*.

As I mentioned above, the thesis about literary modernism as a long lasting historical period gains ever more advocates but it lacks much in a concrete methodological justification and conceptual rigor which would allow one to seize the entire problem within a more precise theoretical framework. An attempt to undertake such a task was made by Fokkema and Ibsch (1987). The Dutch authors have immensely enriched the understanding of the generic characteristics of modernist prose (at least in its initial stage) but their analysis, with an exception for T. S. Eliot, ignores poetry and drama, and does not go beyond what they call the narrative code of modernism, represented by such writers as Thomas Mann, Robert Musil, André Gide, and Virginia Woolf. The narrowness of this methodological approach constitutes the main weakness of their otherwise interesting and valuable critical endeavor.

The question about the option regarding the understanding of the term modernism, that is, its narrow interpretation versus a broad one, presents us with a difficult dilemma. The answer depends to a great extent on the way we formulate our strategic goals. I am in favor of treating modernism in its broad meaning. However, it should be emphasized that such an approach compels one to find a common denominator, that is, a set of common features indicating a certain cohesion of an epoch which has passed but in a sense is still with us (at least through the postmodernist extension), and incessantly intrigues the curiosity of students. To this end I would like to suggest a few possible, albeit hypothetical, solutions. They are concerned primarily with terminology and aimed at its more accurate use. We shall begin with a comparison. The wish of a comparatist to accept the understanding of modernism from the perspective of Anglo-American cultural tradition is tempting but immediately encounters an impediment in that it has to face a "competitive," so to speak, term, namely—the *avant-garde*. Like modernism, this term is conditioned and burdened by some cultural codes. Renato Poggioli was fully aware of this when more than thirty years ago he wrote, not without a certain dose of irony, that "[s]peaking literally and linguistically rather than figuratively or ideally, Anglo-American culture is surely not wrong in treating the term 'avant-garde art' as if it were a Gallicism: the formula and concept are of a not easily identifiable origin, but clearly French, indeed clearly Parisian" (Poggioli [1968], 8).

Also in countries of Central and Eastern Europe (The Czech Republic, Poland, Russia, Slovakia, Hungary, former Yugoslavia), one accepted this term (that is, *avant-garde*) as a denotation of literary transformation which began towards the end of the 1900s and came to a close with the outbreak of World War II. In the mid eighties, Jean Weisgerber edited his monumental two volume work entitled *Les avant-gardes littéraires au XX siècle* (Twentieth-century literary avant-gardes), devoted to the most important experimental currents of the twentieth century (Weisgerber [1984]). The problems and material analyzed in this work are very similar to, if not identical with, what we find in Bradbury and McFarlane's *Modernism*. In other words, the difference in both titles has been determined by two distinct literary cultural traditions. How strongly such factors may influence and determine intellectual outlook, maturity and perspective may be proved by the example of Renato Poggioli himself: after many years spent in the United States, he did not accept the term "modernism" and retained the title of his book on *avant-garde*, translated from the Italian, as *The Theory of Avant-Garde*. At the same time he made the point that within its framework, writers such as T. S. Eliot can find their place. However, in spite of acknowledging the importance of these cultural conditionings,

one should still ask the question whether they are the only reason of the “interchangeability” of the terms “modernism” and “avant-garde.” Lies hidden behind such a “synonymy,” perhaps, something immanent in the texts of this epoch which permits this terminological dualism to exist? Does this dualism not by any chance hint at some other and deeper hidden characteristics of this epoch and point to its peculiar syncretism of artistic realizations?

### The Dichotomy of Modernism: Between Classicism and Avant-Garde

The syncretic character of modern art and literature has been noticed many a time, yet the question to be asked is whether this syncretism is a chaotic conglomeration of ideas and artistic devices or whether it is also possible to speak of a certain systemic order, which may lead to the establishment of some typological categories and artistic phenomena placed under the label of modernism? To answer this question one should be aware of the practice in Western literary criticism of using the term modernism in relation to experimental literature of rather moderate bent which did not ignore the tradition of past artistic experience; the term avant-garde, on the other hand, was practically reserved for extreme artistic experiments, which called for breaking off (most often by noisy and iconoclastic manifestos) with the legacy of past cultural achievements. As the years went by, a third term began to gain ground, even more so in Poland than in the West, namely, classicism. Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz' *Czym jest klasycyzm* (What is Classicism) from 1967, Ryszard Przybylski's *et in arcadia ego* and his *To jest klasycyzm* (This is Classicism) coincided with a more serious interest for this term in the West (Kermode [1975], Konstantinović et al. [1981]). Thus, one began gradually to identify the term “classicism” with the denotation of the artistic current of a more “preservative” nature and to replace *modernism* as its main watch-word. It is worth mentioning here that both T. E. Hulme and T. S. Eliot proposed at the early stage of their activity to name the “great artistic break-through” classicism. It was only later, and due to the continuous transformation of its theoretical premises and artistic practice, that one opted for the term modernism as the more appropriate one. It is interesting to observe that this interlacement of classicism with the modern or modernism has been noted by some intellectuals whose work shines prominently among studies devoted to modernism. Thus, Jürgen Habermas in his famous essay “Modernity: An Unfinished Project” writes the following:

whereas the merely modish becomes outmoded once it is displaced into the past, the modern still retains a secret connection to the classical. The ‘classical’ has always signified that what endures through the ages (and [...]) thus we can speak today of ‘classical modernity’ as if such an expression were obvious [...]. (Habermas [1997], 39–40)

Habermas writes about the “secret connection” of the classical and the modern but not about identification of the two. Indeed, to understand the underlying mechanism of the “great modernist break-through” in arts and literature, it is necessary to separate these two notions because they cannot be treated as identical or interchangeable. Consequently, if relieved from its “double” role (that is as both a denomination for moderate artistic current and synonym of classicism), modernism can and begins in my view to function as the name for a long-lasting artistic epoch based on a dichotomy between new classicism and the avant-garde. The latter gains in precision as the opposition to the

classical type of creative endeavor; and modernism can be understood as a term denoting constant tension between these two variants of the same artistic invariant. Of course all the above mentioned five meanings of modernism, conditioned by either cultural or ideological differences, share one common characteristic which implies “newness” and assumes incessant transformation, but there is a difference between the substance of the term as a long lasting, broad international period and/or as a current of a short or shorter time span. In the latter case “modernism” usually corresponds with national or regional literature, it pertains to a current or even group of writers (for instance, in Serbian literature “modernism” denotes a short-lived group which was formed at the end of World War I and survived into the mid-1920s; it became a transitory literary trend from symbolism to surrealism), and more importantly, it is also more consistent in formulating its program and demonstrates greater coherency with regard to its literary practice. Thus, the above dichotomy in relation to these fractional modernisms is not applicable. They are forming self-contained constituents of an artistic phenomenon which functions within modernism understood as a broad and long-lasting period and usually belongs to its initial stage.

The aesthetic and creative status of modernism, on the other hand, as a period of long duration and diverse manifestations of narrative styles, poetic codes and dramatic forms which break with traditional conventions of artistic expression, is actualized by invoking the concept of the avant-garde as a means by which the principle of artistic modernization and innovation is constantly implemented. There operates, however, an opposite principle aimed at assuagement of the impetuous move towards newness and claiming the need to base creative experiment on somewhat more solid cerebral, intellectual grounds. When Friedrich Nietzsche formulated his well-known differentiation between Apollonian and Dionysian art, he rediscovered or recalled not so much the past as that he splendidly predicted the coexistence of these two creative elements in a new epoch. Or, it can be also claimed that such a view can find to some extent a justification in the Hegelian distinction between symbolic (oriental), classical (Greek) and romantic (Christian) modes of creativity. In other words, one can perceive modernism as a continuation and hybrid or specific integration of the classical/romantic tradition — both preoccupied, as we know, in one way or another with human spirituality, ranging from the rational to utter subjective experience and emotional anxiety which augured future instability. One of the first artists who noted this modernist split of classicism versus avant-garde was the Russian painter and stage designer Léon Bakst. In his article “The Paths of Classicism in Art” published in *Apollon* (1909), the mouthpiece of the classical stream in Russian art and literature at that time, he talks about “two warring tendencies” and provides us with their short characterization. It is also worthwhile to emphasize here that in 1932, T. S. Eliot made the differentiation between ‘classic’ and ‘romantic’ literature and noted that “we do not mean quite the same thing when we speak of a writer as a romantic, as we do when we speak of a literary period as romantic. Furthermore, we may have in mind, on any particular occasion, certain virtues or vices more or less justly associated with one term or the other, and it is doubtful whether there is any total sum of virtues or of vices which may be arrogated to either class” (T. S. Eliot [1932], 30–1).

If we take a closer look at national literatures of the first half of the twentieth century, one can easily ascertain the coexistence of these two currents: in Russia futurism versus acmeism, in Ukraine futurism versus neoclassicism, in Poland the Cracow avant-garde versus Skamander (and later the so called “second avant-garde”). In Italian literature one can discern the opposition between hermetism and futurism; in England the split runs along the line of Vorticism versus modernism. To

be sure, this duality—albeit in a different methodological context and purpose—has been noted by Peter Bürger in *Theory of the Avant-Garde* ([1984], 70). According to him, classicists “treat their material as something living” and “respect its significance as something that has grown from concrete life situations” (70). For a classicist, “the material is carrier of a meaning.” For the avant-gardists on the other hand, material is “just that, material”—an empty sign “to which only they can impart significance” (70). In other words, they intend to kill the “life” of the material. If classicists tend to create a living picture of totality even when “limiting the represented reality segment to the rendition of an ephemeral mood” (70), avantgardists tear the material out of reality and turn it into a fragment with the intent of positing or disposing meaning.

In what follows, the understanding of classicism is based primarily on T. S. Eliot’s essays “The Classics and the Man of Letters,” his famous article “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” and, as a way of comparison, on Osip Mandelstam’s reflections about the same subject. As T. S. Eliot emphasizes the necessity to appropriate both Greek and Latin classical heritage, he puts the stress on the need to preserve in our collective memory the entire Mediterranean literary past, including second-rate and minor poets. This kind of approach implies experimentation to be possible on the basis of continuity which the artist unsettles by his/her original and creative intervention or intrusion. Eliot is exactly a propagator of this type of artistic experiment, but at the same time he does not preclude—and more importantly—he does not reject yet another possibility of renewing literature when he writes that “we meet poets with a sense of the past only or, alternatively, poets whose hope of the future is based on the attempt to renounce the past” (Eliot [1968], 58).

Almost simultaneously yet independently of T. S. Eliot, a similar albeit not identical concept of classicism was promulgated by Osip Mandelstam. In his articles “The Word and Culture,” “Concerning the Nature of the Word” or in other statements he formulated classicism as “a longing after the world’s culture”:

Poets of today speak languages of all times and all cultures. Nothing is impossible. As the room of a dying individual is open to all, so is the door of the world: it is thrown wide open to the crowd. All of a sudden everything becomes the property of all. Go and take. Everything is available: all labyrinths, all mysteries, all forbidden passages. [In a syncretical poet] [...] ideas, scientific systems, state theories sing just as in his predecessors nightingales and roses sang. (Mandelstam [1971], 227, my translation)

We can speak here of two variants of the same artistic phenomenon. The difference between these two poets seems to lie in their understanding of *the function* of classical poetry. While the English poet treats it as a means of warning against the progressing disintegration of modern civilization due to the possibility of its rupture with the past and loss of historical perspective, Mandelstam tends to see classicism as the dawn of new times. The basis of new variants of classical poetry is constituted of strong intertextual affinities and bonds with the literary heritage of the preceding epochs—“in its mature versions, writes Miłosz, it is literature nourished by literature” (Miłosz [1980], 30–1); furthermore, it fosters the image of the poet as an erudite. A classicist remains aware of the word’s shaky status and the instability of its semantics but at the same time feels a strong attachment to it and still treats it with traditional piety as bearer of meaning. Instead of destabilizing it, he or she tends to lend the word a more tangible communicative value, yet at the same time makes use of its polysemic nature. Finally, it should be mentioned that modern classical poetry exploits tradition-

al values of the past (myths, religious thought, aesthetic conventions, social and political concepts, folklore, and so forth). A classical poet subjects them to his/her own intellectual scrutiny and formal treatment, yet at the same time takes a depersonalized stand, preserves a certain distance in relation to these values, while confronting them with his or her own epoch, with contemporary questions of human existence. At times such poetic strategy lends to modern classical poetry an ironic tinge but above all it brings into relief a reflexive dimension and philosophical depth.

And what are the conventions or formal thematic determinants of those poets whose “hope of the future” (as T. S. Eliot puts it) “is founded upon the attempt to renounce the past” (Eliot [1968], 58)? Here we have a range of currents distinct by their extreme zest for radical experimentation (see Friedrich [1974], 108), combined at times with strong social and political commitment, challenging the cultural past or rejecting it all together. Compared to classicism, they constitute the opposite pole of modernism by stressing the anti-traditionalist urge for innovation, the proclamation of noisy manifestoes, the drive for obscurity and the uncontrolled desire to shock the public; they display a programmatic “anti-literariness” by breaking with established aesthetic canons and often lay the literary devices bare to demonstrate the “artificiality” of the creative act. To use Yuri M. Lotman’s differentiation between styles of identification and styles of dissimilarity, we can say that classicism belongs to the former and the avantgardist currents to the latter.

Against the reflexive mode of classicist poetry the avantgardists set an activist desire of having an immediate impact on the reader. If classicists relate to the past in a positive response and see in it a source for new creativity, their avantgardist counterparts display a demonstrative negativism which at times assumes the shape of the primitive. The classicist creative discipline and order are countered by flightiness of style; intellectual challenge and rigor is often opposed by irrational defiance; the extreme formal experimentation, primitivism and thematic radicalism of the avant-garde is balanced, or countered, by classicist moderation with regard to both these aspects of artistic creativity. It is our view that the very essence of modernism rests on the above-mentioned oppositions and tensions.

### **Common Characteristics: Towards a Synthesis**

This abbreviated (and simplified) characterization of the two artistic currents determines, in my view, the essence of modernism as a conglomeration of the above described antinomies and seeming contradictions. This kind of approach to modernism opens the way to a better understanding of such literary phenomena as acmeism or the Anglo-American imagism. Now they can be treated not as “exceptional” or “atypical” artistic accomplishments which are lying outside the main stream of literary process in the first decades of the twentieth century (most often identified with the avant-garde), but as its legitimate components, the other pole of the same creative process.

However, at this point some questions might be asked as to whether the above mentioned dichotomy implies a juxtaposition of antithetical phenomena which coexist beside each other in a mechanical way, without having any common characteristics, two currents that flow beside each other without a common mouth at which they meet? These are most difficult questions concerning modernism understood as a long-lasting and complex literary epoch. So far these questions have neither found satisfactory answers nor have they even been formulated with the full pungency they

deserve. This explains also why so many studies have dealt rather with some fragments of modernism (futurism, surrealism, constructivism and so on) but not with modernism as a large movement in its own right as a certain literary system. In short, they lacked a synthetic approach. But is synthesis possible at all? At the present state of research there is no easy answer to this question but one should undertake an effort which could allow, perhaps, the opening of new investigative venues.

To initiate an attempt to answer the above query and address uncertainties related to it, let us start with a more specific discussion of a problem which cuts both across a specific poetic sub-genre and its manifestations in various artistic currents seen through the prism of an international, comparative perspective. We are asking the question of whether one can find some common characteristics in concrete literary practice of various “isms.” Or to put it bluntly, are the differences between, for example, futurism or imagism totally unbridgeable on the “lower” level of their concrete poetic realization, that is on the level of their microcosm, detached from programmatic and theoretical considerations? In trying to tackle this question I would first like recourse to the material from Russian literature and then later take a shorter look at some Western examples. What I have in mind is the concept of art and literature as “thing” or “object,” in Russian “veshch,” which became particularly popular and practiced in poetry, but also present in other literary genres and visual arts. There is no clear-cut definition of what a thing-poem is, but its distinct mode of existence can be established by setting it apart from the romantic model of poems tinged by personal experience (“*Erlebnisgedicht*” in German) in which the lyrical “I” expresses its feelings and most often bestows them upon nature. Thus the lyrical subject tries to achieve the closest possible unity with the universe. In “thing-poetry,” on the other hand, the poetic persona remains withdrawn and hidden, as it were, behind the description of things and tries to render his or her observations of the outside world. In such poetry the visual element might be a factor in determining its “thingness.”

East or West, the early adherents of “thing-poetry,” united by their opposition to symbolist vagueness and a search for the absolute, developed a number of strategies to achieve their artistic ends with the help of extensive use of nouns, the development of semantic fields, the use of new diacritical marks, the combination of verbal expressiveness with visual effect, the destruction of traditional stanza forms and so on.

Literary scholars have devoted a considerable amount of attention to one of the most central aspects of futurist aesthetics, namely the well-known slogan of the “word as such,” which became one of the principal corner-stones of Russian futurism. Considering the importance this principle played in fostering further experimentation, particularly on the level of poetic lexis and in the rise and development of theoretical premises of Russian Formalism, the interest shown in this specific aspect of futurist vision is understandable. However, one should not overlook the fact that in spite of common declarations, Russian futurism displayed in literary practice a far-reaching internal diversity. Right from the beginning, it contained the seeds of development which fostered contradictory, at times opposite, artistic realizations. The poetry of Vladimir Maiakovskii is a case in point. Although the author of *Oblako v shtanax* (Cloud in Trousers) signed all of the most important futurist manifestos, he did not follow the extreme line of experimentation and remained rather cool towards the idea of a transrational language (*zaum*) advocated so strongly by Aleksei Kruchonykh and Velimir Khlebnikov. When reading Maiakovskii’s early poems, one is struck by what, in a most ordinary way, can be defined as *concreteness*. In spite of its metaphorical complexity, Maiakovskii’s poetry displays, so to speak, an amazingly materialized appearance. For example, the poem

“Ešče Petersburg” (It Is Still Petersburg) contains nouns and expressions which in our everyday vernacular speech do not have physical connotations. Yet in this poem “fog” has the face of a cannibal who devours people. Of course *tuman* (“mist” or “fog”) cannot have the face of a cannibal who “masticates unsavory people” but Maiakovskii’s poem transforms certain abstract or immaterial phenomena into an iconic homologue. Examples can be multiplied; thus the cloud can be “dressed” in trousers (as in the title of the well-known poem), the “night” is “obscene” and “drunken” and what Maiakovskii calls “City’s Inferno” (*Adišče goroda*) is described in most tangible terms by making reference to some attributes of the modern city. Maiakovskii’s metaphor often moves from the realm of the abstract to the realm of the concrete. The semantic content of these metaphors activates the reader’s visual perception and lends to the poetic discourse an almost physical appearance. Such formal devices, aimed at achieving the illusion of thingness, are further enhanced by the clearly descriptive and narrative mode of these poems which finds its most evident manifestation in the use of the colloquial.

It should be noted that among futurists, Maiakovskii was not alone in his attempts to create what can be called “thing poetry” (or “thing poem”). It was at the same time that Vasilii Kamenskii wrote a cycle of poems entitled *Zhelezobetonnye poemy* (Ferroconcrete Poems) which went beyond Maiakovskii’s experiments (Możejko [1993], 93). The title itself is quite indicative of the author’s intentions and one can suggest that Kamenskii was consciously striving to achieve the impossible, that is, to create a poem-object (a poem thing). A number of poems seem to confirm such a claim, for example, “Konstatinopol” (Constantinople), “Kabare” (Cabaret), “Tsirk” (Circus), and “Polet” (Flight). The last of these, written in the shape of an isosceles triangle is to be read from the bottom up to the apex which ends with a dot symbolizing a dashed away plane in the sky. By and large these poems can be defined as syncretic poetry which combines a strong visual element with the word and references to or even a cult of technological inventions. They are supposed to be “seen” rather than read and it comes as no surprise that Kamenskii presented them as “exhibits” with Larionov’s so called “no. 4” group of painters in 1914.

The futurists’ early literary practice makes it easier to understand why some of them embraced the revolution with an almost childish credulity by developing the aesthetic program of LEF. The idea of art as a “thing” can be viewed as preceding the slogan of “žiznestroenie” (life-building) and the concept of “literatura fakta” (literature of fact) which came to occupy such prominent position in their program. As far as the “thingness” of art is concerned, its interpretation within LEF acquired a twofold form: either it was understood as a dissolution of the artists’ creativity in the production of practical use, which of course led to the rise of applied and industrial art; or it meant a preservation of an artist’s (and writer’s) status as a creator, whose creative drive was, however, limited by and heavily dependent on the happenings of everyday life.

However, it may come as a surprise that the futurists did not explicitly formulate the idea of poetry and literature as a thing. In fact, it was accomplished by the acmeists. In his early programmatic declarations, Nikolai Gumilev, the spiritual father of acmeism, insisted that the word cannot be a sign of or an allusion to the unknown (undetermined) but ought to possess a concrete and definite power of denotation. He suggested that a lyrical poem ought to be cast in the same mold as is the beautiful human body — “this highest degree of imagined perfection” (Gumilev [1966], 163). In the article “Nasledie simvolizma i akmeizm” (The Legacy of Symbolism and Acmeism), he formulated his well-known comparison of the poem to a cathedral whose completion requires, of course, a

long lasting and meticulous elaboration. He noted that it is more difficult to build a cathedral than a tower (Gumilev [1966], 173), a clear allusion to the symbolist desire of isolating oneself in the proverbial “ivory tower.” Gumilev did not go as far as to declare poetry to be a “thing,” but he definitely prepared the ground for such a formulation (in this respect his poem “Slovo” or “Word” is quite significant). The magic word we are looking for here, that is, “thing” or “object” (“veshch”) and the definition of poetry as such, (Martini [1958], 266–9; see also Janeczek [1984]) was pronounced by Osip Mandelstam in his article “O prirode slova” (Concerning the Nature of the Word):

In place of a romantic, an idealist, an aristocratic dreamer about pure symbol, about abstract aesthetics of the word, in place of symbolism, futurism and imaginism, arrived a living poetry of the word-object, and its creator is not an idealist-dreamer Mozart, but a rigorous and severe artist-master Salieri, stretching his hand to the master of things and materialistic values, to the builder and producer of the material (reified) world. (Mandelstam [1966], vol. II, 301, my translation)

In no other essay, including “Utro Akmeizma” (The Morning of Acmeism), has Mandelstam ever formulated more clearly the concept of poetry as a thing. Whether this was a response to the growing interest in the definition of art as thing in general (the article was published in 1922 when the discussion was in full swing) or whether it was the result of his own more profound considerations is difficult to say. It should be noted, however, that in his first discussion of this subject, which took place probably as early as 1913 (in “The Morning of Acmeism,” Mandelstam [1987]), Mandelstam was definitely more cautious and not as unequivocal in this formulation of poetry’s thingness as he was to be in 1922. In his earlier years he seems to have emphasized the importance of the meaning of words which was clearly directed against transrational linguistic experiments of the futurists. Mandelstam speaks of the reality of the verbal material, of the word as such, and compares it to stone. He justifies such an aesthetic program by the spirit of the Russian language itself which, according to him, is permeated with a special kind of nominalism (he talks of Russian nominalism), it is nominalistic by nature.

Mandelstam’s poetic practice both confirms and interacts with quite a few of his theoretical beliefs. If analyzed from the point of view of what we call “thingness,” Mandelstam’s poetry emerges as the poetry of physical, almost palpable appearances and mimetic descriptions. It is particularly evident in the poem “Tsarskoye Selo” published in 1916 (Mandelstam [1991], vol. I, 20). The poem, saturated with nouns and structured on the principle of narrative discourse, gives a realistic image of the famous St. Petersburg’s suburb. In a marvelous progression, each stanza of the poem reveals before the reader a different aspect of the town’s life.

The acmeists were not isolated in their efforts to find an adequate formulation of poetry as thing. In 1922, Ilya Ehrenburg issued in Berlin two important programmatic documents: the book *A vse-taki ona vertitsia!* (And Yet the World Goes Round!) and together with El (Elizar or Lazar or Eliezer) Lissitzky the journal *Vešč. Gegenstand. Objet* (Object). Both publications, taken as a whole, declare with unprecedented enthusiasm that all forms of artistic creativity cannot exist but as objects, that there is no art beyond the limits of things. In the book *And Yet the World Goes Round!*, Ehrenburg announced the arrival of new art; his most extreme (and radical) statements refer to visual arts. The creative energy of painters, sculptors and architects is dissolved, as it were, in producing practical, industrial objects. Thus plastic arts in themselves cease to exist or, to put it differently, they exist in industrial production. With regard to literature, however, Ehrenburg shows more restraint



and moderation. Poetry does not wither away but moves from lyricism to epos. Ehrenburg avoids using the word “poem” and instead speaks of “beautiful objects” created by poets, and of poetic “thingness,” which according to him is achieved through the introduction of the epic mode, new (as he calls it *obnazhennyj* or naked) rhythm, economy of artistic means for the sake of reaching precision and the use of everyday vocabulary coming from what Russians call *byt* (everyday material existence). As models worthy of emulation, Ehrenburg quotes Vladimir Maiakovskii and Boris Pasternak. His particular interest is attracted by Maiakovskii’s poem *Čelovek* (The Man) because it renders the abstract essence or notion of man — *čelovečnost*, that is *humanness* — through concrete poetic imagery.

It should be noted that the futurist and acmeist understanding of poetry or art in general differed in its premises. Eventually, their creative practice would lead to quite different results: in the former case, to the negation of the necessity of art or at best, to the acceptance of so called utilitarian art, “literature of facts” (Ehrenburg’s ideas were close to these concepts), and in the latter case to the opening of new possibilities for poetic expression oriented towards reflection and philosophical generalization.

A detailed analysis of this problem goes beyond the limits of this paper and calls for a separate discussion. Here I would like to stress and draw our attention to the fact that various artistic currents which existed within modernism were not isolated from each other by a proverbial “Chinese Wall” or separated by irreconcilable contradictions, but they functioned in dialectical correlation on the level of microstructure. It should be also pointed out that the concept of art and literature as “thing” or “object” is not exclusively Russian. It was known in other European literatures, including Slavic ones such as Polish, Bulgarian, Czech and others. When Anglo-American imagists formulated their artistic program they included in it the principle that “poetic ideas are best expressed by rendering of concrete objects” (Ford [1930], xiii) with absolutely accurate presentation and no verbiage (Jones [1972], 15–16). In his early theoretical pronouncements, Ezra Pound urged poets to achieve “direct treatment of the ‘thing’ whether subjective or objective” and “to paint the thing” (Jones [1972], 16) as they see it. Slavists in both England and North America have pointed out a great similarity between Ezra Pound on the one hand and Gumilev and Mandelstam on the other. In calling for the “direct treatment of the ‘thing’ whether subjective or objective,” Ezra Pound maintained that clarity and exactness or precision in poetic practice are the most important formal and moral constituents of poetry. He insisted on the honesty of the word. Just a few years earlier, Mandelstam had formulated almost identical tenets in “The Morning of Acmeism.” In France, thing-poetry reached its peak under the pen of Francis Ponge, whose work marks an entirely new and separate epoch in the evolution of poetic discourse in that country (the most important collection of his poetry was entitled *Le parti pris des choses* and published in 1942). “Dichter der Dinge,” as German critics call Ponge, brought his poems to the point of convergence with prose; hence the use of the term “proems.” It comes as no surprise that Ponge was credited for the rise of the “nouveau roman” and modern experimental cinematography.

In search for new answers let us also turn for a moment to a more general aspect of modernism on the level of its theoretical and aesthetic premises, that is its macrocosm. In Jose Ortega y Gasset’s essay *The Dehumanization of Art* the author dwells on new art and literature being not understood by the mass audience of receivers. The Spanish philosopher did not ascribe this feature to any particular current or school only, but to the modernist movement as a whole, at least in its initial, pre-

canonized stage, and this, in his view, reflected the new artistic sensibility — a disregard for a wider readers' appeal and understanding of the texts. He points to other characteristics as well, such as irony or extreme subjectivity. In its final outcome this becomes the cause of the breakdown in communication between the artist and the reader.

Generally speaking, the rise and evolution of modernism as a large and long lasting period has been accompanied by a remarkable bloom and vigor in theoretical reflection: the Formalist School in Russia, New Criticism in Anglo-American Literature and Structuralism in Czechoslovakia. Both responded to the need of explaining as to how the new vision and practice of art and literature ought to be understood. While Russian Formalism was more concerned with a variety of comprehensive theoretical issues of literature as a *device* (and the literary work of art defined as a sum total of formal devices), which eventually lead to the rise of structuralism, New Criticism developed a rich and diverse critical terminological framework for a hermeneutic interpretation of the literary work of art. It should be emphasized that Russian formalists never limited or based their theoretical assumptions and postulates exclusively on the texture (*Stoff*, as the Germans would say) drawn from the avant-garde's literary experiments. Their concept of *ostranienie* (making it strange), for example, was equally applicable to both avantgardist and classical texts of the time; it grew out of their literary practice, so to speak. It later became part and parcel of literary theory. As for New Criticism, particularly relevant here is the understanding of the literary work of art as an entity of contradictions formulated in I. A. Richards's *Principles of Literary Criticism* (see especially chapter thirty-two, "The Imagination") The author refers to Coleridge's definition of imagination as "the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities" (Richards [1925], 242–3). As he elaborates on it, he compares the role of stimulations (impulses) which inspire the imagination of the poet and the "ordinary man." The latter "suppresses nine-tenths of his impulses because he is incapable of managing them without confusion" and the former "through his superior power of ordering experience is freed from this necessity" (Richards [1925], 243) What deserves a particular attention in Richards's discussion of the imagination is his observation that a poem's ontological status, its mode of existence ought to be treated as a unity or an entity of contradictions. In fact, when one takes a closer look at Richards's discussion of the imagination, it leads us to believe that he gives an abbreviated characterization of literary modernist conventions of creativity.

Finally it is necessary to touch upon two other hallmarks common to all literary ramifications of modernism: fragmentariness and the relation to realism. As far as the fragmentariness is concerned its ubiquitous presence in the literature of modernism can be substantiated by examples from all literary genres. It constitutes an unquestionable part of poetic technique of such philosophically and artistically distant writers as T. S. Eliot and Maiakovskii. Whereas the English poet represented within modernism the classical current, the Russian bard stood for its avantgardist, revolutionary direction of acting and writing; yet both of them resorted in their well known long poems *The Waste Land* and *Cloud in Trousers* to the formal devices of fragmentariness which imposed on readers the impression of internal discontinuity, and with regard to their semantic significance they conveyed the uneasy feeling of chaos, disharmony and uncertainty of human condition.

Speaking of the relationship between modernism and realism one can take the above mentioned fragmentariness as a sign of distrust in the realist mode of literary production based on narrative continuity, the postulate of verisimilitude and imitation of external reality which, in the final analysis, brought about its rejection. In most general terms, it can be said that realism exalts the principle

of *representation* and modernism fosters *deformation* or: if realism claims *objectivity* of presentation, the main aesthetic tenet of modernism actualizes itself through extreme *subjectivity*. This controversy found its most explicit proclamation in the so-called “Lukács-Brecht *Debatte*.” In his two polemical articles “Die Essays von Lukács” (Lukács’s essays) and “Über den formalistischen Charakter der Realismustheorie” (On the Formalistic Nature of Realism Theory), Bertolt Brecht ([1969], 87–94) questioned the cogency of the old traditional bourgeois (*bürgerliche*) novel, challenged its artistic effectiveness and insisted on the necessity of renewing formal expressive devices of literature which would appeal and be able to cope or keep pace with the demands of new historical consciousness. If realism is the only mode of representing reality, does this imply that modernism’s referential function is void and invalid? With regard to this question one can find interesting comments in Hugo Friedrich’s classical study *The Structure of Modern Poetry*. Relating the question of fragmentariness to so-called reality, he states that the modern poet does not turn his back to it but he takes “shards of the real world, working them over again and again, and making sure that the broken surfaces do not fit together” (Friedrich [1974], 157–8), which is exactly what stands in opposition to the premises of realistic conventions. Yet the reality in the construction of the modernist work of art does not disappear and can hardly be treated, to rephrase Walter Benjamin, as an “aestheticization of the historical” (see “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” in Arendt [1969], 217–42). “The relationship of twentieth-century poetry to the world, writes Friedrich, is many-faceted, yet the result is always the same: a devaluation of the real world. In poetry as in the novel, the real world has splintered into a set of individual phenomena meticulously comprehended and replacing the totality” (Friedrich [1974], 156). In his book *Modernism and Hegemony*, Neil Larsen raised similar concerns about the crisis of representation and the Jamesonian perception of it in the context of “realism/modernism problematic as ideological aporia” (Larsen [1990], 3–6). He warns against hasty acceptance of Jameson’s thesis because it remains, as he rightly points out, within the parameters of Adorno’s idea of modernism as an aestheticized resistance to “the power of reification in consumer society” (Adorno [1970], 4–7). In view of Friedrich and Larsen’s remarks about the relationship between modernism and the historical evolution of society from the mid-nineteenth century to the 1950s–1960s, one is inclined to suggest that modernism constitutes a new *paradigm of representation* equally relevant to both the classical and avantgardist modes of literary practice and artistic creation.

## Concluding Remarks

In trying to find an answer to the question about the very nature of modernism we have concentrated first of all on establishing its chronological boundaries; in doing so, we have accepted the Anglo-American view and Adorno’s position formulated in his *Aesthetic Theory*, which both assume that modernism ought to be treated as a long-lasting literary period (a judgment prevailing in Anglo-American criticism) or epoch (Adorno). Secondly, in the process of our analysis we arrived at the determination that modernism is composed of many artistic currents, national and international in scope, which often seem to be perceived as opposites or distinct at best. By accepting the term in its above mentioned meaning, we tried to reevaluate the use of some categories and reshuffled the meaning of some terms which in our view may help to introduce to the “modernist chaos” a cer-

tain degree of order or even clarity which eventually could contribute to a better understanding of the complex nature of this period. To this purpose we have introduced the notion of the dichotomy: classicism versus avant-garde. We have tested here one aspect of modernist poetry (the concept of “thingness”) and tried to demonstrate how it runs across various artistic currents and national borders, extenuating as it were the above mentioned dichotomy in the evolution of the entire period. In other words, while not neglecting these differences, it became necessary to dwell on and reveal their (quite often) amazing affinity, attested to by the fact that they raise the same or similar aesthetic issues in spite of resorting to a variety of artistic (formal) strategies. Indeed, one should not overlook the fact that while dichotomy means continuous bifurcation, it also implies the existence of a main axis from which the branching takes place. These are two poles of the same phenomenon, and between them operates an entire gamut of medial currents of various programmatic shades, often accepting devices and artistic stimulus from both classicist and avantgardist sources (a typical example is Russian literary constructivism). That, in turn, leads us to believe that the centrifugal tendencies within modernism are underlain or countered by a not so easily discernible centripetal force. Or, to express it in more typical and familiar terms, it can be said that in constructing its identity, modernism constantly deconstructs itself; the process of construction is steadily accompanied by deconstruction, which makes the movement elusive to definition. In short, it escapes easy generalizations and is difficult to “pin down” as a comprehensive entity, conforming to a more regulated artistic pattern or one style.

While preserving moderation of judgment and avoiding hasty conclusions, one may still venture the claim that deconstruction, as initially formulated by Jacques Derrida in the late 1960s, is equally the consequence of some philosophical inspirations and theoretical (aesthetic) formulations combined with artistic practices of modernism. What do we observe in modernist texts? In a most general way it can be said that in modernism, the world is perceived as being problematic, that is, while posing epistemological questions, the artist does not provide any valid answers as to how to solve or remedy them. He or she is left, so to speak, without any guidance, and is alienated from the external reality, lost in its multiplicity and lack of any unifying *Weltanschauung*. In this respect, Roman Jakobson’s remarks on the metonymic nature of cubism in painting are helpful in supporting this view. He notes that in cubist painting the object is transformed into a series of synecdoches. This claim is particularly relevant in relation to the avantgardist mode of writing and, to a great extent, lays the ground for its playfulness. It seems, however, that one can expand this claim to classicism as well. True, the classicist aims at totality of presentation based on the Mediterranean and Christian tradition understood as a cogent and binding agent of cultural values; yet this effort is constantly thwarted and tinged by a sense of despair and skepticism. Hence, the classicist offers a tragic or at best reflective vision of the world. His/her effort to find unity and consistency constantly falls apart. Consequently, the entire culture and artistic production of modernism is basically of synecdochal nature, bound by the principle of *pars pro toto*. Modernism is synecdochal on both its formal and semantic levels in that it avoids or is unable to provide a holistic, comprehensive artistic vision.

Of course questions posed in this article may lead us to yet other problems. If we accept the thesis about the dichotomous nature of modernism, does it mean that we remain exclusively within the realm of theoretical speculations and avoid any so to speak practical consequences that may ensue from such an approach? To be more specific or, to put it bluntly, one may ask the following query: which of the two streams within modernism — avantgardist or classical — may have had a greater

impact on the shaping of what we know and debate today as postmodernism? It seems that the hitherto prevailing view in critical literature points to the avant-garde as a direct predecessor of postmodernist zeal for experimentation and heir to its negativism and nihilism. However, this direction of postmodernist dependence on some properties of the modernist aesthetic canon, brings out an immediate skeptical reaction: after all it was the classicists who advanced the idea, to quote Miłosz again, that “literature is nourished by literature” (“O niewiedzy, wyuczonej i literackiej” [About ignorance learned and literary], Miłosz [1980], 30–1). Are we here at the source of the concept of “literature of exhaustion” and the postmodernist assertion that literature is doomed to nothing else but to make the most of its past? Terry Eagleton sensed the importance of these kinds of questions when he stated in his article “Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism” that

Postmodernism takes something from both modernism and avant-garde. [...] From modernism proper, postmodernism inherits the fragmentary or schizoid self [...] From the avant-garde, postmodernism takes the dissolution of art into social life, the rejection of tradition, an opposition to ‘high’ culture as such, but crosses this with unpolitical impulses of modernism. (Eagleton [1986], 146–7)

According to our terminology the word “modernism” should be replaced here with the noun “classicism” but our main reservation concerns the use of such locutions as “postmodernism takes” or “postmodernism inherits” or our own word “dependence” applied earlier. This would suggest that, postmodernism preserves a passive role in relation to modernism, which in our opinion is not the case. What postmodernism does is, to use the formalists’ theoretical notion, that it lays the literary devices of modernism bare. No other example befits better to demonstrate this claim than the above comment quoted from Miłosz that literature is nourished by literature. It introduces us to the notion of intertextuality. Modernists, and above all those of the classicist bent, availed themselves of this device in abundance. However, their intertextual affinities were usually hidden, opaque, that is, not easily identifiable with the source of their origin. In postmodernist literary practice intertextuality acquires the form of the recycling, that is, it constitutes most often an open reference to another text. Thus, the “mystery” of a classical text, and particularly its intellectual interplay with the reader is degraded, as it were, brought to the level of triviality. The question of the relationship between modernism and postmodernism still requires further investigation and a comparative approach to it would certainly bring about more clarity to these concepts.

I have tried to raise some issues regarding the status of modernism as a period within scholarship of comparative literature, without nourishing any ambition to offer definite solutions, because to reach this kind of solution at this point in time is difficult, if not impossible. My intention has been to raise questions, and stimulate perhaps a further discussion of modernism because hitherto available answers to the problems it poses still remain inconclusive and ambiguous — as ambiguous and puzzling, yet still fascinating, as the literary period itself (for a detailed bibliography and survey of American discussions of modernism in the first half of the nineties see Helming [1994], 291–309).

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## Cultural Parataxis and Transnational Landscapes of Reading

### Toward a Locational Modernist Studies

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Modernism in the study of the arts and literatures of modernity has been definitionally linked with the metropolitan centers of nations and empires, most particularly, the great “culture capitals” of Europe and the United States—preeminently Paris, London, Berlin, Rome, New York, and Moscow. Cosmopolitan and urban, modernism has for many embodied a kind of internationalism fundamentally at odds with the parochial, regional, and monolingual. Modernity as a set of historical conditions characterized by rapid change, technological advance, and radical conjunctures of difference, intensified the internationalism of the metropole.

Pervasive border crossings—geopolitical, psychological, spiritual, sexual, moral, and aesthetic—underlie the cultural imaginary of modernism, including that of its past practitioners and its present day critics. Such internationalism is evident in the expatriate wanderings of many of its writers (for instance, Ezra Pound, James Joyce, Thomas Mann), in the polyvocal pastiche of languages and allusions woven through the textual tapestries of some of its canonical texts (for instance, *The Waste Land*, *The Cantos*, *Ulysses*), and in its embrace of the primitivist Other from elsewhere (for instance, Pablo Picasso, Igor Stravinsky, D. H. Lawrence). It is evident as well in the assumptions of field-defining critics such as Malcolm Bradbury, James McFarlane, Hugh Kenner, Marjorie Perloff, Peter Nicholls, Astradur Eysteinnsson, Mariana Torgovnick, Fredric Jameson, T. J. Field, Shari Benstock, Bonnie Kime Scott, Sandra Gilbert, and Susan Gubar—to name but a few whose important overviews, histories, and formulations have played influential roles in Modernist Studies.

It is time, I believe, to revisit the concept of modernist internationalism. Today, the peoples of the globe are ever-more interconnected through the technologies of information and media, the massive flow of migrants and cultures in a transnational ethnoscape, the globalization of local economies, and the violent clash or hybridized blend of different cultural systems. The intensification and acceleration of global traffic of all kinds—some call it “postmodernity,” others, “late modernity”—fosters a reflective look back, a reexamination of founding assumptions in the field of Modernist Studies. In particular, I want to call into question the pervasive assumption of “the West” as the center of modernism’s cultural production, with “the Rest” either as ripe for cultural appropriation or as mere imitative reproducers of the innovative genius pouring out of the Western metropole.

“Things fall apart, the center cannot hold” (Yeats [1956], 184). Whether in conservative or progressive modes, Modernist Studies has too often presumed a center that preexists its falling apart, a center based in the culture capitals of Europe to which expatriates from all over flock and (to a lesser extent) in the United States. Within this paradigm, whatever particular political stance is affirmed,

“the West” stands as the originator, center, and canonical embodiment of modernism. What some felt to be the sterility or bankruptcy of the West sent many seeking elsewhere for new forms, alternate spiritualities that might be brought home to revitalize the West, as texts such as T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* and E. M. Forster’s *A Passage to India* so dramatically demonstrate. Nonetheless, this view and the reading strategies it promotes reaffirm the post-Renaissance constructions of “the West” as the pinnacle of civilization and the inventor of modernity in all its glory and discontents. The modernities and modernisms produced in other parts of the globe have often been ignored, treated as the raw material for Western aesthetic production, or regarded as pale imitations of Western modernism brought into being as a trickle down effect. European and American hegemonies have imperceptibly shaped the understanding of modernism’s internationalism according to global binaries of the West and the Rest, the center and its peripheries.

In place of such approaches to modernism’s internationalism, I want to suggest the development of transnational strategies for reading a global landscape of interlocking and mutually constitutive centers that are influenced by and that in turn influence others. Such a geography of modernism requires the recognition of heterogeneous and multiple sites around the globe that produce their own modernities and modernisms at different points in time, each with its own hegemonies and internal divisions and each placed in some sort of changing but hierarchical relation to others. Such an approach is locational, attuned to the geographical specificities and historical overdeterminations that give each manifestation its own particular idiomatic inflection. Moreover, this transnational approach recognizes how local formations of modernism are continually affected by cultural traffic of all kinds—not just from other “culture capitals” of Europe and the United States but from other continents as well. This new internationalism requires attention to traveling ideas and cultural forms, transcultural dialogue, reciprocal influences and indigenizations, and the cultural hybridity that results from widespread intercultural communication and contact zones. Ideas, cultural practices, aesthetic artifacts, artists—all travel and migrate incessantly, producing syncretic formations. Modernity, I would hypothesize, is a historical condition that intensifies such hybridity and movement with the result of epistemological and representational dislocations that are characteristic of modernism wherever it flourishes, although the particular forms of those ruptures take different shapes in different locations. Rather than positing a mosaic of different modernisms, each separated from all others by the fixed barriers of geopolitical and cultural borders around the world, I regard differences as porous, boundaries as permeable, and borders as borderlands where self-other confrontations and mingling are mutually constitutive, both *between* different societies and *within* them. Lest it be thought I propose a utopianist notion of transnational hybridity, let me hasten to add that power relations—including unequal distributions of power—play a shaping role in the cultural formations of transnational modernity. The global landscape I suggest is not an ideal but rather a real space of continuous change and exchange.

In this essay, I will propose one among many possible strategies to read this differently constituted internationalism in Modernist Studies. I call this reading strategy “cultural parataxis” as a deliberate echo of a poetics often associated with “high modernism,” that is, the juxtaposition of disparate elements in non-hierarchical ways, with syntactic and thematic connections unspecified, left open for the reader to construct. As a dialogic method of reading based in global juxtapositions, this method of reading fosters the decentering of canonical European and American modernisms and demonstrates the interlocking web of transnational connection in the production of different modernisms.

### Cultural Parataxis as Reading Strategy

In Modernist Studies, *parataxis* is a term borrowed from rhetoric to describe the rupture of connective logic in modernist poetics evident in the radical juxtapositions of images or lyric sequences. Connections are suppressed, not immediately apparent, or even non-existent, to be formed in the mind of the reader through an interrogation of the possible correspondences or resonances between the disjunctive and the fragmentary. Adapting the poetics of parataxis, a reading practice of *cultural parataxis* involves the conjuncture of seemingly disparate cultural texts for the new light this juxtaposition sheds on each text in the cluster. Applied to literary cultural texts, this strategy invites a new form of comparativism, one not based solely on an analysis of similarities and differences or on tracing the itineraries of influence often from a presumed Western center to non-Western peripheries. Rather, this paratactic comparativism relies upon the conjuncture in the mind of the reader of different literary texts produced in different cultural locations for the new light that such juxtapositions might produce. Instead of studying a writer in isolation, or in relation to only a single national literary tradition, cultural parataxis as a reading strategy examines the *conjuncture* of writers, looking for the multiplicity of identities, traditions, and locales that once set in relation to each other can produce insights otherwise not visible.

As a reading strategy, cultural parataxis assumes the necessity of a spatial orientation, one that foregrounds a geography of intercultural encounters in contact zones characterized by the historical conditions of modernity and postmodernity, colonialism and postcolonialism. By *space*, I do not mean to suggest a site of static emptiness outside of time, but rather space as the location of multiple cultural constructions and historical overdeterminations. In tune with Bakhtin's concept of the "chronotope" as constitutive coordinates of narrative (Bakhtin [1981], 84), I regard space as active, as full and generative of movement through time, of palimpsestic layering through time. Lawrence Grossberg calls space "the milieu of becoming" that allows for understanding experience in terms of "orientations, directions, entries and exits." "It is a matter of a geography of becomings," he continues, "it refuses, not only to privilege time, but to separate space and time. It is a matter of the timing of space and the spacing of time" (Grossberg [1996], 179–80). Like the geographer Edward Soja, I invoke the concept of space to promote the spatialization of history. In "History: Geography: Modernity," he advocates a "theoretical consciousness" that sees "social being actively emplaced in space *and* time in an explicitly historical *and* geographical contextualization" (Soja [1989], 10–11). Given the conventional privileging of time over space as categories of human thought, Soja suggests that to see the "interplay of history and geography" a compensatory assertion of "the interpretive significance of space" is necessary (Soja [1989], 11). Modernity in particular has so often been approached through temporal modes of thought as the progressive march of time or as the rupture of that linearity that the spatialization of modernity as a historical phenomenon emergent around the globe is particularly important. Only then can there be "this creative commingling [...] a triple dialectic of space, time, and social being; a transformative retheorization of the relations between history, geography, and modernity" (Soja [1989], 12).

Within the framework of spatial consciousness, cultural parataxis performs a juxtaposition of different cultural spaces on a transnational landscape to accomplish a form of epistemological travel in the mind of the reader, to render visible the complex dialogic of the contact zones of colonial and

postcolonial locations. In contrast to the hierarchical principles of rhetorical hypertaxis, cultural parataxis helps to break down binarist models of reading based on oppositions like colonizer/colonized and center/periphery while remaining keenly attuned to the circulation of power in the contact zones. Rather than a single center from which power flows unidirectionally, cultural parataxis assumes instead multiple centers, agencies, and subjectivities—what Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan call “scattered hegemonies” (Grewal and Kaplan [1994]) and what S. P. Mohanty considers essential for crossing the gap between “us” and “them” (Mohanty [1989]).

In Modernist Studies, in particular, this means reading modernist writers in juxtaposition with writers in the colonial and postcolonial spaces linked with Europe and the United States and with writers caught up in other imperial centers and the modernities such centers tend to produce in their metropolises and colonies. It means abandoning the Eurocentric framework pervasive in Modernist Studies more generally that modernity and modernism are first produced in the great culture capitals of Europe and the United States and then exported to the colonies and postcolonial nations of the non-Western world, where they exist in diluted and imitative form as “trickle down” effects of European and Anglo-American innovative genius. In “Definitional Excursions,” I have already critiqued the kind of frameworks evident, for example, in the influential work of literary historians Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (e.g., their *Modernism* [1976]) and social theorist Anthony Giddens (e.g., *The Consequences of Modernity* [1990]). As an extension of that critique, I posit here the strategy of cultural parataxis to achieve the kind of new “comparative specificity” that Susan Sniader Lanser calls for in her revisionist attack on a Comparative Literary Studies originating in and covertly supporting nationalist projects centered in Western culture (Lanser [1994], 280–300).

The spatial orientation of cultural parataxis also focuses on the role of spatial locations *within* the narratives themselves. This involves first an attention to the effects of movement across various terrains—the way texts represent how people, ideas, cultural practices and material goods travel, transplant, hybridize, and indigenize as a continual and ordinary function of cultural formation and change. Second, it involves an awareness of the complex conjunctures within each text of such intersecting axes of difference as race, nationality, class, sexuality, religion, and gender—namely, the social locations of the characters and collectivities in the local sites of the text. Blending the discourses of contemporary cultural theory in anthropology, geography, and modernity studies, we can examine how the narratives being juxtaposed each enact a geography of intercultural contact—how they narrativize the borderlands between difference, the dialogic of what James Clifford calls the ethnographies of dwelling and travel and the dialogic relationship between roots and routes (Clifford [1997], 17–46), what Arjun Appadurai terms the “global ethnoscape” (Appadurai [1996], 48–65), and what Roland Robertson means by “glocation,” the enmeshing of the global and the local (Robertson [1995], 25–44).

### **A Transnational Parataxis: Conrad, Woolf, Salih, Roy**

To test cultural parataxis as a transnational reading strategy designed to decenter or scatter conventional hegemonies in Modernist Studies, let me propose a cluster of texts from different parts of the globe all of which engage with questions of modernity relying upon recognizably modernist modes

of representation: *Heart of Darkness* (1899), by the Polish/British writer Joseph Conrad; *The Voyage Out* (1915), by the English writer Virginia Woolf; *Season of Migration to the North* (1967), by the Sudan's leading writer, Tayeb Salih; and *The God of Small Things* (1997), by the Booker Prize winning author from India, Arundhati Roy. The first two of these novels sit on the cusp between realism and modernism, while the latter two exist on the tenuous border between modernism and postmodernism. The representational strategies of all four, however, rely on rupture, self-reflexivity, multiperspectivity, jumbled chronology, simultaneity, ambiguity, and a crisis of normative certainties. All narrativize the psychodynamic processes of consciousness, memory, and desire—embodying or implying the mechanisms of repression and the symptomatic return of the repressed. All use migratory motifs to narrate the world split open, the center that cannot hold. For all, the effects of empire are inseparable from issues of individual subjectivity and agency. And for all, the intersection of gender and race or caste functions as the linchpin that holds together the social order of the nation and its discontents.

Within a comparative matrix, the novels reverberate back and forth, connected intertextually by the deliberate echoing and rescription of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* with which the three subsequent novels directly engage. The journeys of Kurtz and Marlow into the depths of the unnamed Congo, the revelation of the savagery at the heart of Belgian imperialism, the muteness of the African *Other* (subjected but never subject), and the deception of the Intended who is allowed to maintain her belief in the high idealism of her fiancé's endeavors function as the literary and historical ground upon which the later writers construct their own edifices of aesthetic modernity. In this sense, the cluster appears to confirm a Eurocentric and male model for Modernist Studies: Conrad as the originating master modernist, with the English woman, Sudanese man, and Indian woman as his satellites, limited to the periphery of modernism's center. Such a view, however, ignores the fact that as an immigrant Pole and a seaman, Conrad is ambiguously British, formed in the wake of his imperial wanderings and migration as an exile from Poland, which was colonized by Russia, to an adoptive homeland and language. He is not so much a point of origin to which the others must react as he is yet one more manifestation of a centuries-long tradition of travel writing, one particularly intense at the height of the British Empire when its global hegemony seemed but was not in fact unassailable. Conrad's own identity as a writer and the identities of his protagonists reflect a relational process of formation in which continual engagement with others far from "home" or in some way "foreign," *other*, or alien, are constitutive of the self.

There is, of course, much critical debate about Conrad's views on colonialism, some of which is represented in Robert Kimbrough's Norton Critical Edition of *Heart of Darkness* and Ross C. Murfin's Bedford edition of the novel. I read *Heart of Darkness* in the context of the widespread attacks at the time on the particular brutality of Belgian imperialism in the Congo, a huge, heavily populated, and resource-rich area that King Leopold of Belgium claimed as his personal property. In *King Leopold's Soliloquy* (1905), Mark Twain bitterly satirized the king's practice of cutting off hands and feet of black Africans. Attacks on Belgian imperialism did not always imply similar critiques of other European, British, or American forms of imperialism; indeed, they sometimes represented hierarchies of value within the West itself, implying, for example, that the British Empire exercised its authority in a moral way, accepting the "white man's burden" to "civilize" the colonized rather than to brutalize them. Just where Conrad's novel belongs within the various discourses of colonialism of his time will no doubt continue to be debated.

Nonetheless, Conrad's own multiple homelands and constant travel help to highlight some of the more enigmatic moments in *Heart of Darkness* and thus raise questions about the text's total alliance with Western hegemony and colonialism. These are moments at which Marlow's Eurocentric assumptions are ironically unveiled, intensifying the reader's suspicions of his unreliability as a narrator and heightening the novel's indeterminacy. There is, for example, the puzzling presence of the "harlequin" Russian, "the man of patches" who ambiguously guides Marlow to the site of ultimate "horror," the dying Kurtz (Conrad [1996], 68). He provides a carnivalesque rupture of colonial authority and the imperial narrative that associates blankness and savagery with the heart of Africa and the patina of civilization with Europe. This man "in motley" is Marlow's final guide into the heart of darkness, a sort of half-way native informant whose narrative provides the clues to Kurtz's descent. As such, he remains a mystery to Marlow, as to the reader:

there he was before me, in motley, as though he had absconded from a troupe of mimes, enthusiastic, fabulous. His very existence was improbable, inexplicable, and altogether bewildering. He was an insoluble problem. It was inconceivable how he had existed, how he had succeeded in getting so far, how he had managed to remain—why he did not instantly disappear. (Conrad [1996], 71)

At the very least, his ridiculous and inexplicable presence gestures at the existence of another, mostly non-European imperial center, Tsarist Russia, at the hands of which Conrad's own Polish family and nation had suffered. Many in Poland might well have wondered why Russia "did not instantly disappear."

Or, there is the reciprocal gaze shared by Marlow and his black helmsmen, as they journey up river, a moment of shock for Marlow that prefigures in reverse the horror he sees in Kurtz. In this earlier moment of communion between white and black men, Marlow's assumption of the civilized/savage binary splits open, a different sensation of uncanny horror in which he recognizes the intelligent humanity and agency of the foreign and specifically black *other*. Initially, Marlow regards his helmsman as "the most unstable kind of fool I had ever seen," an "athletic black" who "thinks the world of himself" and whose "swagger" offends Marlow's sensibilities (Conrad [1996], 60). But when the "fool-nigger" loses his life in bravely defending the steamer from ambush, Marlow's sense of civilized superiority is shaken by the man's dying gaze, "his lustrous and inquiring glance [that] enveloped" the "two whites who stood over him" (Conrad [1996], 63). Marlow can't get his dead helmsman out of his mind:

No; I can't forget him. [...] Perhaps you will think it passing strange this regret for a savage who was no more account than a grain of sand in a black Sahara. Well, don't you see, he had done something [...] He steered for me—I had to look after him, I worried about his deficiencies, and thus a subtle bond had been created, of which I only became aware when it was suddenly broken. And the intimate profundity of that look he gave me when he received his hurt remains to this day in my memory—like a claim of distant kinship affirmed in a supreme manner. (Conrad [1996], 67)

The helmsman's lustrous gaze is the mark of his agency, the sign of his humanity, and the evidence of a kinship that Marlow both affirms and continually struggles to deny.

Still another enigma is the regal African woman whose dignity and knowledge far surpasses that of the Intended, Kurtz's betrothed. The two women are set up as opposites, drawn together by their love for the same man and grief at his passing. In Marlow's account, they embody the polarities of empire in Africa: white/black; civilized/savage; wife-to-be/mistress; colonizer/colonized. Mar-

low's narrative both affirms and ruptures these binaries. He recalls how the African woman greets the steamer, a figure to him of barbarism and irresistible power:

And from right to left along the lighted shore moved a wild and gorgeous apparition of a woman. She walked with measured steps, draped in striped and fringed cloths, treading the earth proudly, with a slight jingle and flash of barbarous ornaments. She carried her head high; her hair was done in the shape of a helmet. [...] She was savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent; there was something ominous and stately in her deliberate progress. (Conrad [1996], 77)

As with his helmsman, the emotive power of the woman's face and the humanity of her gaze haunt Marlow, embodying and yet throwing into doubt her strangeness:

Her face had a tragic and fierce aspect of wild sorrow and of dumb pain mingled with the fear of some struggling, half-shaped resolve. She stood looking at us without a stir, and like the wilderness itself, with an air of brooding over an inscrutable purpose. She looked at us all as if her life had depended upon the unswerving steadiness of her glance. (Conrad [1996], 77–8)

As she did in greeting the steamer, she “stretched tragically her bare arms after us” in mute appeal when the steamer leaves (Conrad [1996], 84).

Where he respects the humanity of the African woman (even as he keeps reaffirming her barbarism), Marlow dishonors that of the Intended by lying to her about Kurtz's dying words, which he falsely reports to have been her name instead of “the horror! the horror!” (Conrad [1996], 86). As he recalls, her gaze is full of innocence, the desire to believe in Kurtz's moral high purpose to the end: “This fair hair, this pale visage, this pure brow, seemed surrounded by an ashy halo from which the dark eyes looked out at me. Their glance was guileless, profound, confident, and trustful” (Conrad [1996], 91). The Intended's gaze embodies for Marlow the purity and simplicity of civilized womanhood, the spiritual home or center, sustained by empire and nurturing it. Its guileless trust, however, is a mark not of subjectivity as is the gaze of the African woman, but rather of a self that is founded upon a lie. Marlow pities the “civilized” white woman and cannot help but admire the “barbarous” black woman, whose “tragic” gaze communicates her understanding of the truth the white woman supposedly could not bear to hear. The bond between the white agent of the empire and the black woman who symbolizes Africa itself is a distant kinship that suppresses the agency and knowledge of the white woman in whose name the empire is defended. The final irony of the text is that Marlow's lie to protect the European woman's innocence is in some sense a lie that reinforces his own sense of masculine superiority by maintaining his belief in (white) feminine weakness and need for protection. For all his revelation of the “heart of darkness” at the center of European colonialism through the story of Kurtz, Marlow in the end sides with the ideology of Western civilization that rationalizes the patriarchal superiority of men over women and Europe over a colonized and feminized Africa.

Rather than reinforcing a center/periphery model for Modernist Studies, Conrad's novel continually undermines its own affirmations of Western hegemony in its narrativization of multiple centers and agencies. In conjunction with the novels of Woolf, Salih, and Roy, *Heart of Darkness* even more clearly helps to bring into visibility the shifting locations of different agencies, even different modernities — alternative centers, standpoints and itineraries as they are constituted within the axes of history and geopolitics. In Woolf's first novel, for example, the woman who occupies the position of the Intended is herself the traveler, the one who leaves the Thames in passages that



echo the opening of Conrad's novel, headed not for Africa but for a colony of expatriate English in South America. It is she who learns "the horror, the horror," when Richard Dalloway's celebration of a paternalistic and imperial Britain turns suddenly into a sexual assault on Rachel, thus suggesting that the heart of darkness lies within Western and specifically British gender and class relations as well as colonial ones. Rachel's journey into the heart of darkness takes the form of a benignly updated Jane Austen novel that swerves suddenly and irrevocably away from the marriage plot. The relatively happy courtship of Rachel and Terence climaxes into a proposal and engagement during a trip upriver into the Amazon jungle where the "horror" lies deep within the happiness of the marriage plot itself, a horror symbolically indicated in Rachel's subsequent and rapid descent into undefined illness and death, presaged by her untranslatable hallucinations of terror.

Some fifty years later, Salih writes from a Sudanese postcolonial perspective the story of Mustafa, the brilliant student who travels from Africa to London, into the heart of the colonial metropolis. With the title *Mawsim al-hirja ila l-shamal*, Salih's novel first appeared in Arabic in Lebanon in 1967 and then in its first English translation as *Season of Migration to the North* in 1969. The novel has been very controversial in the Sudan and the Arab world in general, with calls for its banning because of its assumed negative portrayal of Islam, as Nihal Bol discusses in "Sudan Pressure on Novelist and Singer" (1997). This controversy has not interfered, however, with its significant presence in contemporary Arabic literature, as *Season of Migration to the North: A Casebook*, edited in Beirut by Mona Takieddine Amyuni makes evident. In its English translation, *Season* has acquired a life of its own as a widely-read and central text in the canons of postcolonial theory and fiction. Recognized for its aesthetic brilliance and political cogency, the novel is often discussed as a rewriting of *Heart of Darkness*, with particularly important readings by Mohammad Shaheen (1985), Saree Makdisi (1992), and Edward Said ([1993], 209–19).

Reversing Kurtz's journey to the south, which begins in his idealism and ends in brutality and despair, Mustafa's journey to the north begins in his embrace of modernity and ends in the seeming destruction of his humanity at the heart of imperial civilization. There in London he succumbs to the North's primitivist desire for and rejection of him. He seduces three white women who are enthralled by his blackness. The last of these he marries and then murders before returning to the Sudan, set free by the court testimony of his guilt-ridden and forgiving father-in-law. Later settling as a stranger into a village, feeling the effects of postcolonial modernization, Mustafa publicly repudiates his British sojourn and education, marries a beautiful village woman, and embraces the traditional agricultural life of rural Sudan. Secretly, however, he admits that he feels no desire for his village wife and finds his greatest pleasure in maintaining a hidden study lined with Western classics, the veritable library of an English gentleman. As a mirror image to Kurtz, who went native, Mustafa is the "Black Englishman" who reveals his secret identity only to the novel's main narrator, a young man from the village who has just returned home from a period abroad. One day, Mustafa vanishes, whether through suicide in the river or an escape back into the West is not fully clear.

Like Marlow, *Season's* main narrator is uncertain about the meaning of the multiply-narrated tale and the charismatic hero's final fate. Like Marlow, this narrator becomes increasingly unreliable. The more he tries to understand the mystery of Mustafa, the more he reveals about his own inner conflicts around issues of tradition and modernity, self and *other* in a postcolonial context, and the divisions of class, gender, and race *within* the Sudan. Moreover, the conjunction of *Heart of Darkness* and *Season of Migration to the North* juxtaposes the stories of the "white African"

Kurtz and the “black Englishman” Mustafa and the narrations of Marlow and the nameless main narrator in a relation of what Homi Bhabha has called “colonial mimicry” (Bhabha [1994], 85–92, 102–22). This mimicry — this imitation-with-a-difference — decenters the prior text by calling into question the inevitable naturalness of its dominance. It also interrogates the binaries of colonial rule that Conrad’s text both embodies and calls into question: civilization/savagery; modernity/tradition; colonizer/colonized; self-reflexivity/naiveté. Fifty years after India’s independence from Britain, Arundhati Roy narrates multiple passages to and from India in *A God of Small Things*, a story that rewrites both *Heart of Darkness* and *A Passage to India* — with a difference. Set during a thirteen-day period of unfolding traumas in 1969 interwoven with a retrospective day in 1992, the novel’s time frame encompasses the colonial, postcolonial, and postmodern periods of the whole twentieth century. The events of 1969 are generated by the visit of little Sophie Mol, who comes from Britain with her English mother to Kerala, on the southwest coast of India, to visit her Indian father Chacko for the first time, only to die in the treacherous river. This journey of mother and daughter echoes that of Adela Quested and her mother-in-law to be in *A Passage to India*. It also reverses Chacko’s passage to London and Oxford, where he went to study as the son of a confirmed Anglophile. Like Salih, whose novel Roy may or may not have known, Roy rewrites the earlier British narratives of colonial travel to examine the journey in reverse, from the postcolonial center to the colonizing periphery.

Chacko’s success at Oxbridge and marriage to a white woman made him almost English, leading to his family’s acceptance of his break with tradition in selecting his own wife, a woman outside his Syrian Christian faith and upper caste status. When Margaret divorces him before the birth of their child, Chacko returns home an embittered man, able nonetheless to take up a position as head of the Ipe family and his mother’s Paradise Pickles and Preserves Factory, able as well to service his sexual needs by having lower caste women brought discreetly into the house for his pleasure. As the pampered son, Chacko is caught in a postcolonial love-hate relation with the English, claiming that the British Raj still blocks the ability of Indians to claim their own history. He explains this knot of Anglophilia/Anglophobia to Rahel and Estha, his seven-year old twin niece and nephew, stating that India is like a “History House” that

we can’t go in [...] because we’ve been locked out. And when we look through the windows, all we see are shadows [...] all we hear is a whispering. And we cannot understand the whispering, because our minds have been invaded by a war. A war that we have won and lost [...] a war that has made us adore our conquerors and despise ourselves. (Roy [1997], 52)

But the story undermines his claim to exclusive victimization, disclosing his caste and gender privilege, insisting that Indians must confront this history as it is interwoven with the geopolitical/postcolonial one. The twins associate Chacko’s metaphoric History House with an actual building across the river, the deserted Akkara estate at the heart of an old rubber plantation. This History House, which Roy terms the Heart of Darkness and the Dark of Heartness in repeated refrains, is an architectural palimpsest, a spatial embodiment of multiple historical overdeterminations. Here, during the colonial period, a British man ran his rubber plantation, went “native,” and killed himself. Like Salih before her, Roy rewrites Conrad to tell the story:

The Black Sahib. The Englishman who has ‘gone native.’ Who spoke Malayalam and wore mundus.

Ayemenem's own Kurtz. Ayemenem his private Heart of Darkness. He had shot himself through the head ten years ago, when his young lover's parents had taken the boy away from him. (Roy [1997], 51)

Here, in the postcolonial period, Ammu—Chacko's beautiful, divorced sister, doubly punished by the family for her love marriage and divorce, denied the financial and erotic freedoms of her divorced brother—secretly meets her lover Velutha, the Untouchable whom she touches, as he touches her in a twin violation of caste laws. Here, her children watch the police beat their beloved father-figure Velutha to near-death for breaking the Love Laws. Here, Rahel returns in 1992 to discover a multinational corporation running a theme hotel for tourists eager to see the 'real' India. As both the "heart of darkness" and the "dark of heartness," the History House encapsulates geopolitical, racial, gender, caste, and familial power relations—the nightmare of both international and domestic power relations from which its occupants struggle to awake. It stands in intertextual relationship with not only the postcolonial discourses within India but also the many "history houses" of British modernism: Forster's *Howard's End*, Joyce's Martello Tower and 16 Eccles Street in *Ulysses*, and Woolf's Talland House in *To the Lighthouse* and "A Sketch of the Past," Knole in *Orlando*, Pointz Hall in *Between the Acts*, and the hotel and villa in *The Voyage Out*. Read through the lens of Roy's History House, the transnational dimensions of these houses come into view more sharply.

### The "Swerve": Gender, Race, and Nation in Woolf and Salih

Roy's rescriptions of Conrad and Forster focus attention on India's domestic structures of gender and caste at the same time that they rely upon transnational narratives of colonialism and postcolonialism. This insistence on multiple constituents of identity highlights the way in which cultural parataxis prevents simple alignments of texts based on national status alone. Any given geographical location—be it London, the Congo, Sudan, or Kerala—exists within a larger transnational map of power relations. But it also contains within its site a history of local hegemonies and hierarchies that interact with those of other geographical relations. The juxtaposition of texts from different geographical sites of modernity helps to make visible local power relations, bringing to light multiple and often conflicting alliances based on gender, race, and class/caste as well as nation.

Such shifting alliances are evident in the transnational cluster of texts I have been discussing—*Heart of Darkness*, *The Voyage Out*, *Season of Migration to the North*, and *The God of Small Things*. Attention to gender, religion, caste, and race as well as nation, for example, suggests different and competing ways of grouping the writers. In geopolitical terms, Conrad and Woolf are British modernists whose novels share a critique of empire at the same time that they perpetuate in varying degrees the homogenization of the racial *other*. As postcolonial writers, Salih and Roy voice the agency and subjectivity of heterogeneous and non-white *others*. In terms of gender, however, Conrad and Salih share the use of women as the symbolic ground upon which the configurations of male subjectivity take shape. Woolf and Roy, in contrast, pinpoint the gendered inequities of home and nation that often make women's identification with their ethnic, racial, or national communities so conflicted. Religion similarly brings into play a set of contradictions. For Conrad and Woolf, Christianity and its civilizing mission provide the ideological patina justifying European colonialism, a hypocrisy that both writers expose. In Roy's novel, however, Syrian Christians

are both anti-colonial and allied with a Hindu elite directed against lower and unscheduled castes. In Salih's novel, a hierarchy of religions from North to South—from European Christian, to Arab Muslim in the Sudan's North, to Christian/animist in the Sudan's South—similarly displaces a binarist approach.

The distinct discourses of race, caste, nation, gender, and religion in all four of these novels complicate any automatic alignment of texts based on any one of these identity constituents alone. Generalizations about male or female modernisms, imperialist or postcolonial modernisms, and Christian or non-Christian modernisms do not hold up in the face of crisscrossing collective identifications. Within the flux of these shifting locations, no single category should be privileged over another. The cultural formations of modernity and modernism require the critic's attention to the multipositionality of individual and group identities based on different axes of power. It also requires attention to traveling modernities and the transnational syncretic formations developed through intercultural interactions in multiple locations, each of which constitutes its own center.

These multiple, shifting, and evolving identity categories also create what I call the "swerve" as the narrative line based on one aspect of collective identity suddenly veers in a different direction based on another communal affiliation. This swerve constitutes a form of rupture that cultural parataxis as a reading strategy helps to heighten. Within a single text, the narrative elements related to different constituents of identity often interrupt each other—by which I mean that the narrative lines based on gender, race, or nation often serve as the flashpoint of rupture around which the poetics of uncertainty revolve, as the problematic that prevents a simple reading of the text. They focalize the kinds of contradiction, ambiguity, fluidity, and uncertainty that follow in the wake of multipositionality. By way of illustration, I want to probe more deeply into the instances of such a swerve in the cultural narratives of gender and nation in *The Voyage Out* and *Season of Migration to the North*.

In *The Voyage Out*, Woolf attacks the tyranny of the marriage plot by constructing a travel narrative that echoes the colonial plot of *Heart of Darkness* and a whole tradition of travel writings where the journey away from home is the shifting ground for the figuration of the protagonist's development. An essential component of the *Bildungsroman*, leaving home in the context of Western travel narratives often invokes issues of national identity as the protagonist crosses frontiers and enters the contact zone of intercultural encounter, often with a non-Western *other*. *The Voyage Out* is no exception. But Woolf swerves away from the more traditional colonial plots, particularly from Conrad's version of it, with the demands of the gender plot in part shaping this rescription.

The first evidence of a swerve away from Conrad's colonial travel narrative is Woolf's telling decision to set Rachel's destination and the main events of the novel within a Latin American state whose former ruler was Spain, not Britain. Given the importance of India for Woolf's extended family and the many stories she must have heard about it—on her mother's side and later through Leonard Woolf—it is curious that she set her first novel on the foreign continent with the least British presence, in an imaginary city that the narrator explains belonged only briefly to the "hardy" British after they defeated the "bloated" and dissolute Spanish three hundred years ago. Here the British Empire failed to gain a foothold for lack of imperial designs, and thus Santa Marina was overrun by the Portuguese, Spanish, and Indians, who intermarried to produce a Latin mestizo race (Woolf [1948], 88–9). Here, the English have returned only ten years prior to Rachel's arrival, and not as colonial rulers, but as tourists and retirees, "disinterested" in Europe's older scenes, eager

for experiencing “the new world,” and occasionally occupied in peddling native authenticity back home in the form of trinkets, a satiric reversal of the history of European conquest in the Americas (Woolf [1948], 90–1). The novel’s setting and the social locations of its inhabitants share more with Forster’s repressed English tourists seeking Latin warmth and life in Italy in *A Room with a View* and *Where Angels Fear to Tread* than they do with Conrad’s Kurtz and Marlow or Forster’s later travelers and colonial rulers in *A Passage to India*. Why does Woolf invoke the colonial plot of *Heart of Darkness* only to swerve away from it?

Woolf’s dismantling of the marriage plot, I want to suggest, depends upon a subtle deconstruction of the colonial plot’s reliance on the binaries of civilized/savage, the West and the Rest. Directly echoing Marlow’s journey into the heart of Africa, Rachel’s trip up the great, unnamed Amazonia river leads to both her engagement to Terence and the contraction of the mysterious fever that kills her. Just as Marlow’s experience hovers between the strange and the familiar, Terence and Rachel almost mutely recognize the inevitability of their engagement in the uncanny atmosphere of the silent flow of the powerful river and the shadowy, Edenic jungle replete with strange fruits and tropical noises. In contrast to Conrad’s novel, however, Woolf foregrounds cultural mimesis. Signifying the imitation or mirroring of cultural practices across borders of difference, cultural mimesis is a concept I borrow from anthropology, particularly from Michael Taussig’s *Mimesis and Alterity* (1993; also Friedman, *Mappings* [1998], 74–8, 123–5, 143–8, 163–5, 177–8). Cultural mimesis exists in *Heart of Darkness* as well, especially evident in the shared gazes of Marlow, his helmsman, and the African woman. But the closer Marlow gets to Kurtz’s skull-encircled compound, the more his narration emphasizes cultural alterity—the difference between savagery and civilization. In the climactic scenes of the marriage plot in *The Voyage Out*, however, the boundaries of the colonial binary blur.

The courtship plot upriver features two parallel engagement scenes that are woven with scenes of intercultural encounter portraying an uncanny combination of mimesis and alterity. When Terence and Rachel first head alone into the woods, for example, they leave Helen sitting on a stool that is likened to the “green chairs in Hyde Park” (Woolf [1948], 269–70) and they take “a wide pathway striking through the forest at right angles to the river. It resembled a drive in an English forest, save that tropical bushes with their sword-like leaves grew at the side” (Woolf [1948], 270). The narrator repeats this description—“They found themselves again in the broad path, like the drive in an English forest”—right after their strangely mimetic first declaration of love:

Silence seemed to have fallen upon the world. [...] ‘We are happy together.’ He did not seem to be speaking, or she to be hearing. ‘Very happy,’ she answered. [...] ‘We love each other,’ Terence said. ‘We love each other,’ she repeated. The silence was then broken by their voices which joined in tones of strange, unfamiliar sound which formed no words. (Woolf [1948], 271–2)

The world they occupy is both “remote” and as familiar as an English park. Woolf critics have debated whether these pronounced repetitions signal a utopian reciprocity or a feminine passivity in the courtship plot. I believe the ambiguity is deliberate, part of the text’s play with uncertainty. But what interests me here is how the couple’s repetitions—not only of each other but of the marriage plot itself—are narratively woven within scenes of cultural mimesis between self and foreign *other*. This mirroring challenges the colonial plot of self/other embodied in *Heart of Darkness*, perhaps to emphasize its contiguous attack on the binaries that underlie the marriage plot.

The second engagement scene in the forest upriver repeats and heightens the oscillation of the first: the invocation and deconstruction of the civilized/savage opposition. As the tourist expedition approaches the “native village,” they observe the hut where the explorer McKenzie died of fever, “almost within reach of civilization” (Woolf [1948], 277–8), an ironic foreshadowing of Rachel’s fate, for she dies of fever “almost within reach” of marriage, a metonym for “civilization” itself. The ironies continue when the “civilization” McKenzie was within reach of turns out to be not the far-way sea-coast town of Santa Marina but a village of natives. The approach to this native village reminds the tourists of “an English park,” the greens leading up to a great English country house: “On both banks of the river lay an open lawn-like space, grass covered and planted, for the gentleness and order of the place suggested human care. [...] As far as they could gaze, this lawn rose and sank with the undulating motion of an old English park” (Woolf [1948], 279). “It might be Arundel or Windsor... if you cut down that bush with the yellow flowers,” says Mr. Flushing, the expedition’s leader, while Hirst remarks, “What an ass I was not to bring my Kodak” (Woolf [1948], 279). Tourists with a difference, the English find not savagery, but civilization, which they find so alien in its jungle setting that it warrants a photograph. It is civilization with a difference in the heart of Amazonia—another instance of “colonial mimicry,” here a cultural mimesis that unseats the hegemony of the kind of gentry culture Woolf was to reveal as hollow and “savage” in Pointz Hall in *Between the Acts*.

The cultural mimesis in the colonial plot of *The Voyage Out* parallels a similar uncanny mimesis in the marriage plot. The second declaration-of-love scene between Terence and Rachel is sandwiched between the approach to the native village and the scene in the village itself. However, this love scene stands in a parodic relationship to conventional ones—a mimesis in the gender plot anticipated by the cultural mimesis of the colonial plot. It is full of silences, inarticulate murmurings, and imitative questions, a kind of swerve away from the passionate expressions of devotion a reader might reasonably expect of the courtship plot: “[T]hey were both silent. ‘You love me?’ Terence asked at length, breaking the silence painfully. [...] She murmured inarticulately, ending, ‘And you?’” And a bit later, she continues: “Am I in love—is this being in love—are we to marry each other? [...] Marriage?” (Woolf [1948], 280–1). Like the first declaration scene, the second contains the oddly mimetic dialogue between the lovers: “‘What’s happened’ he began. ‘Why did I ask you to marry me? How did it happen?’ ‘Did you ask me to marry you?’ she wondered. [...] ‘We sat upon the ground,’ he recollected. ‘We sat upon the ground,’ she confirmed. [...] And loud to Terence she spoke, ‘This is happiness.’ On the heels of her words he answered, ‘This is happiness’” (Woolf [1948], 282–3).

Swerving away from Marlow’s horrified approach to Kurtz’s compound, the arrival of the tourists at the native village to gawk and buy crafts in *The Voyage Out* immediately follows this uncanny courtship declaration. As Mark Wollaeger has shown, this scene invokes the civilized/savage, modern/traditional binaries that underlay the rise of ethnography and tourism in the context of Empire, imperial cultural practices to which Woolf would have been introduced through the world exhibitions in the West featuring traditional native life and through the explosion of ethnographic picture postcards of “savages” which “civilized” people enjoyed sending to each other in the early twentieth century. Woolf to some extent rewrites the familiar cultural scripts of the period as well as *Heart of Darkness* by emphasizing the way the silent native women stare back at the gazing tourists, exhibiting what Wollaeger calls “the flicking of independent subjectivity” that affirms the agency of

the colonized *others* (Wollaeger [2001], 67). To his analysis, I would add that the stare of one native woman in particular, a mother nursing her baby, resonates with the shattering gazes of the black helmsman and the African woman in *Heart of Darkness*. “As they [the English] sauntered about,” Woolf writes,

the stare followed them, passing over their legs, their bodies, their heads, curiously, not without hostility, like the crawl of a winter fly. As she drew apart her shawl and uncovered her breast to the lips of her baby, the eyes of a woman never left their faces, although they moved uneasily under her stare, and finally turned away, rather than stand there looking at her any longer. (Woolf [1948], 284–5)

The subject/object binary that undergirds colonial tourism dissolves in this moment of the reverse gaze. It is a moment of “colonial mimicry” and cultural mimesis. In echoing Conrad, Woolf instituted the colonial plot and then swerved away from it. The fact that it is a nursing mother who highlights the dismantling of binary oppositions conjoins the colonial and gender plots and foreshadows Rachel’s retreat from marriage into illness. In this native woman nursing, Rachel sees her future bondage to marriage, motherhood, and the female body; from this gender-based point of connection across racial and national lines, Rachel’s retreat from the courtship plot begins. The scene ends with the seeming reinstitution of the civilized/savage opposition as “the steamer turned and began to steam back towards civilisation” (Woolf [1948], 286). But a more complex reading of the novel takes into account the way in which the category “civilisation” has already been and will continue to be interrogated.

The novel’s uninterrogated ethnic racism lies not so much with the village scene as with the negative portraits of the Spanish and French doctors who mistreat Rachel. Dr. Rodriguez, in particular, inspires no confidence in Terence, who “looked at him and saw his insignificance, his dirty appearance, his shiftiness, and his unintelligent hairy face” (Woolf [1948], 337–8). It is at this point that Terence decides to move “higher up” the European scale from an English point of view by calling in the French doctor, who is nonetheless helpless to stop the advance of Rachel’s mysterious fever. We never learn if Drs. Rodriguez and Lesage are local mestizos or actual Europeans. But I would suggest that the text’s uncritical representations of the doctors’ foreignness reflects a north/south, Anglo/Latin binary that underlies the heterogeneity of Europe rather than the subject/other binary of colonialism—the kind of intra-European dynamic that I see at work in *Heart of Darkness*, in the Polish émigré’s attack on Belgian imperialism that subtly reinscribes the discourses of the British Empire.

Close attention to the ways in which gender, geography, race, and issues of colonialism complicate *The Voyage Out* prevents any simple association of the novel with either the perpetuation of imperialist projects or the critique of them. Woolf’s weaving of the gender and colonial plots in particular helps to bring into focus the way in which gender complicates what appears to be a rather straightforward postcolonial revenge plot in Salih’s *Season of Migration to the North*. Salih himself alludes to this plot in commenting on his protagonist’s motivation:

In Europe there is the idea of dominating us. That domination is associated with sex. Figuratively speaking, Europe raped Africa in a violent fashion. Mustafa Said, the hero of the novel, used to react to that domination with an opposite reaction, which had an element of revenge seeking. In his violent female conquests he wants to inflict on Europe the degradation which it had imposed upon his people. He wants to rape Europe in a metaphorical fashion. (Berkley and Ahmed [1982], 15–16)

Salih, however, can no more be equated with Mustafa than Conrad with Marlow. A closer look at the novel's gender configurations complicates its geopolitical plot, renders ambiguous its interplay of African traditionalism and European modernity, and unsettles the trope of the colonized as rape-victim-turned rapist.

Mustafa's relations with the three white women he seduces in London play out the colonial revenge plot—their fall into suicide and murder results from his coldly calculated manipulation of their primitivist desire for the black, foreign *other*. In this sense, Mustafa inverts Conrad's Kurtz, whose seduction of the majestic African woman leads to her mute despair. But the black and white women in Africa introduce enigmas into this postcolonial narrative and represent a significant "swerve" away from a simple reversal of Conrad's travel narrative.

The first swerve emerges out of Mustafa's mother, a widow who raises her son without affection or warmth. As Mustafa tells the novel's main narrator, she remained a "stranger" to him, with a mask-like face, leaving him completely free from a sense of family obligation (Salih [1969], 19, 21–3). When he is offered a scholarship to study in Cairo, she gives him money, saying: "'It's your life and you're free to do with it as you will' [...]. That was our farewell: no tears, no kisses, no fuss." "I was cold as a field of ice," he tells the narrator (Salih [1969], 23). Her coldness is reborn in his, which is manifest in his relations with the white women in London. It is not until much later in the novel that one of the subsidiary narrators mentions an aspect of her background that might explain her non-traditional behavior, marked as it is by a seemingly modern adherence to individual freedom: "It is said that his mother was a slave from the south, from the tribes of the Sandi or Baria" (Salih [1969], 54), who married a man from the north, a man of the Ababda tribe who helped Kitchener's army recapture the Sudan. Here is another story of north/south relations and "migration to the north," but one which reflects the existence of African slavery, African complicity in European conquest, the exchange of women as the property of men, and the major division in the Sudan between the largely Arab/Muslim and better-off north and the black African/Christian/animist and poorer south—a split that is at the root of the current, bitter civil war and the continuing existence of slavery in the Sudan today.

The mother's "modern" commitment to individual freedom reappears with a difference in the story of Hosna, the Sudanese village woman whom Mustafa marries in his determination to return to traditional ways. Exposure to Mustafa, however, turns Hosna into a "modern" woman who is determined to decide her own destiny, in defiance of the traditional ways—a form of transnational cultural mimesis. After Mustafa's presumed death, her father orders her to marry the village's oldest lecher, a man described by a village woman as having his "whole brain in the head of your penis" (Salih [1969], 84), a man who revels in the memory of raping a slave girl from the south. Hosna refuses adamantly, violating the patriarchal protocols of the village in her determination to decide her own fate. Breaking with tradition, she asks her father to let her marry the main narrator, the man in whom Mustafa had confided and entrusted the guardianship of his sons, a man who clearly desires her but has been too "traditional" to act on his desire. But her father marries her to the old man anyway to avoid losing face in the village. When the old man attempts to rape Hosna, she stabs him to death "between his thighs" and then kills herself, a double sin within the traditional Muslim village.

This murder represents metonymically the world split open, the dissolution of the traditional center, the coming of modernity. Of Hosna, one old woman says: "What an impudent hussy! That's



modern women for you!” (Salih [1969], 123). However, the old man’s elder wife, reacts to his death with a snort—“Good riddance!”—and gives “trilling cries of joy” after his burial (Salih [1969], 128), thus raising the question of who is traditional and who is modern. As in *The God of Small Things*, the young woman’s “modern” transgression of tradition in attempting to act on her own desire is a narrative line woven in between and complicating the strands of the postcolonial story of north/south power relations. Moreover, modernity appears indigenized in African form, rooted in a woman’s resistance to local forms of (north) Sudanese patriarchy.

Further complicating this blend of narrative lines is the way in which the main narrator’s account of Hosna’s sensuous warmth and perfumed sweetness recapitulates Mustafa’s report of the odor, laughter, and embrace of the one woman who seemed to genuinely care for him: the white woman Mrs. Robinson, the wife of a colonial administrator in Cairo who befriends the lonely boy. She mothers him as his own mother could not with a kindly warmth associated with her European odor, a smell that kindles his first inkling of adult desire, perhaps presaging his attraction to the exotic otherness of the white women in London whom he seduces. The ultimate irony is that the sadomasochistic relationship with his white wife becomes an obsessive love from which he cannot escape, even in the arms of Hosna. In terms of the postcolonial revenge plot, Mustafa’s desire for the odor and body of exotic white women is a form of Anglophilia, a postcolonial dis-ease that the novel attempts to exorcise. But in terms of the novel’s gender plot, Mustafa’s desire for the white female body is rooted in his southern mother’s enslavement by the Arab north within the racial/religious politics of postcolonial Sudan, an enslavement that led to her coldness toward him and his response to the warmer substitute-mothering of the white, colonizing woman in Cairo. As in *The God of Small Things*, gender issues interrupt a purely colonial/postcolonial reading of the novel.

This gender-induced swerve away from the postcolonial revenge plot intensifies in the story of the main narrator, the character who most parallels Marlow. The attraction Mustafa cannot feel for Hosna comes alive in this narrator, who experiences with her—particularly in her odor—some of the intimacy Mustafa felt in Mrs. Robinson. But it is a longing upon which the narrator is too repressed to act, thereby setting in motion the disaster of forced marriage, murder, and suicide. The narrator’s passive and fairly “traditional” exoticization of Hosna contrasts with her attempt to act on her own desire as a “modern” woman. She makes clear her desire to marry him, but he clings to unchanging traditional ways and cannot act on his desires, a reluctance that leads to catastrophe. She demonstrates ways in which tradition can be open to change, while he represents a nostalgic desire for return. The novel’s complex circuits of travel and desire north and south disrupt the fixed binaries of a postcolonial geopolitics. Gender crisscrosses the north/south itineraries to complicate the narrative, calling into question a too-easy alignment of north and south with cold and warm, subject and *other*, colonizer and colonized, victimizer and victim, modernity and tradition.

## Conclusion

A reading strategy based in cultural parataxis for understanding the transnational landscapes of modernism and modernity in *Heart of Darkness*, *The Voyage Out*, *Season of Migration to the North*, and *The God of Small Things* emphasizes the site out of which each emerges and the function of

spatiality in their narratives. Each text is site-specific, reflecting different experiences of and standpoints toward modernity. Each is saturated with its own history, requiring what Clifford Geertz has termed a “thick description” to understand its specificity (Geertz [1973]). A spatial paradigm focuses the way in which modernities spring up in different places at different times, each with its local or idiomatic inflection, thus helping to break the tenacious hold of Eurocentrism in Modernist Studies. It also highlights the way in which global relations are reflected in local formations of modernity—how the subjectivity of the one is shaped through interaction with others, often troped in the significance of travel through space as well as the buildings that people enter and leave.

Let me conclude these cultural parataxes with a brief summary of what I mean by reading modernism and the issues of (post)colonialism in a transnational landscape. To displace the prevailing Eurocentric model of modernism built out of a white, male center with female and/or racial *others* as satellites, I am calling for a geopolitical conjuncturalism that requires a form of spatial practice built on cultural parataxis, a kind of geographical thinking that addresses the meanings of location and itinerary in the production of modernity and its aesthetic manifestations. As a constantly hybridized phenomenon, modernism travels, translates, transplants, and indigenizes—globally, and not from a single point of origin. It emerges from different centers, different experiences of modernity that are not segregated from each other but are rather reciprocally relating to each other in patterns of mimetic mirroring as well as difference. Within this potentially global landscape, gender, nation, race, and religion play a particularly significant role: read in conjunction, they disrupt reductionistic narratives of cultural formation and interaction; and they foreground the contradictions built into their multiple mediations.

I have offered a reading strategy of cultural parataxis drawing on writers from continents around the globe as a way of displacing the center/periphery model of modernist internationalism common in Modernist Studies. Cultural parataxis as a spatially oriented reading practice fosters attention to forms of cultural mimesis as well as difference and helps to establish a locational model of heterogeneous modernity. Modernism understood in locational terms is both site-specific and syncretistic—idiomatically specific to its particular geographical and historical construction and syncretist as an effect of continual cultural traffic into, out of, and across its terrain. Such a modernism is no longer limited in time and place to certain arbitrarily bounded phenomena in the West but is rather understood as aesthetic manifestations of a shifting and traveling modernity that emerges differently, in different times and places, and always in relation to others, potentially global in scope.

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## Modernism at Large

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Globalization poses practical and theoretical challenges to modernism studies that have still not been fully acknowledged. More significantly, it also represents a major challenge to various traditional and current notions of culture itself. But so far, processes of globalization as distinct from historically comparable, earlier phenomena such as internationalization or empire building and colonization have been studied primarily in terms of economics (financial markets, trade, transnational corporations), information technology (television, computers, the internet), and politics (the waning of the nation state, civil society, the rise of NGOs). The cultural dimensions of globalization and their relation to the whole history of modernity remain poorly understood, often for the simple reason that “real” or “authentic” culture (especially if framed in an anthropological or post-Herderian context) is seen as that which is subjectively shared by a given community and therefore local, whereas only economic processes and technological change are perceived as universal and global. In this account the local opposes the global as cultural tradition whereas the global functions as progress for some, and as a force of alienation, domination, and dissolution for others. This global/local binary, however, is as homogenizing as the alleged cultural homogenization of the global it opposes. Rather than offering a new perspective on contemporary culture, it merely recycles an older sociological model for analyzing modernity (tradition versus modernity, *Gemeinschaft* versus *Gesellschaft*, and so on) without any reflection on how modernizing and globalizing processes of the past decades have made that earlier model obsolete.

My argument here is that most modernism research in the academy and in the museum is still bound by the local. Despite the celebrated internationalism of the modern, the very structures of academic disciplines, their compartmentalization in university departments of national literatures, and their inherent unequal power relations still prevent us from acknowledging what one might call modernism at large, that is, the hybrid cultural forms that emerge from the negotiation of the modern with the indigenous. In an increasingly global world, the local of modernism research is of course the traditional Western European and North American canon and its disciplinary codification in national departments of language, literature and culture. Sure, the canon has been expanded in recent years, for example, by including phenomena such as the Harlem Renaissance or Caribbean modernism, but processes of translation and transnational migrations and their effects remain insufficiently studied outside of local specializations. It seems to me that we lack a workable model of comparative studies able to go beyond the traditional approaches that still take national cultures as the units to be compared and which rarely pay attention to the unevenness of flows of translation, transmission, and appropriation. Tim Mitchell has argued that Western modernity has always seen itself as a stage of history and as a stage for historiography against the temporally and

geographically non-modern (Mitchell [2000])). The same is true of modernism. Modernism research has for a long time focused on the former, but it has neglected the latter. The modernity of the geographically “non-modern” has been neglected, except of course when the “non-modern” of, say, traditional or “primitive” African sculpture was simply appropriated in order to prove the universality of the modern as form. What I am suggesting is that modernism research has not even lived up to the promises of Goethe’s notion of “Weltliteratur,” first articulated in 1827 in conversation with Eckermann. The Goethean concept of “Weltliteratur,” itself grounded in a major project of translation and appropriation within German romanticism, was in its time part of an attempt to counter the increasing nationalization of literature and culture that was to dominate the nineteenth century and has since then become institutionally ossified. “Weltliteratur” had always been a touchstone for discussions of Comparative Literature as a discipline, even though the discipline remained safely centered on only a few European languages and literatures. But today we must ask the question in an entirely different key, not least because of developments within modernism studies itself such as the rise of new media and the expansion of the literary to the textual. What Adorno in a late essay “Kunst und die Künste” (Art and the Arts) has described as the large-scale “Verfransungsprozess,” the fraying of the specificity of artistic media and their multiple cross-over effects, has forever changed the nature and function of literature itself (Adorno [1967], 159). At the same time literature as a medium no longer occupies center stage in the formation of identities and national cultures, and thus we may want to reframe Goethe’s question by asking: can there be something like a “Weltkultur,” a world culture or a global culture, and if so, how does one conceptualize it and do justice to its local and (still) national variants? Clearly, the global will always be inflected by the local in cultural matters and nothing was further from Goethe’s mind than a homogenized world literature, say, in global English as Erich Auerbach feared it in an influential essay of 1952 (“Philologie der Weltliteratur”, Philology of World Literature). I think it is easy to agree that there can be no purely global culture totally separate from local traditions, nor can there be any longer a purely local culture insulated from the effects of the global. But which cultural forms can be labeled global at this time, how are they determined by market forces and by the media, and how do they circulate? What, if anything, is global about modernism? Is it possible to imagine cultural practices that are somehow global without circulating globally? Does it even make sense to maintain separate notions of global and local culture today? And what are the layers or hierarchies within forms of globalizing culture? All difficult questions for comparatists.

Clearly, globalization provides the horizon for new research on comparative modernisms today. But how can the transition be made from the often very bland considerations of the global in so much of the literature, in which the global appears either as a threatening specter or as a beneficent invisible hand, to the study of cultural genealogies of language, medium, and image as they undergo transformations under the pressures of the global?

In this essay, I want to revert to a model of literary and cultural studies that, for rather parochial reasons, has been prematurely put to rest by U. S. postmodernism: the model of high and low art or elite and mass culture. High/low should here be seen as a cipher for a much more complex set of relations involving palimpsests of times and spaces that are anything but binary. I want to suggest that this model, once freed from its earlier parochialism, stemming from its embeddedness in U. S./European constellations, may well serve as a template through which to look comparatively at phenomena of cultural globalization, including that earlier phase of non-European modernisms in Asia,

Latin America, or Africa. For too long, such non-Western modernisms have either been ignored in the West as epistemologically impossible since only the West was considered advanced enough to generate authentic modernism, or they were dismissed as lamentable mimicry and contamination of a more genuine local culture. Such “studied ignorance,” as Gayatri Spivak once called it in another context, is no longer acceptable.

But the high/low problematic also extends deeply into the realm of tradition and its modernized transmissions in the present. The issue of the local and authentic versus the global and foreign is currently relevant in many different contexts: think, for instance, of the political role which the classical Brahmin epics play in contemporary India, epics written in Sanskrit ages ago, but endlessly displayed on television and circulated in many languages in oral culture today; or consider the renewed struggle in China over Confucianism which in Mao’s times was relegated to the margin as belonging to feudal culture. Also in China, there has been a turn to traditional popular culture as a defense against the influx of Western mass culture, a debate heavily invested with the politics of the authentically local versus a superimposed foreign influence; and if you consider as well the complex mix of Spanish and Portuguese baroque culture both with indigenous Indian, African, and other European immigrant traditions in several countries of Latin America, it immediately becomes clear that the high/low relationship takes very different forms at different historical times, and that it can be inflected by radically different politics. It is not just that the borders between high and low have begun to blur significantly after high modernism in the West, one of the favorite tropes in the Northern debates which some twenty years ago made us read the Latin American boom novel as a kind of postmodernism *avant la lettre* (for an account of how problematic such a reading is see Avelar [1999], especially chapter 1). But a strong and stable literary high culture cannot be assumed even to have existed everywhere on the model of European nation states such as France, England, or Germany. And where an indigenous high culture did exist in India, Japan, or China, it will inevitably have had a different relationship to power and to the state both in pre-colonial and in colonial times. Such different pasts will inevitably shape the ways that a specific culture will negotiate the impact of globalization and its attendant spread of media, communication technologies, and consumerism. In many parts of the world, the legacies of imported *and* indigenous modernisms, what I call “modernisms at large,” are very much part of such negotiations. Even while media and consumerism may spread everywhere in the world, though with different intensities and widely divergent access, the imaginaries they produce are nowhere near as homogeneous as a new kind of global Kulturkritik laments. Comparatists, however, do have a problem. At a time when literary studies are asked to cover ever more territory both geographically and historically, thus overloading any individual critic’s circuits, the danger is that the discipline will lose its coherence as a field of investigation, get bogged down in ever more local case studies or become superficial, neglecting the need to maintain a methodological and theoretical project. The U. S. model of cultural studies in particular, in its reductive focus on thematics and cultural ethnographies, its privileging of consumption over production, its lack of historical depth and linguistic knowledge, its abandonment of aesthetic and formal issues coupled with its unquestioned privileging of popular and mass culture is not an adequate model to face the new challenges. On this issue I will have more to say later on.

The task is made more difficult by the fact that at a time when we desperately need theoretical frameworks to understand processes at work in globalizing cultures, many in the humanities have turned against theory with a vengeance. Some of this anti-theoretical posturing may not be entirely

undeserved, though it is often based more on resentment than on an argued weakness of this or that specific theory. Politically, the animus against theory seems ubiquitous. In the United States, it can be found on the right, in the defense of a national culture against alien imports as in Alan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* (1986), among liberals such as Richard Rorty in his recent book *Achieving Our Country* (1998), or among some on the postcolonial left and their wholesale rejection of theory as Western and Eurocentric. It strikes me as significant that all such rejectionist views remain predicated on identity politics and resurgent parochialisms that theoretical thought has done so much to undermine. With this statement I am not arguing for an assumed good cosmopolitanism of theory versus the bad localism of identity politics. The point is precisely to avoid such constricting binarisms, for of course, all theories themselves inevitably have their own local and historical inflections. To the extent that recent theories, from the Frankfurt School's social and aesthetic theory to semiotics and the various poststructuralist projects, betray their geographic origin in Europe and their historical genealogy in the age of totalitarianism and the Cold War, such theories need to be adapted, transformed, and converted to use at other times and in other spaces rather than simply being rejected, copied uncritically or used as fashionable signs of self-advertising. I am not saying that theory is beyond critique, but that the theory versus no-theory position is epistemologically deficient, politically insidious, and aesthetically disabling.

So, what is to be done in light of this situation? The often heard call for a return to the facts or to traditional philology is certainly no solution for the project of reassessing modernism as a worldwide phenomenon. To be taken more seriously is the increasing demand for a return to disciplinarity. The crux here is of course how "return" is being defined. If it is meant to annul the changes in the humanities brought about by "theory" and the "cultural turn," it would simply be regression. But if it were meant to counter the premature anti-disciplinarity of so much cultural studies and merge recent theory with traditional critical practices of the disciplines, then indeed the return to disciplinarity could play a salutary role. For if globalization requires one single thing from the cultural critic, it would be a model for comparative study across borders, across languages, across cultures, the kind of comparative study that may help nurture a new sense of connectedness in difference, perhaps even a new kind of cosmopolitanism (for an intelligent discussion of this and other related issues see Robbins [1999]). Clearly, older models of comparative literature such as the study of periods and movements, the analysis of influence and reception, the geographic migration of ideas and the practices of translation no longer suffice to capture the dynamics of cross-cultural flows and their uneven distribution across modernity with its ever expanding intellectual diasporas and its practices of cultural consumption, appropriation, and dispossession. Even a model as intelligent and adventurous as Franco Moretti's "distant reading" cannot do the job, as it remains locked into one literary genre, the novel, and into one theory, Wallerstein's world systems theory (Moretti [2000]). The question I cannot address here is whether or not Moretti's "distant reading" could be made fruitful as a theoretical concept for transnational modernism studies as such. Given anybody's inevitable limitations of linguistic and historical knowledge, at a practical level it is certainly necessary occasionally to engage in distant readings. But I would not want to accept it as a methodological premise. Distant reading at the global level can only generate cognitive gain if it is supported by close reading within the original culture and language. What this requires is networks of scholarly exchange across continents, across languages, and across disciplines.

A major task then is to create sets of conceptual parameters for such comparisons to give some coherence to a field of study in danger of becoming either too amorphous or remaining simply parochial. My tentative reflections are meant to move us into that crucial cultural space between the local, the national and the global. And here it may be important for humanists and literary scholars to draw on the recent attempts to revitalize social science area studies which have themselves been searching for new transnational and transregional paradigms since the end of the Cold War.

The demand for an alternative model of comparison that would transcend an older European-style Comparative Literature paradigm may be new, but not all tools need to be invented from scratch (for an account of the debates in the field see Bernheimer [1995]). After all, the issue of globalization remains very much tied up with the rich debate about modernity and aesthetic modernism and their respective historical trajectories. And here we need to acknowledge that the political and cultural developments of the 1990s have not been kind to the postmodernists' confident prediction that modernity was at an end, let alone the even more triumphalist claim that history had ended (Fukuyama [1992]). Nor has the equation of modernity and sometimes even modernism with fascism, totalitarianism, and genocide been very helpful. On the contrary, modernity is now (and has been for some time) everywhere, and the discourse of postmodernity seems only an episode (if a significant one) within a certain transformation of Western modernity itself. The issue is no longer modernity versus postmodernity, even though this inevitably reductive binary still underlies much of the currently popular anti-modernity thinking that emerges from a narrowly understood postcolonial approach. The issue is rather what Arjun Appadurai has identified as modernity-at-large, and what others have described as alternative modernities. As Dilip Gaonkar wrote in a recent special issue of *Public Culture* on alternative modernities: "It [modernity] has arrived not suddenly but slowly, bit by bit, over the *longue durée*—awakened by contact; transported through commerce; administered by empires, bearing colonial inscriptions; propelled by nationalism; and now increasingly steered by global media, migration, and capital" (Gaonkar [1999], 1). Indeed, the critical focus on alternative modernities with their deep histories and local contingencies now seems to offer a better approach than the imposed notion, say, of postmodernism in Asia or in Latin America. It also permits us to critique current globalization theories in the social sciences which in their reductive modeling and lack of historical depth do little more than recycle the earlier U. S. generated modernization theory of the Cold War. Even if the West remains a major powerbroker and "clearing-house" of world-wide modernities, as Gaonkar puts it, it does not offer the one and only model of cultural development, as both cyber-utopians and the dystopian McDonaldization theorists seem to believe. Nor does the West possess the only model of political development toward civil society and human rights. Especially the tale of the two modernities, the good and the bad, now appears to be very place- and time-specific. The standard account of aesthetic modernism and avantgardism in Europe as a progressive and adversary culture directed against the social and economic modernity of bourgeois society may not easily apply outside of Europe. It is enough to think about "Shanghai modern" in the 1920s as the space of emergence of Chinese communism, or about the explosion of modernism in Brazil in the 1920s and 1930s and its instrumentalization for a national proto-fascist project to know that the European model of a strong opposition between social and economic modernity and aesthetic modernism did not translate seamlessly into other contexts. Today, it no longer even holds as an interpretive model for European culture itself, and it certainly never held for colonial or communist societies in which cultural and political modernization was shaped by very



different constellations. Such historical and geopolitical differences are at stake with a notion of modernity at large that avoids the trap of homogenization claims as much as it rejects the illusion of a happy plurality of modernities, a kind of theoretical Benetton effect.

The same need to argue in place- and time-specific ways applies to the relationship between high art and mass culture that accompanied the trajectory of Western modernity from romanticism to postmodernism and that is intimately connected to the idea of modernism as adversary culture. In much valuable recent work on the editing, marketing, and dissemination of modernism in Europe, my earlier argument about the Great Divide has been criticized as if it had been an argument about a static binary of high modernism versus the market (see for example Dettmar and Watt [1996] or North [1999]). That, however, was never the point. The argument rather was that since the mid-nineteenth century in Europe, a powerful imaginary insisted on the divide while time and again counter-acting or violating that categorical separation in practice (see especially the introduction to Huyssen [1986a]). It was a conceptual rather than an empirical argument, and it operated at the level of artistic production rather than dissemination. After all, the insight that all cultural products are subject to the market was already advanced by Adorno in the late 1930s, which made him no less an emphatic theorist of the divide between modernism and mass culture (see for example Adorno's 1938 essay "On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening" [1978]; and see also my essay "Adorno in Reverse," Huyssen [2002]). Thus documenting in detail how the high modernists were all involved with the marketing of their works, bickering with publishers, engaged with small journal enterprises, even with fashion magazines, will not do away with the issue of the divide. With certain forerunners already around 1800, it was established as a central conceptual trope in the mid-nineteenth century, and it became an energizing ideological norm of the post-World War II period, when it took hold in the context of Cold War cultural politics and the explosive acceleration of consumerism and television culture. It was that post-war version of the divide that was primarily at issue in the postmodernism debate of the 1970s and early 1980s, more so anyway than what certain modernist authors and artists did or did not do in the period of high modernism proper. And then there was another dimension to the debate in the early 1980s. The critique of the divide in postmodernism discourse allowed the historical avantgarde to emerge retrospectively as an alternative to high modernism and to legitimate a variety of neo-avantgarde enterprises in the arts of the 1960s and 1970s. Here, too, one could make the historical argument that the distinction between high modernism and the historical avantgarde was not so much a clear-cut historical reality, say, between 1910 and 1930, as it was a later codification that served a post-1950s generation of artists and critics to question the Cold War ideology of high modernism.

All of that is history today and indeed no longer pertinent. The modernism versus mass culture problematic that was once central to the emergence of postmodernism and its project to break down the walls between high and low has since vanished from our screens. But it may have vanished for not entirely good reasons. To recall it now in a more than just archival way will require that the argument be freed from its rather limiting postmodernist connotations in order to deploy it in a geopolitically expanded frame.

I am suggesting here that the model of high versus low can be productively rethought and related to cultural developments in "peripheral," postcolonial or post-communist societies. The high/low relationship has taken very different shapes and forms outside of the Northern Transatlantic, and to the extent that it captures aspects of cultural hierarchies and social class, race and religion, gen-

der relations and codifications of sexuality, colonial cultural transfers, the relation between cultural tradition and modernity, the role of memory and the past in the contemporary world, and the relation of print media to visual mass media, it can be made productive for the comparative analyses of cultural globalization today as well as for a new understanding of earlier and other roads taken within modernity. In other words, the discourse about alternative modernities in India or in Latin America can profitably be expanded to include the assessment of alternative developments in the relations and crosscurrents between indigenous popular culture, minority cultures, high culture (both traditional and modern), and mass mediated culture. Historically alternative modernities have existed all along and their trajectories continue into the age of globalization. The term “alternative modernity” is not meant to suggest that there is one real and authentic modernity which in its spreading across the world created those alternative modernities in Latin America or in Asia. At the same time, our attempts to de-Westernize or to de-Europeanize the concept of modernity may ultimately run up against a real limit set by the genealogy of the concept itself. This tension is to be acknowledged rather than defused.

But why focus on the issue of high/low at all, one might ask? For one, the reinscription of the high/low problematic in all its complex and multi-layered dimensions into the discussions of cultural modernity in transnational contexts and across borders can counteract the widespread notion that the culture of the East or the West, Islam or Christianity, the United States or Latin America is as unitary as writers such as Alan Bloom, Benjamin Barber, and Samuel Huntington have suggested. In other words, it can counter the bad heritage from cultural anthropology and a Spenglerian kind of American style *Kulturkritik*. It can problematize the all too evident need to create an inside/outside myth in order to maintain a *Feindbild* (enemy image), an absolute other, which can be read itself as a heritage of the Cold War in current theories about clashing civilizations. And secondly, it can also counteract and complicate the equally limited argument that only local culture or culture *as* local is good, authentic, and resistant, whereas global cultural forms must be condemned as manifestations of cultural imperialism, that is, Americanization. Every culture, after all, has its hierarchies and social stratifications, and these differ greatly according to local circumstances and histories. To unpack such temporal and spatial differentiations might be a good way to arrive at new kinds of comparisons that would go beyond the clichés of colonial versus postcolonial, modern versus post-modern, Western versus Eastern, center versus periphery, global versus local, the West versus the rest. In order to de-Westernize notions such as modernity and modernism, we need a lot more theoretically informed descriptive work about modernisms at large, their interaction or non-interaction with Western modernisms, their relationship to different forms of colonialism (different in Latin America from South Asia and again from Africa), their codings of the role of art and culture in relation to state and nationhood, and so on. And in the end, it may well turn out that despite the best of our intentions, such de-Westernization of modernism/modernity will always and for good reason remain limited. Some day such a project may not even seem as pertinent as it does now.

But for me there is yet another reason to rethink the high/low relationship today. It also points us back to the left modernism debates of the 1930s (Brecht, Lukács, Bloch, Benjamin, Adorno) and their never abandoned concern with issues of aesthetic value and aesthetic perception in relation to politics, history, and experience (a limited number of translated texts from a much wider debate has been collected in Bloch et al. [1977]; for a fuller selection of documents see Schmitt [1973]). Revisiting the high/low problematic in a transnational context might then serve us to reinscribe the issue

of aesthetic value and form into the contemporary debate, and to rethink the historically altered relationship between the aesthetic and the political for our age in ways that must surely go beyond the debates of the 1930s, but also beyond the postmodernism and postcolonialism debates of the 1980s and 1990s.

Two brief points on this: in light of the fact that an aesthetic dimension shapes not just the high arts but also the products of consumer culture in terms of design, advertising, and the mobilization of affect and desire, it is retrograde to claim that any concern with aesthetic form is inherently elitist. And secondly: if those earlier debates were primarily organized around a linear temporal axis (modernism versus realism, postmodernism versus modernism) and focused on media of high culture such as literature and painting, the condition of globality requires consideration of a strong geographic and spatial dimension, a recognition of the different intertwinings of the temporal with the spatial and their aesthetic effects. We might want to explore further what Arjun Appadurai has usefully described as the “production of locality” and “locality as producing” as key ingredient of modernity at large (Appadurai [1996]). Here, the analysis of city cultures and the aesthetic perceptions and social uses of space are key factors in such a discussion. And the high/low distinction itself, in its spatial metaphoricity, can be linked quite pragmatically to the different urban spaces of cultural production and consumption such as the street, the neighborhood, the museum, the concert hall and the opera house, the tourist site and the shopping mall. My main point in all of this, however, is that reconsidering high/low has the advantage of inevitably bringing back the issue of aesthetics and form which cultural studies in the United States (as opposed to cultural studies in Brazil or Argentina) has all but abandoned in its move against the alleged elitism of aesthetics. I would argue that the politically legitimate attack on an earlier social-cultural elitism embodied in the figure of the aesthetic connoisseur ignores the fact that the insistence on aesthetic value and the complexities of representation in cultural production can today easily be uncoupled from a socially coded elitism in the sense of Bourdieu’s “distinction”. For a better understanding of how cultural markets function under conditions of globalization, a critical understanding of the aesthetic dimension of all image, music, and language production remains absolutely crucial. The struggle against aesthetics as a code word for European modernism and elitism has simply become obsolete.

This brings me to my main argument why cultural studies in its current configuration does not provide a good model to understand globalizing cultures or the role of modernisms at large. From the point of view of a U. S.-style cultural studies, it is easy to claim that the high-low debate is history. After the events of 1989–90, postmodernism as a concept, just as the concern over high and low culture, was swallowed up by an emerging new set of social, political, and economic configurations. The vast expansion of cultural markets, a spectacular museum and gallery culture, and electronic media have made evident the extent to which the postmodern high/low debate was still predicated on the stability of literacy and print as dominant medium, on the notion of architecture as building style, on the visual arts as high marker of culture, and on the nation state as guarantor of high culture in Western, especially North Atlantic, societies.

To revive *this* debate today would be futile. In the U. S. context of market triumphalism, life style revolution, and the victorious march of pop cultural studies through the institutions, low has won the battle and high has been relegated to the margins, the American culture wars from Allan Bloom’s manifesto of the 1980s to the reassertion of literary and artistic canons in the 1990s notwithstanding. But it has been a pyrrhic victory, marred by continuing resentment toward the vanquished realm of

high culture. Thus a significant part of the left academia still decries high culture as elitist and Eurocentric, denounces aesthetics as totalitarian, and refuses a debate about cultural value. The right, on the other hand, ossifies traditional culture before modernism, but rejects contemporary high culture in much of the arts as well as in the literary and theoretical fields where European imports, especially from Germany (Nietzsche, Heidegger) and France (Derrida) are blamed for the “closing of the American mind” and for the spread of nihilism and relativism. The outcome of the postmodernism debates has thus not been the creative merger of high and low, as it once was imagined by some in the postmodernism debate of the 1970s and early 1980s: a new democratic culture that would couple aesthetic complexity with mass appeal, abolish hierarchies of taste and class, and usher in a new age of cultural pleasure beyond the entropies and minimalisms of late modernism on the one hand and beyond the numbing hegemony of Cold War mass culture on the other. If there ever was a postmodern utopianism, this would have been it. But, as with all utopias, we have had to settle for much less.

Instead of an ambitious and complex postmodernism of resistance, we may now have a new version of what sociologist Herbert Gans (1999) described as midbrow taste cultures (upper middle and lower middle culture). But midbrow today is not as clearly circumscribed by class as it was for Gans in the early 1970s. It is rather multiply fragmented according to new forms of niche marketing and ever more diversified upscale consumption patterns. In terms of style, design, and sophistication, midbrow operates at a higher level now than it used to, which has led some to speak of a high pop in contrast to a low pop. Clearly, there has been some upward mobility, if not in most people’s real situation in life, then certainly in general levels of taste and consumption. But the new diversity of consumer goods is the result of new market developments, described by David Harvey and others as post-Fordism (Harvey [1989]), and of new immigration patterns since the changed immigration laws of 1965, both of which must be assumed to have had an impact on cultural production *per se*.

Indeed, consumerism is ever more inevitably the common denominator of all culture, making illusions about the autonomy of “high” ever more difficult to sustain. If high was predicated on emphatic notions of production, authorship and the work of art, contemporary Western culture has been subjected to the principle of consumption writ large. This development not only invalidates artistic autonomy which, it turns out, was often better protected by the state through subsidies for culture than it now is by the market; but it also affects the very possibility of intellectual critique. Thus today we have elite consumerism, various kinds of midbrow and lowbrow consumerism, differentiated by generation, income levels, and life styles, and an imaginary counter-consumerism as celebrated by cultural studies as the privileged space for the authentic critical enterprise in the humanities.

Now I will not resist the temptation to polemicize against this notion of counter-consumerism (this polemic is indebted to the Chicago journal *The Baffler*. See especially Frank and Weiland [1997] and Frank [1997]). Counter-consumerism is the 1990s U. S. version of Marcuse’s great refusal. It is embodied in the notion of the rebel consumer who transgresses and subverts the cultural commodity in the act of consumption. The rebel consumer, typically associated with the identity politics of a marginal group or a minority, has taken the place of the avantgarde artist who in turn has become marginal or superfluous. Not the artist as producer of a new collective and a new mode of reception, as Benjamin and Brecht once imagined it, but the consumer as bricoleur of meanings that permit escape from the iron cage of the market or the state. Thus academic cultural studies, whose theoretical discourse is of course anything but popular, has simply reversed the old high/low hierarchy. High

becomes taboo, low the norm. The once legitimate critique of outdated notions of high culture as the cement that provides class identity and national cohesion has entered into an unsavory brew with a methodologically limited ethnography of cultural reception and a politically limited identity politics. The end of the subversive, avantgarde work of art has given rise to the transgressive consumer. If the first turned out to be a delusion in the end, the second most certainly is a delusion from the very beginning.

A second point needs to be made. To frame the discussion rigidly in terms of high versus low always suggested too much solidity of the two poles. Cultural sociologists have always insisted on making further distinctions in terms of taste or *habitus*, and cultural historians know about the subterranean linkages between high and low that were always present. And yet, there was a time when high and low were indeed defined fairly clearly by their dichotomy—high as a circumscribed body of European, American, and museal culture, codified by the universal museum, the academy, the gallery system, the art film; low as popular entertainment, spectator sports, rock and country music, pulp novels, detective stories and science fiction, Hollywood film, television. High enjoyed the solidity of the archive: ambitious and original works worthy of being incorporated into the tradition and promising eternity; low representing the fleeting productions for the day, subject to the rule of fashion and secured by a system of repetition and reproduction. The production of high culture was characterized by the low turnover velocity of the archive, based on slow accumulation and even slower erosion rather than on perpetual replacement and planned obsolescence; the production of low or mass culture, on the other hand, was always subject to the high turnover velocity of a consumer society, its fleeting pleasures, its transitory obsessions, and its need to constantly renew the promises it inevitably failed to make good on. But as a stark dichotomy, the high/low divide reflected as much a political and social vision of the world as it had to do with elusive criteria of aesthetic judgment and quality.

Today, as we all know, the binary in its emphatic sense has been abolished by a new logic of cultural circulation brought about by media technologies, new patterns of marketing and consumption and their radical effects both on cultural tradition and on the structures of fashion and entertainment, developments which Adorno had already intimated in the late 1930s. But there also are social changes that no longer give even minimal support to a politically and socially relevant notion of high culture. The high turnover velocity of low culture has by now engulfed even the production of traditionally low velocity high culture. Formerly solid cultural traditions (high) are set into motion in the rapid turn-over of museum blockbusters and in museal asset management à la Guggenheim with its spectacular building projects. Theater spectacles become media shows, ancient epics are turned into television series and comic books, and festivals of classical music are organized on the basis of the star system with the global mobility of international actors, directors, orchestras and art works matching that of global capital flows.

None of this is to claim that the distinction between high art and mass culture no longer exists, either in Western societies or elsewhere, as some might argue. It does—very much so. There will always be differences in quality and ambition between cultural products, differences in complexity, different demands on the attentiveness and knowledge of the consumer, differently stratified audiences. But what used to be a vertical divide has become in the last few decades a horizontal borderland of exchanges and pillagings, of transnational travels back and forth, and all kinds of hybrid interventions. And complexity is not only to be found on one side of the old binary.

But there is something else that strikes me as new and different from, say, the situation in the 1980s. The largely national bases of both high and of low cultures are fraying as a result of the cultural flows accompanying waves of migration and diasporas *and* as a result of the increasing number of corporate mergers in the culture industries across national borders. For those reasons alone, the high/low divide can no longer provide the field of battle for an alternative social or political imagination as it did in the twentieth century, first in the interwar years in Europe, and then again in the 1960s in Europe and the United States. To see low as a threat to social and cultural cohesion is a conservative phantasm deployed for political maneuvering in the never-ending fight of U. S. conservatives against the effects of the 1960s on secular culture and changing life-styles. But this phantasm of course feeds the mirror phantasm of the rebel consumer and a left American populism (for a cutting attack on the downside of contemporary cultural studies in the United States see Frank and Weiland [1997]).

How to get out of this dead-end? In a very preliminary way, I would suggest the following. First, we abandon the high/low distinction in its traditional figuration that opposes serious literature and art to the mass media, and replace this hierarchical or vertical value relation by a lateral or horizontal configuration. This would dedramatize the notion of high and acknowledge that high is as much subject to market pressures as low (and perhaps because of that in need of some support and protection). We no longer face a hegemonic culture industry and its autonomous high other (as suggested in the writings of Adorno or Clement Greenberg), but a quantitatively and qualitatively differentiated mass *and* niche marketing for all kinds of cultural consumption.

Second, we should raise the issue of medium (oral/aural-written-visual) in all its historical, technical, and theoretical complexity rather than continue to rely on the traditional binary notion of media culture as low and its high literary other in traditional modernist fashion. For example, in a country like Brazil where culture is shaped more by musical and visual traditions of the popular realm than by what Angel Rama has called the lettered city, such a focus on mediality would be more pertinent than the high/low distinction itself (Rama [1996]).

Third, we should reintroduce issues of aesthetic quality and form into our analysis of any and all cultural practices and products. Here the question of criteria is obviously central: rather than privilege the radically new in avantgardist fashion, we may want to focus on the complexity of repetition, rewriting, bricolage. The focus might then be on intertextuality, creative mimicry, the power of a text to question ingrained habits through visual or narrative strategies, the ability to transform media usage, and so on. With this suggestion, I argue for a modernism in the Brechtian sense, but it is a modernism with a difference: politically more modest and aesthetically more open to past practices than the utopian rhetoric of the historical avantgarde allowed for.

Fourth, we should abandon the notion that a successful attack on elite culture can play a major role in a political and social transformation. This was the signature of avantgardism and still lingers in certain academic-populist outposts. Instead we should pay close attention to the ways in which cultural practices and products are linked to the discourses of the political and the social in specific local and national constellations. Here, for example, the issues of how major exhibits, museums, and cultural mega-events are funded and whether or not funding determines content yield a more fruitful field for investigation than the focus on the purity of high versus the contamination of low. At the same time, we need to acknowledge that culture is no longer organized according to habitus and distinction in the way Pierre Bourdieu has described it. When everything becomes available

(though not always accessible) to the consumer's choice, it becomes that much harder to find a place for effective political critique.

Fifth, in all of this, comparatists may wish to combine a non-reductive cultural studies with the disciplines of cultural history (including a sociological and economic dimension), the new anthropology, and the close reading traditions of literary and artistic criticism. A sustained focus on the operations and functions of public cultures and the changing role of critique within them will be essential. Here, it seems to me, we need to draw on the debates about civil society, imagined communities, gender, subalternity, and the emerging debate about transnational urban imaginaries. If we succeed in making our skills of reading available to those other projects, we will have expanded the field of literary criticism without abandoning what we do best. And within such a disciplinarily and geographically expanded field, we will surely be able to develop new readings of modernism as a transnational, even global phenomenon.

Thinking back to the high-low problematic today points to the distance we have traveled since the heady days of postmodernism and the emergence of new forms of cultural studies. But it also reveals the underlying American parochialism of the postmodernism craze. Postmodernism thought itself global, but was perhaps nothing more than the belated attempt to create a U. S. International against the model of the European International Style of high modernism of the interwar period (1918–1939) (I have argued this point in Huyssen [1986b]). And yet, the postmodern decades in the United States from the 1960s to the 1980s generated a new relationship between high culture and mass media culture that resonates, however differently, in other cultures of the world. But the simple reversal of the old high/low hierarchy advanced by U. S. cultural studies is not the solution. It can even be seen as a betrayal of the original promises of the postmodern itself.

In a global context, then, the question about the relationship between high culture (both traditional and modern), indigenous and national popular culture, minority or subaltern cultures, and transnational mass media culture may still provide the impetus for a new kind of comparative work that would draw our attention to the very different forms such constellations take, say, in India or China as compared with Latin America or Eastern Europe. A number of interesting theoretical questions emerge in this context. We may ask, for instance, whether and how postcolonial theory applies to Latin American countries whose colonial and postcolonial history is fundamentally different from that of India or African countries; whether or not the notion of the subaltern can be transferred unproblematically from one geographic context to another; whether notions of hybridity and diaspora—the latest master-signifiers, it seems—are sufficiently rigorous to describe the complex racial, ethnic, and linguistic mixings in different parts of the world. Attuned to the vicissitudes of traveling theory (Said [1983]), we must guard against the facile translation of critical vocabularies from one intellectual and geopolitical context into another. (Thus “cultural studies” in the United States has turned out to be quite a different thing from what it was in the hands of the Birmingham school, critics such as Stuart Hall or Dick Hebdige).

We must always secure deeper historical knowledge in order not to capitulate to the market and to the obliviousness of the present. Clearly, the role of high culture today varies greatly from country to country and it is deeply embedded in each case in local and national traditions, the different roles of state and private sector in cultural politics, systems of national education, the strength or weakness of cultural institutions, and so on. Yet some sectors of high culture, such as opera, classical European music or contemporary art and Western architecture, have become transnational in

organization and dissemination, as opposed to the theater or literature, which remain bound by language and thus more limited in their capacity to reach broad transnational audiences. At the same time, high culture itself has become ever more commercialized and spectacularized, much more so than even Adorno could have imagined in the mid-twentieth century. The problem is that some, both on the left and the right, still want to force us to choose between high and low, or, as Susan Sontag put it in the 1960s, between Dostoevski and *The Doors*. This choice, then and now, is to be rejected. Of course, postmodern practices in literature and the arts have rejected it all along, producing all kinds of fascinating hybridizations of high and low which seemed to open up new horizons for aesthetic experimentation. But today the celebration of a postmodern hybridity of high and low may itself have lost its once critical edge. Cultural production today not only crosses the borders between high and low, it has also become transnational in major new ways, especially in the music industry (see Erlman [1999]), but also in certain sectors of film and television (for example, Indian cinema in Africa, the export of Brazilian telenovelas). Hybridization of whatever kind now happens increasingly under the sign of the market. But markets, even elite niche markets, as Nestor Canclini has pointed out in his recent book *La globalizacion imaginada* (*The imaginary globalization*) tend to domesticate and to equalize the rough and innovative edges of cultural production (Canclini [1999]). They will go for the successful formula rather than encouraging the not-yet-known, experimental and unusual modes of aesthetic expression. The danger is that by now most of high culture is as much subject to market forces as mass mediated products. Big mergers in the publishing industry shrink the breathing space for ambitious writing. Literature itself, as we once knew it, becomes ever more an untimely enterprise. But this may also be literature's chance. For we need a space of writing that can raise issues of aesthetic complexity, formal experimentation, the vicissitudes of representation and radical political content. We need to ask whether or not the market can secure new traditions, new forms of transnational communications and connectivities. But we would abandon our role as critical intellectuals if we were to prematurely exclude from such considerations the question of the complex imbrication of aesthetic value and political effect which is fundamentally posed by the traditions of high culture and needs to be rescued for contemporary analyses of all culture under the spell of globalization.

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## Modernist Innovations

### A Legacy of the Constructed Reader

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Think, too, that of all the arts, ours is perhaps that which coordinates the greatest number of independent parts or factors [...] and all this by means of a medium essentially practical, perpetually changing, soiled, a maid of all work, everyday language, from which we must draw a pure, ideal Voice, capable of communicating without weakness, without apparent effort, [...] and without breaking the ephemeral sphere of the poetic universe, an idea of some self miraculously superior to Myself. (Valery [1958], 81)

As it becomes increasingly difficult to agree on what modernism was, we may find it easier to focus on what modernism can be. Can we specify significant common traits of modernism by asking how modernist works manage still to challenge and to inspire contemporary works? One answer comes immediately to mind, and is worth keeping there: modernism matters now because it provides our basic rationales and vital examples for the spirit of experiment still capable of engaging contemporary writers. By encouraging artists and writers to dramatize intense refusals of received conventions, modernism also poses the demand that this negative be transformed into a positive assertion capable in principle of handling the problems demanding such innovation. Modernism is the art of turning theatrical negation into at least the possibility of demystified affirmation.

Unfortunately criticism cannot be content with so simple an endorsement of the experimental spirit, since experimentalism now risks seeming just another convention. Our contemporary literary culture has to work through the apparent contradiction of treating avant-garde ambitions as part of a continuing tradition. So if we are to continue to value experiment and to reject work that does not resist culturally dominant traditions, we have a substantial intellectual task confronting us. We could perform this task by developing a quite new rationale for experiment that claims to break from modernism as modernism did from its Victorian patrimony. Or we could return to modernist examples and show how their spirit retains significant power to motivate contemporary work. Obviously these alternatives are not mutually exclusive. But I find the idea of returning to modernism especially attractive because of the quasi-dialectical possibilities involved. We have to reconstitute modernism's authority by submitting that work to the test of what it offers a contemporary writer. At the same time, these tests hold open the possibility of helping us appreciate in new ways certain aspects of modernism now ignored or misrepresented by critics. We can view its accomplishments in relation to our needs, hopes, and projected satisfactions.

This fantasy of a dialectic leads me to focus on the tendency in modernist writers to concentrate more intensely than previous writing in English on how the text can model an ideal reader and at

the same time propose ways of testing why it might matter to pursue that ideal. While important research has been done on the reader in modernism, that work has very little currency with respect to how we interpret or attribute value to the experimental dimension of modernist texts. Yet this topic seems to call out for further attention because it affords two crucial frameworks for our proposing evaluations of these modernist experiments. It immediately engages the psychological dimension where one can test whether the experiment establishes significant powers for the readers it constructs. And at the same time it allows us to avoid empirical questions about the reception of modernism. For me, we gain very little by looking at how readers actually interpreted the work because the texts set themselves so aggressively against conventional reading practices. So one might even say, with Nietzsche, that attending to existing readers serves primarily to indict the current society and to understand why authors might try so desperately to construct alternatives. The crucial question is not who were the readers, but how did writers construct the kind of readers who might be able to take on the powers that the text projects as significant resistance to dominant cultural habits. And then, ironically, we find ourselves in the midst of another kind of history where contemporary writers try to position themselves in relation to these ideal constructs.

When we begin to explore how modernist texts construct readers we find at least three basic projects, all sharing a fundamental set of needs and desires. First, we find a range of texts that cast a major character as confronting a situation for which a dominant cultural grammar fails to provide appropriate categories, so that the characters have to reevaluate their own dependencies and take account of new powers that they are discovering. Correspondingly, the actual audience for the texts has to work out complicated identifications with the forms of reading that the characters embody. For relevant examples we might turn to Conrad's Marlow, Woolf's Lily, Faulkner's Shreve, Joyce's Gabriel Conroy, Fitzgerald's Nick Carraway, and Hurston's Phoebe (who has no other role in the novel but to demonstrate its capacity to produce certain readerly states). Second, we encounter a tendency in modernist texts to foreground elaborate writerly presences which make it impossible for readers to treat the texts as conventional narratives: the purposes behind the text will only make sense if the reader treats it as trying out new imaginative stances. Woolf seems to use the second section of *To the Lighthouse* to render the fact that reading can no longer be content with the forms of empathy possible in Mrs. Ramsay's world. The reader shares with the characters in part three the distinctive burden of having to respond not only to specific agents, but also to the cultural facts of general destruction and oppressively vulnerable mortality dramatized by this disembodied voice speaking for an irreducible historicity. Analogously, texts like *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* insistently refuse the reader a comfortable stance and constantly challenge the reader to try out identifications that have little to do with the standard subjective and empathic interests driving traditional fiction. The ideal reader can become something as abstract as a calculating machine, as capacious as a consciousness that can process the sum of all possible puns and allusions, or as capable as a Beckett narrator of negating everything but the hum of consciousness.

Finally, this line of inquiry puts us in a position to appreciate the burden on modernist poets. They need to rely on constructed readers even more desperately than the novelists because the value of their work depends so absolutely on the direct realization of specific powers of mind. Yet they do not have much opportunity to have specific characters embody these issues about reading. So the poets have to treat the projected reader as a self-reflexive position established by the text to interpret the possible significance of its own stylistic innovations. Eliot invites the reader to try on an imper-

sonality modeled by the writing and he demands that this impersonality stretch itself to adapt to the text's range of allusions. There is much more than erudition at stake. For the more fully one accepts where *The Waste Land* positions reflexive consciousness, the richer the sense that one can identify with the haunting other who walks always beside the individual voices recorded in the poem. Pound is equally demanding, but with quite different ends in mind. His treatment of Malatesta challenges the very practices of doing historical analysis and demands that we learn to honor the full intricacy of a particular human being who has severe limitations but who cannot be easily judged in the ethical terms that our culture provides. And Wallace Stevens offers probably the most comprehensive rendering of this situation through his concern that reading become the self-reflexive concrete testing of the powers of imagination that the poetry elaborates (see especially his "Two or Three Ideas" in *Opus Posthumus*). One might almost say that the ultimate meaning of a Stevens poem is the mode of self-awareness that the readers take on as they flesh out the words and rhythms. "Major man" just is the figure of the reader coming to terms with what is possible within particular acts of mind.

Generalizations like the ones I have been making risk charges of bad faith and/or sloppy thinking. For we have to decide at what level it is permissible and productive to collapse local differences and allow ourselves risky comparative terms like "similar" or "not unlike" or (the prize winner) "not wholly unlike." In this case the risk seems to me well worth taking because the very notion of readership may require engaging in generalizations. This inquiry is quite different from one that notices specific stylistic traits or thematic concerns and then constructs general categories to enable a shift from differentiating writers to bringing them into some shared sense of practice. When we inquire into how writers project readers we have good reason to approach the writers as if they were exploring a common enterprise—both as a deliberate choice setting them against their predecessors and as a not quite conscious consequence of shared desires to show what is involved in being modern. Even though Modernism is nothing if it is not a celebration of diverse creative stances, it remains plausible that writers will seek significantly similar ways of projecting possible uptake for their different experimental strategies. The very force of those efforts at singularity provide strong imperatives for speculating on how an audience might develop shared ways of encountering these diverse projects. Moreover, the writers all faced a similar problem. Once they had repudiated conventional idealizations referring to eloquence, to morality, to emotional authenticity, and to connoisseurship, the modernists left themselves virtually no direct mimetic language by which they could assess the significance of their imaginative products. What possible standards could they use to determine that their work made a significant impact or should make a significant impact? I think the only way they could avoid wallowing in the infinite ironies negation makes possible was to replace mimetic ideals with pragmatic ones. Establishing the possible consequences of their experiments required being as explicit as possible within the work about the differences these experiments might make for those engaged in the reading process. When all routes to representing the world seem untrustworthy, the basic locus of value almost has to devolve to what we can display about the mind's efforts to negotiate those problems. And the more writers depend on the internal syntax of their work as the bearer of its semantic force and intensity, the more they have to establish how the activity of reading becomes the emblem for why formal energies can matter in relation to values that make a difference beyond the world of texts.

This rationale explains why the modernists might have shared a need to rely on projected readers. It does not explain why criticism has failed to attend to this project. And, more important, it fails to

give any but archival reasons for our making efforts to recuperate the force of these shared projects. Even if there is a common modernist concern for constructed readers, we still have to ask what makes that concern a pressing one for people interested in contemporary writing and contemporary culture. One can answer that question by turning to the most important recent criticism on modernism and asking how work on projected readers might modify or challenge its assumptions and conclusions. I am fortunate in this regard because there have recently appeared two very important critical books that directly address the issue of modernism's relation to contemporary culture, so that we have a clear arena within which to test what differences my emphases might make. At one pole we find T.J. Clark's monumental *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* presenting modernism as a noble idea that we can now see has failed because it depended on imaginary versions of agency that never managed to develop sufficient social substance. (Clark's stated topic is modernism in the visual arts but it does not take much imagination to recognize similar charges, less well formulated, brought to bear against modernist writing.) At the opposite pole, we find Marjorie Perloff's *21<sup>st</sup>-Century Modernism: The "New" Poetics* offering an intriguing case that "ours may well be the moment when the lessons of early modernism are finally being learned" (Perloff [2002], 200). Some contemporary writers are returning for inspiration to the giddy days of avant-garde experiment cut off by World War I because they see an important unfinished experiment in exploring the "materiality of the text" (Perloff [2002], 6). This line of experiment enabled authors to turn away from inherited models emphasizing "spatial realism" and the "continuity of the speaking voice" in order to rely on the effects produced by "a force-field of resonating words" (Perloff [2002], 41). Such force fields bring into play a dense "multiplicity of contexts" elicited by the multiple levels of signification (42). And that multiplicity shakes up or estranges habit while providing readers a renewed sense of delight made possible by their capacities to develop intricate interrelations within the language fields of the text.

Here I will not dwell on the considerable virtues of these texts but will use them to indicate how my quite different approach to reading can bring to the foreground significant values that have no place in their stories. Clark will receive more of my attention than Perloff because his is the negative case and hence the one that demands the most elaborate response. Clark puts forward clearly and powerfully a range of suspicions that now seem to me widely shared in the academy. And, more important, he puts forward clearly and powerfully what may very well have been a nagging anxiety for the modernists as they developed their experiments. So I will use his work to provide a framework for appreciating three dense examples of how the modernists used projected readers to engage those anxieties. Then Perloff will enter my story because her emphasis on the "materiality of the text" seems to me to set off clearly by contrast the values that most concern me. At stake are competing versions of the most important features linking modernist to contemporary writing.

Clark sees modernist art as a noble failure because the cultural situation made it impossible for the artists to align themselves with a socialism that, for all its debilitating conflicts with anarchism, "occupied the real ground on which modernity could be described and opposed." Hence "there could have been (there ought to have been) an imagining otherwise that had more of the stuff of the world to it:"

Modernism had two great wishes. It wanted its audience to be led toward a recognition of the social reality of the sign (away from the comforts of narrative and illusionism, was the claim); but equally it dreamed of turning the sign back to a bedrock of World/Nature/Sensation/Subjectivity which the to

and fro of capitalism had all but destroyed. I would be the last to deny that modernism is ultimately to be judged by the passion with which, at certain moments, it imagined what this new signing would be like. [...] But at the same time I want to say that what they do is only imagining, and fitful imagining at that—a desperate, marvelous shuttling between a fantasy of cold artifice and an answering one of immediacy and being in the world. Modernism lacked the basis, social and epistemological, on which the two bases might be reconciled. The counterfeit nature of its dream of freedom is written into the dream's realization. (Clark [1999], 9–10)

There is probably no evading Clark's observation that modernist art could not align itself with any existing set of social values and so had to rely on "fitful imagining," sustained by a "shuttling between cold artifice" and hopes for an immediacy that might get the imagination back to the world. But there is considerable room to doubt that socialism "occupied the real ground on which modernity could be described," especially if, as Clark admits, we look closely at the socialisms available to the artists and writers. In fact there seems to me considerable room to doubt that any socialist project could fully engage what had become problematic in modern life because the very terms by which we pursue progress and define welfare for the majority were very much in question. Socialism and anarchism were so sharply divided because of the question of the degree to which people had to change in order to integrate shifts in modes of social production with shifts in the quality one could attribute to the lives affected by those modes. And the more we are suspicious that artists and writers could successfully occupy the explanatory ground Clark attributes to socialism, the stronger the case for appreciating what the modernists made of this necessity for imaginary constructs. The major modernist writers all seem to base their work on the specific problem of how one might engage social reality when that reality takes the form of Joyce's Dublin or Faulkner's Oxford, or Eliot's London, or Pound's various venues. With that as their shaping context, it cannot suffice to criticize the writers' reliance on imagination because we have to take quite seriously the possibility that the only recourse they had for modifying the real was to explore how their art might also test what those imaginations made available. That is why I want to call attention to the roles that modernist writing scripts for its audiences. Access to social reality becomes a matter of demonstrating what challenges are posed for the audience and what powers the texts provide for engaging those challenges and testing possible orientations toward the world that result from such engagements. This treatment of agency may not satisfy Clark's socialist commitments, but it at least helps provide an adequate hearing for modernist responses to the political crisis of modernity.

In particular I want to provide that hearing for three aspects of modernist writing that do not seem to me fully addressed in Clark's arguments. There is first the simple fact of how clearly and intensely the writers and artists understood their personal alienation from their own cultures and from the immediate artistic heritages they had to negotiate. Therefore, rather than condemning them for the situations in which they find themselves, it makes more sense to explore sympathetically what they attempted to make of those situations. How could they avoid being co-opted on the one hand or, on the other, reducing themselves to endless irony, or the dandy's disdain, or a whining insistence on some kind of personal authenticity? When society could not provide adequate terms of assessment, the artists relied on their own capacities to construct actual sites making demands on the imagination and allowing readers to explore how their own activity might take on representative force as a model for what individuals might bring to the remaking of social space.

Given these responses to the social situation, it seems imperative to explore whether there might be means of establishing such representativeness without relying either on instrumental reason or on the political rhetoric that replace such reasoning. The modernists would have found it very difficult even to pose the question whether socialism occupied the real ground. Rather than establish “truths” of any kind, they had to pursue the possibility that there were non-discursive means of modifying how reality is established and values fostered. And that meant that their writing could not be held up against the world as its mirror. This writing had to be tested in dynamic terms by exploring what differences it might make in how consciousness positioned itself in relation to the world. Where argument seems impossible, the only chance for making a difference is to modify how relationships are established in the first place. By stressing how non-discursive structures concretely orient consciousness, the writers might explore new means of pursuing the authority and power once attributed to epistemic instruments.

Finally, the emphasis on modeling reading made it possible to elaborate a relation between the making of signs and the experiencing of certain kinds of immediacy in ways that finesse Clark’s sharp binary opposition between these poles. Modernist idealizations of immediacy would shift the emphasis from claims about specific veridical experiences to claims about how one finds oneself able to experience. This version of immediacy does not derive from resisting artifice but from foregrounding the qualities of attention and affective investment that artifice could produce as being aspects of immediacy themselves. When Ezra Pound tried to develop a complex image of life within a metro station, he made the verbal qualities of “apparition” fundamental to the direct qualities the text presents to us as a means of experiencing an aspect of the world. What we experience is not a sight of faces in a crowd but a realization of those faces in relation to the range of associations that the term “apparition” brings to the image. The relevant experience brings sight to bear, but within an awareness of how language mediates between sensation and the ghostlier demarcations brought into play here by the Persephone myth.

I turn now to examples of how particular modern texts concretely explore these three demands on the roles established for readers. Wallace Stevens will exemplify lyric poetry’s investments in this process of construction because he concentrates on how poetry can put readers in self-reflexive states enabling them to appreciate how they take on imaginative powers. Then they can be positioned to test the modes of will or “affirmative capability” (Ellmann [1984]) congruent with that self-awareness. Because novelists tend to avoid such straightforward idealization and to place readers within specific social situations, I will then shift to representative readerly attitudes composed to handle two such situations. In my view there is no demand on reading bleaker than the one posed by the final section of Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury*. Conversely I find striking the ways that Joyce’s “The Dead” explores alternative audience dispositions to a quite similar overall bleakness about available forms of social life.

The Stevens most obviously suited to my concerns is the late Stevens who often explicitly addresses what is involved in the reading process (see for example his “Large Red Man Reading” and his “Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour”). But I want here to focus on a much earlier poem, “Idea of Order at Key West” (Stevens [1954], 128–30), in part because it is more elaborately dramatic in its modeling and in part because this modeling helps us track the fundamental considerations leading Stevens away from the experiments of his previous volume, *Harmonium*, experiments that fit much better into Perloff’s account of avant-garde emphases on the materiality of the text. “Idea of

Order at Key West” begins with a speaker observing how a woman’s song becomes an aspect of a seaside scene. Then the poem gradually elaborates why it matters that “it was she and not the sea we heard.” Because the poem dwells on the ability of the maker to negate the specificity of place, the sea becomes merely “the place by which she walked to sing.” Where place had been, the poem seeks to flesh out what it understands “spirit” to be:

“Whose spirit is this?” we said, because we knew  
 It was the spirit that we sought and knew  
 That we should ask this often as she sang.  
 (Stevens [1954], 128–30)

Even this initial shift suffices to indicate how strange the spirit will have to be if it is to appreciate its relation to this making process. For the recognition of spirit proves inseparable from a commitment to future questioning. Perhaps then the break from place is inseparable from breaking also from treating knowledge as the mind’s primary concern. It may be that rather than needing propositions as the basis for assent, we can find satisfaction in shuttling intensely between the interrogative and the exclamatory until the two seem very closely linked.

There soon follows the poem’s relentless concluding effort to articulate the powers basic to elaborating such recognition:

And when she sang, the sea  
 Whatever self it had, became the self  
 That was her song, for she was the maker. Then we,  
 As we beheld her striding there alone,  
 Knew that there never was a world for her  
 Except the one she sang and, singing, made.  
 Ramon Fernandez, tell me, if you know,  
 Why, when the singing ended and we turned  
 Toward the town, tell why the glassy lights,  
 The lights in the fishing boats at anchor there,  
 As the night descended, tilting in the air,  
 Mastered the night and portioned out the sea,  
 Fixing emblazoned zones and fiery poles,  
 Arranging, deepening, enchanting night.  
 Oh! Blessed rage for order, pale Ramon,  
 The maker’s rage to order words of the sea,  
 Words of the fragrant portals, dimly-starred,  
 And of ourselves and of our origins,  
 In ghostlier demarcations, keener sounds.  
 (Stevens [1954], 128–30)

This passage is striking in its offering what feel like lyric resolutions only to turn these resolutions into springboard effects. We get a resonant image that turns her striding into an enduring



image of what the speaker comes to know through this meditation on her. Then the poem emphasizes a “we” who reaches out to the philosopher Ramon Fernandez in order to establish an explicit representative for the self-consciousness enabling the sense of shared identity. But the speaker quickly shifts course once again, this time from an awareness of how the night is changed to a new appreciation of his own wording of this scene.

The ramifications of the song expand so insistently that we have to ask what Stevens is doing and what consequences such doings have for the poem’s projected reader. In retrospect it seems that Stevens could not conclude simply with this focus on the singer as maker because then there would be no measure within the poem of why the making might matter. The poem would be simple idealization that relies on an ideology of making and offers no concrete test of the values it asserts. To get beyond this state, Stevens is careful first to treat the making as fundamental to this emerging sense of a “we” becoming self-conscious as it observes the scene of reflection on the force of making. Then he reaches out to Ramon Fernandez because he wants this “we” to come to a kind of self-consciousness that reaches out toward philosophy. There is no need for Fernandez to speak, however, because Stevens is ultimately less interested in any specific conclusions by the philosopher than he is in the movement of mind that leads out to the idea of the philosopher then quickly beyond that idea back to the scene. By this movement he can continue to honor the spirit of making while allowing consciousness to return to “the place by which she walked to sing,” now also transformed. The night scene combines making with a renewed sense of place. And the poem now overtly calls attention to how its own making complements her song. The poem’s ability to wield multi-syllabic predicates like “arranging, deepening, and enchanting” displays the capacity of spirit to move beyond specific identities to participate in a marvelously fluid distribution of the power to develop syntheses and to care about such developments.

Here even a quite distinguished poet might be willing to let the poem conclude. Not Stevens. What the speaker learns watching the woman seems to extend even beyond this revived sensuality. In the concluding stanza, the poem’s sense of self-consciousness proposes a daunting task for the constructed readers. They have to reach for a level of abstraction responsive to the apostrophe: the focus of the experience is now not the woman herself but the rage for order dramatized in both the woman’s singing and in the responder’s appreciation of the night. Then they have to take a position where it is possible to appreciate how all this expansiveness can be concentrated into a final emphasis on the force of words themselves as the poet’s analogue to the song.

The sea becomes a kind of speaker. Identifying with its ways of speaking requires both reaching beyond the scene and reaching further into the words that are then elicited. The poem wants its readers to hear “spirit” returning in the etymology of “ghostlier,” and it then tries to position them so that they have terms for appreciating what such hearing involves. Now spirit seems as much in excess of the scene’s powers of making as the woman’s song was in relation to the sea beside which she sang. Spirit has the capacity to turn from the fullness of night to reflection on how these ghostlier possibilities entice the self-reflexive imagination.

This proposed shift in emphasis does not promise satisfactions anything like the sharpening of night’s sensuous vitality. Once one begins to hear etymology, the “keening” within “keener sounds” makes its inescapable presence felt. But this hearing also establishes the possibility that the reading can rise to this occasion by recognizing that the very sense of difference which makes it feel itself as spirit also requires fully accommodating the painful side of “ghostlier demarca-

tions.” Stevens’s reader must learn to feel the inescapable loss at the very core of its richest affirmative possibilities. Only then can the reflective mind fully acknowledge its own inevitable isolation from the chain of connections it makes possible. Spirit’s ultimate tie to the world is the fact it is condemned to this inescapable sense of mortality even as it recognizes its transformative powers.

The projected reader of Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury* faces a similar challenge, but by virtue of a very different mode of self-consciousness. At the core of the challenge is the novel’s treatment of Dilsey in its last section. She is an enormously sympathetic character. But Faulkner is pretty clear on the fact that her perspective cannot suffice to resolve the novel’s concerns. Her vision of Christian resignation cannot be reconciled with what comes to the foreground through the traditional third-person omniscient narration framing her section of the novel. So the reader is forced to strive for a position that can at once sympathize with Dilsey and see beyond that sympathy. As John T. Matthews argues, Dilsey’s “Christian order is predicated on the denial of the inexplicable and the contingent” (Matthews [1982], 387) while the omniscient narration suggests a need for a colder, more distant view that is better adapted to the forms of suffering that pervade the Compson’s world. The reader must find an imaginative site capable of handling Benjy’s final version of peace and order as well as the fact that it might take a Jason to produce even this resolution.

Let us assume that Matthews is right in his suggestion that the last section of the novel offers a version of this site characterized by “broader contexts but shallower understanding” than the sections written from within particular perspectives (Matthews [1982], 392). We still have to ask why Faulkner puts these competing sets of values in tension with each other and what is involved in negotiating that tension. And I doubt we can provide a good answer if we remain locked into epistemic judgments like those Matthews makes when he compares omniscient understanding with the perspectival emphasis in the novel’s other sections. Such judgments will not clarify what the readers are to make of being left with this broad but shallow angle of vision. Clearly concerns for what one can know do suffice to show why Dilsey’s perspective is insufficient. But readers still have to work out why it matters that they are confronted with her inadequacy. And for that they may have to explore modes of responsiveness not so caught up in concerns about what she can and cannot know. The reading has to come to terms with the range of feelings elicited by the various hopes and frustrations the author establishes.

These reflections lead me to propose that Faulkner uses a third-person narrative in the last section not primarily to raise questions about knowledge but to make us reflect on a range of feelings involved in the very desire for the kind of knowledge possible from such a perspective. At question is not just with whom to identify and at what distance, but also what attitude to take toward the entire process of identification. After all, the final passage seems not only to embody the essential terrors of seeing the world objectively but also to go a long way toward justifying why we have to learn to see this way:

The broken flower drooped over Ben’s fist, and his eyes were empty and blue and serene again as cornice and façade flowed smoothly once more from left to right, post and tree, window and doorway and sign-board each in its ordered place. (Faulkner [1994], 199)

Boiled down to its essential features, this may be all that survives of the Compson heritage. Here shallowness may be the reality and not a mark of inadequacies within the observer’s position. And

then the central question at the end is not so much what we can know as what we can will in relation to what we know is all there is to know.

It is true that when we take a character's perspective we gain intimacy with his or her needs and desires and ways of making sense of experience. In those registers we exceed what the objective view allows. But this sense of intimacy may attach us to qualities that are themselves primarily aspects of the characters' imaginary versions of themselves. Certainly the Compsons need significant illusions in order to make their lives seem bearable. So it is possible that the very process of identifying with a perspective in this novel seduces us into sharing an attitude toward the world that is fundamentally mad. Perspective here establishes an impenetrable grid that severely reduces what can count as significant information for the agent, and at the same time it provides elaborate defensive mechanisms reinforcing the character's deepest illusions. One might even say that perspective in this novel provides something close to a form of suicide because it secures solipsism and destroys the possibility of meaningful time—there is only endless repetition of the same evasions of what might challenge the agent's defenses.

Early Lacan would have had to look no further to demonstrate his sharp distinctions between the traps of the imaginary and the necessity for seeing the world from the distance provided by the symbolic order. And even without a Lacanian agenda, it is difficult not to invoke a similar perspective in order to make sense of Faulkner's remark that as he kept rewriting the story he saw that he had to get himself "completely out of the book" (Faulkner [1994], 231). Perhaps the more fully one is drawn into the perspective of these characters, the more desperately one shares with T.S. Eliot the desire for a stance toward the world that might be entirely free of perspective. So reading this novel entails becoming acutely aware of the limitations of the emotions that attach us to characters and, ultimately, that establish us as distinctive characters in our own right. The novel forces us to deal with desires to escape the seductions of point of view, even if the alternative is the shallow bleakness of an attempted objectivity. Subjectivity is blind; objectivity empty—this may be as absolute as nihilism gets.

*The Sound and the Fury* actually offers two alternatives to perspective. The first enters with the Benjy section. We can stress the fact that Benjy's is a subjective stance continuous in mode with the next two sections. Or we can stress the fact that subjectivity here is subsumed under a kind of objective rendering of details that makes this section a perverse parallel to the concluding one. In Benjy's world subjectivity and objectivity enter strange conjunctions. Of course the objectivity in Benjy's rendering of the world is severely reductive because it renders only sensations without articulate judgments. But compared to the closing section, this absence of judgment becomes a strange and enticing freedom. There is no gulf between what Benjy registers and what is actually taking place. The closing section then has to be seen as presenting a version of objectivity that makes greater demands on the observer than does Benjy's way of seeing, yet offers even more diminished prospects of reward. Objectivity is not just a matter of how information is rendered but also how it is judged, or narrowed so that only certain judgments seem to make sense. Omniscient narration presents a pronouncedly reductive effort to make available a form of judgment and of coherence that bypasses the obvious limitations of perspective. The narrative of the final section has to resist the temptations to impose memory on the present or to see the present only in relation to imagined possible futures.

Feeling the necessity to pursue this effort at objectivity ought not to be confused with finding satisfaction in what that effort produces. Even though Matthews is right to suggest that seeking such

order risks replicating Benjy's final state (Matthews [1982], 392), there seems no feasible alternative. To rest in a world of identifications with perspective is to run the risk of thinking that the most important condition of response is knowing how the world appears to specific individuals. However, then we have no way to deal with the madness within the perspective or with the ambivalences that necessarily follow when we find ourselves identifying with those who are doomed because of the very traits that attract us. By turning to a different, less person-based perspective at the end, Faulkner invites the reader to face up to an apparently irresolvable conflict between two possible dispositions of will. Indeed he makes it seem that to have a mind attempting to understand a history like that of the Compson family is necessarily to be locked into this conflict. One aspect of the will wants the less deluded third-person perspective—at least here one can understand the interrelationships driving the plot and one can take in the projected future, seeing it steadily and seeing it whole. Yet the will also has to face the fact that what one can see clearly from this third-person perspective is not just shallow in its accuracy; it is utterly depressing in its scope and in its finality.

Ultimately the novel imposes on its ideal reader the need simultaneously to will knowledge as relief from perspective and to will for some way of not being trapped within the very terms allowing knowledge, all the time recognizing that such willing puts one back into the space of perspectival fantasy. To be Faulkner's projected reader is to test one's capacities to face up to situations where what one wills seems intensely resistant to what one has to know. And one has to know that one is in this trap and so must continue to wish there were some alternative way to care about what the writing discloses. Despite the Enlightenment's fantasies, one has to take responsibility for the realization that objectivity need not be the beginning of freedom; even shallow objectivity can force us to confront the end of the very dream of freedom and of the significance of memory.

I add Joyce to this mix because I want to elaborate a readerly stance that seems capable of evading Faulknerian nihilism without returning to the blindness within perspectivism. Probably any of Joyce's novels would provide such a stance, so I have chosen *Dubliners* because it is obviously the most manageable. Moreover this text closely parallels the way Faulkner imposes a distinctive concluding section that substantially intensifies the demands made on the reader. To understand *Dubliners* as a whole we have to ask two basic questions about its final story "The Dead": what needs and powers are brought into focus by adding to the book a text written several years later than the other stories, and how is the reader's role articulated by Gabriel Conroy's efforts to become a reader of his own situation?

In order to go directly to these questions I will simply have to assert my sense that the greatness of this innovative novel consists largely in its brilliant understanding of how cultural interpellation takes place. The story of Dublin is the story of how the blind neediness of the adults inflicts suffering on the children, which leads them to form the kinds of identifications making them in turn similarly blind, needy adults. Dublin life is an endless cycle of frustrated desire leading people to compensate for such pain by blending self-defensiveness with compensatory forms of aggression. How then can one take an imaginative stance toward lives laid bare by such acute and unrelenting analysis? Even though these characters are doomed largely for reasons not of their own making, they nonetheless will be responsible for furthering an infinite regress of blindness upon blindness, defensive violence upon defensive violence. And it does not take much reflection to see that such characters are sufficiently warped to adapt any sympathy conferred on them for their own destructive purposes. So what can one's relationship be to Dublin when one realizes how little possibility there is to resist or

to reverse such persistent and pervasive contaminations of the spirit? What happens after the epiphanies, when one has to bear the burden of seeing truths that the characters themselves will never realize? Must one seek escape at any cost, being wary especially of the temptation to sympathy that might suck one into the very conditions one thinks one may be able to understand if one keeps one's distance? But then does this choice not simply align one with the fantasies of escape that are stock material for Dublin imaginations? Is there any level at which the ironies allow one something other than pervasive disgust?

I put the issues this way so that we have to turn immediately to the question of what investments Joyce has in Gabriel Conroy, especially as Gabriel shifts from the role of frustrated author of a dinner speech to that of deeply embarrassed reader of his own life in Dublin. Gabriel is not like the Dubliners in the other stories. He does, though, live the typical life of an Anglo-Irish managerial class that sees itself providing an alternative to that Dublin. Joyce turns to Gabriel then because he is fascinated by the likelihood that such efforts at opposing Dublin turn out to be part of the trap Dublin prepares for its citizens: if one avoids the corruptions of the colonized it seems one can only do so by aping the manners of the colonizers—hence Duffy in “A Painful Case.” From the beginning of the story, Gabriel the author of a holiday speech is tormented by concerns about how he is being read by the Catholic Irish and about how he can conceal the disdain produced by his own reading of them. These quiet disturbances then become intensely magnified when he is forced to have to see himself primarily as a reader rather than as someone with the power of authorship. And here Joyce's own struggles with identification come to the fore, since Gabriel's struggles provide a useful figure for his own effort to come to terms with the Dublin he has rendered without being destroyed by the sympathy and rage that his engagement elicits. The last story holds out the possibility that Joyce the author can establish a reading position enabling him to accommodate himself to what he can neither invent nor control nor subsume by means of the bitterly ironic stance adapted in the previous stories.

The demands on Gabriel as a reader begin when he realizes that although he is experiencing intense sexual desire (his own version of the Dublin dream of escape), the wife whom he desires is thinking of a boy who was in love with her when she lived in Galway and who died because he risked his health to see her (Joyce [1993], 196). Now all of Gabriel's self-satisfaction and projected desire seem little more than marks of his own alienation from everything that binds her to the old Ireland of her Galway days:

Gabriel felt humiliated by the failure of his irony [...]. While he had been full of memories of their secret life together, full of tenderness and joy and desire, she had been comparing him in her mind with another. [...] He saw himself as a ludicrous figure, acting as a pennyboy for his aunts, a nervous well-meaning sentimentalist, orating to vulgarians and idealizing his own clownish lusts, the pitiable fatuous fellow he had caught a glimpse of in the mirror. (Joyce [1993], 200)

There is much more in this great passage than I can elaborate here, especially Gabriel's self-righteous effort to reduce the Irish boy to “another” and the devastating precision of how this all too accurate self-description calls up the figure of a mirror that catches the self rather than stages it. But for my purposes, the crucial part of the scene occurs when his wife falls off to sleep and he shifts from this slightly melodramatic self-contempt to rapt attention at her sleeping body. As he stares, all the dark lucidity of his new state of self-awareness gravitates to thoughts about mortality, and then to a much more desperate version of his fantasies of escape: “One by one they were becom-

ing shades. Better pass boldly into that other world, in the full glory of some passion, than fade and wither dismally with age" (Joyce [1993], 203).

Gabriel does not escape into this other world. Instead he turns on himself and for a moment breaks through self-defensiveness to recognize that this life of passion is not for him: "Generous tears filled Gabriel's eyes. He had never felt like that himself toward any woman but he knew that such a feeling must be love" (Joyce [1993], 203). Here is a Dubliner who seems capable of imaginatively engaging another person's desires without staging them as a figure of his own need or his demand for her response to that desire. By recognizing how she is different from him he also finds a means of sympathizing with her grief. These "generous tears" prove sufficiently powerful to sustain a relatively unsentimental vision of shared mortality. But Joyce cannot quite suspend his sense of the need for irony. These are Gabriel's concluding reflections:

[Snow] was falling, too, upon every part of the lonely churchyard on the hill where Michael Furey lay buried. It lay thickly drifted on the crooked crosses and headstones, on the spears of the little gate, on the barren thorns. His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead. (Joyce [1993], 204)

Gabriel is entering new emotional territory. But he is also the same old self-righteous Gabriel, here perhaps finding in this rhetoric of shared mortality something like a masturbatory substitute for his long-sought orgasm. This talk about becoming shades and wandering the other world is clearly a melodramatic projection on Gabriel's part. And the last sentence of his reflection is embarrassingly florid in its chiasma and in the alliterative excess of "his soul swooned slowly." Anyone disposed to such rhetoric is not likely to learn much of what Western Ireland might teach an Anglicized Dubliner.

By refusing to renounce irony even as he finally seems to allow some sympathy for an adult character, Joyce presents his readers with a daunting task. Can they find a way to maintain some version of Gabriel's generous tears even as they have to acknowledge the need for a reading of this passage quite different from the one Gabriel gives it? Clearly it will not do to rely on some traditional ideal of edifying breakthrough. Such talk would invite the reader to the same self-congratulation that Gabriel manages to muster even as he comes as close as he ever will to understanding degradation. To read Joyce carefully is to encounter a constant demand to distance oneself from such prospects—hence the need for a modernist remaking of the reader's position. But perhaps we can say that even if Gabriel cannot create plausible new meanings for his life, he can recognize what is involved in dwelling more attentively at the edges of meaning, where he can begin to see why his sense of self-importance cannot suffice.

Criticism is not especially helpful on this point because we find predictable divisions. As John Paul Riquelme puts it in a superb essay on this topic: while some readers think Gabriel has "begun to disburden himself in a painful but salutary way of illusions that had kept him from accepting those around him [...] on terms of equality," others think he "just gives up" and "becomes one of the dead" (Riquelme [1994], 220). So our question becomes whether we have to see readers as choosing one of these stances or whether we can see the text projecting a reader who might be able to treat the conflict as requiring a more capacious stance, a stance attempting to appreciate why the text exerts these competing pulls. I think the second option is feasible. Rather than produce a single attitude toward Gabriel, the reader is invited to explore how the writing might make it possible to

dispose emotions and wills so that we do not flee the complexities of thinking and of feeling created by this conclusion. More specifically, the reader is challenged to develop some equivalent of Gabriel's "generous tears" even while recognizing how difficult genuine change will be for him. A positive response to this challenge requires first sharing Gabriel's commitments to lucidity and then attuning ourselves to the limitations of that lucidity. Gabriel's awareness of his own limitations provides affective access even to those limitations he cannot recognize. So the reader can at least grant him the difficulty of getting beyond his own education in the florid and the self-serving, and so can credit the effort while recognizing the resistance of his available medium.

If we grant this as Joyce's intention with regard to Gabriel, we can also propose a second test for the reader, this one linking how one interprets Gabriel to how one projects a basic identity for the novelist. Joyce's writing can only avoid pure ironic distance if it can project an imaginative stance that can sympathize with Dublin without buying into its self-pity. I think the writing accomplishes this by further elaborating a generous form of irony that treats even bitter understanding as a mode of sympathy rather than as a mode of condemnation: sympathy and condemnation become irreducibly interwoven. Were Joyce to claim explicitly that his writing opens a new sympathetic attitude toward the Dubliners, he would trap himself within Gabriel-like idealizations and in effect evade the haunting sense that a mandarin critical sensibility and hatred might have led him to miss something crucial about Ireland. But were he to distance himself entirely from Gabriel, there would be no alternative to the vicious irony and consequent utter alienation that characterize all the other stories. Joyce would be left with only a dream of his own freedom, a dream that invites making him the object of the reader's ironic sense. However, an ideal of generous irony makes it possible to imagine that neither author nor reader need to seek the ironic mode of freedom that repudiates all the intimacies that the text establishes.

A readerly stance based on generous irony may manage, although just barely, to avoid the self-congratulation that comes when we decide that our way of reading realizes some kind of ethical ideal. For generous irony shares with its more bitter counterparts the distance necessary to recognize how easily we make a mess of our needs and how readily we make the imagination do the work of reason—nowhere more than in our quest to claim ethical identities for ourselves. But, at the same time, generous irony will not yield to the authority of the "lucid" intellect. It will not let the ideal of clear seeing block out the emotions elicited by our attention and demanded by our awareness of our own investments. There can only be the rueful pleasure of realizing the inevitability of our blindness and the possibility of sharing with others the most intimate possible rendering of our efforts to realize our limitations. Exploring how to read Gabriel prepared Joyce to develop the modes of acceptance enabling him to make *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* a remarkable experiment in rendering a person's singularity.

I have focused on the dense and intricate demands on readers made by particular texts. Elaborating such examples seem to me the best response we can make to those who think we have to say farewell to modernism: these forms of intelligence are not yet ready for the dump. Moreover the relation these texts establish between imagining and identifying goes a long way toward showing how the writers might have responded to the critique that Clark proposes. Yet I am not satisfied to remain on the level of example. I want to treat those examples as evidence helping us appreciate the force and the resonance of quite general attitudes developed within modernism to face the issues we have been considering. Here the best I can do is to illustrate three specific values that develop from

this commitment to constructing ideal readers. For that task I will shift from Clark to Perloff as the critical presence I am addressing. Engaging Clark required showing from examples that modernism retains sufficient imaginative force to have a vital place in any account of contemporary literary possibilities. Engaging Perloff will require arguing for specific theoretical commitments within this work that I think lead to a different version of how the modernist spirit of experiment best enters contemporary writing. To make my arguments as concise as possible, I will confine myself to her account of Eliot because I think his work and his influence fit my story better than they do hers.

My basic difference with Perloff has to do with her efforts to make the principle of “materiality of the text” fundamental to early Eliot and central to an account of his accomplishments. Clearly Eliot shared with other modernists a strong interest in the expressive capacity of their medium. But I think we severely limit the force of that interest if we impose on it the language of “materiality” with its inescapable range of associations. Perloff sees Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” and “Portrait of a Lady,” establishing a vital presence in English for both “Flaubert’s radical doctrine of the *mot juste* and the Mallarméan precept that poetry is ‘language charged with meaning’—a language as intense and multi-vocal as possible” (Perloff [2002], 4). Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, on the other hand, made enormous allegorical demands on the linguistic surface and hence became a piece with Eliot’s increasing conservatism. So from this perspective it is a mistake to treat *The Waste Land* as Eliot’s most innovative work. Early Eliot had an intelligence about writing as writing that brought him quite close to Stein and the pre-war European avant-garde on matters of the difference between art and life, the importance of impersonality, the sense of the work as an entity in its own right, and the importance of disinterest (Perloff [2002], 45–55).

I differ from Perloff because I doubt that this emphasis on “materiality” provides the best framework for bringing alive Eliot’s interest in Flaubert and in Mallarmé. Early Eliot certainly loved theatricalizing the poet’s distinctive labor in choosing playfully precise diction. Yet it is difficult to imagine a concern for *le mot juste* that has no emphasis on making manifest what makes certain choices more just than others. For Eliot the basic framework was fundamentally psychological: words are “just” not because they contribute to a certain kind of circulation but because of how they intensify and specify a dramatic condition. And the charged meaning produced by such language is not primarily a matter of internal resonance but of how that internal resonance establishes complex psychological states. Perloff’s specific readings of Eliot’s early poetry is richly responsive to these psychological dimensions. But when she theorizes about it, psychology is subordinated to verbal intricacy and much of the rationale for the diction is lost. Analogously, Eliot’s concern for the objective correlative becomes primarily a matter of how words fit together rather than of how experiences get rendered.

I labor the limitations of this discourse of materiality because they have significant historical and theoretical consequences. Historically we lose the internal logic between “Prufrock” and the later poems. By foreclosing the psychological aspect of the objective correlative, Perloff has no way of honoring how and why Eliot took lyrical poetry beyond the limits of the expressive ego. Yet it seems to me obvious that this concept helps him develop a style concerned less with the play of words than it is with the extraordinary social resonance voices can establish for those words. And because these voices take on a kind of immediate reality in their own right, they create a distinctive challenge and corresponding opportunity for elaborating a projected reader. Readers find themselves discovering a mobility to move within and among these voices so that complex possibilities



of identification emerge. But at the same time, the mobility encounters something about these various modes of suffering that evokes some common core, some unrepresentable spiritual condition in which the voices all participate. The reader's own individuality then seems at once an unnecessary limitation on the imagination and also a deeply painful locus of the boundaries that make this sense of the spirit something only glimpsed and not quite realizable (see Brooker [1981] on collaboration).

On the theoretical level, this emphasis on materiality fails to give us imaginative access to the demands on readers established by modernist writing's experiments with the role of the medium. And that in turn makes it impossible to provide a significant framework for the authors' investments in their own work. In order to make the concept of the "materiality of the text" effective one has to oppose it to some version of ideality. The material qualities of the language (or the paint or the found object) must make available something different from the domain of intentions, where we attribute to agents ideas about what they seek through the use of language. But then our language for responding to the works has to be content with those aspects of meanings which inhere in the object qualities of the work. The just word is still just a word. The materiality model gives us no means of valuing the aspects of perspicacity and purposive resonance which cast the word as a certain way of doing justice to some aspect of experience. For writing at least, this emphasis on the material ironically forecloses much of the labor in linking words (and the pleasure in such labor) that writing can involve and did involve for most of the major modernists. The most a materialist model can say about agency is that there are significant values to exploring the freedoms afforded by intricately composed indeterminacy. But in my view this model of agency cannot treat even this indeterminacy as entering into the kind of dialogue that brings a significant sense of challenges and pursuable goals.

If we are to honor how and why modernists foreground the artefactuality of the art object, we have to modify substantially the parallels to political rhetoric that we purchase with talk of materiality. We have to take our cue from Pound and shift our focus away from metaphysical quarrels with idealism towards quarrels that set labor against the versions of value basic to capitalist economy. Then rather than tie ourselves to textual properties without agents, we can concentrate on how artists and writers make the "workedness" of their objects the necessary starting point for establishing an audience. A language that dwells on how texts are worked can capture why the modernists were so adamant in their resistance to traditional mimetic ideals. They did not want art to picture or mime reality; they wanted to display possibilities for intervening within and upon the real by composing objective sites making distinctive demands on how an audience deploys its intelligence and its affective capacities. On that basis the modernists could envision their art as literally constituting possibilities of modifying those structures of the psyche shaped by dominant societal practices. Think of what Stevens accomplishes by insisting on the role of etymological implications in relation to intensified self-consciousness or what Faulkner does by forcing perspective to the foreground or Joyce by his pervasive attention to the costs of becoming Dubliners. (In dealing with "workedness" I elaborate important work in manuscript by Henry Staten. But I differ from him in thinking that modernism approached workedness in a unique way because that becomes the fundamental bond between author and reader: they have each to seek sociality in terms of the sense of shared powers that the processing of workedness makes available).

Concepts of workedness cannot do much work unless we can supplement them with specific accounts of how art objects have the capacity to take hold in the lives of their audiences. So we have

to establish a second modernist principle connecting how authors imagine audiences to how they can claim for texts the power to produce them, even if this too has to remain an idealization. Perloff's version of the objective correlative emphasizes the object and so calls attention to works as dense "multi-vocalic fields of linguistic relations". But she cannot provide any purposiveness for those linguistic relations. For that purposiveness we have to stress what the notion of "correlative" brings to Eliot's theorizing. Then we can see texts as bringing into articulate social existence structures of signs that solicit the audience's taking on particular attitudes. More generally, we can imagine cultural traditions as repositories for such correlatives — some deeply symptomatic, others opening up new ways of imagining how we might stand toward such symptomatic configurations of affect. We have both the mental states called up in *The Waste Land* and the effort to shore up such fragments against one's ruins. We have the madness of perspective and the effort to engage a more objective stance. And we have Stevens's emblem of how we can hear ghostlier demarcations and keener sounds.

My third modernist principle is even more abstract, but it ultimately provides a context for appreciating all the concrete claims I have been making about why the modernists had to turn to constructing readers because they could no longer trust prevailing mimetic ideals. Now we can supplement that story by fleshing out the consequences of this distrust. Perloff and I agree that this shift is crucial to modernism: to appreciate its enabling moves requires at least provisional sympathy with modernist artists' hatred of the entire structure of epistemic values established by the Enlightenment and perpetuated in any literature that relies on representational principles congruent with that enterprise. One reason we both oppose official verse culture is its effort to accommodate epistemic realism, even to extend it to questions of agency by treating writing as the representation of the psyche's expressive energies. But then we substantially disagree on what is involved in this resistance. Perloff emphasizes the possibility of another kind of lucidity. If writing cannot bring clear knowledge of the world, it can still provide demystified versions of how craft can compose dense artificial structures and use these to mobilize sensibilities. However, I think we then have to ask what we gain by so mobilizing sensibilities, even if the effort to answer this question requires entering a level of generalization with which she is (rightly) uneasy. In my view it was modernism's rejection of Enlightenment tendencies to make epistemic concerns the basic measures of value that required it to recast all the processes by which values are established and satisfactions pursued.

In order to make my point I have to indulge for a moment in somewhat potted but reasonably accurate intellectual history. As Theodor Adorno tells the story, the Enlightenment triumphed by subordinating received versions of teleological reason to an "instrumental reason" thoroughly suited to empirical inquiry. This broader but shallower version of rationality simply finessed talk about higher purposes and placed reasoning under the control of discrete projects set by concrete practical inquiries. That refocusing enabled Enlightenment thinkers to make epistemic concerns the basic measures of value and to sponsor the emphasis on method that enabled these concerns to take on substantial institutional power. As one crude but all too relevant example, consider the ways that empirical social scientists determine values by surveys rather than by some more imaginative assessment of what might be involved in actually living in accord with the relevant commitments. One might also think of the extents to which Freud had to go in order to claim knowledge about how we make our most basic psychological investments.

Yeats thought of the emphasis on epistemic thinking as asking art to become a "mirror dawdling down a lane" (Yeats [1936], xxvii). For Eliot this emphasis required treating the entire culture as

suffering from a dissociation of sensibility produced by the seventeenth century's tendency to think and feel in fits, with neither state able to find common ground enabling it to influence the other. But the most striking and most general statement of modernist resistance to epistemic thinking emerges in Nietzsche's contrast between the will to truth and the will to power. Here we see most clearly why the modernists' largely ill-defined resentments about the shape of prevailing values led them to replace a literature content to interpret the world by one that had to invent the very terms by which their art might provide and test alternative ways of making investments in that world. Nietzsche saw Enlightenment epistemic values as the final triumph of a will to truth that was also responsible for the nihilism eating away from within at the Western psyche. For when value depends on truth understood as the product of instrumental reason, there is no way to honor subjective or affective intensities. These intensities have to be attributed to objective and objectifying forces. One could only know one's emotions if one could explain how they are caused. Since finding causes means tracing external influences on the psyche, the only way to trust our accounts of the basic forms of human desire becomes translating them into insistently non-personal analytic frameworks. The more intense our emotions, the less likely we were to own them in any significant way. For artists and writers this had a double effect: it disqualified the work they produced from any significant claim to authority, and it made it difficult not to be tormented by paranoid fantasies that seemed necessary to account for forces not intelligible within the prevailing paradigms.

Modernist writing came of age when it realized it did not have to resign itself to lamenting this condition or presenting ironic renderings of its consequences. Like Nietzsche, the writers could treat the will to truth as a perverse evasion of the personal intensities possible in conjunction with the will to power. And they could then try out various ways to bring the arts closer to versions of the will to power that preceded Enlightenment thinking—one important reason for modernist interests in matters Greek and Roman and medieval. Here what I have been calling "the workedness of the works" played a significant role. That workedness was indubitably objective, but its ways of making experiences seem valuable had very little to do with epistemic judgments. Instead of seeking independent facts as the necessary grounds for making claims about values, the modernists wanted value to be inseparable from the qualities by which the psyche comes to engage an object. Value depended primarily on how the writer's activity brought alive a particular attitude as a condition an audience could take on for itself. Then the "proof" or rationale for supporting the values had to reside in the ways that they might make a direct difference in the lives of other people as they participated within what the activity made possible.

Because this line of thinking provided a rationale for treating the works as correlatives defining possible readerly attitudes, it also opened an even more radical possibility. For art could shift from the promise to give an account of aspects of the world to the promise of providing a challenge or demand that we take up and test a range of particular ways of engaging that world. The challenge took two basic forms. The constructed reader had to be responsible to the intricacies of assertion establishing the art situation—that is to both what the art as work gestures toward and to the affective intricacies embodied in the gesturing. And the constructed reader had to recognize that this challenge involved going beyond the limits of those judgments sustained by epistemic culture. The audience had to take seriously the question of how the challenge to adapt a readerly attitude also involved a challenge to see what kind of will or commitment the reader could make toward the attitude taken. Works of art could invite an audience to reflect on the possibility of giving their assent

to and through what the workedness of the text made articulate. Reading was ultimately a matter of taking responsibility for accepting, rejecting, or modifying the construction of powers that the text made available.

Consider Eliot one more time. *The Waste Land* offers a world in which the epistemic has failed. It has given no relief for the spiritual anomie that the poem renders. And while the poem can state certain ethical principles, it cannot translate the principles into possible modes of action. Insofar as the poem remains bound to its task of representing its culture, the most it can do is articulate the pain of lacking any interpretive framework within which the pain can actually invoke some clear recognition, some way that the suffering within the poem can take itself seriously. Yet rather than stop there, Eliot relies on his craft, on the intricate structure of parallels and on the aural demands that continually reach beyond what can be said, in order to call into question the very roles of interpreter and spectator that frame epistemic inquiry. (The call to the “hypocrite lecteur” is one means early in the poem of suggesting that the poem’s efforts at self-consciousness make all the established roles unstable.) Reading here becomes a complex activity of trying to see beyond the limitations of the very descriptions the poem renders. For if the reader becomes only an interpreter, the spiritual dilemma of the poem becomes only anthropology. Interpretation and participation have to be intricately mixed. And then, as in Faulkner, the reader is asked to face the difficult question of how he or she might correlate what there is to be known with what might be willed. But here willing is a more complex process than in Faulkner, where the challenge is not to alter the spectator position but to bear it. In Eliot the reader is almost forced to ask whether any form of understanding will make it possible to feel that one has a path through this psychological landscape. The poem cannot call for a direct act of will because it does not find in the affects it explores sufficient ground for something it can assert. But the poem can ask the reader to dwell within the strange ritual space produced by the poem’s way of approaching the suffering it encounters. And the poem can offer the hope that this sense of incomplete ritual, this strange interface between cry and prayer, may be enough to keep the reader at the margins of society. That non-place may be the one site where a call might still be heard that guides one past this aimless pathos.

For Eliot, facing the challenge of learning how to form a will ultimately proved a sufficient ground for making the commitments he felt were necessary. Most of us will not share these commitments. But there is every reason to hope that contemporary authors will continue to explore the psychological spaces that gives such writing a continuing resistance to both the arrogance and the anxieties of epistemic culture.

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## Chapter 2

### Reassessments

The following section contains four articles that seek both to reevaluate modernism in the light of a number of critical arenas in recent literary studies, and to reassess the capacity of these critical methods to come to terms with modernism. Two figures are especially prominent here. Theodor W. Adorno plays a significant role in three articles, connecting Marxism and critical theory, but also guarding the autonomy of the subject, in contradistinction to its splintering in the field of poststructuralist inquiry. The fourth article highlights the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, a scholar whose theories many would consider an alternative to all the other areas mentioned, but one who may have a good deal to say about the social as well as the authorial and subjective weight of the radical discourse of modernism.

**Gunther Martens** questions the way in which Critical Theory has tended to portray modernization in bleak terms and how the ideology-critical method of Adorno and others has shaped their reading and interpretation of modernism, which is often seen as deviating from or disrupting social modernity. In pursuing this line of questioning, Martens draws upon his analysis of texts by Robert Musil and Hermann Broch and focuses on the role of irony as regards authoriality and critical points of view. Martens calls for a more differentiated understanding of the relationship between modernism and social modernity and urges us to see that modernism often stands in an affirmative relation to modernity.

**Sascha Bru** discusses the heterogeneity of Marxist approaches in the period between the two world wars, as reflected in the works of Georg Lukács, Theodor W. Adorno, and Antonio Gramsci. Having explored the intricacies of the standpoint of the individual subject and larger social perspectives in their theories, matrices that are relentlessly problematized in modernist writing, he shifts his attention to the more recent theories of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. While they continue some of the work of their Marxist predecessors, their post-Marxist, “constructivist” approach rests on a more dispersed idea of subjectivity while also accounting for the dislocational impact of modernity on culture and society.

The place and position of the authorial subject, so vigorously, if “negatively,” defended by Adorno, is of key importance to Bakhtin’s career as a theorist of narrative and the novel. His theory of the “polyphonic” novel might seem to undermine the position of the author, but from another perspective it can be seen as securing a field in which several subjects are allowed to speak interactively. Looking at, but also beyond, comments that suggest Bakhtin’s troubled relationship with modernism, **Anker Gemzøe** demonstrates how his theories often fruitfully interlock with modernist prose

and its subversive, anti-realist narratives. Gemzøe finds that Bakhtin has approached and interpreted both Dostoevsky and Rabelais from a perspective that can be called “modernist,” revealing how these writers are, in various individual ways, precursors to modernism.

**Peter V. Zima**, who is among the critics Martens takes to tasks for sticking too closely to the mission of Critical Theory, studies Adorno’s theory of the subject in relation to beauty and to modernist penchant for aesthetic negativity, the grotesque, the ugly, the ambivalent, the unconscious, and the sublime. Adorno’s approach is compared to Jean-François Lyotard’s theory of the subject and the sublime. The ways in which Lyotard in part builds on but then abandons Adorno’s attempt to salvage the individual subject, help us see the difference between modernist and postmodernist reactions to modernity.

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## Literary Modernism, Critical Theory and the Politics of Irony

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### Introduction

The *Kritische Theorie* (Critical Theory, associated with the names Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer and their successor Jürgen Habermas) has the powerful allure of being firmly rooted in (German) philosophical tradition. It is characterized by a distrust towards the collective (of course informed by the political events that took place during its conceptual development) and towards the standardizing nature of the social and technological developments of modernity. Its interpretations of literary modernism (especially Adorno's readings of Kafka, Paul Valéry, Beckett and Proust are revealing in this respect) are informed by a specific preoccupation with and practice of interrupted allegory that has rightfully been termed and considered an aesthetical theory of modern art in and of itself. This practice of apocalyptic synecdoche, however, leads to a metadiscourse that, although elegantly persuasive in its aphoristic and apodictic quality, tends to substantialize its claims of alienation and ideology in a way that does not do justice to the specific literary epistemology of the texts under scrutiny.

My approach to the putative "selective affinity" between Critical Theory and literary modernism is bifold: first, I will supplement the constellation with its often excluded third, viz. the more anti-humanist branch of functionalist theory. Functionalism presents a completely different outlook on modernity as the process of differentiation, rationalisation and autonomisation of society that greatly complicates the articulation of the generalised rationality of the Enlightenment. Secondly, I will discuss the role of the literary device of irony in this debate. My approach to irony is a deliberately restricted one: I will focus on its relation to overt narratorial mediation. A new branch of narratology, namely rhetorical narratology, can help us to establish a terminological framework that enables us to explore the contribution of enacted forms of speech and thought representation to the shaping of models of narration in a way that remain less tied to historical poetics.

The profile of modernism, as it has generally been shaped by (undoubtedly reductive interpretations of) Critical Theory, is that of a movement essentially reactionary to the changes of modernity; especially "high modernism" (the avant-garde will not be taken into consideration here) has been defined as an artistic practice that compensates for the effects of modernity. It is burdened with the task of mourning the unity that has been lost due to the rapid modernisation before and in the wake of World War I. Jameson's account of modernism is clearly informed by Critical Theory when he defines modernism in general as a "revolt against reification and a symbolic act which involves a whole Utopian compensation for increasing dehumanization on the level of daily life. [... M]odern-



ism can [...] be read as a Utopian compensation for everything reification brings with it" (Jameson [1981], 43, 236).

This definition is mainly based on an undoubtedly selective reading of Anglo-Saxon representatives of High-Modernism (such as Woolf and Lawrence), privileging as distinctive such features of these texts as their "withdrawal into the private domain of the individual mind" (Stevenson [1992], 138). The casting of modernist authors in essentially nostalgic terms — "sentimentally or otherwise, modernism looks back to recover in fiction what has vanished in fact" (Stevenson [1992], 139) — has been at the centre of its (mis)appropriation by postmodernist discourses. I have argued before that important modernist texts simply refuse to match this categorisation (see Martens [1999]).

My aim therefore is to reconsider the complex relationship (or even elective affinity) between Critical Theory and its cherished point of reference, literary modernism, with regard to the form of ideology critique which adherents of Critical Theory attribute to modernist texts. I will do so by confronting two texts that may be seen as representative of two different orientations within modernism, or at least of a cleavage within modernism, namely Robert Musil's "Triädere" (Binoculars) from 1936 and Hermann Broch's *Die Schlafwandler* (The Sleepwalkers) from 1930. It cannot be denied that authors like Musil and Broch develop a similar ideology, critical style, and thematics (as has been pointed out by Peter V. Zima and others). But read from a straightforward ideology-critical angle, some nuances of their depiction of modernity are lost, and it can be argued that different narratological and ideological framings of irony are involved in the misrepresentation of these modernists' outlook on modernity.

### Musil's "Triädere" as a case of discordant narration

Let us first look at a classical example of the peculiar double-bind between an ideology-critical tendency in reading modernism and a purportedly "ideology-critical" style. I will take as a point of departure a short text entitled "Triädere," originally written by Musil in 1926, and later republished in the 1936 short-story collection *Nachlaß zu Lebzeiten* (Posthumous Papers of a Living Author). "Triädere" features a primal scene of literary modernism. A distanced and anonymous observer stands behind a window armed with a spyglass and observes people passing by, a situation which at first sight seems to lead up to a harsh condemnation of the everyday life of naïve people and of the omnipresence of ideology and convention. "Triädere" is fascinating because it gives a metafictional figuration of the heterodiegetic, authorial<sup>1</sup> narrator still strongly present in the forms of essayistic prose and socio-historical diagnosis practiced by Musil and many other modernists.

I will read Musil's text against the background of modernism's elective affinity with ideology critique as practiced by Critical Theory. The text contains some major signifiers that are powerful weapons in ideology-critical discourse. First, the observer displays an extreme certitude about the distinction between appearance and reality, between "façade" and real interior. He claims ontological truth. Second, the scientific dissection of the illusionary amounts to sheer aggressiveness (almost phallic metaphors of unveiling, unmasking, piercing, cutting through the surface). Third, a constant opposition is set up between (illusive) surface and underlying depth: the apparently personal and individual events of everyday life are reduced to impersonal scientific laws and anonymous forces. The piercing of *surface* reality seems to be aimed at the alienation exerted by cliché-ridden

utterances and icons that are part of an unreflected social code: modern technology and conformist representatives of bourgeois society are met with classical phrasings of “suspicion.” In sum, “Triëdere” seems to be a classical example of the age of suspicion (*l’ère de soupçon*). To adherents of micrological epistemologies this kind of panoptic “view from nowhere” policing reality must be simply inadmissible. The counter-scene to “Triëdere” could be De Certeau’s “Walking in the City” from *The Practice of Everyday Life*, which argues that the structuralist order cognitively imposed by modernists such as Le Corbusier is effectively undone by actual people who produce space. The postmodern paradigm would then entail a shift from *meaning* to the *senses*, from *metaphysics* to the *physical*, from the *mind* so central in modernist texts (Valéry, Woolf) to *corporeality*. The alternative to this cognitive gaze of the modernist masters of suspicion, Marx, Freud and Nietzsche (for whom ultimate reality lay respectively in an economical, psychological and power-theoretical sub-structure) was also brought to the fore in the 1980s by various anti-hermeneutical currents. Thus Peter Sloterdijk pleaded for a consciously Ptolemaic perception in which direct sensory experience (for instance that the sun moves around the earth) prevails over abstract knowledge (Sloterdijk [1986]). Susan Sontag argued for an “erotics of art” over and against modernist “depth hermeneutics,” and, in a similar anti-hermeneutical vein, Foucault stated: “There is no text underneath” (Foucault [1997], 174). Modernist perception, as it seems to be exemplified by Musil here, is moreover said to be prone to a confusion between rules/conventions on the one hand and local strategies and tactics on the other hand. It is not structures and general laws that demarcate the borders of the sayable and the visible, but positive-factual strategies:

The most effective disciplinary techniques practiced against those who stray beyond the limits of a given culture are probably not the spectacular punishments reserved for serious offenders—exile, imprisonment in an insane asylum, penal servitude, or execution—but seemingly innocuous responses: a condescending smile, laughter poised between the genial and the sarcastic, a small dose of indulgent pity laced with contempt, cool silence. (Greenblatt [1995], 226)

In this respect, the observer in “Triëdere” would himself be subject to a serious illusion. He is unaware that people are less determined by the arbitrary conventions that he mocks than by the ironic smile of the observer. His own response is a much more effective, normative agent than the conventional symbol systems it supposedly “unmasks.”

Because of these alleged imperialist, masculinist and high-modernist intellectualist overtones, the text has met with a lot of harsh criticism, the most eloquent of which is Helmut Lethen’s (1986). According to Lethen, “Triëdere” contains a performative contradiction in that subjectivity, at the level of mimesis, is shown to be largely an illusion, while the text’s diegetic mode features an unproblematic subject in the guise of the distanced, commenting observer who is himself no part of the scene. The way Lethen—clearly speaking from the vantage point of avant-garde poetics—condemns “Triëdere” is symptomatic of the prejudices against a so-called intellectualist high-modernism. According to Lethen, the text entertains the illusion of an ideology-free perspective by means of a scientifically informed “master vocabulary” that asserts its exclusive privilege of a utopian re-ordering of chaotic reality.

What is particularly striking and exemplary with regard to the relationship between modernists and Critical Theory is the way in which Musil’s texts have been recontextualized in mutually exclu-

sive critical paradigms. For the Musil reception of the early 1960s, for example, his texts speak in a very Adornesque jargon. The authorially focalized dimension of Musil's writing is especially highlighted and interpreted as a strongly satirical and moralizing attack on a totally alienated society. Although I consider this remarkably continuous elective affinity to be a *selective* affinity, there are elements in Musil that indeed induce such a reading: the text makes abundant use of theatre and role metaphors and of the so-called "container metaphor." Human physiognomy becomes a "sack-like space," a role filled with socially accepted conventions: "our character would scatter like a powder if we did not pack it into a publicly approved container" (Musil [1987], 85).<sup>2</sup> A street-car passing by is a "contraption pressed together like a cardboard box" (Musil [1987], 82).<sup>3</sup> These metaphors constitute a form of ruthless translation of figural consciousness (which is often called 'reflectorization'); significantly enough, the text's narratological setup consists of a mute character's thoughts expressed by an anonymous narrator. The role and container imagery reinforces the apparent dichotomy between the authentic and the inauthentic. There are different ways, however, to assess this narratological and stylistic information. In Arntzen's account, authoriality is given unlimited prerogatives: "Authorial comment thus gains the character of an *advocatus diaboli*, who, in the reflection on that which is real, finds himself affirmed as *advocatus veritatis*" (Arntzen [1983], 81; my trans.).<sup>4</sup> Arntzen deploys his conception of the normative essence of satire—"Satire is *utopia ex negativo*" (Arntzen [1964], 17; my trans.)—in a book with the telling title *Gegenzeitung* (anti-newspaper). This kind of media critique, most famously epitomized in the "Culture Industry" chapter from Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, is nowadays often said to be obsolete. Its detractors hold the view instead that ideology critique "needs to go on a diet" (Vancoillie & Verhoeven [1999], 187; my trans.).

It is useful, however, to look beyond the polarizing rhetoric and see what conceptual concerns are involved in this fundamental debate. One central issue involves the need to reflect on the effectiveness of one's practices of observation and (causal) attribution. The other issue involves the concerns of Niklas Luhmann's systems theory, a potentially less alarmist conception of modernity (also with reference to Musil as a precursor). In this view, ideology is not something to be exorcised, but a necessary aspect of social communication. Certainly, this discussion may seem somewhat staged. It cannot be denied that Sloterdijk and Luhmann are offering a very one-sided reading of Critical Theory (and a sometimes even more problematic display of optimism). But what is at stake here is that Critical Theory's take on modernity is heavily pessimistic, and this negation of modernity informs Adorno's highly influential readings of seminal modernist authors such as Paul Valéry and Samuel Beckett. Both Valéry and Adorno have striking passages about the negative and imperative impact of—nowadays rather common—technological innovations, such as the telephone, on the subjectivity and "concentration" of the individual: "So that is what the telephone implies? They call you, and you have to answer it" (Valéry [1960], 1217; my trans.).<sup>5</sup> Strikingly similar comments about the impact of modern technology are to be found in Adorno's *Minima Moralia* (1951). The affirmative point of view would emphasize that this kind of ideology critique credits cultural phenomena with a too rigid and essentialist meaning. To some extent, Musil's *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (The Man Without Qualities) relishes in teasing out the performativity, that is the context-driven nature of such innovative phenomena (see Vivian Liska's reference to the "hurtig Griff" as the epitome of modernity, Liska [2000]).

### **Irony: Some Changes in Perception**

The two paradigms mentioned above (Critical Theory and systems theory), for the sake of abbreviation but with a good deal of unavoidable simplification, have often been described as either *critical* or *affirmative* of modernity, framing modernism differently through their divergent notions of irony. Trying to single out irony as a distinctive parameter of any period code in literary history is, of course, a risky business. Indeed, all attempts to claim irony for a specific goal—even leaving aside the question whether it is a property of texts rather than a category of reception or “active deconstruction”—seem to be thwarted by the fact that irony is an all-pervasive communicative device, occurring throughout literary history (for instance in Swift, Diderot). In addition, one is forced to confront a general impression that, under the aegis of modernism, irony is often invoked as a kind of “text sanitizer” with regard to recurring ideological blindness and complicities with colonial and other all too familiar ideologies and tendencies of various kinds (as in Joseph Conrad, André Gide, to name but two authors).

Irony has frequently been considered one of the primary parameters of literary modernism. This is particularly the case within the ideology-critical paradigm. It has in fact been singled out as the key to modernism’s openness and subversiveness. In recent literary criticism and poetics, however, a general distrust of irony as a linguistic and narrative device is on the increase, although some of the arguments date back to a longstanding philosophical debate beginning with Hegel’s critique of Schlegel’s concept of irony (see Behler [1997]; Schoentjes [2001]). Let us first take a look at some of the putative reasons for this distrust. Although irony is often hailed as a pre-eminently ideology-critical device (Hutcheon [1994], 202), it is also often blamed for its “evasiveness” (Hutcheon [1994], 202). At the same time, paradoxically enough, its strong degree of intentionality, its inclusive function and its partiality have been highlighted as well, as in the following examples:

The chief use of irony is to convey the speaker’s attitude toward a situation, and this attitude is almost always negative. (Winner [1988], 7–8)

Irony is a weapon of partiality: the speaker is so certain about the persuasiveness of his own party and of the sympathy of the audience that he can echo the arguments of his opponent in order to reveal their falseness by means of context. The will of the speaker is so strong that it breaks down the arguments of the opponent and it helps the truth (indirectly expressed by its opposite) to victory. (Lausberg [1972], 302)

Another target of critique is the aspect of “domination” (Hamon [1996], 18) and illicit distancing. In his 1986 book on the German modernist novel, Stephen Dowden has voiced his unease over the type of irony used, amongst other places, in Thomas Mann’s *Buddenbrooks*. He is inclined to see it as a “structural flaw” (Dowden [1986], 138–9) because it allows an anonymous, authorial narrator to produce dogmatic generalizations at the cost of a number of flat characters, a ventriloquism occasionally slipping into sheer “mockery.” These features are at first sight completely at odds with the modernist universe of “disponibilité” (*L’homme disponible* was the title André Gide suggested for the French translation of Musil’s *The Man without Qualities*) and open-endedness. Additionally, Paul de Man warns of “the seductiveness owed to negative rigor” (de Man [1979], 205), and an influential German deconstruction manual seems to call for the necessity of a meta-ironical subver-

sion of irony: “ironical are those traces in texts, which undermine even their own negative insight and their hypostasis to a figure of substantialist negativity” (Hamacher [1988], 14–15; my trans.).<sup>6</sup>

The most subtle dismantling of ironic speech comes from Roland Barthes. According to Barthes, irony is, somewhat surprisingly, not a characteristic of literary modernism, but a property of classical texts, because it destroys “multivalence.” As this book defines modernisms as branches of “post-realist activity” (see introduction to this volume), I must pay special attention to Barthes’s debunking of irony as a trait of classical, readerly texts (Barthes [1994], vol. II, 584; my trans., as are all other references to Barthes), a debunking that occurs during his deconstruction of realist, “readerly” writing in *S/Z*, a text that has strongly influenced modernist studies. Barthes perceives irony solely in its intentional aspect. “Irony always departs from a secure/sure place” (Barthes [1994], vol. II, 1517) and is thus completely at odds with the “unlocalizability of speech” attributed to “modern” writing (which is to be found in some places in Flaubert, Robbe-Grillet, Sollers, and others). Irony is considered to be subjectivist; “irony without subjectivization” (Barthes [1994], vol. II, 1517) is impossible:

[I]rony inhabits the role of a display and hence destroys the multivalence that one could expect from a citational discourse. [...] It’s the wall of the voice that needs to be pierced in order to obtain a writerly text (l’écriture): the latter refuses any designation of ownership and consequently can never be ironic; or at least its irony can never be certain (an uncertainty that characterizes a limited number of great texts: Sade, Fourier, Flaubert). Conducted in the name of a subject that puts its imaginary in the distance which it pretends to take from the language of the others and that thus positions itself even more unmistakably as a subject of discourse, parody, which is in a way irony at work, is always a classical way of speaking. (Barthes [1994], vol. II, 584)<sup>7</sup>

Hence the modernist autonomisation, normally situated in a gradual reticence of the narrative voice on evaluative and ethical matters and famously exemplified in Flaubert’s *impassabilité*, is now challenged in readings that tend to stress the potential satirical impact of that voice. For instance, Mahler (1995) contests Warning’s claim (1981–82) that Flaubert uses an all-comprehensive form of irony that makes it impossible to determine a fixed centre of orientation. He especially highlights the potentially satirical effects of Flaubert’s writing, which induce a stronger sense of intentionality and normativity (Mahler [1995]). The stock example is taken from *Madame Bovary*: “‘What a terrible catastrophe!’ cried the druggist, who always found expressions congruous with all imaginable circumstances” (Flaubert [1972], 186; my trans.).<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Olsen points out that a distinctive narrative voice is much more present than had hitherto been recognized, especially in the form of corrective or incriminatory irony:

The use of free indirect discourse in *Madame Bovary* has been highly exaggerated in quantitative terms, despite the warnings of someone like Auerbach. Not only does Flaubert use a considerable amount of other procedures, description for example; he also mixes his voice with those of characters. The presence of the author, despite his *impassabilité* and his invisibility, remains strong. (Olsen [1999])<sup>9</sup>

The suspicion of irony can be recapitulated by means of a remark made by Walter Fanta on Musil’s brand of authorial irony. He expresses

contemporary doubts as to the controllability of language and unease with the language power displayed by Musil’s irony. There is indeed in Musil’s narrative and essayistic style a continuous and unmistakable surfacing of a voice with a clear-cut ‘opinion’ that remains unchallenged in the text and that constantly repeats that nothing is what it seems. (Fanta [2000], 377; my trans.)

One finally faces a situation where irony used to be the one sanctifying or *soteriological* principle of negativity in modernist artistic practice, but is now gradually coming to be seen as the vehicle of an epistemological wise-nose perspective hinging on a very strong intentional moment of power.

The brand of irony under scrutiny here is thus limited to a specific narratological modality, basically linked with forms of authorial narration that serve as a rephrasing of thoughts and observations of fictional characters in a distancing, “ironical” voice. This definition of scope is crucial: neither irony nor authoriality can be reduced to this specific use of irony. This explains why (modernist) authors can be ironical while at the same time wary of authorial intervention and subjectivisation. A poetological equivalent to Barthes’s criticism and Foucault’s anti-hermeneutic position would be the poetics of the *Nouveau Roman* as practised by Robbe-Grillet. Rejecting the “archaic myths of depth” (Robbe-Grillet [1965], 22),<sup>10</sup> and taking as a rigid, seemingly unquestioned point of departure the absolute meaninglessness of reality, Robbe-Grillet is very critical of what he sees as the essentially *soteriological* and utopian nature of modernist literature. He is especially opposed to the use of the so-called anthropomorphic metaphor, through which even Sartre and Camus reveal their lingering sympathy with humanism, their love-hate relationship with it. (This argument was later taken up by Ihab Hassan in his first attempts to create mechanical binary oppositions like modernism/metaphor versus postmodernism/metonymy). Robbe-Grillet’s normative concept of the text only allows for an enumeration of depthless objects, an objectivity deprived of the psychological depth of a unified subject. The use of metaphor, by contrast, is often a form of authoriality, of evaluation by the narrator. Obviously, in “Trièdère,” the use of ironical, reductive metaphors and transformations (for example animal imagery) is massive, to the extent that the city completely drops out of the picture. Barthes is thinking of this type of irony when, in an article on De la Rochefoucauld’s aphorisms, he reduces the ironic attitude to the syntactical relation of “ne que” (“nothing but, merely”), which is seen as the expression of a kind of aristocratic pessimism that is mainly a monologic, subjective discourse: “the demystifying relation, because the author reduces appearance to its reality, is the logical expression of what has been termed Rochefoucauld’s pessimism” (Barthes [1994], vol. II, 1339).<sup>11</sup> I will skip Lukács’s debunking of irony as “negative mysticism of godless times” but it is clear that the ironical relation of “ne que” or “nothing but,” singled out by Barthes, strikes a surprising chord with the pessimism inherent in the ironical reductions in “Trièdère.”

According to Barthes, irony introduces a kind of double-layered speech, a distinction between the surface of a literal, straightforward meaning and the hidden, dissimulated depth of what one is actually saying. It remains to be seen, however, to what extent the authorial mediation singled out here is a distinctive feature of modernist prose with an ideology-critical allegiance. One could surmise that the distancing, ironic usage of imagery and tropes often remains restricted to inferior characters, whose hasty portrayal in broad strokes serves the purpose of staging them as ideologically blinded flat characters. It could be evidenced that the observers serving as focal characters are far less subjected to the ironic rephrasing of their thoughts and dialogues.

Texts like “Trièdère” and other enactments of the modernist observer do bear the traces of the panoptical scene that de Certeau attacks in his article on the production of social space. But mimetic selections—in this case, the scenic elements and thematic signifiers of the positivist-intellectualist, “overbearing” (Hamon [1996], 147) attitude—should not be confused with narratological structures. Dorrit Cohn, in her article “Optics and Power in the Novel” (1999), makes an interesting case against recent applications of Foucault’s theory to literature that blame authorially

focalized nineteenth- and twentieth-century writing for being a repressive, closed system that forces characters into a total transparency of mind and thought in a sort of “confession” practice that yields total control to the omniscient narrator. Within the Foucaultian perspective, authorial reframing of focalisation is regarded as an *invasion*, an imposition of the author’s voice on the perspective of characters. The most flagrant case of this infection of a character’s speech and perception would be the irony and free indirect speech in “Triëdere,” which lets the self-consciousness and focalized vision of a fictional character come to the fore while at the same time infecting these with comments and evaluations, often for ironic purposes. Cohn objects to this kind of homology between narratology and power relations; she formulates “a skeptical [sic] assessment of all manners of simple and stable correspondence of modal type and moral stance. First, the traditional link between authorially focalized novels and clear normative values” (Cohn [1999], 179). Cohn’s disapproval of what she terms New Historicist forms of “associationism” (Cohn [1999], 169) is legitimate, but the arguments she gives are not satisfactory. According to Cohn, power can only exist between non-fictional persons, but this distinction between ontological fiction (as if, modality) and literary fiction (representation, mimesis) becomes difficult when one sees that in Foucault’s theory “real power” is said to be based on “fictional (imaginative, ideological) relations.” Furthermore, she bases her argument on a general impression of liberal education in America. That literature makes up a polyphony “constitutionally incapable of indoctrinating the reader” (Cohn [1999], 171) can be more accurately substantiated by recent developments within the linguistics of narrative enunciation, which have shown that even authorial narration in literary texts is far less monologic and unitary than has been taken for granted in all too heated debates. “The unity of the enunciation is a fiction created by certain linguists that doesn’t exist in a literary text, which generally multiplies the representations of utterances by means of an enunciative ‘mise-en-scène’ that can be termed ironical” (Hamon [1996], 96; my trans.).<sup>12</sup>

The latent authoriality of modernist texts has to be situated on a continuum between two extremes. The first extreme would be the infection of the structural mechanics of narrative with traces of figural consciousness. This is the so-called Uncle Charles-effect, taking its name from a passage in Joyce’s *Dubliners*. The assumption here is that this form of “infection” serves the purpose of representing the fragmented nature of modernity by undermining the stability of a single preferred meta-point of view from which to contemplate reality. The other side of the spectrum would feature the infection of figural consciousness with authorial markers. As examples one could mention the act of translating the character’s dreams into psychoanalytic terminology in Hermann Broch’s *The Sleepwalkers* or in Musil’s satirical portraits of the main ideological representatives of his time. One could assume that these narrative tactics aim to gain a grip on the loose threads of a dissolving social and moral tissue, binding together into a new meta-language (Broch), a return to a monologic discourse or a “master vocabulary” (Rorty). Texts like “Triëdere” indeed illustrate that the ironical rephrasing of reality into a meta-language runs the risk of laying claim to a scientific-formal truth outside of discourse. Most of Barthes’s utterances concerning irony can be related to this typical poststructuralist wariness of meta-language, summarized in the thesis that there is no meta-language at all. A re-evaluation of irony in terms of performativity, however, is more inclined to the position of the later Barthes, who suddenly states that “there are only meta-languages” (Barthes [1994], vol. II, 1158). As such, authoriality is not completely incompatible with ideology critique

(as claimed by Adorno [1958]). There are also productive forms like the thick description of the speech acts associated with the “mechanics of telling.” The Faulkner-like modernist style of narrow perspective is normally bent on reducing these inquit-formulae (he says / she said) — as a remnant sign of narratorial presence — to an absolute minimum (thus making the attribution of voice frequently impossible). Authors like Thomas Mann and Musil, however, deliberately elaborate on the act of saying to the extent that its metaphorical, often ironical description (e.g. by means of simile, see Biebuyck 2005) undercuts or contradicts its ideological content. A short example from Musil’s *The Man Without Qualities* will have to suffice here: “he said it in a way that stood in contradiction to the whole embodiment like a heavy blossom on a frail stalk” (Musil [1996], 1077; my trans.).<sup>13</sup> This “framing” of utterances contributes to usual “double voicing” involved in irony, because the term “blossom” (Blüte) is an interesting case of discordant narration hinting towards the ornate and cumbersome nature of the quoted discourse; such acts of framing approximate the “enunciative ‘mise-en-scène’” mentioned by Hamon.

However, the prevailing negative stance towards authoriality has also influenced modernist studies. Strikingly enough, descriptions based on the Anglo-Saxon canon (with Faulkner and Woolf in mind) have excluded authorial writing from modernism in a rather wholesale way. We could for instance take a look at the following very traditional definition by David Lodge:

[Modern fiction] is fiction displaying some or all of the following features. First, it is experimental or innovatory in form, exhibiting marked deviations from existing modes of discourse, literary and non-literary. Next, it is much concerned with consciousness, and also with the subconscious or unconscious workings of the human mind. Hence the structure of external ‘objective’ events essential to narrative art in traditional poetics is diminished in scope and scale, or presented selectively and obliquely, in order to make room for introspection, analysis, reflection and reverie. [...] Lastly, modern fiction eschews the straight chronological ordering of its material, and the use of a reliable, omniscient and intrusive narrator. It employs, instead, either a single, limited point of view, or multiple viewpoints, all more or less limited and fallible; and it tends toward a complex or fluid handling of time, involving much cross-reference back and forward across the temporal span of the action. (Lodge [1976], 481)

It is interesting to see how differences between geographical and historical variants of modernism get erased in the search for a representative definition. Apparently, one thus needs to conclude that either the German modernist time-diagnostic novel (*zeitkritischer Roman*) relying on authorial irony is simply not modernist, or that central defining criteria are in need of revision. Indeed, recent investigations into the linguistics of enunciation have pleaded in favor of accepting the “heterogeneity of the utterance” (Mainguenu [2000], 54). Consequently, narratology should adopt the view that the interpretation of narratological phenomena hinges on co(n)textual phenomena rather than on the attribution of an intention to a privileged source.

Furthermore, the privileging of figural narration, which goes back to Sartre’s influential attack on Mauriac and which is further reinforced by writers like Faulkner and Uwe Johnson, is not as clear-cut as it seems. In fact, the reduction to a limited point of view does not necessarily exclude authoriality. It can be seen, for instance, that Kafka’s heroes, trapped in their limited points of view, constantly exceed the limits of their restricted view, drawing on an anachronistic type of representative certainty normally attributed to the authorial mode of writing (in the “gnomic” code, grafted on formerly pre-given but no longer warranted systems of reference and value). The figural narration



of Kafka's texts constantly exceeds the limits of its own skeptic epistemology. The subject obstinately seeks to speak with a validity and representativity that it has foreclosed in positioning itself as a nomadic subject without backup of traditional value systems, seeking to reduce a diffuse universe of meaning to the rigid distinctions of the epic battle between good and evil. The "modern alienation" experienced by the subject is partly caused by its applying outdated frames of reference (such as direct causality, personal plotting) to a reality that has grown much more complex (due to the multiplication of interfaces and increased randomness).

Likewise, at the other end of the spectrum, it is important to see that (authorial) irony need not be restricted to the "judgmental" (Dowden [1986], 138) type described in the assessments quoted above. In my opinion the actual working of irony has to be reassessed in view of recent theories of performativity (Butler) and developments in narratology (Fludernik [1996], Gibson [1996]). In this perspective, irony becomes more of a co(n)textual (i.e. hinging on the actualisation of narratological situations) rather than an intentional phenomenon (see Martens [2006]). When Schlegel linked irony with "reflexivity" and with a "continuous oscillation of self-creation and self-destruction," this may seem very similar to the central tenets of performativity (construction of identity through a mimicry of discourses, a parasitic grafting onto random effects of hegemony and imperfect speech situations, and so on). Yet Schlegel's stress on "permanent parabasis," although taken up by Paul de Man in a very influential manner, cannot simply be transplanted to modernist texts. Central to romantic irony are the disruption of the unity of the fictional world (*Illusionszerstörung*) as in Ludwig Tieck and the making visible of the producer in the produced. These aspects resurface in the *mise en abyme*-constructions in André Gide's *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* (The Counterfeiters, from 1925) and Broch's *The Sleepwalkers* (1930). Yet foregrounding this type of irony runs the risk of reducing a narrative dynamic to the spectacular forms of metafiction and to the paratextual prerogatives of extrafictional authors. From the point of view of an intensified narratological and rhetorical analysis, there may be no such thing as a typical or privileged form of modernist irony; yet it may serve as a heuristic tool in severing the all too obvious links between "high modernism" and a conservative political agenda.

"Triädere" serves as a good example of how the more thematic and poetological issues of irony (distance, evasiveness) in the text are complicated by stylistic strategies. In "Triädere," Musil is playing the devil's advocate against his own concept of irony, teasing out its potential risk of ending up with a self-sufficient "view from nowhere." But the act of authorial rephrasing can by no means be physiognomically judged as a reliable or even dogmatic centre of orientation within the text. It is precisely the level of similes and metaphors normally associated with authorial intervention that introduces a kind of uncertainty zone. The ironic-epideictic redescription of characters' observations and thoughts in *impertinent* terms (for instance borrowed from animal imagery) does not pretend to *substitute a master vocabulary* for a lesser, naïve view of things. It draws attention to the context-determined, *interactional* nature of meaning. The "other gaze" is not superior to or more violent than the normal gaze, it magnifies in a hyperbolic movement the violence that is inherent in any act of perception. By highlighting and short-circuiting the functional homology behind what one deemed to be opposites, "the transideological nature of irony's politics" (Hutcheon [1994], 222) comes to the fore on a more structural level. Those who have short-circuited the scenic elements of detached vision with control and imposition, have ignored the reflexivity of such meta-discourse.

### (S)Elective Affinity

Detractors of Critical Theory like Peter Sloterdijk or Niklas Luhmann have questioned Adorno's desire for an illusionary "Standpunkt der Standpunktlosigkeit" (position of apositionality) (Sloterdijk [1983], 19) and his appeal to a substantialist exemption of art from reality. Their main argument is that the generalized suspicion of ideology which his theory casts on society is itself too homogenizing: "Critical sociology had acquired attitudes of omniscience. It posed as a rival observer with faultless moral impulses and superior oversight" (Luhmann [1997], 1115; my trans.).<sup>14</sup> At another level, literary sociologists such as Pierre Bourdieu have maintained that modernist reading and textual practices perceived as "hermetic" and "shifting" merely serve the cultivation of a very specific, elitist (aestheticist) attitude towards aesthetic artifacts (for instance Bourdieu in *Les règles de l'art* or *Rules of Art*). There is a more general feeling that the ideology critique as advanced by Critical Theory, and still brought to bear on modernist studies by, for instance, Peter Zima, now has to go on a "diet" (this is the polemical metaphor used by Luhmann). The modalities of Peter Zima's approach to modernism have been commented upon by Ertler:

the theoretical knitting pattern according to which the ideological is being singled out tirelessly in novels by Robert Musil, Hermann Broch or Alberto Moravia appears to be indebted to dualist, naturalist and monologic principles itself because of its repetitive and heavily armed argumentation on lexical, semantic and narrative levels of the scientific text. (Ertler [1998], 133; my trans.)<sup>15</sup>

Ertler is wary of how various modernists are subsumed under a general conception of polyphony. Recently, however, Zima appears to have made his notion of ideology somewhat more reflexive: "a discourse becomes ideological when the enunciating subject does not reflect the narrative scheme it has constructed (for instance the process of rationalisation) as a contingent structure that can be confronted with other structures" (Zima [1992], 62; my trans.).<sup>16</sup> If Zima quotes Musil's definition of irony (which he frequently does), we should be aware that it cannot be considered an essentially soteriological principle but that it is more in keeping with the above constructivist reformulation of ideology as a fatal relationality.

Critical Theory is also used by Eysteinsson in *The Concept of Modernism* as a vantage point from which to describe privileged tenets of modernist poetics (Eysteinsson [1990], 40–1). He can do so by relying on the various deviation theories cherished by many of the theoreticians of modernist poetics. Wolfgang Iser, however, has pointed out that the notion of "deviation" ("Normverstoß"), though certainly fruitful for understanding poetical debates and the external dynamic of literary movements from a praxeological point of view, is inadequate for explaining the internal, text-rhetorical organization of modernist texts (Iser [1975], 303). In addition, most recent investigations show a tendency to regard modernism not as the liquidation of a realist tradition, but as a meta-observation of traditional narrative techniques. The revaluation of authorial forms of writing in general and of authorial irony as it surfaces here in particular testifies to this tendency. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that Critical Theory indeed proves a powerful tool to describe modernist texts. One can of course mention, as Eysteinsson does (Critical Theory as "theory of modernism," see Eysteinsson [1990], 39–40), the actual cooperation between Thomas Mann and Adorno on the negative aesthetics of the novel *Doktor Faustus*. Hermann Broch's novel *The Sleepwalkers* is

another example of a text that accords nicely with the central tenets of Adorno's *history of decline* of modernity. The "sleepwalkers" are ideologically blinded characters caught up in a world characterized by decline and disintegration of values ("Zerfall der Werte"). The novel seems to be beset by the effects of instrumentalisation and differentiation that accompany the process of modernity. The powerful use of *Leitmotivik* by sheer self-reference creates a surplus of meaning that seems to be compensating for the lack of meaning in the diegetic world actually depicted. This effect is mainly achieved by means of zero focalizations that go beyond the character's point of view and that present themselves as the negation or the substitution of what a character saw or could have seen. Broch's text thus tries to create a symbolic and expressivist universe in which all signifiers are reintegrated within the horizon of a single ethos, remedying on the level of representation what is perceived to be lost on the level of diagnostics, with various tactics that try to exert control over the reader's reception. This implies the obstinate use of representative speech at the expense of the intradiegetic characters and allegorization practices. This practice of self-interpretation can however be seen to lose its transparency in the actual textual practice, thus illustrating the demise of a substantialist ethos in the very attempt to re-launch it.

### Aberrations in Modernism Affirmative of Modernity

My attempt at a differentiation within the modernist period code may evidently be countered by numerous studies that have indeed singled out a branch of technoprogressive modernisms *affirmative* (not *critical*) of modernity, but these have mostly been classified as having a more or less dubious political agenda. The fact that an affirmation of modernity can indeed be a risky undertaking, although in my opinion it need not be, can be illustrated by reference to Ernst Jünger. His first novel, *In Stahlgewittern* (Storm of Steel, 1920), seems to be on the whole critical of the effects of modernity witnessed during World War I. In this first "total war," the subject really became functionalized within a technological warfare ("Materialschlacht," Benjamin [1990], 439) no longer governed by man-to-man interaction. In opposition to this, the novel seems to display a peculiar nostalgia for pre-modern war, for instance through a peculiar longing for the "honest shot" and an allegiance to the value codex of knightly honor and person-to-person heroic confrontation that sharply contrasts with the boring, eventless reality of day-to-day duty in the trenches. The ruthless killer-hero that constitutes the authorial persona of Ernst Jünger's *In Kriegsgewittern* defies the new logic of modern war by means of special mission infiltrations into enemy territory, all of which are very murderous and completely useless as they do not advance the static war in the trenches. By the end of the war, however, Jünger seems to adapt his ideals to the new reality: he develops a sort of training schedule for a new type of fully functionalized super-soldier in his 1932 essay *Der Arbeiter* (The Worker).

The similarities to some of Musil's ideas about functionalisation, the optimisation of ideology and *Sachlichkeit* are at times striking; they are indeed taken for granted by Christoph Hoffmann who sees this connection in a somewhat more unfavorable light (Hoffmann [1997], 267). It is not convincing at all that a cautious affirmation of modernity and a recognition of the "multiplicity" (Musil) of its rationalities should directly lead to the concentration camps, as Hoffmann suggests. A comparison of Musil's "Triädere" and Jünger's texts might serve as a case in point of how similar narratological forms can have differing ideological connotations. Like Jünger's *Der Arbeiter*,

Musil's "Triädere" attends to the fundamentally functional nature of social existence (the shattering of a unified subjectivity in partial roles and functions), but Musil's text does so in an experimental and heuristic way, relayed through the narratological tension between figural consciousness and the narrator's ability to rephrase, whereas Jünger's homodiegetic narrative leaves its gripping, yet inherently monologic grasp of reality unchallenged and remains on the whole apologetic and straightforwardly affirmative. Modernist studies can benefit from a renewed attention to the formal inscription of ideas, namely their mediation through various types of irony and various degrees of narratorial back-up.

## Conclusion

First, interpretations of modernism as a movement against "instrumental rationality that is seeking to incorporate even the disruptive forms of its opposition" (Eysteinsson [1990], 241) tend to obscure the fact that there is a countercurrent within literary modernism (Eysteinsson discusses this alternative modernism in the introductory parts of his book) that actually tries to see modernity not as an alienating force, but as a development that can be made productive — albeit rather through the unintended side effects of its rationalizing and standardizing impetus.

Second, the substantialist characterization of modernism as "destructive" (Eysteinsson [1990], 240) or "interruptive" credits texts with an inherent, but rather empty subversiveness and threatens to sacrifice the formal and stylistic dynamics intrinsic to certain modernist writers to the — from a narratological and rhetorical point of view — rather vague principle of "deviation." Holding up deviation from "everyday" mass communication as a distinctive criterion of texts is risky because the unspecified quality of otherness, of sheer "innovation," that wrests something away from tradition, can be claimed by any "new" class of texts and secondly because of the fact that the main modernist tropes and representation strategies (irony, the relayed or even erroneous attribution of voice, the work-in-progress-situation, and so on) have found their way into such instrumental communication forms as advertising campaigns. The category of the "subversive" is a relational one, and its saliency has to be determined as such rather than by attaching it to period-unspecific philosophical principles of signification that threaten to lack inscription in literary texts. More recent positivist tendencies within modernist studies re-read the writers mentioned here in terms of their worldliness and entanglement with the contemporary everyday, with political and social discourses and scientific theories. It is important to realize, however, that the reference to irony as a "principle" poses the same risk of turning into an excuse: irony therefore needs to be described in terms of its actual use and interdependence with other textual and narratological strategies.

Third, if one judges by the flood of recent monographs on prominent modernist writers that try to saturate the context of their oeuvre with the vast body of scientific theories and contemporary philosophy they have "absorbed," the so-called modernist "philosophical novels" (or modernist texts with a theoretical slant in the essayistic mode, as I prefer to call them) like those of Paul Valéry, Robert Musil and Hermann Broch, are undergoing the fate that Walter Benjamin described in the following citation: "today the book is an outdated interface between two different filing systems, as the essential can be found in the card-index boxes of either the writer or the reader" (Benjamin [1972], 102; my trans.).<sup>17</sup> A renewed attention to the variety of forms of irony

and authoriality by means of an analysis that I would describe as applied tropology and topology seems crucial to our ability to describe in a more *salient* way the texts' relationship to a set of ideas and assumptions that are indicative of a particular positioning towards modernity. This implies paying attention to the fact that the master signifiers (utopia, cerebralisation, depth hermeneutics) to which modernist texts are being reduced, can indeed be found in these texts, but that they simultaneously display a tension between an affirmative and a self-reflexive discourse through the inscription of these master signifiers in diverse textual strategies and stylistic devices, such as the oscillation between authorial comment and "reflectorisation." It is the actual mediation through textual, rhetorical strategies and complex processes of double-voicing these positionings that has to be taken into account and that makes the sometimes diffuse border between these anti-modern and pro-modern currents a subject in need of an account that stresses the heterogeneity of the enunciatory structure. When irony is addressed in such a way, namely taking into account first, its self-reflexivity towards its use of meta-language in paraphrasing characters and discourses alike and, second, its recourse to seemingly more traditional (for example authorial) modes of telling, we may have an approach that leads us to a more differentiated understanding of modernism's complex stance concerning modernity.

## Notes

1. Note on translation: I prefer to use the translation "authorial" for Stanzel's "Auktorialität," corresponding roughly with "extradiegetic-heterodiegetic narration" in English narratology, as regards the attributes normally ascribed to "omniscient narration," viz. identification of characters, description of the scene, commentary or "gnomic code," report of what characters did not think, see or say (see Rimmon-Kennan [1983], 165). Authorial is not intended to mean "of the author." In the repeated attacks on the notion of "omniscience," the mode of authorial narration is all too easily reduced to the more spectacular forms of "performative authoritativeness" (Culler [2004], 26). These are only the extreme realizations of a more continual form of interface that attempts to address the interests and orientation of the narratee.
2. "unser Charakter wie ein Puder auseinanderfallen könnte, wenn wir ihn nicht in eine öffentlich zugelassene Tüte stecken" (Musil [1999], 85).
3. "drückte plötzlich diesen Kasten zusammen wie ine Pappschachtel" (Musil [1999], 82).
4. "Der Kommentar erhält so den Charakter eines advocatus diaboli, der—in der Reflexion aufs Tatsächliche—als advocatus veritatis sich bestätigt sieht" (Arntzen [1983], 81).
5. "C'est ça, le téléphone? [...] On vous sonne, et vous y allez" (Valéry [1960], 1217).
6. "ironisch ist derjenige Zug der Texte, in dem sie noch ihre negative Einsicht zerbrechen und ihrer Hypostase zu einer Figur substantieller Negativität den Boden entziehen" (Hamacher [1988], 14–15).
7. "l'ironie joue le rôle d'une affiche et par là détruit la multivalence qu'on pouvait espérer d'un discours citationnel. [...] Il s'agit de traverser le mur de la voix pour atteindre l'écriture: celle-ci refuse toute désignation de propriété et par conséquent ne peut jamais être ironique; ou du moins son ironie n'est jamais sûre (incertitude qui marque quelques grands textes: Sade, Fourier, Flaubert). Menée au nom d'un sujet qui met son imaginaire dans la distance qu'il feint de prendre vis-à-vis du langage des autres, et se constitue par là d'autant plus sûrement sujet du discours, la parodie, qui est en quelque sorte l'ironie au travail, est toujours une parole classique" (Barthes [1994], vol. II, 584).
8. "Quelle épouvantable catastrophe! s'écria l'apothicaire, qui avait toujours des expressions congruentes à toutes les situations imaginables" (Flaubert [1972], 186).

9. "On a d'ailleurs beaucoup exagéré, quantitativement, l'usage du style indirect libre dans *Madame Bovary*, malgré les avertissements d'un Auerbach. Non seulement, Flaubert utilise bien d'autres procédés — la description par exemple; il mêle également sa voix à celles des personnages. La présence de l'auteur, malgré son impassibilité, son invisibilité reste forte" (Olsen [1999], quoted according to version online).
10. "die alten Mythen der ‚Tiefe‘ haben abgedankt" (Robbe-Grillet [1965], 22).
11. "la relation démystifiante, puisque l'auteur réduit l'apparence à sa réalité, est l'expression logique de ce qu'on a appelé le pessimisme de Rochefoucauld" (Barthes [1994], vol. II, 1339).
12. "L'unité de l'énonciation est une fiction de certaines linguistiques, et n'existe pas pour (dans) un texte littéraire, qui multiplie en général les représentations d'énonciations par "une mise en scène énonciative de type ironique" (Hamon [1996], 96).
13. "Die Vortragsweise stand zur ganzen Verkörperung im Widerspruch wie eine schwere Blüte zu einem Stengel" (Musil [1996], 1077).
14. "Die kritische Soziologie hatte Attitüden des Besserwissens angenommen. Sie gerierte sich als konkurrierender Beschreiber mit tadelfreien moralischen Impulsen und besserem Durchblick" (Luhmann [1997], 1115).
15. "Abschließend wäre noch die Frage zu stellen, ob Zima mit seinem Ansatz — bei allem Respekt vor dessen erkenntnistheoretischem wie auch propädeutischem Wert — durch ein zu starres epistemologisches Konzept nicht selbst in dieselbe Denkfalle geraten ist, die er bei anderen Textproduzenten ausmacht. Denn das theoretische Strickmuster, nach dem Ideologisches in Romanen von Robert Musil, Hermann Broch oder Alberto Moravia unermüdlich nachgewiesen werden soll, scheint durch die repetitive und gepanzerte Gedankenführung auf lexikalischer, semantischer und narrativer Ebene des wissenschaftlichen Textes selbst mehr einem dualistischen, naturalistischen und monologen Prinzip verpflichtet zu sein als einem offenen Diskurs, welcher der Komplexität zeitgenössischer Gesellschaften entsprechenden Ambivalenz, Ambiguität oder Indifferenz Rechnung tragen würde" (Ertler [1998], 133).
16. "wird dadurch ideologisch, dass sein Aussagesubjekt das von ihm konstruierte narrative Schema (z.B. den Rationalisierungsprozess) nicht als kontingente Struktur reflektiert und mit anderen Strukturen konfrontiert" (Zima [1992], 62).
17. "Und schon heute ist das Buch, wie die aktuelle wissenschaftliche Produktionsweise lehrt, eine veraltete Vermittlung zwischen zwei verschiedenen Katalogsystemen. Denn alles Wesentliche findet sich im Zettelkasten des Forschers, der's verfasste, und der Gelehrte, der darin studiert, assimiliert es seiner eigenen Kartothek" (Benjamin [1972], 102).

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## A Map of All Possible Paths

### Modernism after Marxism

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*When the starry sky is a map of all possible paths.*

G. Lukács

Is modernism “a mouth [that] makes nothing happen,” as W. H. Auden suggested in *Another Time* (1940)? Or is it a possible instigator of social change as he contended in “Spain 1937,” a poem which portrays both his alienation from modern society and professes a utopian alternative to it?

When György Lukács, Antonio Gramsci and Theodor W. Adorno turned to modernism during the interbellum period, questions such as Auden’s were high on the agenda. For an introductory bibliography consult Lunn ([1982], 301–22); compare Holub ([1992], 3–116). Vainly awaiting Karl Marx’s promised social revolution in the West, and critical of classical or orthodox Marxism’s historical materialism, all three of these writers considered modernism as one of the possible “last resorts” from which to dislodge the reader’s rigidified view of his position within capitalist society (Jay [1984b]; compare Barret [1991], 22–6; Anderson [1984]; and Johnson [1984]). Underlining the importance of culture in the formation of ideology, their inquiry into modernism called for a theory of society as a whole with which to frame the modernist text. It soon became clear that their opinions differed as to if and how modernist literature could lead to an actual change of outlook on society. To a certain extent, Gramsci, Adorno and Lukács’s opinions differed because each drew on different parts of the modernist corpus. Their opinions on the possible revolutionary role of modernism also differed due to the various *structures* of society they outlined in their theories. Whereas Gramsci anchored his theory in the modern democratic system, for instance, Lukács and Adorno founded their social and cultural theories on the logic of the economy. Further, Gramsci, Adorno and Lukács’s divergent views may be attributed to their various conceptions of the *subject* (the writer and his reading public) within society as a whole. Lukács, for example, regarded the public as belonging to inter-subjective classes. By contrast, Adorno tended to focus on singular individuals. Modernism was, accordingly, regarded from a wide range of angles.

Despite this heterogeneity, Marxist studies of modernism in the inter-war period remain of interest to comparative literature because, as Eugene Lunn suggests in *Marxism and Modernism*, inter-war neo-Marxism (Lukács and Gramsci) and Critical Theory (Adorno) were historical *con-texts* of early and “high” modernism (Lunn [1982], 7). Indeed, as a contemporary of modernism, Marxism partook in the same historical process of modernity/modernisation. Both modernists and Marxists, to various degrees, witnessed how this complex process led to an unprecedented fragmentation of

the social fabric and to the gradual alienation and “decentring” of the subject. Both modernism and Marxism can themselves also be viewed as examples of fragmentation, since the heterogeneity of Marxism easily matches the heteronomy of modernism. More than modernism, however, Marxism aspired to be a theory or science of society. These aspirations left Marxism on the wane in literary theory during the last decades of the twentieth century. After all, Auden’s tantalising inter-war Marxist questions go unanswered, and this can only suggest that Marxist studies were mere conjectures, tentative analyses which from a contemporary perspective appear not quite capable of describing the complex society from which they arose. At best, Marxism is currently regarded as a metaphysical myth or *métarécit* promising a principle of order in a fragmented social constellation, much like modernism is perceived by some postmodernists as “monolithic, totalising (but also simultaneously selective and excluding)” (Williams [2000], 14; compare Hebdidge [1996], 177–8; Graff [1979], 55). For other critical assessments of Marxism, see for example Derrida (1994); Lyotard ([1993] and [1988], 47–62); Baudrillard ([1975], 53–67); Soja ([1989], 60–75); and Baumann ([1992], 175–86). Nonetheless, as Jacques Derrida suggests in *Spectres of Marx* (1994), (Marxist) questions like those of Auden linger on in theory today as ghosts we can neither get rid of, nor fully re-address (see Sprinker [1997]). For comparative literature too, these questions remain helpful, not so much because of their potential outcome, but because restating them may shed new light on the historical and social functioning of the modernist corpus.

Recently, the *post-Marxist* discourse theory of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe has taken up this challenge. Getting Marxism up to speed with insights from post-structuralism, Lacanianism, feminism and post-colonialism, their work can be characterised in the same way as Charles Jencks describes postmodernism in relation to modernism, that is, as a “paradoxical dualism” (Jencks [1986], 7) that accepts some parts of the Marxist tradition but breaks with others. Laclau and Mouffe, to be sure, work primarily in the field of political theory, and they do not touch upon the issue of literary modernism’s social functioning. However, many of their insights, from *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985) onwards, have been welcomed in cultural and literary theory (Hall [1986]). In this paper, I will first focus on the way Gramsci, Lukács and Adorno approached modernism and pre-figured the post-Marxist perspective. Then, I will show how post-Marxism enables us to re-direct comparative literature’s inquiry of the rules governing the modernist representation of society and the subject, and to re-address Auden’s dilemma.

### György Lukács (1885–1971)

It is laboring an obvious point today to say that Lukács was most conservative when it came to literary modernism. Yet, the way he thought subjects came to grip with capitalist society in *History and Class-Consciousness* (1922) still warrants attention in comparative literature. Lukács’s study, as is well known, was of primal importance to later Marxist scholars of modernism, including Theodor Adorno (1958), Walter Benjamin (Buck-Morss [1977], 20–8), Lucien Goldmann (Cohen [1994]; Baum [1974]) and Peter Zima (1973). What may have contributed to the work’s significance is its (Hegelian) conviction that theory and practice, knowing society and changing it, are essentially two peas in a pod. Subjects produce society through culture, Lukács contended, and culture structures society in a “totality,” a dynamic and contradictory system of values, ideas and objects. Since this

structure is man-made, the subject, the human being, should also be able to consciously master it, Lukács believed, and this ability, in turn, implies the promise of changing it.

Mastering society, to Lukács, was easier said than done, since he witnessed how subjects under capitalism gradually lost touch with their surroundings, and thus also with the complexity of the cultural “totality.” What happened instead was that simplifying structures of belief gradually disguised this complexity and gave subjects a sense of being “centred,” at one with their environment. Drawing on the work of Marx and Engels, Lukács argued that capitalism and its laws of production were the primal causes for this simplification, since they had come to form the material conditions of social and cultural life. Capitalism determined the position or identity of people in society, splitting them up into two larger antagonistic classes or “subjects”: a dominant bourgeoisie and a subordinated working class. The former provided machines and equipment to manufacture commodities; the latter functioned both as consumers and producers of commodities. Ideologically, the proletariat fully accepted the bourgeois worldview; its own values, beliefs and ideas were subdued by capitalism. The economic organisation of life thereby displayed a tendency to *reify* human beings, to conflate the material result of human production with humanity itself. Bourgeois ideology took commodities for granted, Lukács contended, and disguised the fact that these commodities were produced by other and equal human beings, turning the latter, instead, into objects themselves. For Lukács, bourgeois ideology thus also reduced consciousness to a partial or fragmented assessment of the totality. To be sure, bourgeois ideology for Lukács was not *false* consciousness. “It [was] thought true to a false situation” (Eagleton [1994], 189), that is, to a reified and reifying bureaucratically rationalised economic structure (Jay [1984b], 110). Indeed, Lukács also asserted that as the dominant class expounded a dominant ideology, the bourgeoisie perceived society as a reified whole, as a (Weberian) iron cage, which led some members of the bourgeoisie into despair, and others into a self-centred disregard of the possibility of social change. Precisely this possibility, however, is dealt with in *History and Class-Consciousness*, since Lukács argued that, if cognition and production, theory and practice, were essentially tied together, this also had to entail a “subject” that could surmount the restricted perspective of bourgeois ideology, and know (and change) society as a whole. The proletariat, Lukács thought, was up to this task. Since the subaltern working class was simultaneously the producer (subject) and the consumer (object) in capitalist economy, it could also become the intentional “creator-subject” of a new dominant social whole and cultural ideology—at least in theory, for *reification* also prevented the proletariat from consciously experiencing its privileged position within capitalism. Bourgeois ideology made the proletariat perceive itself as an object as well. Party officials, intellectuals and writers therefore were to make the working class conscious of its potential, to elevate the proletariat from an “object” to the status of a “subject.” They further had to show the working class that, when totality is grasped, the world is always mutable. Lukács coined the term “Augenblick” for the moment upon which this insight is gained, stressing the visibility of an alternative (see Žižek [2000], 115). Lukács was not so much interested in the creation of a specific alternative (a classless society), but in positing the possibility of an alternative. His primal concern was to show that things did not have to be the way they were, and that culture could play a major role in spreading this awareness.

In trying to make an alternative visible, *History and Class-Consciousness* thus stressed that the individual should identify with a more encompassing *subject or class position*, that he should take a *standpoint* within the whole (Lukács [1968–78], vol. II, 331–97, 471–517). Lukács’s (later) refuta-

tion of German expressionism and modernism in general, was largely inspired by this “standpoint-theory” (Sim [1994], 40–104). To Lukács, modernism was at one with the bourgeois experience of the social world. Franz Kafka’s Gregor Samsa, for instance, in his irrational transformation from man to insect, expressed only a part (the particular) within the totality (the universal). While Lukács conceded that Kafka’s work displayed the modern *angst*-ridden vision of existence that actually undercut bourgeois ideology within the dehumanised capitalist system, he criticised Kafka because the author failed to frame or *visualise* this vision in a larger social constellation. Similarly, Gottfried Benn was attacked for expressing a regressive anti-humanism in his poetry, for opposing “man as animal, as a primeval reality, to man as a social being” (Adorno [1991–92], vol. II, 233). For Lukács, the (critical) realism of Honoré de Balzac or Thomas Mann, formed the counterpart of expressionism. Though few realists sympathised with the Marxist cause, their characters often provided a correlate to the working class position in society. Drawing heavily on the few texts of Marx and Engels on realism, Lukács regarded (critical) realism as the only way of exemplifying a “true” view of human life under capitalism, one that might dislodge its rigid structure. Through typical, centred characters and situations close to everyday language and experience, organic plot construction and the representation of human beings both subjected to and participating in social life, (critical) realism *synecdochally* reproduced social totality within literature. In Lukács’s work after 1922, this act of cognition of the whole was to remain synonymous with the implication of transforming it (Kolakowski [1978], vol. III, 270). Despite his later revision and refutation of *History and Class-Consciousness*, his defence of realism and dislike of modernism moved along similar lines. For instance, in *Studies of European Realism* (1950), he still stated that “the putting of the question and not the answer given to it” was important, and that this action always entailed identifying with a (“synecdochic”) class/subject position, which made visible the whole of society and man’s condition in it (Lukács [1972], 146). Ultimately, Lukács’s studies resulted in a nebulous taxonomy of literature between two poles: *primo*, an oppositional (realist) sub-paradigm that challenged capitalism and its dominant ideology by identifying with the position of the subordinated proletariat, and, *secundo*, a (modernist) sub-paradigm, which escaped from society and political responsibility by reiterating the bourgeois standpoint (see Liska [1995], 67).

Lukács’s “standpoint theory” is relevant to many scholars of modernism to this day, and, as we will see, it is also of the essence to post-Marxism (Corredor [1997], 92). It could be argued, for instance, that there is no point in reading W. B. Yeats’s “myth” of the social as the “filthy modern tide” and his alternative to it in “The Statues” (1938), without identifying first with “We Irish, born into that ancient sect” (Yeats [1957], 611). Yeats’s “myth” is enlightening, however, because it also allows us to hint at the limitations of Lukács’s view of modernism. We may wonder, for example, why we should view Yeats’s “Irish [...] ancient sect” as (part of) a class “subject” (compare North [1991], 6–9). Furthermore, if bourgeois modernism showed that the bourgeoisie’s belief in being one with its surroundings was an ideological illusion, how then could Lukács himself know this? Through modernism, it seems (and not through the subdued values of the proletariat, since these were made invisible). After all, Lukács admitted that expressionism showed that the bourgeoisie was implicitly aware of its “true” position in society. As Adorno concluded after him, this meant that (only) in modernism itself could be found the potential for dislodging the *dominant* view of society.

Famously, *History and Class-Consciousness* professed that Marxism should never become a doctrine so that it could keep all future options open (Lukács [1971], 1; compare Sim [1998], 3–4;

Smith [1998], 66; Mészáros [1972]). This is, undoubtedly, another reason why Lukács's study remained influential long after its publication. Adorno, for instance, welcomed Lukács's advice, and used it to substitute the assessments of Lukács with an alternative view on the role of modernism in society.

### Theodor W. Adorno (1903–1969)

With his characterisation of theory and Reason as the “jargon of authenticity,” Adorno would be the last to contradict Lukács's conviction that theory's conjectures may be relative (Jay [1984b], 241–75). Statements such as “[t]oday society, which has unjustly been blamed for its complexity, has become too transparent,” nonetheless suggest that there is a rather rigid view on society's structure present in Adorno as well (Adorno [1972], 190–1). This structure substantially differs from Lukács's, though. Whereas Lukács had highlighted the notion that bourgeois ideology was blind to the reification of consciousness and subjects, Adorno maintained that *commodification* and the *exchange* of objects were concealed by bourgeois ideology (Adorno [1968], 100–1). Drawing on psychoanalysis in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), Adorno asserted (with Max Horkheimer) that both the bourgeois subject's consciousness and unconscious had become victim to commodification. Not only did that subject thereby regard subjects as objects, it also saw subjects as identical and interchangeable objects. Adorno therefore replaced Lukács's stress on the humanist idea of *equality* (Lichtheim [1970]), with a stress on *difference*. Commodification and fetishisation, he argued, as principles of control and tight regimentation, made society “too transparent.” This transparency, however, was an illusion *untrue* (or *false*) to the potential complexity of (a future) society, in which people would be able to experience their true identity, and as “centred” subjects could feel at one with their environment.

To hint at the possibility of such a society, Adorno turned to the *immanent* qualities of commodities themselves. Modernism, he argued, was a commodity too, albeit of a peculiar nature. Modernist texts, though always in danger of becoming fetishes in the culture industry, were resistant to the instrumental status of commodities, Adorno thought. Modernism thereby opened a window to the social world through which the ideological distortion of society's potential complexity could be gauged. Although he paid elaborate attention to more popular or “low” cultural artefacts such as film and radio (Jarvis [1998], 72–80; Wellmer [1985], 9–47), “high” art, and German expressionism in particular, was the site to which Adorno retreated. “High” art was considered “useless” in capitalism, Adorno observed, and it was thereby given a privileged, semi-autonomous role in society, since within this relatively autonomous sphere writers were allowed to deal (often inadvertently or unconsciously) with the constricting nature of capitalism. From his 1920 essay “Expressionism and Artistic Truthfulness” right down to his *Aesthetic Theory* (1970), Adorno promoted the same (expressionist) representational strategies Lukács so fiercely attacked because of their limited perspective (Lunn [1982], 195–8, 261–7; Jay [1984a], 130). For Adorno, however, these strategies entailed the only viable perspective. Destroying the illusion of organic beauty, expressing the breakdown of communicability, and bearing witness to the disintegration of the subject in modernity, the works of Kafka, Georg Heym, Ernst Barlach and Georg Trakl depicted society in a state of disintegration and dehumanisation. “The magic of works of art is a disenchantment,” Adorno claimed

([1997], 228). He thus approached modernism from a normative angle diametrically opposed to that of Lukács, although both agreed on the truth value of modernism. Significantly, however, Adorno also replaced Lukács's primary emphasis on the (visible) content of a literary work with a consideration of *form* and its immanent, invisible or negative meaning(s). By way of this shift, Adorno ultimately surpassed Lukács's reading of modernism. Consider the following remark on Kafka:

The more the I of Expressionism is thrown back upon itself, the more like the excluded world of things it becomes. [...] Pure subjectivity, being of necessity estranged from itself as well as having become a thing, assumes the dimensions of objectivity, which expresses itself through estrangement. [...] Kafka] in this completely estranged subjectivity, follows the expressionist impulse farther than any but the most radical of poets. [He] forces Expressionism [...] into the form of a tortuous epic. (Adorno [1968], 262)<sup>1</sup>

Elevating the angst and pain of alienation to the level of something that can be "played with" in the formal construction and production of a work of art, Kafka (unintentionally or unconsciously) showed that change was conceivable. Gregor Samsa's metamorphosis from man to bug not only displayed impotence. In his depiction of the aftermath of this change, Kafka also "resists [the world] through non-violence" (Lunn [1982], 265). For Adorno, this non-violent or silent opposition hinted at the presence of a negative force within society that strove for a future "true" totality: a state of distinctness without domination. As modernism's silent opposition exemplified, however, this force remained substantially "empty;" it was restricted to form. As a semi-autonomous body of texts, modernism therefore participated in a *negative dialectics*.

Despite Adorno's anathema to large parts of Lukács's work, he thus shared Lukács's insistence on "putting the question" of change. We cannot neglect a number of strange inconsistencies in Adorno, though, even when we are sensitive to the intricate dialectic at work in his writings and to his resistance to systematisation. Adorno, on the one hand, seems to have been at pains to illustrate that modernism had to be understood as situated within a closed regimented capitalist structure that determined the identity (and) thinking of all subjects. On the other hand, he gave the form of modernism the power to transcend or disrupt the dominant outlook on social realities, drawing on the difference that bourgeois ideology annihilated. Like Roman Jakobson, Adorno thereby attached a "poetic function" to literature, differentiating it from other forms of discourse (Jakobson [1987]). Obviously, only a limited number of educated peers and writers mastered an awareness of such a distinction in the semi-autonomous sphere of "high" art. Unlike Lukács's view on modernism, Adorno's "mandarin" approach to it thus put all its hopes on intellectuals and artists. Adorno failed to ground the latter's privileged role, however. Instead, he claimed that bourgeois ideology was all-pervasive. What therefore could be addressed, at best, was a "fractured" totality. The large, macro-logical structure of society was therefore of limited interest to Adorno. Rather, small-scale, micro-logical issues are predominant in his work. Issues related to larger inter-subjective classes also retreated to the background, and made way for a focus on the fate of individuals. In contrast with Lukács, however, who grounded his own perspective in a larger class "subject" whose voice was subdued (or whose presence was made invisible), Adorno never tried to legitimise his own privileged position as a theorist (Jay [1984a], 117). Rather, he stressed that theory too was subject to commodification, and ultimately thereby admitted that his own concepts could never be "realist" (note that he also employed this insight to rally against Lukács's conflation of idealism and realism.

See Adorno [1970–86], vol. VII, 104). We are thus somehow to take for granted that Adorno was a “centred” subject still at one with the fragmented world that surrounded him.

Significant to Laclau and Mouffe’s recent post-Marxism is that with Adorno a *terrain of negativity* emerges to sustain the alleged unity of society and subject. The radical difference that characterises the “true” or potential complexity of society as a whole could no longer be articulated positively in Adorno. Not only did bourgeois ideology and identity thinking make it impossible to formulate the alternative utopian outlook in which all differences between subjects were respected, but Adorno also insisted that this alternative should remain negative, since the idea of excluding domination or power always ran the risk of being re-inscribed into the capitalist logic of equivalence. I will illustrate later on that Laclau and Mouffe take both Lukács’s and Adorno’s views on ideology and society a step further. With Lukács they share the idea that no ideology or discourse is ever false as such. It is the positive articulation of something that can only remain negative, beyond the scope of language, being society and all its differences in identity. Thereby they also share Adorno’s view on the practical impossibility of expressing a state of distinctness without domination or power. Before we can turn to Laclau and Mouffe, however, one last inter-war Marxist needs to be discussed.

### Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937)

In his pragmatic approach to modernism, Gramsci too witnessed how the “centred” subject was slowly disappearing under capitalism. For instance, in his notes on Luigi Pirandello’s *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921), the fragmented and alienated consciousness of the Pirandellian character was related to a bourgeois structure of consciousness. Like Lukács and Adorno before him, Gramsci also asserted that there actually had to be a non-bourgeois subject, for whom reification and commodification did not exist (Gramsci [1985], 136–47). One of the most profound contributions of Gramsci to Marxism, however, was that, whereas Adorno took bourgeois ideology for a coercive discursive construct, Gramsci questioned the all-pervasive nature of this ideology. The “real nature” of the subject, Gramsci thought, was “its struggle to become what it wants to become” (Gramsci [1985], 145). Adorno, to be sure, implicitly shared this view. In fact, he turned to expressionism precisely to illustrate that the desire of this “true” subject was truncated. Heym, for example, in “The God in the City” (1911), allegorically stages the “whole” of society as the city of Berlin, a society which evolves from a site of rational order to a place of institutionalised chaos and insanity, making it impossible for the subject to exist. Gramsci, however, went a step further in that he read such texts as instances of submission to alienation and commodification. For Gramsci, this submission could only be explained by the subject’s consent to capitalism. And where there is consent, Gramsci emphasized, there is always resistance and subversion as well. Therefore, turning to modernism had to imply a search for subaltern voices, not only on the level of form (Adorno) but also on the level of content (Lukács).

As is well known, Gramsci introduced the concept of *hegemony* to come to terms with the problem of consent and coercion within society. This concept needs to be related to Gramsci’s view of the “integral state.” “State = political society + civil society,” Gramsci wrote (Gramsci [1971], 263). In this closed structure, Gramsci shifted from Lukács’s and Adorno’s primacy of the economy



to that of parliamentary democratic politics (Gramsci [1971], 247). Civil society contains every social sphere outside of the sphere of politics. From nursery school to funeral parlor, all aspects of social and cultural life within civil society, Gramsci thought, made up a “common sense,” an “organic” way of perceiving society (emanating from the people). This dynamic collection of individual life-projects, which included bourgeois ideology, he called “hegemony” (Williams [1977], 108–14). Within the sphere of democratic politics, the state tried to represent this organic hegemony in a political programme, which in turn was hegemonic, but in a pejorative sense. It was a coercive, dominating hegemony. Yet, the organic collection of “wills” in society could never be fully mirrored by political representation, Gramsci thought. Political representation is selective, it articulates only those ideas and concerns within civil society that are supported by large numbers of the public. That political hegemony was dominant, to Gramsci, could thus only be explained by the fact that people consented to it, despite the fact that it always favored some over others. Tracking down these others, these subaltern voices, it seems, was Gramsci’s central concern.

In the (civil) artistic sphere, Gramsci paid much attention to Italian futurism. He sympathised with the work of F. T. Marinetti and his followers, because he regarded them as a force of opposition (Gramsci [1985], 48–51, 369; compare Lista [1977]). Though Gramsci was fiercely critical of futurism’s fascist orientation, he also characterised its cry for “new forms of art, philosophy, behaviour and language” as essentially Marxist (Perloff [1986], 2). As part of the subaltern resistance in civil society, Marinetti’s *Zang Tumb Tumb* (1912), for example, illustrated both in its form and in its vibrant subject matter, that no political hegemony was ever capable of fully encompassing the whole of civil society. Writings like Marinetti’s, for Gramsci, depicted the “age of big industry, of the large proletarian city and [...] the intense and tumultuous life,” and from this they derived a cultural alternative (Gramsci [1985], 51). Gramsci also compared Marinetti’s words-in-freedom to the paintings of Picasso, since in them he found the decomposition of the image crucial to any successful aesthetic opposition. (Gramsci thus did not share Lukács’s “ocularcentric” concern with making society visible as it “truly” was, nor did he comply with Adorno’s claim that an alternative should necessarily remain invisible or negative.) Marinetti’s *sostantivo doppio* and other poetical innovations, for Gramsci, seemed to go against the rules governing political representation. Hence, both in form and content, futurism (as part of modernism) “moulded” society into something new, testifying to the “real nature” of the subject to experience itself fully.

Gramsci thought that every historical period could be viewed as a relatively stable if not fixed totality. Every period, he argued, forms an “historical bloc,” a closed structure of belief, which arises from a proximity between the “official” or political and the civil hegemony. This “bloc” unites the differences amongst factions into a “collective will,” a view on the future of society shared by all its subjects (Gramsci [1971], 137, 366). This insight allowed Gramsci to surpass the views of both Lukács and Adorno, for Gramsci was prone to stress that hegemony was restricted neither to one economic class nor to one particular class ideology. It was primarily a struggle *within* culture and discourse (and not between ideologies). In other words, hegemony co-ordinated or articulated all practices and spheres in civil society (the sphere of economics, art, the juridical sphere, etcetera) so that resistance was subdued, and differences between factions were blurred (Mouffe [1979], 179). Modernism, as Gramsci’s enthusiastic appreciation of futurism illustrated, could play an essential part in dislodging the dominant hegemony. However, Gramsci’s sympathy for futurism exemplifies that he was critical of Adorno’s “mandarin” stance. He was sympathetic to futurism largely because

it was a popular phenomenon in Italy. Indeed, the futurist movement could count on a large body of readers, many of them of working class origin (Rainey [1994]).

In sum, Gramsci moved beyond Lukács's (limiting) class position and primal focus on content. He also surpassed Adorno by opening up the possibility for a positive articulation of an alternative. Still, we may observe a number of inconsistencies in all three. All three Marxists tried to cling to the "centred" (realist) subject at one with his environment, for instance, despite their shared conviction that this "centred" subject was on its way out in modernity/modernisation. Like Lukács who retained the "centred" subject by articulating it as a subdued class subject, and like Adorno who pointed to the presence of the "centred" subject in "high" art, Gramsci asserted that only politics prevented subjects from self-fulfilment. All three also promoted rather rigid views on how society was actually organised or structured. Nevertheless, the differences between the "totalities" of Adorno, Gramsci and Lukács, and their various normative opinions about modernism are quite striking. The Marxist endeavors to answer Auden's questions thereby seem dubious, since their variety suggests the interference of contingency. Consequently, inter-war Marxism may be read as a collection of conjectures, incessantly pointing to an ontological and epistemological ambiguity. The willingness to accept this ambiguity and to embrace the multiplicity of structures is the fundamental difference between Marxism and post-Marxism.

### **Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe**

Laclau and Mouffe call for a Weberian conception of society as it appears in the light of modernisation and fragmentation (Laclau [1989] and [1993]). An image that captures their view rather vividly is J.-F. Lyotard's trope of the archipelago. The archipelago's islands are governed by different discourses on and within fragments of the social sphere. The subject floats from one island to another, alighting here and there to make sense of it all (Lyotard [1983], 189–91). As this complex trope suggests, any theory of the "structure" of society can only be selective or partial (compare Taylor [1985]; Winch [1990]). The social world can only be viewed from one particular island, one viewpoint, and as a result there is no Archimedean (stand)point from which to describe the whole, and neither can there be an adequate map or ultimate geography of the social world (Dallmayr [1987], 284). Inter-war Marxism, for example, illustrates that it is possible to root a "total" view of society and culture in a variety of ways, not only in the sphere of economics (Lukács, Adorno), but also in the sphere of politics (Gramsci). These inconsistencies suggest that Lukács, Gramsci and Adorno tended to reduce the subject's identity to its role within these spheres, and *synecdochally* took part of society for the whole. In line with post-structuralism, Laclau and Mouffe, however, state that such (synecdochal) closure is impossible. Unlike Baudrillard, they do not claim that modern society "disintegrates." For at any given time there exists a number of discursive constructs which people employ in their everyday lives to make sense of society and their role within it. A study of those discursive constructs should always begin by situating them within their proper context. The modernist subject, for example, regards society from the "literary sphere" or institution. (Although Anna Marie Smith ([1998], 63–4) has illustrated that Laclau and Mouffe are also compatible with the sociological (literary) "field" approach of Pierre Bourdieu, and even though Laclau often uses the term "systems" in *New Reflections of the Revolution of Our Time* (1990), suggesting a link to (poly)

system theory, I prefer the term “sphere” which Chantal Mouffe employs in *The Return of the Political* (1993).) Adorno already observed that (“high”) literature occupied a semi-autonomous place in society. Any assessment of modernism, therefore, first has to stake out this sphere. How this can be done, will be illustrated later on. First, however, let us look at what happens to the subject in Laclau and Mouffe.

The subject in Laclau and Mouffe is contemplated in two complementary ways. First of all, they pay attention to the way subjects attain a sense of *identity* or subjectivity. Like Lukács, Gramsci and Adorno before them, Laclau and Mouffe believe that the subject always tries to develop its full potential. The “true” or fully “centred” subject, however, is an impossible object of discourse for them. Drawing on Lacanian psychoanalysis, Laclau and Mouffe state that identity is defined by the symbolical “blockage” of an Other, since it is always embedded within a social antagonism. This is experienced both positively, because it gives us a sense of identity, and negatively, because social antagonisms tend to destabilise our identity (Žižek [1990], 253). Consider the following remark of Lois Farquar in Elizabeth Bowen’s *The Last September* (1929), with the tenor of the word “hate” steadily gaining a more positive edge: “‘I hate women’ [...] ‘But I can’t think how to begin to be anything else [...] I would hate to be a man’” (Bowen [1998], 99). As this example shows, the “full” or “free” subject is an impossible object of discourse. In highlighting the significance of social antagonisms, Laclau and Mouffe appear indebted to Lukács’s standpoint theory. According to them, a subject always identifies itself with a number of subject positions, which allow the subject to identify with larger discourses about the social world. As Lukács exemplifies, this act of identification always involves the subject in forms of social antagonism, for example, between the working class and the bourgeoisie. In line with feminism and post-colonialism, however, Laclau and Mouffe force the concept of class to disintegrate as the sole category by which to account for identity. They complement the subject position of class, with those of race, generation, nationality and gender (compare Best and Kellner [1991], 194). Consider Stephen Dedalus’s famous remark in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*: “This race and this country and this life produced me [...] I shall express myself as I am” (Joyce [1964], 203). This could be read as: “my race, nationality and generation make up my identity.” If post-Marxism is influenced by insights from feminism and post-colonialism, it is simultaneously very critical of essentialism in both. It warns both scholarly strands not to fall prey to Lukács’s mistake of universalising one social antagonism. For Lukács it seems class was the only thing that mattered. A subject is either bourgeois or working class. In post-colonial studies, mention is often made of an “imperial structure” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin [1989], 6; Richards [2000], 231; Loomba [1998], 2) which closely resembles Lukács’s (dual) capitalist structure and leads to an all-pervasive “race consciousness” that reifies non-Eurocentric subjects (Mukherjee [1994], 17–38). Here there is a risk of letting the social sphere be fully swallowed up by an opposition between ethnicities or nationalities. Similarly, in feminist studies, Showalter, Marcus, Ellman, Gilbert and Gubar seem to display a tendency to reduce the social sphere to an antagonism between genders (Rajan [1995], 143). Yet, as the above quote from Joyce illustrates, a subject never identifies with just one subject position. Significantly, scholars too are limited by the subject positions they (can) identify with. No discourse or ideology is therefore ever *false* according to Laclau and Mouffe. Instead, it is a positive articulation of an essentially negative or unrepresentable object: society with all its actual differences of identity (Barret [1994], 259–60). What lies outside ideology is therefore always ideological as well, Laclau contends (Laclau [1996]; for a different point

of view, see Zima [1999]). As readers or scholars we cannot transcend ideology. Much in line with Janet Lyon, for instance, who also reads manifestos as part of the avant-garde discourse, Laclau therefore argues for the most elaborate notion of discourse possible (Lyon [1999]). The more historical material from the “social text” a scholar can incorporate, the better he or she is equipped to re-construct modernist identities.

Identity (re)construction, clearly, is essential if we want to come to grips with the kind(s) of subject(s) promoted in the modernist text. Scholars can, however, also use it to read para-literary texts, to arrive at a view of a writer’s or reader’s identity. Identity (re)construction, in both cases, is a necessary step to arrive at the way subjects are said to function within society as *agents*. Viewing subjects as agents is Laclau and Mouffe’s second way of contemplating the subject. Like Lukács did before them, Laclau and Mouffe state that once a subject has identified with certain subject positions, it is able to inscribe itself in more encompassing narratives or discourses that make sense of its fragmented social surroundings. Unlike Lukács, though, Laclau and Mouffe are not so much interested in the *material* foundations of the representation of society (which unavoidably lead to reductionism), but in the way this reconstruction comes about *discursively* or *ideologically*. Naturally, they do not contradict that there is a “reality” outside of language, but like Max Weber they tend toward nominalism, and they share his views on the dislocational impact of modernity on social and cultural life (Palonen [1999], 43). Their theory is thus *radically constructivist*, stating that the actions a subject undertakes in society are always filtered through the subject’s identity and situatedness. An agent’s actions, according to Laclau and Mouffe, can only be explained by locating them in the proper context or sphere. Spheres are always governed by pre-existing and dominant discursive structures, which a subject is forced to identify with. Following Gramsci, Laclau and Mouffe call these dominant structures *hegemonies*. A *sphere* may be understood as the “reproduced patterns of interaction” between agents operating in a sphere. When we turn to the artistic or literary sphere, for instance, we may wish to deal with conventions between agents and their “interpretative community” (readers and peers) (Torfin [1999], 137; Fish [1980]; compare Fokkema and Ibsch [2000], 113–24). Hegemonies permit the continued reproduction of spheres, prescribing “literary competence,” who is in power and who is not, etcetera (Culler [1975], 116). Hegemonies always include an outlook on society as a whole as well. Laclau and Mouffe coin the Lacanian term *social imaginary* (or *imaginary of the social*) for such an outlook. An imaginary promotes a view of society; it justifies the place and practice of a particular sphere within society at large, it distributes power amongst agents depending on their identities, and so on. Importantly, hegemonies thus eventually make it nearly impossible to draw clear-cut boundaries between spheres, since a particular hegemony can be shared in different spheres.

Interestingly, Laclau and Mouffe’s theory also allows scholars to investigate how hegemonies are constructed, and here they seem to share a number of ideas with Adorno. Laclau and Mouffe’s notion of discourse is grounded on the idea that hegemonies always draw from what they call the *terrain of discursivity* or the *discursive*. This terrain resembles Adorno’s negativity. Yet, whereas in Adorno we are to view it as dialectically related to a closed social whole, in Laclau and Mouffe, this “whole” is characterised by contingency. This somewhat abstract field contains all *elements* (identities, objects, ideas, etcetera) at hand to all discourses at a given moment. These elements are characterised by sheer difference and negativity, since they are not yet articulated. Once they have been positively articulated in a discourse, Laclau and Mouffe call them *moments*. *Articulation* is

thus understood as the process of connecting or co-ordinating elements in discourse (Slack [1996]). An example from modernist discourse might prove clarifying here. There is a tendency in modernism to make sense of the present by articulating the element of “tradition” with contemporary phenomena. As Weber already observed in “Science as a Profession” (1918), modernists often looked in a particular direction: “The multitude of ancient gods, disenchanted and therefore in the form of impersonal forces, are climbing out of their graves, striving for power over our lives and resuming their eternal struggle with one another” (Weber [1970], 149).<sup>2</sup> Pre-dating many major technical breakthroughs in modernism—even the most explicitly future-oriented ones—is an exploration of the aesthetic and cultural past (Butler [1994], 25). Articulating “tradition” with other elements led to different intersecting discourses. There are those discourses “discovering” tradition as an ensemble of secret histories and meta-histories, as in Yeats, Pound, Eliot (see Surette [1993]; and Smith [1994]); those stressing transition and a Nietzschean conception of tradition (the importance of forgetting and remembering simultaneously) as Svevo and Joyce (Hollington [1976]); and those destroying tradition altogether, most notably the historical avant-garde (Russel [1985], 3–39; Poggioli [1968], 178–9; Bürger [1974]; Krynski [1995], 30). Articulating these discourses in the literary sphere with subject positions, in turn, took different directions. Yeats’s “The Statues,” for example, articulates a myth with an “Ancient Irish sect” as its central subject, around which “historical events are shaped by turbulence created by their conflicting pulls” (Smith [1994], 18). Virginia Woolf, in *Orlando* (1928), “celebrates a kind of transhistorical aristocratic identity in which the tie to the landed estate permits the destabilising of gender” (Glover and Kaplan [2000], 31). As these various discourses sharing the hegemonic preference for “tradition” illustrate, hegemonies are by no means stable constructs.

Hegemonies, according to Laclau and Mouffe, change shape when *dislocation* occurs, that is, when an event, a text, or an identity cannot be domesticated in any hegemonic discourse at hand. Dislocation therefore calls for a re-articulation of elements and subject positions into an alternative hegemony. Proust’s observations via the narrator Swann about Combray, in *Remembrance of Things Past*, provide an interesting case:

Middle-class people in those days took what was almost a Hindu view of society, which they held to consist of sharply defined castes, so that everyone at his birth found himself led to that station of life which his parents already occupied, and from which nothing, save the accident of an exceptional career or a ‘good’ marriage, could extract you and translate you to a superior caste. (Proust [1983], 16–17)<sup>3</sup>

This strict worldview imposes itself on the “bourgeois” man and woman, and sets them apart from other “castes.” Paradoxically, Marcel Proust also sketches how the French Revolutionary idea of the equality of condition lives on within the very same middle class milieu (Proust [1987], vol II, 1097). This illustrates a hegemony need not be “logical.” For it to be successful it is to articulate attractively as many elements and subjects as possible, so as to subdue any resistance. The frailty of the hegemony sketched in *Remembrance of Things Past* became very clear with the Dreyfus case. This case made “the social kaleidoscope turn,” as Proust put it, and quite suddenly pushed many Jews into the lowest social regions of society (Proust [1987], vol. II, 194). Here, by dislocation (caused by the Dreyfus case) of the given (middle-class) hegemonic structure, the subjects identifying with the structure are forced into the *terrain of discursivity*, into *undecidability*. There, they have to re-articulate or co-ordinate anew a potential discursive hegemony that provides them with

an alternative way of perceiving and participating in society. For a re-articulation to be successful, it is thus required that a community of subjects shares the same counter-hegemony or alternative imaginary. For Laclau and Mouffe this highlights *the primacy of the political*. When regarded as a collection of symbolical hegemonies always (potentially) subject to dislocation, society is primarily characterised by a struggle for *discursive dominance*. The more identities a potential hegemony can house, the better it is equipped to do away with concurrent resistance.

Importantly, dislocation also leaves room for modernist discourse to participate in social changes outside the sphere of literature, to formulate positive alternatives to its readers. When literary discourses become constitutive of the social beyond the confines of the literary sphere, they often incorporate symbolical *nodal points* (Lacanian “points de capiton”). A nodal point is a discursive element that is *overdetermined*, that is, it means too many things at the same time for the element to retain any referential power. Nodal points can therefore be described as “empty signifiers” (Torfing [1999], 303). As “empty signifiers,” they allow for a number of re-articulations stressing the equivalence of elements and subjects rather than their difference. “Tradition,” for example, may be called a nodal point: it seems to cover so many things, that it even loses its linear or historical meaning (Schleifer [2002], 11–12). Likewise, “democracy” or the utopian “classless society” in Marxism may be called nodal points, for as inter-war Marxism shows, not their actual but potential meaning was relevant. Nodal points, in Roman Jakobson’s vocabulary, thus *float* above the syntagmatic chain of language and organise the radical contingency that characterises the chain at a time of dislocation.

Through such nodal points, the discourse of modernism can be shown to articulate itself with discourses from other spheres. For instance, in Italian futurism the belated industrial revolution played a significant dislocational role. It was felt the revolution had unleashed a (spiritual) energy, which was still to be domesticated. One of its most apparent influences is exemplified by futurism’s “modernolatria.” Equally significant, however, was the relatively late unification of Italy. In fact, what made futurism interact with the political sphere, was the nodal point “*italianismo*,” which figured frequently in literary journals, manifestos and performances of Marinetti (Gentile [2000], 8–10). “Italianismo” appears to have meant a number of things: the demand that the power of the state, in line with the unleashing of (spiritual) energy, seemingly caused by the industrial revolution, had to be handed down to the Italian people so that it could experience itself fully as a national “subject;” and the demand that the Italian government take a firm interventionist stance in international politics. “Italianismo,” not surprisingly, was hammered on in the Italian political opposition as well, most notably by the *arditi* (war veterans) and by later members of the Italian fascist party (see Poggi [1997], 17–62). “Italianismo” thus functioned as a signifier in which discourses from several spheres converged. Further, in its cultural programs and manifestos, futurism articulated spiritual and liberal elements with “italianismo” in suggesting a way forward—Marinetti’s *Futurist Democracy* (1919) did not only seek to reduce state control, but also stressed, for instance, that prisons should be abolished. Fascism, on the contrary, clearly adhered to more conservative and aggressive elements. Nevertheless, because of the prominence of “italianismo” in both discourses, futurism and fascism never got fully disentangled (Spackman [1996] and Sartini Blum [1996]). Previously, we saw that Gramsci witnessed how futurism could count on a large body of readers. Fascism gradually gained hegemonic status, it seems, in part by inheriting those readers.

Is modernism “a mouth [that] makes nothing happen”? Or is it a possible instigator of social change? Gramsci, Adorno and Lukács, as authors of con-texts of modernism, illustrate that mod-

ernism was a mouth making many things happen. Comparative literature may still show that modernism was a cultural participant in social changes in other instances as well. To this end, it could obviously benefit from Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory, especially in reconstructing the potential social imaginaries erected in the literary sphere, and in comparing these to imaginaries from other spheres. As Lukács already noted, in this endeavor everything will depend on the angle from which modernism is observed. Let there be no doubt: the angle is always multiple.

## Notes

1. "Je mehr das Ich des Expressionismus auf sich selber zurückgeworfen wird, um so mehr ähnelt es der ausgeschlossenen Dingwelt sich an. Vermöge dieser Ähnlichkeit zwingt Kafka den Expressionismus, dessen Schimärisches er wie keiner seiner Freunde muss verspürt haben und dem er doch treu blieb, zu einer vertrackten Epik; die reine Subjektivität, als notwendig auch sich selber entfremdete und zum Ding gewordene, zu einer Gegenständlichkeit, der die eigene Entfremdung zum Ausdruck gerät" (Adorno [1975], 328–9).
2. "Die alten vielen Götter, entzaubert und daher in Gestalt unpersönlicher Mächte, entsteigen ihren Gräbern, streben nach Gewalt über unser Leben und beginnen untereinander wieder ihren ewigen Kampf" (Weber [1988], 605).
3. "[L]es bourgeois d'alors se faisaient de la société une idée un peu hindoue et la considéraient comme composée des castes fermées où chacun, dès sa naissance, se trouvait placé dans le rang qu'occupaient ses parents, et d'où rien, à moins des hasards d'une carrière exceptionnelle ou d'un mariage inespéré, ne pouvait vous tirer pour vous faire pénétrer dans une caste supérieure" (Proust [1987], vol. I, 16).

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## Modernism, Narrativity and Bakhtinian Theory

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### Reactions against Realist Narrative

In prose fiction modernism may be characterized as some kind of reaction against the conventions of realist narrative. This reaction can be more or less radical, ranging from the partial dismissal of certain devices to the complete rejection of the exciting, entertaining plot, the interesting character, the recognizable environment, solidly rooted in time and space, and the understandable language. Generally speaking, the reaction has taken two complementary directions.

One tendency is the rejection of narrative in favor of realism: the very recognition of a mimetic obligation towards modern reality similar to the motivation of realism leads to a denouncement of realist narrative as a conventional form that does not transmit reality but stereotypes. This is in line with the impressionist aversion against *telling*—represented by the sovereign narrator in the finalized life stories of the Bildungsroman, conceived as a linear development, as well as by the “improbable” intrigue plots of the romance and the adventure novel. The preferred alternative is *showing*—a semi-dramatic form with scenes, dialogues and related devices such as interior monologues (or soliloquies). Epic narration is replaced by “phenomenological apperception,” an attempt at a direct rendering of impressions (from specific, subjective points of view) while avoiding a logical and analytical rearrangement of the impressions. There is no (strong) plot line and the world is dissolved into cuts between points of view, fragmented sensations and an unseizable manifold of unfinished utterances. Dostoevsky’s polyphonic novel is a prominent, and special, representative of this line. Later we find Joyce’s stream of consciousness with an approximate equality between narrated time and time of narration and Beckett’s voices, speaking and speaking, endlessly denying and repeating them.

The complementary reaction is the rejection of realism in favor of narrative. The conventional conception of reality represented by the psychological and social realism of the nineteenth-century novel is problematized by the introduction of eccentricities and alternative worlds. This line continues and renews a long grotesque tradition including the fantastic tale of romanticism. Modernist texts of this orientation focus on the “last, decisive questions” of life. While adhering to narrative they renew or alienate it by favoring not the well-rounded narrative beginnings and endings, but the threshold situation, the sudden change, the complete metamorphosis from one state to another in utter contempt of realist rules. Such a more expressionist and maximalist tendency is prominently represented by the Vienna and Prague modernism of Kafka with his contemporaries and many later adepts and “relatives.”

In practice, however, modernism contains a lot of hybrids and mediations between the two poles. And they both, in various ways, represent the will to break radically with the literary tradition. There is a sharp ambivalence towards modernity; an acute attention to language and its borders; an analogy between literary creation and the formation of consciousness; a distrust of an objectivist concept of truth, of the old philosophical subject-object dualism and of language as an unproblematic reflection of reality. In both kinds of modernism the sense of reality is on the one hand characterized by a multiplicity of dimensions and spheres of value, on the other hand by an obsession with phenomena of absence.

In the present article my purpose is to demonstrate that Mikhail Bakhtin has contributed substantially to an understanding of both of the indicated modernist poles. He treated the impressionist pole indirectly in an early manuscript, posthumously published as “Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity,” and directly in the two versions of his *Dostoevsky Book* of 1929 and 1963. He highlighted the grotesque and fantastic pole in parts of his writings on the novel from the 1930s and not least in his *Rabelais Book*, finished in the first version in 1941 and finally published in 1965. Likewise, I want to show that Bakhtin has both contributed to a “formal” description of modernist features—questions of authorship, of the role of the reader, of plot, of the literary representation of time and space, of character, of discourse and style—and to a placement of modernism in literary history. As a literary historian, he has concerned himself with modernism in the epochal sense, for instance with the connections between modernity and modernism, but also with the place of modernism in the long lines of tradition, in the “great time” of literature according to Bakhtin’s own terminology.

### **The Crisis of Author-ity**

It has, however, often been questioned if Bakhtin is relevant to modernism at all. Has he not focused almost solely on Antiquity, on the Renaissance (Rabelais), on Goethe and Dostoevsky? In Bakhtin criticism of the 1980s and 1990s, especially of Anglo-American origin, it is quite common to meet regret about Bakhtin’s lack of emphasis on modern European literature and his conservative literary tastes. In fact, he was not, like most of the Russian Formalists, closely and enthusiastically associated with contemporary experimental literature. Moreover, he started out in the 1920s with a defense of a classical narrative poetics and misgivings about the modern erosion of the authority of the author. And even in his later work, like the *Rabelais book* of 1965, he speaks of modernism with some reservations.

In the “Introduction” to this book, Bakhtin claims that the grotesque tradition in literature is experiencing a “new and powerful revival” in the present century. He distinguishes between two main lines: the “modernist grotesque” (Alfred Jarry, the surrealists, the expressionists, and so on), which more or less goes back to the traditions of the Romantic grotesque “and evolved under the influence of existentialism,” and, secondly, “the realist grotesque (Thomas Mann, Bertolt Brecht, Pablo Neruda, and others). It is related to the tradition of realism and folk culture and reflects at times the direct influence of carnival forms, as in the work of Neruda” (Bakhtin [1968], 46).

Bakhtin may have preferred Mann, Brecht and Neruda—who, on the other hand, can hardly be characterized as quite regular household realists—to Jarry. And it is obvious that Bakhtin the existentialist was somewhat irritated by a certain self-important, complacent 1950s existentialist pre-

ciousness concerning modernism. This is seen in the subsequent controversy, the sharpest in the Rabelais book, with Wolfgang Kayser's *Das Groteske in Malerei und Dichtung* (1957). One must also take into account what Bakhtin believed he could allow himself to do in the Soviet Union in the middle of the 1960s when considering the widened use of the official plus-word realism and the narrowing down of the term modernism. On the non-tactical level one should note that the polemic is directed against specific tendencies in modernism (or in the conception of it): tendencies towards individualization, towards elitist closure and towards a weakening of the ambivalence of the grotesque image due to a unilateral weight on the negative pole.

I will claim (see Gemzøe [2002a]) that the picture of Bakhtin's relationship with modernism is more complicated than this. Bakhtin had a special, acute consciousness of—and constantly worked with—the cultural and literary metamorphoses, which sprang from modernity and manifested themselves in modernism, in its broadest sense. His theories grew from such a consciousness, which in part he thematizes indirectly by transposing it to previous times of unrest and upheaval; in part, he directly confronts it.

When literary modernism in general is evoked the term has often been and still is mostly associated with poetry. In spite of the enormous attention and scholarship devoted to the modernist novel and short "texts", this seems still to be true. Bakhtin's main point of departure is modern prose. He considers the novel as the main hero of recent literary developments, one that influences all the other genres, involving them in a process of novelization. Bakhtin's "prosaics" (a term suggested in the very title of Emerson and Morson [1990], a comprehensive, but idiosyncratic work) might contribute to a more adequate appreciation of modernist prose and henceforth eventually modify our conception of modernism as a literary current.

As mentioned above, Bakhtin started out with a rather critical account of the modern crisis of authorship. The long essay "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity" (Bakhtin [1990], 4–256) is radical in its philosophical, phenomenological dimension, and anticipates many of Bakhtin's later positions (dialogue, chronotope, and so forth). Aesthetically, however, its position is traditional. Bakhtin seeks to determine the relationship between author and hero in the novel—in a kind of descriptive and normative poetics. The main idea is that the author should be able to round off, complete, "consummate" the hero and thereby create a character (see Gemzøe [2002b]). This requires a suitable distance: the author must not lose himself in his hero, but neither must he keep such a great distance that empathy becomes impossible. The loving finalization of the hero—this is the opportunity and duty of the author-ity. Fundamental to this poetics is the analogy between the literary creator and God, the so-called creator trope or theological trope. The author is almighty whilst the hero is subjected to the aesthetic necessity of the creative rhythm: "The creator is free and active, whereas that which is created is unfree and passive" (Bakhtin [1990], 119). In Bakhtin's early writings, where his religiosity is particularly obvious, the author is likened to a lofty, almighty God.

The interesting thing is that this emphatic defense of a classical narrative aesthetics results in Bakhtin's recognition that, from a historical point of view, authorial authority is in crisis. One of the chief villains in this dissolution of aesthetic values is Dostoevsky—for approximately the same reasons that Bakhtin later advanced in defense of his status as a hero. Scarcely a hundred pages later in the essay, he recapitulates this issue in the section "The Problem of the Author." Here he describes "the crisis of authorship," which he considers especially important in prose: "All stable transgressive forms begin to disintegrate (first of all in prose—from Dostoevsky to Bely; the crisis of author-

ship is always of lesser significance in lyric — Annensky, and so forth)” (Bakhtin [1990], 203). The lack of will to take on the burden of the role of author is seen by the young Bakhtin as an expression of the fear of responsibility, which manifests itself aesthetically as a fear of boundaries.

Between this classical aesthetic viewpoint and the new position in the Dostoevsky book, as well as in the essays of the 1930s, there is in Bakhtin himself a Copernican revolution of the same kind as the one he described in Dostoevsky. A main concern in his approaches to Dostoevsky’s polyphony is to characterize the new author position. It is now a decisive quality of the author that he does not seek to limit and finalize, and a decisive quality of the hero is that he does not allow himself to be objectified. The hero is characterized by an all-consuming self-awareness, incompleteness, open and indefinite. Precisely this change of dominance in the presentation of the character requires a new authorial position.

Connected to this and if possible even more important is a new relation to the word. In its smallest, fundamental form this manifests itself in the predominance of the double-voiced word, next come the inner and outer dialogues. And Dostoevsky built the whole structure of his polyphonic novel as a “great dialogue,” a tense confrontation of all the significant ideological positions of the epoch.

Similarly, Dostoevsky’s polyphonic novel is an early and radical example of the general modernist critique of plot, of the traditional organization of a literary work (especially a narrative one) around a unilinear sequence between a beginning and an ending. This is the version of the before mentioned “first line” of one of the fundamental questionings in modernism: the problematization of the notions of continuity and causality; of the very concept of the literary work. In her excellent study on *Poetic Closure*, the chapter on “Closure and Anti-Closure in Modern Poetry,” Barbara Herrnstein Smith notes the modern taste for the open and uncompleted: “In much modern poetry and in modern poems otherwise quite dissimilar in style, one may readily observe an apparent tendency toward anti-closure” (Smith [1968], 237). The French *nouveau roman* is an extraordinarily obvious example of the same tendency in modern prose, where anti-closure, primarily as anti-narrative, has even more radical effects. In line with such attitudes Bakhtin often — and overwhelmingly so when dealing with Dostoevsky’s works — considers plot a symptom of exaggerated authorial control, of monologism, of framing the open-ended event of existence in ready-made stereotypes. In the first chapter of the 1963 version of the Dostoevsky book he shows how Dostoevsky replaces the temporal organization of the world in narrative with a spatial, dramatic confrontation of contemporary perspectives on the world. And in his preparatory notes “Toward a Reworking of the Dostoevsky Book” from 1961, some of the wider implications of this are suggestively indicated:

Dostoevsky uncovered the dialogic nature of societal life, of the life of a human being. Not ready-made existence, the meaning of which the writer must uncover, but open-ended dialogue with an evolving multi-voiced meaning.

The unity of the whole in Dostoevsky is not a matter of plot nor of monologic idea, that is, not mono-ideational. It is a unity above plot and above idea. (Bakhtin [1984], 298)

In this case too, a Bakhtinian point of view on Dostoevsky can, by a meta-operation, be applied to himself. On this Caryl Emerson has the following interesting remarks:

First, as a rule, Bakhtin does not do beginnings and ends. He only does middles. Wholly committed to process and to the dynamics of response, Bakhtin concerns himself very little with how something starts (a personality, a responsibility) or how it might be brought to an effective, well-shaped end. This neglect

of genesis and overall indifference to closure left a profound trace on his thought, imparting to his literary readings their strange, aerated, often fragmentary character. (Emerson [1997], 157)

This is not an unqualified truth about Bakhtin. It does not apply to the poetics of his early works before the Dostoevsky book. Neither does it do justice to his focus on plot in the essay on “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel” (Bakhtin [1981], 84–258). Nor to every aspect of the position in “Epic and Novel” (Bakhtin [1981], 3–40), where precisely the novel’s open-ended conception of time, corresponding to the present in its inconclusiveness, creates a demand for “an *external* and *formal* completeness and exhaustiveness, especially in regard to plot-line” (Bakhtin [1981], 31)—both features setting the novel off in relation to the epic. Nor to Bakhtin’s interest in the opening chapters in Rabelais’s *Gargantua and Pantagruel*. But it does point to a prevailing tendency in his work.

In Dostoevsky’s polyphonic novel, no single voice, not even the author’s, is the privileged bearer of the authoritative message of the work. And no unitary vision is presented in the form of a neatly rounded plot. That Dostoevsky’s positioning of the author was a decisive problem for Bakhtin appears with all desirable clarity from the constant references to it in the aforementioned notes “Toward a Reworking of the Dostoevsky Book.” Polyphony is seen here as a response to the crisis of the author’s position, emotion and discourse. Keeping to the terminology from “Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity,” Bakhtin notes that in Dostoevsky’s novels it is important that the individual positions do not merge but retain “outsideness” and the associated “excess of seeing.” However, what is important is the use made by Dostoevsky of this excess, which never serves to objectivize and finalize the other, but shows itself as love and the desire for understanding. The creator trope also receives a new twist, since the author-creator is compared with Prometheus who creates (or recreates) living beings who are independent and equal with himself. The centre of interest lies on the human level and the hierarchy between almighty god and unfree creature has been abolished or at least dramatically modified.

Bakhtin points out that the book will concern itself with questions of literary history only in so far as they are unavoidable in characterizing Dostoevsky’s specific artistic vision. But in the notes, the polyphonic novel is put more clearly and in a more concentrated manner into a modern literary historical context than in the book itself: “The problem of the author’s position. [...] Various resolutions to this problem in contemporary novelists (Mauriac, Graham Greene and others).” “Thomas Mann’s *Doktor Faustus* as an indirect confirmation of my idea” (Bakhtin [1984], 284). And:

After my book (but independently of it) the ideas of polyphony, dialogue, unfinalizability, etc., were very widely developed. This is explained by the growing influence of Dostoevsky, but above all, of course, by those changes in reality itself which Dostoevsky (in this sense prophetically) succeeded in revealing earlier than the others. (Bakhtin [1984], 285)

Dostoevsky, then, is placed in an epoch of upheaval and a modern literary-historical context. Another aspect of the same issue is the parallel in the revised Dostoevsky book between “artistic consciousness,” implicit in the polyphonic novel and modern “scientific consciousness,” manifested in the decentred Einsteinian world with a multiplicity of systems of measurement.

In his last years Bakhtin continued his reflections on these problems. The inventive notes and sketches of the 1970s include some of his most exciting thoughts about the position of the author in



the modern novel and a positioning of Dostoevsky and the polyphonic novel in the history of modernism. In spite of the obvious common verbal root, the notions of literary authorship and of social authority are often treated as if they belonged to completely separate areas. According to Bakhtin these questions are intimately interrelated. He includes a correspondence between the determination of the social subject and of the addressee of an utterance. Almost at the end of the selection of Bakhtin's "Notes Made in 1970–71" in *Speech Genres and other Late Essays*, we find the following passage:

The form of authorship and the hierarchical place (position) of the speaker (leader, tsar, judge, priest, teacher, private individual, father, son, husband, wife, brother, and so forth). The corresponding hierarchical position of the addressee of the utterance (the subject, the defendant, the student, the son, and so forth). The one who speaks and the one spoken to. All this determines the genre, tone and style of the utterance: the word of the leader, the word of the judge, the word of the teacher, the word of the father, and so forth. This determines the form of the authorship. (Bakhtin [1986], 153)

In consequence, the crises of authority in modernity and of authorship in modernism are forcefully interlinked. This is quite clearly stated in the beginning of the same selection of the "Notes:"

Irony has penetrated all languages of modern times (especially French); it has penetrated into all words and forms [...] Irony is everywhere—from the minimal and imperceptible, to the loud, which borders on laughter. Modern man does not proclaim; he speaks. That is, he speaks with reservations. Proclamatory genres have been retained mainly as parodic and semiparodic building blocks for the novel. [...] The speaking subjects of high, proclamatory genres—of priests, prophets, preachers, judges, leaders, patriarchal fathers, and so forth—have departed this life. They have all been replaced by the writer, simply the writer, who has fallen heir to their styles. He either stylizes them (i.e., assumes the guise of a prophet, a preacher, and so forth) or parodies them (to one degree or another). He must develop his own style, the style of the writer. For the singer of ancient feasts, the rhapsode, and the tragedian (Dionysian priest), even for the court poet of more recent times, the problem did not yet exist. [...] But the writer is deprived of style and setting. Literature has been completely secularized. The novel, deprived of style and setting, is essentially not a genre; it must imitate (rehearse) some extraartistic genre: the everyday story, letters, diaries, and so forth. / A particular nuance of sobriety, simplicity, democratism, and individual freedom inheres in all modern languages. (Bakhtin [1986], 132)

The passages quoted above could, I suggest, be taken as a concentrated preface to the study of modernist prose. And they give a clear indication of Bakhtin's basically sympathetic attitude to modernity and modernism. In this very context we find thoughts about one of the arch-themes of modernism, that of silence—an essential complement to the word in human communication and, historically, a sign of the crisis of the unbroken, authoritative word. Bakhtin outlines a literary history of silence, since silence is seen as one of the solutions to a long-lasting literary crisis of authority, identity and language:

Quests for my own word are in fact quests for a word that is not my own, a word that is more than myself [...]. The author's quests for his own word are basically quests for genre and style, quests for an authorial position. This is now the most critical problem of contemporary literature, which leads many to reject the genre of the novel altogether, to replace it with a montage of documents, a description of things, to bookishness [lettrizm], and, to a certain degree, also to the literature of the absurd. In some sense, all these can be defined as various forms of silence. These quests led Dostoevsky to the creation of the polyphonic novel. He could not find the word for the monologic novel. (Bakhtin [1986], 149)

It is a basic feature of modernity that the primary author cannot appear author-atively, he is invisible and silent, but this silence can assume indirect—ironic, allegorical—forms of expression.

Precisely because the creator trope—the analogy between author-creator and God—is still at work, we can glimpse a connection between Bakhtin and Nietzsche's pictures of modernity. Just like the divine, the literary author-ity is dead or at least reduced to being *deus absconditus*, to invisibility and silence. This is due to a loss of positive, proclamable and shared compelling values, of an inevitable, undeniable authority. So, according to Bakhtin, the polyphonic novel is just one of several special cases and "solutions" in the problematic history of modernism which very fundamentally concerns author-ity and its crisis. Among the other possibilities explicitly mentioned are montage, hyper-realistic descriptions of things, lettrism, and the literature of the absurd.

All the characteristics of modern literature, especially of modern prose, are constantly referred to as fundamental features of the epoch, of modern culture and life. But in a kind of complementarity, all these phenomena are also placed in "great time"—regarded as a continuation and renewal of the old literary-philosophical tradition of hybrid genres, especially of the menippean satire, and of the cultural traditions of the carnival. All these mutually connected phenomena are seen to have flourished in times of upheaval. Bakhtin's picture of them is obviously conceived on the basis of his own modern times, the times of upheaval par excellence. Because of Bakhtin's special ability to bring together phenomena that are usually separated in time and space, the modern—in decisive aspects modernist—perception calls up new things from the picture of classical Antiquity and the Renaissance. Conversely, his original picture of the genesis of the novel in Antiquity and the Renaissance provides important—by no means yet utilized—opportunities for an amplification, in part a revision, of the view of modernism.

### The Problem of the Reader

The lack of apparent unity, the overwhelming complexity, multi-dimensionality and heterogeneity of the kinds of modern prose hinted at above, presupposes another kind of reading, places hitherto unknown demands on the reader. No wonder, then, that *the problem of the reader* occupies a prominent place everywhere in Bakhtin's work (other aspects of Bakhtin's concept of the reader than those foregrounded here are taken up in Shepherd [1989]). There is a clear continuity there. For even in the pre-modernist poetics of the works of his youth, there is an unusual significance attributed to the role of the reader-contemplator as a co-creative and form-shaping moment in the aesthetic process. In later phases, Bakhtin goes on to elaborate on these reflections on the role of the reader as part of an ontology of understanding—imbued by his characteristic, dramatic fusion of hermeneutic and formalist points of view. In addition, he develops a keen sense of the historical changes in the role of the reader and the optics of understanding.

Ontological as well as historical reflections on all aspects of reading and reception—considered as dialogic answerability—are found very much throughout all of his late essays and notes. One first aspect that can only be briefly touched upon here is addressivity. The change of author position inevitably implies a change in the addressivity of the literary text, one that strongly augments the presupposed freedom of choice, activity and creativity of the reader. In "The Problem of Speech Genres," the historical nature of this relation is underlined: "Each epoch, each literary trend and

literary-artistic style, each literary genre within an epoch or trend, is typified by its own special concepts of the addressee of the literary work, a special sense and understanding of its reader, listener, public, and people" (Bakhtin [1986], 98).

Bakhtin's own concept of the reader corresponds to the complexities of the crisis of authority and the predominance of heteroglossia and polyphony. Reading, he claims, contains an "excess of meaning," it is co-creative. Moreover, all understanding represents the first phase of forming an answer, is a responsive and responsible act. In contrast to the structuralist conception of "the ideal reader" as some kind of duplicate of the author, a notion which Bakhtin criticizes severely, he stresses the otherness, the independence and the distance of the reader, connected to every reader's unique position in time and space. It is precisely the distance between the author and the reader which makes reading an event:

To understand a given text as the author himself understood it. But our understanding can and should be better. Powerful and profound creativity is largely unconscious and polysemic. Through understanding it is supplemented by consciousness, and the multiplicity of its meanings is revealed. Thus understanding supplements the text: it is active and also creative by nature. (Bakhtin [1986], 141–2)

In "Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences" he schematically singles out four phases of the process of understanding: 1. Perception of the text (or other sign); 2. Recognizing it (known/unknown); 3. Understanding its significance in the given context; 4. Active-dialogic understanding (disagreement/agreement) (Bakhtin [1986], 159). Evidently the two last phases, the contextual and the dialogic-evaluative aspects of understanding, are crucial to him. Moreover, a contextual understanding involves a movement between times, at least that of the origin of the text, that of the reader and anticipated future times. Such correlating movements backward and forward across distances are essential to dialogic understanding.

The personalistic aspect of Bakhtin's concept of literary communication is non-individualistic, non-psychological. In "The Problem of the Text" he claims the word to be interindividual. Both the author, the listener or reader, and the previous authors of words resounding in the word of the present author all have their rights, and the drama of the word is not a duet, but a trio (see Bakhtin [1986], 121–2). The "third party" implicated here is the instance referred to in Bakhtin's late writings as the superaddressee or loophole addressee, an instance of absolute responsive understanding that in any utterance is presupposed behind the concrete addressee with his or her limited understanding. This superaddressee is a most "theoretical" and complex notion, but it is neither a metaphysical instance (though it can be interpreted as such) nor the "ideal reader" of predominant theories of reception. In a broader sense, any reader of literature is a third party as well as a second: a third party as a witness and a judge of dialogues that are inherent in the work at several levels; and a second party as the specific addressee who in his responsive understanding of the work enters into dialogue with it (see also the introductory Bakhtin chapter in Gemzøe [1997], especially 40–6).

If Bakhtin was skeptical about psychologization, he explicitly denounced "the ideal reader" of modern reception theory:

Contemporary literary scholars (the majority of them Structuralists) usually define a listener who is immanent in the work as an all-understanding, ideal listener. [...] In this understanding the ideal listener is essentially a mirror image of the author who replicates him. He cannot introduce anything of his own,

anything new, into the ideally understood work or into the ideally complete plan of the author. He is in the same time and space of the author or, rather, like the author he is outside time and space (as is any abstract ideal formulation), and therefore he cannot be an-other or other for the author, he cannot have any surplus that is determined by this otherness. (Bakhtin [1986], 165)

The use of “listener” rather than “reader” is widespread in Bakhtin and an expression of his personalistic concept of meaning. In contrast to the formalized, depersonalized mappings of logical relations in structuralist approaches, Bakhtin’s conception of communication is that of voices in dialogue. On the other hand he is very well aware of the written language and of reading as premises for the production and reception of modern literature. In “Epic and Novel,” he foregrounds precisely the relation to writing and reading as an exemplary indication of the modernity of the novel: “Of all the major genres only the novel is younger than writing and the book: it alone is organically receptive to new forms of mute perception, that is, to reading” (Bakhtin [1981], 3).

Remembering Bakhtin’s energetic protest against any idea of an “ideal reader,” one might rhetorically and provocatively try to personify Bakhtin’s theory of reading in a kind of Bakhtinian reader. That would be a highly composite entity, combining the most profound ability of sympathetic co-experience with the utmost distance, otherness and outsideness, supplementing meticulous formal registration with a personal, creative understanding. And if, according to Bakhtin, every epoch, trend, style and genre implies its own kind of reader, then Bakhtin’s implied readers are all, in spite of their irreducible personal differences, intimately connected to the epoch of modernity, to a heterogeneous multitude of competing trends and styles, and to the novel as a hybrid and dynamic genre.

### **Character, Personality, Word, and Mask**

Character, broadly understood as literary representation of the person, retains an importance in Bakhtin as in few other modern theorists of literature (see Gemzøe [2002b]). That is due to a foundation of his thought in a personalistic philosophical phenomenology of I and the other. In spite of its significance Bakhtin’s thinking about character has attracted little attention. But precisely in this field we have a lucid illustration of his development from a classical position—viewing character as the depiction of person at the most advanced aesthetic level—to various versions of a modernist poetics critical of character, now stressing self-consciousness in the process of becoming, now the estrangement and gay deception in laughter and allegory.

In the early Bakhtin of “Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity”, character plays the principal part, but strictly supervised and controlled by the author. The image of the hero is determined by the given degree and kind of distance between him and the author. Bakhtin considers this author-hero relationship a key to the whole of the development of literature.

The reversal of values in the Dostoevsky book, which I treated earlier from the point of view of authorship, can also be described as a denouncement of character in favor of personality. For Dostoevsky it was, according to Bakhtin, crucial to reject all objectifying, reifying determinations of man and let the hero remain open and unfinalized. This is done by leaving the “last word” to the hero and (as mentioned in connection with the author) let self-consciousness be the artistic dominant:

The author constructs the hero not out of words foreign to the hero, not out of neutral definitions; he constructs not a character, nor a type, nor a temperament, in fact he constructs no objectified image of the hero at all, but rather the hero's discourse about himself and his world. (Bakhtin [1984], 53)

The contrast between character and personality is especially emphasized in "Toward a Reworking of the Dostoevsky Book," where Bakhtin calls for a detailed examination of the distinction between character and personality and sees the struggle between definitions of character and open-ended personality elements in the early Dostoevsky as the key to his birth out of Gogol, which is also the birth of personality out of character. To Bakhtin the all-important difference is that personality can only unfold in a dialogic interaction, involving a plurality of sensing, thinking and speaking subjects. In the Dostoevskyan position there is on the one hand a radical transgression of the limitations in both a romantic-idealist and a classical or realist conception of character—and a mediation and realization of their best aesthetic aspirations: the distance, sobriety and relativity of classicism and realism, the open, unfinalized personality of romanticism.

A connected, perhaps even more decisive, displacement in the Dostoevsky book is that we witness not only the birth of personality, but of discourse out of character, the emergence of dialogue out of the interaction between I and the other. This process structures the very composition of *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* that starts with the hero and—passing the idea, genre and composition—ends with "Discourse in Dostoevsky." Bakhtin's well-known "metalinguistic turn," his personalized philosophy of communication, his unique understanding of the utterance and its condition of existence in the dialogic exchange, is analogous to a dominant trend in the philosophy and literature of the twentieth century. In Bakhtin's characterization of discourse in Dostoevsky, which must be called extremely pointed, exemplary, we follow the general movement from (the outer, spatial) description and (plot-compositional, temporal) narrative to a scenic, dialogic form that may further develop into a multiplicity of crossing discourses with a rather indeterminate status. In connection to Dostoevsky's early, but radically experimental work "Notes from the Underground" Bakhtin sharply draws up this perspective:

In Dostoevsky's world generally there is nothing merely thing-like, no mere matter, no object—there are only subjects. Therefore there is no world-judgment, no word about an object, no secondhand referential word—there is only the word of address, the word dialogically contacting another word, a word about a word addressed to a word. (Bakhtin [1984], 237)

The long essay "Discourse in the Novel" (Bakhtin [1981], 259–422), written in 1934–35, which will be briefly touched upon later, represents Bakhtin's most comprehensive development of this focus on the literary word, taking its point of departure in a conception of the novel as a phenomenon consisting mainly of a multiplicity of styles, speech forms and voices.

The above-mentioned aspects obviously relate mainly to the first—anti-narrative—type of modernist reaction. In some of the essays included in "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel" (Bakhtin [1981], 84–258), written in 1937–38, and in the lecture "Epic and Novel" (Bakhtin [1981], 3–40)—already anticipated in "Discourse in the Novel"—Bakhtin sheds light on the other type. Not least in the essay on "The Functions of the Rogue, Clown and Fool in the Novel" he draws attention to some peculiarities of the comic and the grotesque on the border between folklore and the novel, indirectly opening perspectives to modernism. These popular masks, creating their own

special worlds around themselves, acquire from the late Middle Ages a growing significance for the novel, which they connect to the mask theatre of the marketplace. They are especially important because of their very lack of direct significance, by being “others,” alien, and not reflecting any existing world, but a “reversed” world, a world that has undergone a metamorphosis.

In the first place these figures helped to establish an author’s position, which is particularly important and difficult in the novel. To assume the mask of the clown or the fool could help to create a narrative mask, an authorial position that possessed closeness and, at the same time, refraction, that could caricature and could verbalize hitherto tabooed spheres of life (such as body and sexuality) and, most important of all, could express itself in an indirect, figurative, allegorical form. A mask of naïveté, of “not-understanding,” could also and not least be transferred to a character, where it likewise contributed to the development of the device of not-understanding, the strikingly exposing “alien eye” on the vulgar conventionality of everyday life, of morals, politics and the arts. In the novel the mask of the clown or the fool became the eccentric character, creating special eccentric worlds around him, for instance “Pantagruelism” (Rabelais) or “Shandyism” (Sterne). All this contributed to the development of the prose allegorical or prose metaphorical potentials of the novel (and of the short prose genres), helped to prepare the creation of a subtle and heterogeneous literary universe, marked by distance, caricature, hyperbole and litotes, intervals and clashes between roles and non-coincidence between the mask and its carrier.

The theme is taken up again further on in the Chronotope manuscript, in connection with Bakhtin’s first reflections on laughter, seen as a “sociohistorical cultural phenomenon” (Bakhtin [1981], 236) and not least used as a superordinate for a number of the richly varied prosaic forms of indirect ways of expression, existing alongside the poetic tropes, such as irony, parody, humour, the joke, the comic:

In all these approaches, the point of view contained within the word is subject to reinterpretation, as are the modality of language and the very relationship of language to the object and to the speaker. A relocation of the levels of language occurs—the making contiguous of what is normally not associated and the distancing of what normally is, the destruction of what is familiar and the creation of new matrices, a destruction of linguistic norms for language and thought. (Bakhtin [1981], 237)

In the lecture “Epic and Novel” (1941), one of Bakhtin’s most condensed contributions to the theory of modern prose, he once again resumes and reformulates the theme. The comic surplus and freedom of improvisation of the popular masks he claims to be crucial for the new image of man in the novel, placing man not in a closed epic past, but in a chaotic, open-ended present. In an atmosphere of laughter, epic distance was replaced by an experimental investigation of man that grotesquely exposed all the disparities behind the seeming unity. Consequently men did not entirely coincide with the fate assigned to them by the given plot.

“Epic and Novel” is a summary of the attempt to elaborate a stylistics of the novel in “Discourse in the Novel” from the middle of the 1930s—and a link of transmission to the Rabelais Book, which was completed and handed in for evaluation as a doctoral thesis that same year. Bakhtin’s weightiest matter of importance in the lecture is the further development of the concept of novelization, which is both considered in the “great time” of literature and as a key to the literary situation of the twentieth century:

The novel has become the leading hero in the drama of literary development in our time precisely because it best of all reflects the tendencies of a new world still in the making; it is, after all, the only genre born of this new world and in total affinity with it. In many respects the novel has anticipated, and continues to anticipate, the future development of literature as a whole. (Bakhtin [1981], 7)

### Elements of a Modernist Prosaics

The complexity of modern prose writing is, evidently, to be found in all subgenres and sizes—from the smallest fragment to the monstrously voluminous novel. The short modernist text—condensed and enigmatic, with an important starting point in Baudelaire's *Petits Poèmes en Prose*—poses its problems. At the other extreme, we find the enormous multiplicity of subgenres (at least one for each chapter), styles, tonalities, intertextual references in a number of monstrous and hybrid modernist novels.

Remember also the problems posed by the “school of rejection” of the French *nouveau roman*, with its downright rejection of all the traditional accessories of narrative. Anti-literary literature, on the one hand characterized by abrupt shifts between a multitude of dimensions, on the other by a minimalist focusing on phenomena of absence. Saturated with distrust of “fiction” (with its strange tendency to hide its own fictionality), a *nouveau roman* often consists mainly of philosophical, phenomenological investigations. Beckett's *The Unnameable* must be utterly nameable here! Or consider the many late modernist experiments that through different kinds of cut-ups and similar devices eliminate the usual author-guided linear reading and in their very form signify discontinuity, confrontation of positions and a provocative degree of reader's choice. Works of this orientation are acute dramatizations of any reading process, “miming” the reader's start in the vague and chaotic and gradual construction of some kind of whole through an infinity of feedbacks. This is just one of many extremely important self-reflective forms of modernist, post-modernist and grotesque realist metafiction (see Gemzøe [2001]).

If the above-mentioned literary tendencies pose problems for the reader as well as for the professional literary critic, these problems are, in fact, analogous to those problems which are, according to Bakhtin, due to the peculiarities of the novel as a genre. In “Discourse in the Novel” he states: “The novel as a whole is multiform in style and variform in speech and voice. In it the investigator is confronted with several heterogeneous stylistic unities, often located on different linguistic levels and subject to different stylistic controls” (Bakhtin [1981], 261). He even defines the novel as an artistically organized diversity of speech types, voices, often even languages, and claims that its primary generic drive is to create images of languages and that plot itself is subordinated to this task. That is why the novel is always a hybrid and as such the expression of a heterogeneous, decentralized world in the social and ideological as well as verbal sense.

Bakhtin accuses contemporary stylistics of being unable to cope with the novel, as it is mostly preoccupied with the “monologic utterance,” the “unitary word,” the “poetic language” and the “poetic symbol.” Entering the long, international “prose-poetry-controversy,” well-known from the Anglo-American Imagists as well as from the Russian Formalists, Bakhtin in a polemical reversal characterizes artistic prose as a much more complicated phenomenon than poetry—and thus a much better point of departure for the mapping of modern literature. Although a deeper discussion

of Bakhtin's rather polemical and often dubious definition of poetry is out of the question in this connection, I would like to comment on one aspect. In "Epic and Novel" he declares the novel to be the leading hero of modern literature, one that influences all other genres, integrates them and renews them in a process of novelization. On this point Lukács's *Theory of the Novel* (1920) probably inspired him. Both Lukács and Bakhtin, each in their own way, continue the great tradition of Friedrich Schlegel's astonishingly modern definition of the novel. Bakhtin is, however, careful to specify that "the novelization of other genres does not imply their subjection to an alien generic canon; on the contrary novelization implies their liberation from all that serves as a brake on their unique development, from all that would change them along with the novel into some sort of stylization of forms that have outlived themselves" (Bakhtin [1981], 39). In the beginning of the same essay he states that already Heinrich Heine's lyrical verse can be seen as an extreme example of the novelization comprising even lyric poetry. We must, consequently, assume that he admits that modern poetry can also express the decentred world, be stylistically complex, heteroglot. In passing, it should be noted that Bakhtin also points to the novelization of drama, which he exemplifies with Ibsen, Hauptmann and the whole of naturalist drama. To this list it seems, among other possibilities, obvious to add the "epic theatre" of Brecht.

In addition to Bakhtin's more direct contributions to a "prosaics" of modern literature—which I have up to this point tried to characterize—I would like to end by considering some of the inspiring, provocative analyses of Rabelaisian devices and Renaissance genres in the Rabelais book of 1965 (Bakhtin [1968]) as an indirect contribution to such a modernist prosaics. Such an approach is in contradiction with Emerson and Morson's *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* (1990), where Bakhtin's Rabelais book is totally depreciated as a badly written example of primitive body worship and dangerous utopianism. The degree of aggressive, polemical colouring of Morson and Emerson's treatment of the Rabelais book is difficult to explain, unless it is seen as an example of the widespread "cultural Reaganism" of those years and consequently that *Rabelais and His World* (translated in the fatal year of 1968) figures in a stand-in role as a target for attacks on supposedly typical liberal attitudes of the 1970s. In Emerson's *The First Hundred Years of Mikhail Bakhtin* (1997), she has somewhat modified her negative attitude to the work in question.

In the incredibly heterogeneous, composite and complex novel(s) *Gargantua et Pantagruel* 1–5 (1532–64), Rabelais before Cervantes—and in many respects more radically experimental than him—explored a wealth of prosaic devices. In the grotesque literature of the following centuries, such daring devices survived in more or less attenuated forms (a broad generalisation that does not hold water in the face of eighteenth-century works like Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* or Diderot's *Jacques le fataliste*)—to experience a really powerful revitalization in twentieth-century prose most often labeled as modernism or postmodernism. I just want to mention the following phenomena.

Bakhtin distinguishes between two forms of negation in Rabelais. The first one is the so-called chronotopic negation (or time-space-negation): "It transfers the object to the underworld, replaces the top by the bottom, or the front by the back, sharply exaggerating some traits at the expense of others. Negation and destruction of the object are therefore their displacement and reconstruction in space" (Bakhtin [1968], 410). This type of negation is obviously Bakhtin's favorite, retaining the object in time and space and thereby preserving its palpable concreteness and dynamic plasticity (see Gemzøe [2003]). Even so, it is a kind of shock-like, surrealist deconstruction of



every preconceived idea and ready-made form. Such chronotopic negations are found in Joyce and widely represented in all the “maximalist,” grotesque parts of modernist and postmodernist prose.

The other main form of negation is the more abstract, formalist game of negation, which, in its simplest version, consists of replacing a negation by an affirmation: Nemo (Nobody) as a proper name. “Nemo has seen God.” “Nemo can have two wives.” Such a game of negation points at all the hidden possibilities of language, all the forgotten logical implications, and all the dead metaphors. Through narrow, formal and linguistic gates it opens up for an almost unending world of—fantastic, humorous—significations. Considering the obsession with language and formal relations in modernism, games of negation are to be found in any kind of modernism, but especially in its most “linguistic” and formal versions. It suffices to mention its all-pervading importance in Beckett’s prose. Generally these negations correspond to the striking focus on forms of negation, *le néant* and so on, in modern philosophy and literature.

A third device, exemplified by the Renaissance genre of the “blazon,” is an ambivalent fusion of praise and abuse: “It is a two-faced Janus. It is addressed to the dual-bodied object, to the dual bodied world [...] it is directed at once to the dying and to what is being generated, to the past that gives birth to the future” (Bakhtin [1968], 415). This device is equally typical of modern prose and is, just to mention one obvious instance, as essential in *Ulysses* (the Circe-chapter!) as the chronotopic negation.

The fourth device is the *coq-à-l’âne*—named after the *Epître du coq-à-l’âne* (Letter from the rooster to the ass)—which consists of systematic nonsense, “intentionally absurd verbal compositions” (Bakhtin [1968], 422). This is widespread in Rabelais—but of course it is just as fundamental in the radical forms of modernism, that is in the above-mentioned lettrism, in dadaism, of course, and in the literature of the absurd. How does Bakhtin, so often accused of aesthetic conservatism, approach this device?

It is as if words had been released from the shackles of sense, to enjoy a play period of complete freedom and establish unusual relations among themselves. True, no new consistent links are formed in most cases, but the brief coexistence of these words, expressions, and objects outside the usual logical conditions discloses their inherent ambivalence. (Bakhtin [1968], 423)

And:

In a period of the radical breaking up of the world’s hierarchical picture and the building of a new concept, leading to a revision of all old words, objects, and ideas, the *coq-à-l’âne* acquired an essential meaning; it was a form, which granted momentary liberation from all logical links—a form of free recreation. It was, so to speak, the carnivalization of speech, which freed it from the gloomy seriousness of official philosophy as well as from truisms and commonplace ideas. (Bakhtin [1968], 426)

The parallel between Renaissance and modernity is obvious—as is the relevance for modernism. And one could even expand the list of devices by including Bakhtin’s analyses of Rabelais’s grotesque use of proper names and numbers. Finally, one could draw detailed and forceful comparisons between the inclusions of hitherto unprintable spheres of language (vulgarity, sociolects, nonsense, curses, obscenities and so forth), hitherto tabooed subjects (detailed anatomical descriptions of the “lower” bodily functions, of sickness, death and dismemberment) in the Rabelaisian Renaissance—and the many corresponding phenomena in modernism.

## A Few Perspectives

Bakhtin explicitly stresses the difference between the dynamic ambivalence in the imagery of Renaissance grotesque and the one-sided reduction to the overwhelming priority of the dark, negative pole in modernist grotesque. Implicitly he has re-interpreted Rabelais (as well as Dostoevsky) in a remarkably modernist way—discreetly modernizing him and at the same time thoroughly reconstructing the whole literary-historical context in which to place modernism.

There is an interesting exchange of positions, a peculiar inverse proportionality, between Bakhtin's development and that of the contemporary, parallel figure of Georg Lukács (see Gemzøe [2003]). In *The Theory of the Novel* (Lukács [1971]), he presents what must be called a modern or downright modernist view of the literary situation and the role of the novel in it: the novel corresponds to a situation in which the shared values are in dissolution and there is a crisis of authority. He has a decidedly negative evaluation of Tolstoy because of his orientation towards the past and his attempts to write epics, a form which has been undermined by modernity. The evaluation of Dostoevsky, who represents the literary form of a new epoch, is on the contrary extremely positive. In many basic respects, this conception corresponds to Bakhtin's view of the same matter, starting with his Copernican revolution in 1929.

Up to this point, however, the young Bakhtin has leaned toward a traditional aesthetics of the novel—based on narrative, distance and the authority with which the author manages to present his values and finalize his picture of the hero. To be sure, the crisis of author-ity increasingly asserts itself and one of the main villains in this process of dissolution is Dostoevsky. In many important ways, the young Bakhtin's view corresponds to the position of the mature Lukács starting with the 1930s essays on realism and the historical novel—and the accompanying rejection of naturalism and modernism. We have, consequently, a criss-cross figure, a chiasmic exchange of positions: the young Bakhtin corresponds to the mature Lukács—the young Lukács corresponds to the mature Bakhtin. The first position is anti-modernist, the second pro-modernist.

Though very far from an anti-modernism in the style of Lukács, Bakhtin is not a completely unconditional admirer. He has, in fact, both in connection with Dostoevsky and with Rabelais, challenged the elitist and ascetic aspects of modernism, its self-limitation behind a canon of prohibitions. Not least has he questioned a certain, serious, self-complacent conception of modernism, maintained by agelasts. Besides, it is a well-founded hypothesis that Bakhtin's theories have had a worldwide impact sufficient to influence (in convergence with many other factors, certainly) the very course of development of modern prose. This influence can be traced from the experimental openings of modernist self-limitations in the 1970s, often announced as postmodernism, to the broad revitalization of the traditions of grotesque realism in the last decades of the twentieth century. This is a story still to be told—interrelated, but multilinear, assuming a different course and intonation in various countries.

Bakhtin's prosaics poses interesting, wide-ranging questions to the current conceptions of modernism and postmodernism, to my knowledge not yet seriously considered. One central issue is the proposal to take artistic prose as a point of departure (or at least as a more important point of departure) in the characterization of modern literature. Another is to account for Bakhtin's unusually detailed and convincing picture of modern prose, especially the modern novel, as only the latest

part of a long, hybrid, self-reflexive, grotesque tradition in the “great time” of literature. If we find something relevant in these notions, what are we to infer from that?

In my opinion, modernism does not refer to an ahistoric mode, neither is it a concept of period, but a concept of current. A current is an artistic tendency or movement that is epochally based, but exists in different variants and phases and that can occupy a more or less dominant position. A main current like modernism is a movement of movements, always involved in a controversial interaction with other currents. It stretches over a long period, has a richly faceted prehistory and is capable of many revivals. If modernism is a complicated concept to define and to use, its relationship to the derived concept of postmodernism is especially problematic. One of the presuppositions that blur many contemporary—independent or relative—definitions of modernism and postmodernism is that modernism is tacitly defined mainly from the point of view of poetry; postmodernism, on the contrary, from a point of departure in prose fiction. This has resulted in the crippling inclusion of hybrid fiction works in the Procrustean bed of a narrowly conceived modernism. Conversely we have often witnessed, among other strange things, an inclusion of a lot of novels situated in pre-, early and high modernism in postmodernism (even *Don Quixote* has been claimed as a postmodernist novel). This is, to put it mildly, inconvenient. From a Bakhtinian point of view, two kinds of modification of the current literary-historical conceptions seem possible and advisable to me—different, but not necessarily mutually exclusive.

First, we can redefine our concept of modernism with more importance and weight attributed to prose fiction. In that case, we shall end up with a somewhat less exclusive concept of modernism—comprising both minimalist and maximalist forms, full of hybrids, capable of integrating as well as negating traditional devices such as narrative, realism and so forth. Postmodernism, then, assumes a more suitable, limited function as a designation of a late phase or subcurrent of modernism.

Second, while adhering to the historical connection between modernism, the epoch of modernity and the process of modernization we might consider modernism and a fortiori postmodernism as the latest or next-latest ripples on a long, constantly modified, but essentially continuous flood of the grotesque, the self-reflexive hybrid, the fantastic realism (magic realism) and so on and so forth. This would, I suggest, add a suitable sense of tradition, in the sense of Eliot, Frye or Bakhtin, an element of historical relativity and humility to the continued debate.

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## The Subject, the Beautiful and the Sublime

### Adorno and Lyotard between Modernism and Postmodernism

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Inseparable from aesthetic experience in a very broad, Kantian sense, the autonomy of the modern Subject is closely linked to the beautiful and the sublime. Kant's *Critique of Judgement* provides the framework within which late modern (modernist) and post-modern discussions concerning the aesthetics of subjectivity take place. Unlike the beautiful, which, according to Kant, is based on the feeling of delight, the sublime is marked by a contradictory mixture of attraction and repulsion, which results in awe. Although Kant never applied his concepts of the beautiful and the sublime to art, reserving them for the understanding of natural phenomena, they were soon transformed into key concepts of art theories.

For Hegel and his followers, art, not nature, became the embodiment of beauty, and it is well known that, from a Hegelian point of view, man-made art is far superior to anything nature can produce. As a contemporary of Winckelmann, as an admirer of ancient Greek sculpture and of classical harmony in general, Hegel tended to identify art with the beautiful. In this respect, most of his disciples, especially Karl Rosenkranz, who wrote *Ästhetik des Häßlichen* (Aesthetics of the Ugly, 1853), were in agreement with him. Rosenkranz states explicitly that the negativity of the ugly can be justified only if it enhances the beautiful (Rosenkranz [1990], 39).

The most noteworthy challenge to Hegel's classical ideal and his focus on the beautiful probably came from Friedrich Theodor Vischer, a moderately critical Young Hegelian, who blamed his master for neglecting laughter and the grotesque. As the author of *Auch Einer* (Also one, 1879), a tragic-comic novel dominated by chance, failure, laughter and the grotesque, Vischer is possibly one of the most important (and most ignored) precursors of modernism. It is certainly not by chance that Bakhtin refers to him in his book on Rabelais: "Hegel completely ignores the role of the comic in the structure of the grotesque, and indeed examines the grotesque quite independently of the comic. F. Th. Vischer differs from Hegel" (Bakhtin [1968], 44).

This difference is of considerable importance, for it announces the collapse of the nineteenth century classical ideal and the introduction, by modernist authors such as Dostoevsky, Nietzsche and Baudelaire, of the negativity of art: not only of the grotesque and the ugly, but also of the ambivalent, the unconscious and the sublime. This modernist negativity is marked by an insurmountable contradiction, and Rainer Gröbel is quite correct in stressing the ambivalent character of the grotesque: "As an aesthetic category the grotesque is by no means a counterpart of the beautiful, but a

transgression of the antinomy between the beautiful and the ugly into the ambivalent ugly-beautiful" (Grübel [1979], 59).

In what follows, it will appear that Adorno occupies a modernist position in the realm of aesthetics insofar as he breaks with Hegel's ideal of artistic harmony in order to preserve the critical capacities of the Subject. For him, art is primarily a negation of ideology, commercial language and a depraved social communication. Like Mallarmé and Valéry, he rejects an aesthetic compromise with a world dominated by trusts and commercialized media. He nevertheless remains a Hegelian in at least two respects: he expects critical art to express truth (a *truth content* or *Wahrheitsgehalt*) about the historical state of society and, in spite of the negativity of his aesthetics, he continues to recognise the supremacy of the beautiful over the ugly and the sublime.

This supremacy coincides with the autonomy of the Subject that Kant originally related to the possibility of aesthetic contemplation (of nature). Adorno maintains a kind of equilibrium between the beautiful and the negative (the sublime) that he mobilises against the rhetoric of ideologies and the culture industry in an attempt to save subjective autonomy and critique. Lyotard disrupts this equilibrium by developing an aesthetic of the sublime and by turning it against the individual Subject. Although his thought still moves within the triadic relationship between the beautiful, the sublime and the Subject, it breaks the modernist (late modern) triangle by making the destructive sublime paramount and by eliminating the Subject, which has always been a central category of modernity and modernism (see Zima [1999]).

### Adorno's Modernist Aesthetics

Adorno's view of modernism can best be dealt with in the literary and artistic context that is so important for understanding this critical thinker. His closeness to the Viennese composers Schönberg and Alban Berg, to writers such as Mallarmé, Proust, Valéry, Kafka and Beckett has often been commented on. There is no doubt that his penchant for the works of these modernists is due to a kind of "elective affinity."

Together with Horkheimer and the other scholars of the Frankfurt Institute, Adorno thought, wrote and acted within a late modern and modernist problematic. The latter ought not to be confused with an aesthetic, an ideology or a system of values. When Leon Surette writes that modernism was "classically severe" as well as "occult and mystical" (Surette [1993], 286) he seems to be reconstructing an ideology or an aesthetic based on the works of Pound, Eliot or Yeats and ignoring the intricacies, the contradictions of a problematic. A problematic (see Zima, [2001]) in the literary, philosophical and political sense revolves around certain problems to which individual authors, groups or movements react by suggesting similar, different or incompatible answers. Adorno and Horkheimer's *answers* to modernist problems such as revolutionary change, the autonomy of art or the unconscious — differ substantially from those of Brecht, Sartre, Pirandello, Freud or even Walter Benjamin. However, the problems they focus on are very similar and can all be related to the autonomy and the survival of the individual Subject.

This argument can be illustrated by a brief comparison of Adorno, Sartre and Freud. The theories of these authors are all geared towards the problem of individual subjectivity and freedom — a problem considered by most postmodernists as peripheral or obsolete. It is well known, however,

that Adorno is very critical of the positivistic and rationalist tendencies in Freudian psychoanalysis and that he rejects the abstract, Cartesian notion of liberty propounded by Sartre. Sartre in turn is opposed to psychoanalysis on ontological and ethical grounds, arguing that it sacrifices the individual subject to psychic determinism. The problems may be the same or similar but the responses articulated by modernist writers, philosophers or politicians strongly diverge. Surette, who tends to view modernism as a homogeneous system of values, writes that “[f]or the most part, modernism kept its distance from both Freud and Jung” (Surette [1993], 285). This may be true of T. S. Eliot or Jean-Paul Sartre; however, it certainly does not apply to Hermann Hesse, Hermann Broch, Luigi Pirandello or even Italo Svevo whose novel *La coscienza di Zeno* (*Zeno’s Conscience*, 1923) thrives on a polemical dialogue with psychoanalysis.

In other words, a problematic is a heterogeneous whole, the contradictions and incompatibilities of which are as noteworthy as the common features of its texts. One of the theoretical blunders that has marred recent discussions of modernism is the assumption that the object is aesthetically, stylistically and politically homogeneous and that modernism and postmodernism are two different aesthetics, “philosophies” or ideologies. “Difference and ex-centricity replace homogeneity and centrality as the foci of postmodern social analysis,” argues Linda Hutcheon ([1989], 5), who relies almost exclusively on Anglo-American material. However, there seems to be a fundamental antagonism between the authors of Critical Theory and writers, such as Louis-Ferdinand Céline, Wyndham Lewis or Ezra Pound, whose proximity to Fascism illustrates the heterogeneous character of modernism, which also encompasses the works of Brecht, Malraux and Heinrich Mann. Was Céline’s work not ex-centric enough? Was it not quite heterogeneous in an aesthetic, stylistic and political sense?

Of course, the discourse of Critical Theory is also ex-centric in its own way. And it is not by chance that the equally ex-centric poetry of Mallarmé and Valéry is among its most important sources. To assume, however, that this current of modernism—running from Mallarmé and Valéry to Adorno—has nothing to do with Brecht’s materialist brand would be a mistake. Recent investigations (Rancière [1996], Zima [2002]) reveal the revolutionary and utopian strain in Mallarmé’s work, which is linked to the Epic Theatre by Walter Benjamin’s messianic hopes. It seems crucial, therefore, to perceive the ambivalence of modernist authors and their texts, an ambivalence that brings out the affinity between the *poésie pure* and the sociological discourse of Critical Theory.

After all, Stéphane Mallarmé is one of the late modern poets who—together with Valéry—announces the problems and solutions of Adornian aesthetics. The common denominator of Mallarmé and Adorno’s aesthetic positions can be summed up in a few words: save the autonomy of the individual subject by introducing a negative notion of the beautiful. “Le Beau est négatif,” or “the Beautiful is negative,” says Valéry ([1957], vol. I, 374), expressing the central idea of their poetic theories and of his own writing.

Long before Adorno, Fritz Mauthner and Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Mallarmé criticized the depuration of language in a society whose market laws were about to transform culture into *culture industry* in the sense of Horkheimer and Adorno. He believed, however, that it is possible to defend the autonomy of the speaking and writing subject by rigorous negativity: by standing aloof from what he calls “l’universel *reportage*” (Mallarmé [1945], 368).

However, like Valéry and Adorno after him, Mallarmé continued to adhere to the idea of the beautiful. This means that negativity—in whatever appearance—should not jeopardise the sub-



ject-imposed form that arises from a systematic negation of contingency: of chance. In this respect, Adorno appears as an heir to Mallarmé. They both believe that only the systematic refusal of the writing subject to use dubious linguistic material, previously exploited by ideological and commercial discourses, can safeguard the poet's critical stance. The poetic form itself is turned into the main asset of social criticism: "The hermetic works bring more criticism to bear on the existing than do those that, in the interest of intelligible social criticism, devote themselves to conciliatory forms and silently acknowledge the flourishing culture industry" (Adorno [1997], 145). Mallarmé could have written these lines, which also remind us of the presence of Valéry in Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*.

Adorno agrees with Mallarmé and Valéry that the *truth content* (*Wahrheitsgehalt*) of art consists in negating ideological and commercial meaning on a formal level: "Works of the highest level of form that are meaningless or alien to meaning are therefore more than simply meaningless because they gain their content (*Gehalt*) through the negation of meaning" (Adorno [1997], 145). Mallarmé would have spoken of *virtualité*, which is not—in spite of what the dictionaries may say—a synonym of *virtuality*. It is rather the capacity of a polysemic text to evoke meaning that does not coincide with any of the stereotypes exploited by the managers of globalised culture industry.

However, form implies limitation: "Form inevitably limits what is formed, for otherwise its concept would lose its specific difference to what is formed" (Adorno [1997], 144). The individual subject is responsible for this "specific" difference and for the entire formation process. In Mallarmé's, Valéry's and Adorno's works, the notions of subjectivity, form and limitation are closely related and inseparable from the idea of the beautiful. For the beautiful—even Valéry's and Adorno's *beau négatif*—is a result of subjective limitation and formation: of clarity.

In spite of all the idiosyncrasies and differences that separate the aesthetics of Critical Theory and those of the French poets, Adorno, Mallarmé and Valéry epitomise the salient features of modernism: the autonomy of the Subject based on form conceived as a negation of the existing order. Lyotard breaks with this late modern constellation by introducing a notion of the sublime, which globally negates the triadic nexus of limitation, form and subjectivity. In order to understand the relationship between Adorno's modernist and Lyotard's postmodernist aesthetics it seems necessary to clarify briefly Adorno's position between Kant and Hegel. It is a dialectical position and an attempt to mediate between Kant's dictum that the beautiful pleases without concept and Hegel's emphasis on the truth content of art.

### Adorno between Kant and Hegel: the Beautiful and the Sublime

The contrast between Adorno's and Lyotard's aesthetic theories can be treated metonymically as representing the contrast between a model of modernism and a model of postmodernism. Unlike Adorno, whose negative aesthetic is designed to save the individual subject *in extremis*, Lyotard develops a violently negative (and in many respects Adornian) aesthetic that negates subjectivity. By disavowing the notion of Subject, Lyotard takes his leave of the modernist problematic. This approach has quite rightly been associated with German idealism: with Kant's cautious efforts to consolidate, define and limit the scope of subjective knowledge and with Fichte's and Hegel's sweeping statements about the identity of Subject and Object and the ensuing epistemological and historical supremacy of the former.

Despite their persistent critique of Hegelian (Fichtean, Marxist) attempts to identify the Object (reality) with an apparently all-mighty Subject, Adorno and Horkheimer were always prepared to defend the autonomy of the individual Subject, threatened initially by the repressive ideology of National-Socialism and later by the global trusts of post-war capitalism. In many of their writings, they invoked Kant's theory of subjective limitation and of the unknowable object as such (*Ding an sich*) in order to counter the Fichtean and Hegelian illusion of a dominant Subject, which — at the end of the day — turned out to be a manipulated object of the powers that be. In spite of his sympathy for Kant's refusal to identify Subject and Object, Adorno severely criticises the Kantian cogito because it tends to reduce the individual Subject to an agent of conceptualisation, thus reproducing the rationalist split between reason and nature, concept and body. According to Adorno, Kant opposes hedonism not so much on moral grounds, but because he considers it to be heteronomous in relation to the thinking (conceptual) Subject.

However, this radical critique which makes Kant appear as an heir of Enlightenment rationalism, never prevented Adorno from following another Kant: the philosopher of nature who refuses to conceptualise natural beauty and recognises in nature an autonomous realm located beyond conceptual knowledge. Although he never accepted Kant's idea of disinterested pleasure (*interesseloses Wohlgefallen*), because it excludes social criticism, Adorno relied on the *Critique of Judgement* in order to map out an aesthetic theory seeking to accomplish the impossible: to reconcile philosophical reason with nature by making it absorb the mimetic impulse of art. In Adorno's aesthetic theory, this orientation towards artistic mimesis is meant to deliver conceptual thought from its calculating, classifying and organising will to dominate nature, and to reconcile it with the Object.

"Ratio without mimesis is self-negating," Adorno ([1997], 331) remarks in his *Aesthetic Theory*, relying on particular models of discourse in order to escape from alogocentric rationalism without abandoning conceptual thought. He envisages a synthesis of mimesis and conceptualisation. In this respect, he differs sharply from Derrida and the later Barthes. For his essayistic mode of writing, his "thinking in models" developed in *Negative Dialektik* (*Negative Dialectics*, 1966) and the orientation of his *Ästhetische Theorie* (*Aesthetic Theory*, 1970) towards Hölderlin's *parataxis* — which in some respects is a return to his early notion of "configuration" (see Adorno [1973], 369) — have virtually nothing in common with Derridean deconstruction, which is often presented as a global challenge to conceptual thought (see Zima [1994]).

Adorno's fundamental idea is to reconcile conceptual thought with its Object by opening it to the mimetic (non-conceptual) negativity inaugurated by the literary writings of Hölderlin, Mallarmé, Valéry and Beckett. In *Critical Theory*, this negativity is inseparable from a strong, autonomous subjectivity. Commenting on Valéry's work, Adorno speaks of a "conscious Subject which does not capitulate" (Adorno [1958], 193). It is nevertheless true, as Daniel Kipfer aptly points out, that Adorno's attitude towards the individual Subject is ambivalent and paradoxical. On the one hand, the Subject appears as the main source of social criticism; on the other hand, it is considered as a defeated historical force: "In this theoretical approach, the defeated individual is the only instance capable of averting the individual's defeat" (Kipfer [1999], 82).

This paradox not only bears witness to the ambivalent and paradoxical character of *Critical Theory* which radically criticises the subjectivity it relies on; it also hints at the precarious position of the individual in post-liberal capitalist society. In their sociological works, Adorno and Horkheimer themselves have analysed the economic, social and psychological mechanisms responsible for the

decline of individual initiative and subjectivity: the concentration of economic and financial power in monopolies, oligopolies or trusts and the concomitant withdrawal from public life of the liberal entrepreneur, the tycoon who was the core of the bourgeois family. Within the family institution, the paternal authority vanishes along with the economic and social prestige of the entrepreneur. At the same time, the collective bargaining of trade union organisations weakens the individual worker's or employee's initiative (although it may strengthen the position of the group or class). Finally, the media and culture industry trains and manipulates the individual character beyond recognition by depriving the subject of its language. It loses its capacity to reflect on its social and linguistic situation and to recognise the "universal *reportage*" it is immersed in.

These may be some of the reasons why, in his *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno expresses doubts about the survival of aesthetic subjectivity in the avant-garde movements. Reflecting on the experimental approach of the avant-gardes that tends to subvert artistic organisation and form, he points out: "Whether this dates back to Mallarmé and was formulated by Valéry as the subject proving its aesthetic power by remaining in self-control even while abandoning itself to heteronomy, or if by this balancing act the subject ratifies its self-abdication, is yet to be decided" (Adorno [1997], 24). Here, Adorno's ambivalent attitude towards the avant-garde movements comes to the fore: their formal innovations and experiments may be critical, but at the same time they may disrupt the formal autonomy of the Subject.

In the end, Adorno dismisses his own doubts with an almost Cartesian gesture which restores the control of the artistic Subject: "In any case, it is clear that insofar as experimental procedures, in the most recent sense, are in spite of everything undertaken subjectively, the belief is chimerical that through them art will divest itself of its subjectivity and become the illusionless thing in itself which to date art has only feigned" (Adorno [1997], 24). In other words, the negativity of art does not appear to Adorno as a negation of the Subject. He continues to consider the latter as the crucial instance responsible for the construction of the beautiful. This explains why he also continues to subordinate—in accordance with Hegel and his disciple Karl Rosenkranz—the ugly and the sublime to the beautiful, which he redefines—with Mallarmé and Valéry—as a negative phenomenon. Acknowledging Rosenkranz' dictum that the *raison d'être* of the ugly is the beautiful in need of a contrast, Adorno remarks: "By absorbing the ugly, the concept of beauty has been transformed in itself, without, however, aesthetics being able to dispense with it. In the absorption of the ugly, beauty is strong enough to expand itself by its own opposite" (Adorno [1997], 273). This discourse is obviously indebted to German idealism to the extent of being unable to imagine an art situated beyond the beautiful.

It is not surprising in this context that, in Adorno's perspective, even the sublime appears as a function of the beautiful: it serves to enhance its negativity. According to Kant, the sublime differs from the beautiful, which addresses imagination and understanding, by addressing imagination and reason. This shift from understanding to reason—from *Verstand* to *Vernunft*—leads to an aporetic situation marked by a contradiction or *differend* (*Widerstreit*) between the infinite character of reason and the limited forms of imagination as *Einbildungskraft*. This *differend*, considered by Lyotard as absolute and insurmountable, is commented on by Adorno in the context of modernist art where it sheds light on the contradictions of late modern society.

From Adorno's point of view, the late modern sublime appears to have two basic aspects: on the one hand, it is the symptom of an unreconciled nature which erupts within a cultural order based

on the repression of the natural; on the other hand, it is a symptom of the contradictory and unreconciled character of modern art torn by social contradictions. “The ascendancy of the sublime is one with art’s compulsion that fundamental contradictions not be covered up but fought through in themselves,” Adorno writes ([1997], 197). Speaking of the “ascendancy” of the sublime, Adorno refers to a late modern or modernist social situation where the artist feels obliged to contest the harmony of Kantian beauty (the harmony of understanding and imagination) in order to be able to reproduce social antagonisms and conflicts on an aesthetic level. Thus Adorno’s notion of the sublime points beyond Kantian aesthetics towards a modernism torn by contradictions.

Like the ugly, the sublime is an instrument of negativity: it serves to transform the beautiful into a negative-beautiful incompatible with the humanist ideologies and the commercial communication systems of late capitalist society:

The sublime which Kant reserved exclusively for nature, later became the constituent of art itself. The sublime draws the demarcation line between art and what was later called arts and crafts. Kant covertly considered art to be a servant. Art becomes human in the instant in which it terminates this service. Its humanity is incompatible with any ideology of service to humankind. It is loyal to humanity only through inhumanity toward it. (Adorno, [1997] 196–7)

This passage is of particular importance because it turns the sublime into a metonymy of Adorno’s aesthetic negativity. The latter is made possible by an absorption of the sublime and the ugly into the beautiful, which is thus transformed into a modernist phenomenon marked by ambivalence, contradiction and conflict. In short, Adorno’s notion of beauty is negative insofar as it encompasses its antonyms; however, it is not subverted by the sublime, as is the case in Lyotard’s postmodernist aesthetic. In an analogous manner, Adorno’s Subject—like Mallarmé’s and Valéry’s—is constantly threatened by the contradictions and negations it resorts to in order to oppose the language of culture industry; but it never succumbs to this self-imposed negativity. It does not succumb to the sublime.

The German philosopher Albrecht Wellmer is probably correct in criticising Wolfgang Iser’s postmodernist reading of Adorno’s aesthetic as an aesthetic of the sublime. Wellmer reminds us of Adorno’s modern and modernist roots: “Even in Adorno’s case, the category of the beautiful continues to dominate insofar as even the realisation of the artistic sublime continues to be associated with the condition of aesthetic harmony” (Wellmer [1991], 57). Although “harmony” (“Stimmigkeit”) may not be the most appropriate word when it comes to describing Adorno’s aesthetic of negativity and dissonance, Wellmer is right in insisting on the dominant role of the beautiful. He could have added that in Adorno’s case the attempt to save or strengthen the individual Subject is closely related to the preponderance of the beautiful in the *Aesthetic Theory*. The latter continues to unfold the aesthetic negativity inaugurated by Mallarmé and Valéry.

### From Adorno to Lyotard: The Sublime against the Subject

By asserting in *L’Inhumain* (*The Inhuman*)—a very Adornian title indeed—that “the sublime is perhaps the only mode of artistic sensibility to characterize the modern” (Lyotard [1991], 93), Lyotard moves away from Adorno by just one step. But this step is crucial. It is crucial not only because

it leads to the dissolution of the hierarchical link between the negative beautiful and the sublime, but also because it turns the sublime against the beautiful and the Subject.

Unlike Adorno who maintains — with Mallarmé and Valéry — that the autonomy of art and the Subject is inseparable from artistic form, Lyotard invokes Kant — or rather his own reconstruction of Kant's aesthetic, as Gernot Böhme points out (Böhme [1998], 206–8) — in order to oppose the sublime to the beautiful as a basis of subjectivity. In vain does reason demand that the sublime (which Kant associates with reason) be represented by imagination. For imagination is limited:

Reason thus enters the 'scene' in the place of understanding. It challenges the thought that imagines: 'make the absolute that I conceive present with your forms.' Yet form is limitation. Form divides space and time into an 'inside', what it 'comprehends', and an 'outside', what it puts at a distance. It cannot present the absolute. (Lyotard [1991], 123)

Eventually, the antagonism which makes the Subject succumb before the sublime can be traced back to the incommensurability between understanding and imagination on the one hand and reason on the other. Although it is capable of representing the beautiful by resorting to its forms, imagination fails vis-à-vis the sublime, which only reason can think. Lyotard detects this incommensurability within the sublime: "This differend is to be found at the heart of sublime feeling: at the encounter of the two 'absolutes' equally 'present' to thought, the absolute whole when it conceives, the absolutely measured when it presents" (Lyotard [1991], 123).

This conflict of faculties is insurmountable, and the Subject falls prey to it. "Taste promised him a beautiful life; the sublime threatens to make him disappear," explains Lyotard ([1991] 144). At this point a fundamental discursive difference between Lyotard and Adorno comes to the fore. Unlike the Frankfurt philosopher whose discourse aims to strengthen the individual subject, Lyotard tends to follow the postmodernist discourses of authors such as Deleuze, Guattari and Foucault, who identify subjectivity with the ideological sub-ject in the fascist or simply bourgeois sense: with *assujettissement* or *sub-iectum*. In agreement with these thinkers, and with Baudrillard, Lyotard insists on the chimerical character of the notion of Subject and opposes the main stream of philosophy by refusing to consider Kant as a philosopher of the Subject: "Thus it is very difficult to classify Kantism among philosophies of the subject, as is sometimes done" (Lyotard [1994], 146). Whatever one may think of this innovative or heretical re-interpretation of Kant's idealism, it is clear that it bears witness to a problematic which has significantly departed from that of modernism. For despite numerous critiques by modernist authors of the notion of Subject (of subjective identity), modernity and modernism (as late modernity) did emphasise the central function of subjectivity. In this respect, modernism can be considered an heir of romanticism and realism.

Despite all the affinities with the aesthetics of Adorno and the avant-gardes, Lyotard's thought — very much like Baudrillard's and Deleuze's — has left the modernist problematic by refusing to remain within the epistemological framework of (consolidated, threatened or declining) subjectivity, by insisting on the (very questionable) incompatibility of the Kantian faculties and by turning the sublime against the beautiful. Unlike Adorno who continues the idealist tradition by subordinating the sublime and the ugly to the beautiful, Lyotard opposes the two key concepts of aesthetics to one another and proposes an aesthetic theory corresponding to the present state of the capitalist economy: "There is something of the sublime in capitalist economy" (Lyotard [1991],

105). The common denominator of the aesthetic of the sublime and of late capitalist economy seems therefore to be a radical negation of modern subjectivity.

Both in Adorno's and in Lyotard's aesthetic theories, the avant-garde announces this negation. (Both authors refer mainly to Surrealism, but Anglo-American Vorticism and Italian or Russian Futurism would also be cases in point.) In this perspective, the critically destructive work of avant-garde authors seems to confer an aesthetic turn upon the destructive drives of capitalism:

Yet there is a kind of collusion between capital and the avant-garde. The force of scepticism and even of destruction that capitalism has brought into play, and that Marx never ceased analysing and identifying, in some ways encourages among artists a mistrust of established rules and a willingness to experiment with means of expression, with styles, with ever-new materials. (Lyotard [1991], 105)

In short, Lyotard's thesis seems to be that the avant-garde—historical and contemporary—espouses the capitalist sublime, turning it into an aesthetic or poetic practice. However, Lyotard's position is somewhat more complex—and more contradictory—than this thesis, for he emphasises that “modernity is not [...] a historical period” (Lyotard [1991], 68). If this is the case, we cannot possibly speak of a new post-modern period taking shape before our eyes. According to Lyotard, the post-modern is rather an aspect of modernity and always present in the latter. He seems to contradict one of the basic ideas of this article, namely that his aesthetic of the sublime announces a post-modernity that breaks with the notion of the modern Subject: “The sublime is perhaps the only mode of artistic sensibility to characterise the modern” (Lyotard [1991], 93).

Are we to conclude from this, as Peter Bürger ([1987], 138) does, that Lyotard is, after all, a thinker of (late) modernity or of a post-modern modernity? Is the idea of shifting problematics—as presented here—not explicitly disavowed by Lyotard himself? This apparent contradiction disappears—very much like Kant's famous aesthetic antinomy—when one adopts an historical perspective in which Lyotard's formerly Marxist discourse appears as a continuation/discontinuation of Adorno's modernist negativity. It is a continuation of this negativity insofar as it refuses to be associated with a postmodernism (that of Jencks, Oliva or Eco) integrated into the culture industry:

As for the ‘trans-avantgardism’ of Bonito Oliva and the similar currents one can observe in the USA and Germany (including Jencks's ‘postmodernism’ in architecture, which the reader will do me a favour of not confusing with what I have called ‘the postmodern condition’), it is clear that behind the pretext of picking up the tradition of the avant-gardes, this is a pretext for squandering it. (Lyotard [1991], 127)

It is at the same time a radical discontinuation, insofar as it abandons Adorno's negative utopia anticipated by the negative beautiful in art. Moreover, Lyotard's discourse also abandons the complementary utopia of a reconciled subjectivity that forms the core of Adorno's aesthetic. In short: Lyotard initiates a post-modern aesthetic derived from the negativity of modernism.

Adopting this hypothesis, one can explain the striking affinity between Lyotard's and Adorno's aesthetics and at the same time answer the question why English and American authors see Adorno and Benjamin as precursors of postmodernism. Steven Best and Douglas Kellner ([1991], 225) speak of “Adorno's proto-postmodern theory,” while Christa and Peter Bürger ([1987], 138) consider Lyotard as a modern thinker. These two apparently contradictory perspectives coincide as soon as they are integrated into the perspective adopted here: Lyotard is a postmodern heir of Adorno and Benjamin. Lyotard's critique of the technological society and its communication system continues in many respects Adorno's and Horkheimer's critique of Enlightenment rationalism:

The penetration of techno-scientific apparatus into the cultural field in no way signifies an increase of knowledge, sensibility, tolerance and liberty. Reinforcing this apparatus does not liberate the spirit, as the *Aufklärung* thought. Experience shows rather the reverse: a new barbarism, illiteracy and impoverishment of language, new poverty, merciless remodelling of opinion by the media, immiseration of the mind, obsolescence of the soul, as Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno repeatedly stressed. (Lyotard [1991], 63)

This continuity between Critical Theory and Lyotard's post-modern discourse is broken in the following paragraph: "Which is not to say that one can be content, with the Frankfurt School, to criticise the subordination of the mind to the rules and values of the culture industry. Be it positive or negative, this diagnosis still belongs to the humanist point of view" (Lyotard [1991], 64). By abandoning this point of view, Lyotard abandons — together with Deleuze, Derrida and Guattari — the central concept of modernity and modernism: the concept of Subject. His idea of the inhuman differs radically from Adorno's because it is no longer subordinated to the utopian negativity of art, but associated with the destructive forces of the sublime. Monika Kilian, who also tends to consider Adorno a precursor of postmodernism, glosses over this break when she remarks: "Thus Adorno's critique of unity in art and thought can be linked structurally with the postmodern dismissal of unity" (Kilian [1998], 68). One of the aims of this article is to show that Adorno's critique of unity (meaning the category of totality, of the system), of aesthetic harmony and the Subject, is still solidly implanted in late modernity. Far from demolishing the late modern frame of mind, Adorno's critique aims at consolidating it.

The other aim of this piece was to point out the heterogeneous character of the modernist (late modern) and postmodernist problematics. Like modernism, which can best be understood as a constellation of clashing ideological, philosophical and scientific discourses, that range from the extreme right to the extreme left, postmodernism ought to be envisaged as a contradictory socio-semiotic system, within which radically critical positions (such as Lyotard's) coexist and collide with conformist, market-oriented positions. However, this conflict certainly does not represent the whole of postmodernism: the social movements in the ethnic, feminist and ecological sense, so intensively studied by contemporary sociology, are also part of it and inspire different kinds of literature. It seems important to become aware of this heterogeneity and to analyse postmodernism as an economic, social and cultural problematic (see Zima [2001] and [2002]) instead of trying to reduce it to an ideology, a philosophy or an aesthetic.

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## Chapter 3

### Tradition, Avant-Garde, Postmodernism

This section contains explorations of three different fields that have a direct bearing on the contours of modernism as canon and concept. The complex ways in which modernism interacts with literary movements that preceded it as well as the reconceptualization of the notion of tradition itself are currently being renegotiated. Similarly, the distinction between the avant-garde and modernism, which certain critics have insisted on, especially since the late seventies when Avant-Garde Studies wanted to manifest itself as an independent field, is again put into question. Recent studies of the demarcation between the two concepts show that the realms cannot ultimately be wrenched apart, and that the borderline between the two has perhaps always been under erasure. Finally, the advent of postmodernism that implicitly set modernism all sorts of limits in order to give itself an identity, now appears more and more like a crisis and a renewal of certain features of modernism itself. In many ways, postmodernist approaches to modernist works even participated in revealing the ongoing relevance of the modernist paradigm. The boundaries between modernism and these three domains are fruitfully probed and traced in the following articles.

In her reconsideration of the ways in which modernism relates to tradition, **Anne E. Fernald** points to the constructedness of what constitutes “tradition”. She undoes the habitual parameters determining the meaning of the term: linear progression, a stable canon and the assumption of a “natural selection” of “great works” that deserve to be transmitted and are there to last as the unquestioned patrimonium of a given culture. Fernald reveals the function of tradition-making as a stabilizer benefiting established institutions such as the nation state or the social structure of the bourgeoisie. Although modernists indeed opposed these petrified conglomerates, this did not mean that they turned away from the past as such; on the contrary, they turned it into a fertile source of inspiration. Unearthing its forgotten or repressed dimensions, registering the layers of the old in modernity itself or engaging with the past in innovative ways became a salient feature of modernist poetics. More than “forgetting” or turning away from tradition, the active assimilation of tradition turned its very meaning into one of the mainstays of the modernist enterprise.

The avant-garde may seem to be situated at the opposite pole from tradition in terms of attitudes towards convention, but they both make a similarly controversial bid for the modernist terrain. **Benedikt Hjartarson**’s analysis of the avant-garde manifesto reveals its aesthetic dimension and the implications of its performative nature. While this emphasis on the manifesto’s form strengthens its contribution to the avant-garde aesthetic endeavour and its political correlative, it often ironically undermines the authoritarian demeanour of their gesture. The avant-garde manifesto, apparently

located at the furthest remove from the “classical modernism” as it is sometimes portrayed in the discourse of Avant-Garde Studies, emerges as a modernist genre in its own right.

Because of its apocalyptic sense of crisis, German Expressionism is often seen as the most outdated of all the avant-garde movements. In contrast to this opinion, **Vivian Liska** shows that it is precisely because of its untimeliness (Nietzsche’s “*Unzeitgemässheit*”) that German Expressionism continues to be relevant today. Liska is critical of recent attempts to rescue the actuality of German Expressionism only in so far as it “fits” and confirms postmodernist expectations, whether in terms of common concepts of the subject, time and history, or in terms of purely aesthetic innovations. The expressionist impulse to unmask false stabilities and the longing for escape into a new safety can serve as important reminders of the hinge between the trauma of modernity and the dream of awakening from its nightmares. Liska’s revaluation of those dimensions of Expressionism that resist being classified as an outmoded avant-gardism, or tamed into a harmless “classical modernism,” stresses the arbitrariness of the distinction between modernism and the avant-garde.

The modernism/postmodernism divide is a central preoccupation in the field of Beckett studies. **Sjef Houppermans** argues that attempts to situate Beckett in one of the two categories have resulted either in selective and one-sided readings of his work or in an internal periodization distinguishing between its different phases, from modernist innovation to a postmodern resignation of the desire to “make it new.” In a discussion of Beckett’s reading of Proust and of the role of music in his work, Houppermans rejects these approaches and shows instead how Beckett’s work encompasses the crisis of modernity both so broadly and so succinctly that he can be called a “trans-modernist.” Far from leaving modernism behind, Beckett’s later work can be seen as a vast self-reflexive allegory of modernism.

**Barrett Watten** retraces the way in which postmodernism constituted itself by setting up false boundaries to modernism. He challenges this demarcation by shifting attention from a periodization of canonical authors and strictly defined formal attributes to an emphasis on the moments in individual works where a crisis of exemplary cultural agency becomes the decisive factor. Tracing such an “exemplary moment” of crisis in works that have generally been excluded from the modernist canon reveals a cultural “paradigm shift” that extends the concept of modernism beyond its established meaning. Watten argues for a rethinking of modernist authorship, form, and ethics in terms of expectations generally associated with postmodernism. He calls for an increased attention to the crossing of formal features and socio-cultural experiences and for an appreciation of unresolved conflicts in modernist works that would result in a dismissal of the artificial boundaries between a “safe” and stable modernism on the one side and an open-ended postmodernism on the other.

The last article of this section returns to the problematic borderline between modernism and tradition and links the questions it raises to the uncertainties about the relationship between modernism and postmodernism. In his richly documented discussion, **Sam Slote** argues that the modernist imperative to “make it new” has itself a long tradition dating back to antiquity. The awareness of this tradition sheds a new light on the specificity of modernism, which Slote locates in an eclectic and paratactic historical consciousness that refrains from synthesizing or totalizing representations. For Slote, this refusal to construct a coherent tradition should ultimately inform the conceptualisation and revision of modernism itself.

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## Modernism and Tradition

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The first modernists asked us to believe in a break with the past, to believe that they were writing in a way that was wholly new. Yet early admirers of modernism celebrated these writers for their engagement with literary precursors. This is especially apparent in the case of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), where discussions of Homeric and Shakespearean parallels have sustained more than one generation of critics, but it also holds true of discussions of Katherine Mansfield's debt to Chekhov, of T.S. Eliot's debt to Dante, or of Zora Neale Hurston's debt to the oral tradition of Eatonville, Florida. Rimbaud's "we must be absolutely modern" (Rimbaud [1967], 209)<sup>1</sup> conceals the intensity of the modernist obsession with the past. In fact, it exists alongside such credos of recovery as Virginia Woolf's "we think back through our mothers if we are women" (Woolf [1989], 76). This essay starts by recognizing the variety in modernist engagements with the past: contending that, although the terms used to discuss the role of tradition in modernism have often assumed an almost exclusively Eliotic cast, the relation of modernist writers to their past is far richer, more complex, and more contentious than the contrast between Rimbaud and Woolf's aphorisms makes it seem.

What distinguishes modernist writers' understanding of tradition from how pre-twentieth-century writers understood it? Technological and epistemological changes of the period made it increasingly difficult for modernists to assert the existence of a "great tradition." (That is clearly part of the fun for F.R. Leavis, anti-modernist author of a book by that title.) At the same time, increased interest in Asia, Africa, and the Americas fed a popular enthusiasm for non-European cultures and traditions. Thus, judgments of the past became self-consciously contingent and individual rather than the more confidently prescriptive judgments of earlier cultural arbiters. In short, unmooring tradition from progress, greatness, and a more certain notion of the canon's fixity meant that tradition became a *problem*, rather than a fact.

Furthermore, all these changes to historical and cultural understanding transformed the past into a commodity. The notion of the past as a thing, traces of which one could manufacture (as with furniture), or perform (as with folk dance), collect (as with museums), restore (as with heritage sites), and consume (as with all these things) gained significant ground in Europe and the Americas in the late nineteenth century. In turn, this commodification of the past made it possible, in Eric Hobsbawm's formulation, to *invent* tradition. In fact, Hobsbawm argues that the period from 1870 to 1914 saw a particularly rapid proliferation of what he calls invented traditions (Hobsbawm [1983b], 263). For Hobsbawm, invented tradition includes "both 'traditions' actually invented, constructed and formally instituted and those emerging in a less easily traceable manner within a brief

and dateable period—a matter of a few years perhaps—and establishing themselves with great rapidity” (Hobsbawm [1983a], 1). As cultural phenomena, these invented traditions are deeply intertwined with the emergence of the modern nation-state as well as with broader social changes of the period (Hobsbawm [1983b], 263). Hobsbawm’s social focus contains important implications for individual writers. For them, the proliferation of invented traditions made it seem possible to create a choice of inheritance. Rather than feeling, as, for example, Matthew Arnold did, that there was a coherent tradition which all citizens of a nation inherited, the modernists saw a vaster and more diverse array of fragments from the past from which to choose. All of which brings us back to the problem of tradition: as a thing, and a thing that could be invented or exchanged, the modernists all had to determine, consciously, what his or her relationship to tradition would be.

In his entry on “tradition” in *Keywords*, Raymond Williams emphasizes the negative connotation of the word and its variants, particularly the adjectival *traditional* (Williams [1983], 319–20). It is not my intent to dispute the connotation, but to look behind it. When modernists worked to eschew the *traditional*, they sought to avoid the genteel, the bourgeois, the predictable; they did not repudiate the past. In general the modernists favored a simultaneously heroic and ironized recovery of the socially or geographically distant or taboo while rejecting any signs of obedience to the dictates of the traditions and customs of the recent, local, and accepted. The notion of literary tradition that the modernists adopted was distinctly oppositional: it was not a continuation of the reader’s world, but a disruption of it.

A conflict between modernism and other elements of modernity was, from the start, a central element of modernism’s self-understanding and, consequently, has had continued importance to readers of modernism. At the moment of mass culture’s emergence, writers confronted the restructuring of their audience from elite to mass, from citizens to consumers. In *Axel’s Castle* (1931), one of the first studies of modernism, Edmund Wilson claims that the only available positions for a writer in his time are withdrawal and exile (Wilson [1953], 287–8). But Wilson’s two versions of alienation oversimplify the wide range of responses within individual writers’ careers. In fact, his example of exile is Rimbaud, whose aphorism, “we must be absolutely modern,” inspired subsequent writers to embrace the modern world from which he ultimately exiled himself. Ambivalence about the modern lies at the heart of literary modernism and the difficulty of generalizing a modernist attitude to the present parallels the complexity of the modernists’ engagement with the past. What unites these writers, however, is the widespread belief, *pace* Wilson, that one could legitimately choose exile, withdrawal, engagement, or, even some happy combination of all three. And that one might, through reading in forgotten, neglected, or foreign traditions, make productive comments about modernity.

Few exemplify the apparent paradox of anti-modern modernity more dramatically than Sigmund Freud, who created modern psychoanalysis in a conventional bourgeois study filled with antiquities. Freud’s groundbreaking and quintessentially modern discoveries were based on the notion that the past could be recovered. Freud analogized his work to archaeology and for one of Freud’s patients, the American poet H.D., the antiquities in his study were continuous with his psychoanalytic work: “Thoughts were things, to be collected, collated, analysed, shelved or resolved. Fragmentary ideas, apparently unrelated, were often found to be part of a special layer or stratum of thought and memory, therefore to belong together” (H.D. [1984], 14). H.D.’s list—“collected, collated, analysed, shelved or resolved”—is instructive: it bespeaks a confidence in the power of

psychoanalysis (perhaps beyond Freud's own) to master thoughts and memories. The final two terms, "shelved or resolved" suggest a satisfying finality: anything disturbing or aberrant can be put away, relegated to the back of the case, or explained, reclassified until it fits the existing rubric of the collection. If "thoughts are things" that can be catalogued, then they may be less troubling to us. What H.D. neglects to mention here is nonetheless strongly implied: if thoughts and memory can "sometimes" be pieced together, sometimes they cannot. Freud could determine "the main theme of his collection: non-fragmentary pieces from ancient Rome, Greece, and Egypt" (Forrester [1994], 227), and set about acquiring appropriate items, but the work of collecting a coherent narrative from the fragments of the past proved more difficult. His interest in the non-fragmentary relic sets him apart from modernists of subsequent generations, from H.D., for example, who collected and celebrated the fragments of Sappho as her poetic heritage, and from T. S. Eliot, who felt that only fragments remained.

For writers seeking to order this profusion and confusion of traditions, psychological fiction, especially experiments in capturing the "stream of consciousness," became one important method for selecting among the fragments of the modern world. The choice that Woolf, Joyce, and, above all, Proust, made to recover and record everything of significance to an individual mind highlights the intense individualism of the period. In *The Waves* (1931), *Ulysses* (1922), and *A la Recherche du temps Perdu* (Remembrance of Things Past) from 1913–27, what counts as important is what happens to the center(s) of consciousness of the work; what counts as the useable past is the motley collection of texts and memories that capture, however fleetingly, that mind's attention. When Proust compares the flood of memory brought on by the madeleine to Japanese paper flowers floating in a bowl, he is capturing a fashion. He offers something of interest to cultural historians who can note a displacement of a Japanese custom onto French culture, inaugurated by the arrival of Japanese woodcuts in Europe, solidified by their transformation in the paintings of Van Gogh, Gauguin, and Manet:

And as in the game wherein the Japanese amuse themselves by filling a porcelain bowl with water and steeping in it little pieces of paper which until then are without character or form, but, the moment they become wet, stretch themselves and bend, take on color and distinctive shape, become flowers or houses or people, permanent and recognizable, so in that moment all the flowers in our garden [...] and the whole of Combray and of its surroundings [...] sprang into being, town and gardens alike, from my cup of tea. (Proust [1981], vol. I, 51)<sup>2</sup>

The moment is ripe with orientalism, but Proust's interest in it is not even quasi-scholarly. And Japonerie is not the moment's importance for Proust. To him, the metaphor matters because it is exotic, beautiful, was experienced by him, and helps him explain his own experience.

As Proust shows, tradition survives through memory. Trade and empires introduce people to other traditions, separate in place but simultaneous. Philology and history teach people about traditions long forgotten; anthropology, archaeology, and psychology, with their interest in human origins and the distant past, suggest a shared past, and, especially in the early twentieth century, perhaps even a shared origin for apparently diverse traditions. Thus, along with Proust and Freud, many modernists believed that any individual's unconscious may well contain the memory traces of a shared human tradition. If this is truly the case, they believed, one reasonable way to go about preserving the tradition of a culture would be to make a thorough catalogue of the memories of one individual mind.

Thus Proust's project, and the novel of introspection and psychological depth generally, becomes another way of telling the story of modernism and tradition.

Eliot opens "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919), by attempting to revive the idea of tradition as a key term, a goal that this essay shares, in spite of its critical stance on Eliot. As Eliot austere-ly puts it, tradition "cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labor" (Eliot [1975], 38). Until quite recently, critics used his work, and perhaps Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973), as models through which to explain modernism's relationship to its past. The work of John Guillory and Wai-Chee Dimock, in which questions of tradition intersect with questions of canon, proves particularly helpful in re-mapping this terrain in terms other than the more narrowly Oedipal ones of Eliot and Bloom. In *Cultural Capital* (1993), Guillory moves away from judgment of individual works, focusing instead on the process and history of canonization. In fact, for Guillory "the question of judgment is the wrong question [...] The work of preservation has other more complex social contexts than the immediate responses of readers to texts" (Guillory [1995], 237). Guillory's work, through his use of Bourdieu, provides a means to analyze the contexts that led to a range of modernist interaction with traditions, as well as the canon-making public reception of these results. Where Guillory works to unseat Matthew Arnold and T. S. Eliot, Wai-Chee Dimock positions herself against Harold Bloom's idea that texts survive because of their success in the battle for immortality. Instead, she links "literary endurance [...] not to the text's timeless strength but to something like its *timeful* unwieldiness" (Dimock [1997], 1062). Transforming the physics of resonance into a metaphor for the way we read literature, she demonstrates the important ways in which cultural "background noise" can make the previously inaudible audible, and how this, in turn, transforms the meanings of texts over time.

Each of the modernists labored to make tradition their own. For each, the problem of tradition was central, but overall responses to the tension between tradition and innovation were diverse. Among the strategies adopted, the best known are the twin projects of erasure and recovery: the attempt by writers such as Baudelaire and Stein to conceal their debt to precursors, and the recovery efforts of writers such as Eliot, Joyce, and the philosopher Walter Benjamin who present themselves as cultural heroes, saving bits of the past from destruction. By contrast, those who straddle the border between realism and modernism, such as Henrik Ibsen, Nella Larsen, and R. K. Narayan, often adhered to traditional narrative forms in their thematically experimental works, while Zora Neale Hurston and D. H. Lawrence introduced a vernacular tradition into artistically ambitious texts. Finally, in later modernism, writers examined the politics of these choices and began to develop a politics of citation that was about canonizing modernism and its antecedents. Some chose the integrative strategies of the blues aesthetic, demonstrating, for example, that African-American voices have always been part of American literature, by blacks and whites (a position developed by Ralph Ellison), while others chose separatism, showing how women novelists have forged their own literary genealogy (as Virginia Woolf did).

In outlining these four broad strategies, my goal has been to show the diverse range of responses to tradition and thereby to suggest the range of questions scholars might pursue once tradition becomes visible to us as it was to the modernists themselves—as an array of discrete fragments, even a commodity. Many of the writers whose texts I discuss as exemplifying one strategy were equally adept at another. This hazard, inherent to any brief survey, only emphasizes the serious play with tradition, which, I want to argue, is an unacknowledged organizing principle of modernism.

### Erasure and Recovery

Those who worked to erase signs from the past in their work — Marinetti, Stein, Baudelaire — were among the most intense and important formal experimenters of modernism. Those who collected and worked to recover and preserve traces of the past that were being lost in the rapid drive to modernization — Joyce, Eliot, Benjamin — were, also, among modernism's most important formal experimenters. These approaches to the past are responsible for many of the most recognizable modernist texts. At first, the impulse to erase or obscure one's debt to the past would seem to run counter to the effort to recover it, but both impulses rely on a distinctly modern understanding of what tradition is.

Where Freud collected the ancient, Gertrude Stein collected the contemporary. Her collection of early cubist painting and sculpture helped define her moment. In collecting Cezanne, Matisse, and Picasso, she announced her belief in the art of the present just as, in her writing, she sought to erase signs of her own debt to literary and philosophical precursors. Though her approach to literature shows the influence of Henry and William James, Walt Whitman, and other American individuals, it is hard to see the traces of this in such texts as *Tender Buttons* (1914), with fragments such as "PEELED PENCIL, CHOKE / Rub her coke" (Stein [1990], 476). The logic here is elusive in both its representation and its origin. How is a peeled pencil like a sharpened one? Is the choke a start — like the choke to the engine of one of Stein's beloved automobiles — or an end, like the cough of a speaker who has lost her words? Like Stein's most famous statement, "rose is a rose is a rose is a rose" (Stein [1933], 169), this moment resists the leap to metaphor and refuses to hold our hands in simile — as Robert Burns does with "O My Luve's like a red, red rose" (Burns [2002], 113). And, just as "rose is a rose is a rose is a rose" cuts its ties with tradition by announcing how it is different from its precursors, "Peeled pencil, choke" announces its difference from the metaphorical, and by comparison, sentimental, imagist poems that immediately preceded it.

Even texts such as the opera *Four Saints in Three Acts* (1934), which seem to announce their interest in specific historic figures, zero in on such tiny details of their lives — or what their reputation conjures — that the connection between the text and any information one might glean about St. Theresa of Avila or St. Ignatius of Loyola is loose indeed. Stein's celebration of language in its own right, of words, sounds, and her own power to manipulate them is possible because she feels more responsible to be an originator than a successor. For Stein, the lesson that prior masterpieces teach is not specific; it is the general lesson of their own existence: "The manner and habits of Bible times or Greek or Chinese have nothing to do with ours today but the master-pieces exist just the same and they do not exist because of their identity [...] they exist because they came to be as something that is an end in itself" (Stein [1998], 358). Stein's goal is to produce writing "that is an end in itself" in the modern way.

In the final verse paragraph of *The Waste Land* (1922), there is only one line that is not a quotation or adaptation: "These fragments I have shored against my ruins" (Eliot [1930], 46). Where Stein worked to erase her debt to precursors, Eliot strove anxiously to preserve his. (His sense that his contemporaries were losing touch with their past earned the derision of Rebecca West, who thought only an American could hold the delusion that Europe was anything other than shackled to its past [West (1990), 591].) From exile in Paris, James Joyce worked to reconstruct the Dublin of 1904 in *Ulysses*.



In spite of all the differences between them, the striking fact remains that both Joyce and Eliot share a sense that it is possible, modern, and intensely imaginative to transform texts of any kind, from any available cultural source, to serve one's own purposes. Where Joyce enriches tradition by combining all of Irish culture, from the most arcane to the most banal, into a single text, Eliot combs Europe, the Middle East, and India for legends and quotations and tops it off with a little jazz and urban anomie. For both writers, tradition is not simple and emphatically not a blood inheritance (the Irish speakers in *Ulysses* are English), but the inheritance that comes from reading and observing.

For philosopher Walter Benjamin translation is a process of recovery, one fundamentally engaged in "coming to terms with the foreignness of languages" (Benjamin [1968], 75).<sup>3</sup> For him, translation is "charged with the special mission of watching over the maturing process of the original language and the birth pangs of its own" (Benjamin [1968], 73).<sup>4</sup> Thus, good translation both recovers and transforms. What he admires in Hölderlin's translation of Sophocles is that, by showing the seams of translation, Hölderlin shows how philological labor is creative and modern, how the project of reviving the foreign or the ancient adds something new to the language. Where Benjamin's translator takes fragments of language and shapes them into a vessel, in "On Not Knowing Greek" (1925), Virginia Woolf pauses over the fragments themselves and marvels at the untranslatability of words. Recently, Page DuBois, too, asked us to look at the fact of the fragment before projecting it into its whole state. She compares fragments of text to the mutilated "bodies" of statues (DuBois [1997], 37). DuBois, like Woolf, wants us to pause over failure before we imagine "intention" (Benjamin [1968], 76). Benjamin's notion of translation, especially as tempered by feminist skepticism about the possibility of recovering the fragment, brings together the projects of erasure and recovery, showing how these two prominent ideas of tradition are linked, and how both persist in casting the individual author as the heroic preserver/transformer of civilization. Like Joyce and Eliot, Benjamin's innovation lies in creative intertextuality; like Nietzsche, Derrida, and Barthes, Benjamin's best work permits the aesthetic and the theoretical to infiltrate each other. As literary artists of the period asked us to rethink the national, racial, social, and temporal boundaries of tradition, so critics like Benjamin and Woolf deliberately resisted the newly emergent disciplinary boundaries that would seek to separate art from philosophy.

### Modern Themes, Realist Plots

Ultimately, the most socially subversive literature of modernism may not have been the most formally experimental. Broad audiences immediately recognized the texts that used familiar narrative structures to explore modern themes as new. The social changes they described—and helped usher in—in many instances came quickly thereafter. Through recognizable characters in familiar settings, Henrik Ibsen, Nella Larsen, R. K. Narayan, and Franz Kafka raised questions about the conventions and customs of their world. Their most important relationship to the past is not mediated through text; they challenge custom and tradition as lived experiences. Their stories, whose meanings were initially shocking, subsequently became so plain that the texts faded from the modernist canon. Now, a few generations later, the elliptical minimalism, the "scrupulous meanness" (Joyce [1966], vol. 2, 134) of these texts reveals the degree to which they depended on a thorough acquaintance with the very customs they challenged. In fact, as time passes, it may be these texts calling for

social change that are shown to have had the widest impact on the history of art and society. The changing times have made them resonate—to adopt Wai-Chee Dimock’s term—differently for us: initially revolutionary, they quickly seemed tame; now, strange again, we may once more be able to see what was initially so modern about them. In turn, a renewed sense of the modernity of these texts may expand the scope of what we call modernist to include texts with a self-conscious and critical stance toward lived tradition and social custom, a stance that is more individualistic and less rigorously mimetic than the texts of realism but less revolutionary than those of the avant-garde.

Take, for example, any of the stories from Joyce’s *Dubliners* (1914). His technique of scrupulous meanness creates stories that do not so much end as stop. When Eveline cannot board the ship with Frank and stands on the quay like a terrified animal or when Mr. Doran prepares to meet his pregnant lover’s mother at the end of “The Boarding House,” their fate is meant to be clear. Eveline will never leave Dublin; Mr. Doran and Polly will accept their entrapment into marriage (and their varying degrees of complicity in it). Ibsen offers more closure when Nora leaves Helmer at the end of *Et dukkehjem* (*A Doll’s House*) from 1879, but she leaves her husband and children not to return until the “miracle of miracles:” “when we could make a real marriage of our lives together” (Ibsen [1961a], 286).<sup>5</sup> It is clear enough that Ibsen, like Nora, does not “believe in miracles anymore” (286).<sup>6</sup> Still, her decision to leave a marriage where her value is only as a doll, not a partner, was scandalous enough so that, under strong pressure, and aware of the “barbaric outrage” (Ibsen [1961b], 454) he was committing, Ibsen wrote an alternative ending for the German theatre, in which Helmer persuades Nora not to leave her children “motherless” (Ibsen [1961a], 287).

Here, the most important traditions being questioned are the social ones. In this, the theater led the way, where dramatists used prose (instead of the more traditional verse) to explore contemporary social problems. A similar commitment to questioning social codes permeates the early novels of Rebecca West, who took her pen name from the heroine of Ibsen’s *Rosmersholm* (1887). Her first novel, *The Return of the Soldier* (1917), was written during the war while she lived in a country house with her son (whose father, H. G. Wells, remained with his wife and family). *The Return of the Soldier* is one of the first novels to deal with psychoanalytic treatment for shell shock. This work, and her second novel, *The Judge* (1922), both explore the obstacles to love across social class boundaries. *The Judge*, which treats single motherhood across two generations, ends with the young suffragette heroine, Ellen Melville, suspecting that she is pregnant and accepting it as her fate (West [1980], 430).

Modern as these texts are, are they modernist? Answering that question while preserving the distinction between modernism and modernity does not preclude rethinking how we define modernism. Neither form nor chronology alone is sufficient. If we include the desire to break with social convention among the several signs that contribute to making a text modernist, we can reintegrate into the critical discourse on modernism the social urgency that motivated some modernists (and distinguished their projects from aestheticism). The social problems that Joyce and West were exploring—unwanted pregnancy, unequal and unhappy marriage, the suffocation of provincial life—were already being treated in the realist literature written just prior to and during this period. But the modernist contribution here, with its focus on the heavy toll social custom takes on the individual psyche reveals another facet of the modernist ambivalence to tradition. Furthermore, distinctions among modernism, realism, and naturalism remain. Unlike naturalist novels, with their sense of custom as a veneer and their intense interest in the contours of a character’s descent or rise,

modernist texts take custom seriously as an evil influence, and, at the same time, retain some belief in the individual's potential to shape her or his destiny. That is, for all of these characters—Eveline, Polly and Mr. Doran, Nora, and Ellen Melville—there came a moment when they held their future in their own hands. For their part, realist novels carefully delineate the whole social context in which characters operate. To the realist novelist, customs may be limiting but they are not necessarily repressive, and they function within a larger and more populated context. In contrast, the modernist attack on custom focuses on the spirited individual with enough imagination to discern his or her own entrapment. Ultimately, *A Doll's House* is not modernist drama, though Ibsen—like Thomas Hardy, Anton Chekhov, and Henry James—plays an essential role in the early history of modernism for helping shape modernism's social conscience.

Social acceptance of the complexities of race has not made such rapid progress and so the novels of Nella Larsen, especially *Passing* (1929), have suffered a different fate. *Passing*, which explores the tense, homoerotic friendship between two light-skinned, bourgeois black women, one of whom is “passing” for white, was initially praised, then neglected for decades, and is now enjoying a critical resurgence. *Passing* still seems modern—even modernist—in large measure because its treatment of homosexuality and race as social constructs remain relevant to us, three-quarters of a century after its publication. Both *The Return of the Soldier* and *Passing* explore erotically charged relationships between women, both contain discussions of modernist taste in art, clothing, and interior design, both have moments of high modernist metaphor within their fairly linear narratives, both explore the effects of social change on gender roles, in and out of marriage. But West's criticism of rigid social class boundaries and sympathetic treatment of psychic trauma have become accepted and commonly held middle class attitudes. In contrast, Larsen's trenchant criticism of a systematic racism that, by forcing people to choose a race (and thus, the role of oppressed or oppressor), encourages some non-whites to cut ties with their families in order to enjoy the social and economic opportunities of the dominant race, is a story that continues to have emotional and political force today, as does her portrait of the crushing power of sexual repression and the closet. *Passing's* continued importance, then, indicates our social failure.

Another way to judge the impact of these thematically daring works is by turning to literature from colonized peoples and to some of the first postcolonial texts. In many of these, the first generation of Western-educated men and women marked their passage from the communal world of the village to a national (if not international) bourgeois individualism through realist tales of heretofore undocumented lives. In seeking the edges of what counts as modernism, we would do well to reassess the work of writers from the colonial world, such as R. K. Narayan, Chinua Achebe, Aimé Césaire, and C. L. R. James. They present a different challenge to the question of modernism and tradition, for they pursued the language and literary models of the colonial power over and above the predominant and traditional forms of artistic expression from their homelands.

Rather than attempting to “play to the metropolitan culture's [...] perception” (Mishra [2001], 45) by writing orientalist prose, R. K. Narayan borrowed a foreign model, the social realism of English novels, for his art. The opening of *Swami and Friends*, while firmly realist in form, shows the seams of moving between two worlds: “It was Monday morning. Swaminathan was reluctant to open his eyes. He considered Monday specially unpleasant in the calendar. After the delicious freedom of Saturday and Sunday, it was difficult to get into the Monday mood of work and discipline” (Narayan [1980], 1). Everything here, from the repressed emotion of “specially unpleasant”

to the Christian shape of his week, indicates middle-class England. The boy's name is the only sign that we are elsewhere. As the novel progresses and we enter Swami's schoolboy world, the tensions among traditions, between India and England, Hindu and Christian, authority and rebellion, emerge again and again. Swami admires both Gandhi and his friend whose father is chief of imperial police; he adores cricket and idolizes its English stars; enrolled in a Christian school, he has a Brahmin boy's doubts of Jesus's divinity, for any God must surely be a vegetarian. Throughout, we see the effects of fragmented, commodified traditions on the life of an ordinary colonial boy.

In *Die Verwandlung* (Metamorphosis) from 1915, we reach another kind of limit to the ways that writers stretched the generic boundaries that would seem to separate realism, modernism, and the avant-garde. Franz Kafka's Gregor Samsa, too, dreads beginning his weekly routine, though for vastly different reasons. The allegorical literature of modernism, in which a basically realist story contains one or two outlandishly fantastic elements — a protagonist who turns into a beetle-like vermin or one who remembers everything — present a philosophical and epistemological challenge to tradition. Kafka and Jorge Luis Borges are the clear masters of this style and in their works the pressures of tradition and custom on the individual are pushed to their limits.

Typically, social change is attributed to broad and rapid historical trends: changes in industry, urbanization, and the expansion of educational opportunities. As the American and French Revolutions continued to teach the modernists, it was possible to remain within one's discursive tradition and yet to utterly reject a fundamental fact of it as traditional and entrenched as the monarchy itself. As customs became visible as things, constructed and invented, then they could be abandoned when they no longer served their purpose. Where, two centuries earlier, revolutionaries focused their attention on authoritarian governments, in the early twentieth century, writers focused on the persistence of authoritative thinking in social custom and familial structure. Texts that question tradition as it is lived play an absolutely central role in making tradition visible. This is true even of the early drama and the late-colonial and early postcolonial literature, texts that stand just on the border of modernism. As part of the commodification of the past, perhaps few texts are as important as these, for they examine what society takes for granted and show its artifice and its undesirability.

## Vernacular Traditions

Closely connected to those texts with modernist themes, but operating in a slightly different cultural register, were those texts that self-consciously incorporated vernacular traditions into their high modernist discourse. Many of these works were in conscious dialogue with the emergent field of anthropology. But our ability to see this connection should not blind us to the mixed reception of these works when first published.

In 1926, Langston Hughes published "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" to encourage other African-American writers to acknowledge their heritage in their work. In doing so, he marked the difficulty of the endeavor:

The Negro artist works against an undertow of sharp criticism and misunderstanding from his own group and unintentional bribes from the whites [...] Both would have told Jean Toomer not to write *Cane*. The colored people did not praise it. The white people did not buy it. (Hughes [1998], 420)

Few careers exemplify what it might mean to overcome the dual obstacles of misunderstandings from other blacks and the condescension and worse of whites than Hughes's sometime friend and collaborator, Zora Neale Hurston. Furthermore, Hurston's reception well illustrates the principles of resonance, for, until Barbara Johnson's "Metaphor, Metonymy and Voice" (1984), critics heard the difference between Janie's speech (largely in the vernacular) and the narrative (standard written English, full of high-modernist metaphor) as a flaw in the novel's style or a marker of Janie's social class rather than as evidence of Hurston's liberating and celebratory incorporation of multiple traditions.

In terms of tradition, what makes Hurston important is her modern, intellectual, and professional relationship to the folk tradition she documents (in work such as *Mules and Men*, 1935) and transforms (most notably in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 1937) and her ability to blend that tradition with the literary innovations of modernism. Throughout the thirties, she "worked closely with a number of prominent Boasians, including Melville Herskovits [...] and Ruth Benedict" (Gambrell [1997], 101), and *Mules and Men* was a distinctly Boasian project. Nonetheless, Boas's preface singles out her access—"she entered into the homely life of the southern Negro as one of them" (Boas [1978], x)—and her "loveable personality" (Boas [1978], x), not her intelligence or acumen.

Like Hurston, whose work moves among all her worlds—Harlem, Columbia University, Eatonville, Florida—D. H. Lawrence combines the worlds of the miner, the bohemian Londoner, and the exile while focusing on the pain of being trapped in a working class world and of leaving it behind. In stories such as "Odour of Chrysanthemums," Lawrence (like Hurston) moves from detailed aestheticized description to dialect, as in this scene where Elizabeth Bates solicits another miner, Rigley's, help in looking for her alcoholic husband, not yet knowing he has been killed in the pit:

Rigley was big man, with very large bones. His head looked particularly bony. Across his temple was a blue scar, caused by a wound got in the pit, a wound in which the coal dust remained blue like tattooing. "Asna 'e come whoam yit?" asked the man, without any greeting, but with deference and sympathy. (Lawrence [1974], 292)

Our introduction to the man teaches us to admire him first as a physical specimen. Lawrence presents his speech authentically, and then teaches us how to hear it. Rigley is handsome and scarred by work; he is abrupt, but respectful and sympathetic—and, in the European canon, few emotions rank higher than sympathy, which he expresses.

Later, as the pregnant Elizabeth examines her husband's corpse, she experiences an isolating sexual anguish: "she knew what a stranger he was to her. In her womb was ice of fear, because of this separate stranger with whom she had been living as one flesh" (Lawrence [1974], 300). Like Hurston and like Thomas Hardy, from whom Lawrence learned so much, Lawrence emphasizes the spiritual, emotional, and intellectual depth of his uneducated characters. And when he writes about a middle-class character, he still finds ways to incorporate the vernacular: as a story of origin in *The Rainbow* (1915) and *Women in Love* (1920), as a topic of personal and anthropological interest in *Women in Love*, *Kangaroo* (1923), and *The Plumed Serpent* (1926), or, most notoriously, as objects of desire, as in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928).

While Hurston and Lawrence welcomed the opportunity to combine urban modernism with elements of a rural folk tradition, the Irish literary revival maintained a more skeptical stance toward the modern. Thus, in William Butler Yeats's most famous lyric, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," he may

be “on the roadway, or on the pavements grey” (Yeats [1983], 39) but even there he hears “lake water lapping” “in the deep heart’s core” (Yeats [1983], 39). For Seamus Deane, this effort to reject the modern is central to the emergence of a distinctively Irish national literature:

Ireland would become a nation by recovering its traditions and refusing both modernization and modernity. The irony is that such a refusal, variously formulated by many writers, was itself one of the critical features of modernity. Tradition, once conceptualized in this fashion, was already lost; modernity, once refused and dismissed was already in place. (Deane [1995], 364)

For Gayatri Spivak, women of the developing world are especially trapped in this paradox: “Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the ‘third world woman’ caught between tradition and modernization” (Spivak [1988], 306). Both Spivak and Deane re-inscribe the oppositional relationship between tradition and the modern, even modernism. Writers who incorporated the vernacular into their work thematized and lived the “violent shuttling” between worlds that Spivak describes. In doing so, however, they changed both worlds. Hurston and Lawrence each effected a recovery from within. These writers profited from a more flexible notion of tradition by asserting the centrality of their own traditions and, in writing work that integrated highbrow modernist techniques with their own vernacular, they expanded the boundaries of tradition.

### Integration and Separatism

In “Figurations for a New American Literary History,” Houston Baker contrasts the racial and racist orthodoxies that constrained American literary history for generations with the investigative openness of paleontology. While literary historians trapped themselves in a notion of ever-refining, ever-progressing Eurocentric tradition, scientists could continually revise what they knew as new evidence arose: if what was first thought to be a tooth turned out to be a thumb spike, as in Baker’s example, then so be it. No orthodoxies need be disrupted; science advances. But when early literary historians of the United States began to include Native American and African-American literature in their accounts, they confined those texts to appendices, ignoring (even rejecting) the possibility of integrating more than one tradition into their grand narrative of American national development. Extending Baker’s analogy beyond the borders of the United States, might we not, by opening the definition of tradition to new resonances, find new ways to understand how tradition operates within modernism? If, in doing so, we unseat some old orthodoxies about how tradition operates or what counts as tradition, then all the better. Like Wai-Chee Dimock, Baker celebrates the present discovery that alters how we read the past.

Rita Felski argues that, while “modernism [...] can be situated in historical time” (Felski [1995], 22) there is much less agreement regarding the movement’s sociopolitical consequences (Felski [1995], 23). Nonetheless, for Felski, whether we are looking at the more political tradition of the Continent or the rarefied aestheticism of the Anglo-American context, “[b]oth of these traditions, nevertheless, are united in their largely uncritical reproduction of a masculine—and often overtly masculinist—literary lineage” (Felski [1995], 24). For Felski, however, “the feminist critique of

literary history is best achieved not by denying the existence of formal and aesthetic distinctions between texts [as those who would erase the distinction between modern and modernist might have it], but rather by questioning and rethinking the meanings that are frequently assigned to these distinctions" (Felski [1995], 25).

Both Houston Baker and Rita Felski have explicit theoretical goals related to identity categories (race or gender). In this pursuit, their precursors are Ralph Ellison and Virginia Woolf, who first showed us that, if the past is a commodity, it is possible to work with it and use it to construct a tradition amenable to one's aesthetic and political goals and, in the case of both these writers, a tradition which seems to come to its natural culmination in one's own work. For if the best literature, for Ellison, combines the alienation and existential angst of European philosophical modernism with a blues sensibility, then is not *Invisible Man* (1954) the best novel? Or if the best literature, for Woolf, finds a way to express the heretofore unheard voice of Judith Shakespeare, does that voice not find its way into print in *A Room of One's Own* (1929)?

The tense discussions about jazz that ensue between the invisible man and his white communist companions signal the complexity of Ellison's integrationist vision. While the invisible man is rightly insulted at the implication that any black man naturally has the voice of a Paul Robeson (Ellison [1995], 312), his story closes by linking Louis Armstrong to existentialism, by claiming that Armstrong's performance contains the knowledge of existential doubt and pain (Ellison [1995], 580–1). This claim, so bold then, has become apparent to us now. But we see African-American literature as part of the American inheritance in a large measure thanks to writers such as Ellison.

In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf argued that women have a different experience of the world from men and that literature by women should be expected to be different—in subject and in style—and thereby be judged by different criteria. Though Woolf herself profited greatly from her close study of precursors of both sexes and though she argued—in the same text—that the very greatest works of literature were the products of androgynous minds, her statement that "we think back through our mothers if we are women" and her account in *A Room of One's Own* of the history of English literature as written by women made visible a tradition that had been present all along. Her impact has been stunning, though, like Ellison's it is by now quite familiar, inspiring multitudinous studies, from the philological (for instance Margaret J. M. Ezell's *Writing Women's Literary History*, 1993) to the personal (for instance Alice Walker's *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, 1984), all aimed at giving wider recognition to the long-neglected voices of women.

Though their emphases are different, both Ellison and Woolf make similar, highly individual modernist claims: that their intelligence and their experience count, in all its particularity and in all its centrality. In both cases, this is a cosmopolitan and highly politicized gesture. It is one that subsequent writers have distanced themselves from. Yet it cannot be denied that, in Ellison's insistence on the always-already presence of African-Americans in American literature, in Woolf's tracing of a woman's tradition of writing, they both showed their followers a new way of arranging the canon. In so doing, they remade tradition.

In their manifestoes, if not always in their aesthetic texts, the modernist pioneers sought to shake off the burden of the past. The effect of this unburdening was as if an ancient vase had shattered on the floor. Faced with a mass of fragments, writers adopted very different strategies. Some felt liberated, as had been the intent of the vase-breakers. Others became anxious curators. But most strug-

gled to find some workable compromise, choosing to save some fragments from their own past, some from the past of other cultures or the disenfranchised segments of their own. In every case, what the modernists shared was the consciousness of the past *as* a commodity that they could manipulate, construct, use, or abandon. While the modernists actively resisted anything traditional in their work, they mined the past for heretofore-overlooked models of innovation and imagination. In so doing, they ushered in a broader and more flexible notion of the past while advocating a radically individual understanding of tradition. And that notion lies at the heart of modernism's complex bequest to us.

## Notes

1. "Il faut être absolument moderne" (Rimbaud [1967], 208).
2. "Et comme dans ce jeu où les Japonais s'amuse à tremper dans un bol de porcelaine rempli d'eau, de petits morceaux de papier jusqu-là indistincts qui, à peine y sont-ils plongés, s'étirent, se contournent, se colorent, se différencient, deviennent des fleurs, des maisons, des personnages consistants et reconnaissables, de même maintenant toutes les fleurs de notre jardin [...] et tout Combray et ses environs [...] est sorti, ville et jardins, de ma tasse de thé" (Proust [1919], vol. I, 73).
3. "sich mit der Fremdheit der Sprachen auseinanderzusetzen" (Benjamin [1992], 56).
4. "das gerade unter allen Formen ihr als Eigenstes es zufällt, auf jene Nachreife des fremden Wortes, auf die Wehen des eigenen zu merken" (Benjamin [1992], 55).
5. "Nevn meg dette vidunderligste! [. . .] At samliv mellom oss to kunne bli et ekteskap" (Ibsen [1996], <http://www.lysator.liu.se/runeberg/dukkhjem/3.html>).
6. "jeg tror ikke lenger på noe vidunderlig" (Ibsen [1996], <http://www.lysator.liu.se/runeberg/dukkhjem/3.html>).

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## Myths of Rupture

### The Manifesto and the Concept of Avant-Garde

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The history of the manifesto represents a history of modernity in a nutshell. In this medium, different political groups, artistic movements, literary “schools” and individual authors have proclaimed and defined their ideas of modernity. The genre is an open field of conflict in which different conceptions of modernity are played out against one another, thus manifesting the heterogeneous character of modernity. Since the second phase of the French Revolution, the manifesto has served as a fundamental tool for reflecting social and aesthetic modernity and offered a unique medium for proclamations and counter-proclamations, definitions and re-definitions of “the modern.”

Manifestoes do not simply mirror the paradoxes of modernity. As a product of various discourses of modernity the manifesto has over two centuries engraved the conflicts of modernization into its own structure and rhetorical codes. Once the manifesto has established itself as a paradigmatic medium of modernity at the end of the eighteenth century it both reflects and reproduces the paradoxes of social modernity as an inherent part of its own horizon of expectation. Within the boundaries of the manifesto, writers do not only pick up myths, theories and ideas from the social or cultural context, but these elements are also reproduced, reflected, re-appropriated and negated as constitutive aspects of the genre itself. The textual corpus of the modern manifesto thus constitutes an archive of the foundation myths of modernity from the French Revolution up to the present day. Because of its appropriation by different political and aesthetic theories, the manifesto offers a unique possibility to analyze the often strikingly different conceptions of modernity from a historical viewpoint. The different strategies that artists and political thinkers have used to appropriate the genre to their own ideological ends represent a hegemonic battle between the different discourses within which manifestoes have been written and distributed. As a meta-discourse of political and aesthetic modernity the manifesto is both a representative medium and a textual embodiment of their paradoxes.

Since its emergence in the French Revolution, the subversive manifesto has been related to the most radical conceptions of modernity, its rhetoric showing the dynamic character of the idea of “the modern” in an extremely clear light rarely to be found in other genres. The manifesto constitutes a discursive sphere in which the ideological conflicts of modernity are brought to their extreme limits and played out there. Of central importance in this respect is the close relationship of the manifesto with the mythology of historical rupture that is characteristic of modernity. For more than two centuries the manifesto has served as the preferred medium for aesthetic and political thinkers to project their millenarian visions of a total renewal; visions which culminate in the manifestoes

of the avant-garde movements in the early twentieth century and their project of an all-embracing cultural and spiritual renewal.

The political manifesto emerges in the French-speaking world in the late sixteenth century as “a public writing in which one or more responsible politicians make known their views or explain their conduct” (*Trésor de la langue française* [1985]).<sup>1</sup> In the seventeenth century the term enters into other European languages, where it is used to define war declarations and other official proclamations of political rulers. At the end of the seventeenth century, the word “manifesto” gains a broader meaning, as it is also used to designate declarations by powerful groups and individuals in society. This use of the term is dominant in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and remains current into the twentieth century (see van den Berg [1997], 60). Yet, fundamental changes can be seen in the use of the term in the second phase of the French Revolution. Radical groups of Jacobins start publishing “manifestoes” in which they present their demands for radical social change, the two primary examples being Gracchus Babeuf’s “Manifeste des plébéiens” (Manifesto of the Plebeians) and Sylvain Maréchal’s “Manifeste des égaux” (The Manifesto of Equals).

Although the subversive manifesto has a prehistory in political discourse in the seventeenth century, for example in the proclamations of the Levellers and Diggers in England (see Lyon [1999], 16–23) and radical pamphlets (the so-called “mazarinades”) in France (see Malsch [1997], 50–7), the wake of the French Revolution marks a turning point in the history of the genre. To cite Marjorie Perloff: “the manifesto had become the mode of agonism, the voice of those who are *contra*—whether against king or pope or ruling class or simply against the existing state of affairs” (Perloff [1986], 82). The emergence of the revolutionary manifesto presents what can be defined with Judith Butler as a “subversive resignification” of the genre (Butler [1997], 141–59). Authoritarian discourse and its preferred medium are appropriated and iterated in a new context, thus revealing its ideological premises and creating a new space for articulating power. This subversive resignification is related to structural transformations of the public sphere, the rise of a radical critique of the bourgeois concept of the public that has been described as the emergence of an alternative “proletarian” or “plebeian” public sphere (Lyon [1999], 9–45). The subversive manifesto has the function of manifesting the will of “the people” (*le peuple*) as opposed to the bourgeois “citizen” (*le citoyen*), in order to demonstrate the exclusion of the lower classes from revolutionary discourse and articulate its demands to participate in it. This turning point marks the beginning of the genre’s close relationship with revolutionary politics in the following centuries. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries numerous manifestoes are launched by socialist groups, texts ranging from utopian socialists, through Marx and Engels to the Russian Bolsheviks. Following the formation of the socialist manifesto, the term is also used for a number of texts published by different radical groups from the end of the eighteenth up to the twentieth century, such as anarchists, nationalists and feminists.

The subversive manifesto is closely related to the emerging concept of a revolutionary “avant-garde.” Towards the end of the French Revolution the term “avant-garde,” rooted in French military language, is to an increasing degree used by radical groups of Jacobins to describe their own political “battle” (see Calinescu [1989], 90–2). In the same way as the belief in an elite of revolutionaries leading the political battle is coined in the concept of a political “vanguard,” the manifesto presents the perfect medium for such groups to articulate their political demands. Claude Leroy’s remark on the historical avant-garde, that “the manifesto has certainly become the discursive formation of the avant-gardes *par excellence* because it regards itself as the avant-garde of discourse” (Leroy [1997],

277),<sup>2</sup> thus emphasizes a constitutive trait of the subversive manifesto since its emergence in the late eighteenth century. The manifesto brings the revolutionary discourse of modernity to its radical edge, transforms it into a programmatic declaration of an historical transgression opening up a new cultural, social or discursive space.

A reading of subversive manifestoes from the French Revolution into the nineteenth century shows a close connection between the genre and the revolutionary "avant-garde." The primary function of these manifestoes is to reveal the vanguard's deeper knowledge of teleology, whether the texts are understood as the "proclamation of the true primary code of nature" (Babeuf [1965], 212),<sup>3</sup> as in Babeuf's text, or defined in terms of historical materialism as the revelation of "the history of all society up to date as the history of class struggle" (Marx and Engels [1976], 26).<sup>4</sup> The texts are furthermore characterized by a highly metaphoric style that transgresses the boundaries of political and literary discourse. As Marjorie Perloff has pointed out, Marx and Engels's *Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei* has a paradigmatic function in this context, since it was its "curiously mixed rhetoric [...] its preamble itself something of a prose poem, that paved the way for the grafting of the poetic onto the political discourse" (Perloff [1986], 82). It should be noted, that the "mixed rhetoric" of *Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei* (Manifesto of the Communist Party) is rooted in an aestheticized conception of politics which emerges within socialist discourse at the end of the eighteenth and in the early nineteenth centuries, as can be seen clearly for example in Maréchal's "Manifeste des Égaux" and Giuseppe Mazzini's "Manifesto della 'giovine Italia'" (Manifesto of 'Young Italy'). The aestheticized representation of politics in these texts is marked by a belief in the revolutionary power of language. The subversive manifesto not only supports political praxis, it is conceived as a revolutionary rhetoric act. It is the product of fundamental changes in radical rhetoric in the French Revolution, related to its politicization of social life and the conception of symbolic practices as a fundamental aspect of revolutionary praxis (see Hunt [1984], 19–119). The growing impact of literary imagery on political rhetoric is closely related to the socialist belief in the revolutionary power of aesthetic imagination. The "mixed rhetoric" of the subversive manifesto presents an instrumentalization of the historical function of aesthetics by political authority, the conflict between political and aesthetic modernity thus forming a constituent factor of the medium since its emergence in the late eighteenth century.

The intrinsic relationship between revolutionary ideology and aesthetic imagination also affects the evolution of the aesthetic discourse of modernity, the political concept of a revolutionary vanguard being transmitted into the sphere of art and literature in the early nineteenth century. The first known text in which "avant-garde" is used in an aesthetic context is "L'Artiste, le savant et l'industriel" (The Artist, the Scientist and the Industrialist, 1825) by Olindes Rodrigues, a disciple of the utopian socialist Saint-Simon (see Egbert [1967]). The dialogue is marked by a romantic belief in the liberating powers of the aesthetic. The artists are defined as the vanguard of the revolution because they have "all kinds of arms"<sup>5</sup> at their disposal to "spread new ideas amongst men"<sup>6</sup> and are able to "have an electric and triumphant influence" on them (Rodrigues [1966], 210).<sup>7</sup> The kinship of the political concept of an aesthetic "avant-garde" and romantic ideas is more explicit in *De la mission de l'art et du rôle des artistes* (On the Mission of the Arts and the Role of the Artists, 1845) by the Fourierist Gabriel Désiré Laverdant: "Art, the expression of Society, expresses in its highest flight the most advanced social tendencies, it is precursory and revealing" (cited in Calinescu [1989], 197).<sup>8</sup>

The metaphor of an aesthetic “avant-garde” is picked up in the literary writings of numerous authors in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—among others by Shelley, Lamartine, Hugo, Heine, Rimbaud, Zola and Strindberg (see Calinescu [1987]; Barck [2000])—and becomes one of the central notions in definitions of aesthetic modernity. Whereas the political concept marks the subordination of art to politics, aesthetic descriptions stress that the autonomy of the aesthetic is a necessary condition for literature and arts to fulfil their revolutionary role as an “avant-garde”—a conception which finds its radical conclusion in André Breton’s and Léon Trotsky’s manifesto “Pour un art révolutionnaire indépendant” (For an Independent Revolutionary Art, 1938). Political aims remain of central importance for defining the emancipating power of literature, but are defined in a broader context. The poet is represented as “the unacknowledged legislator of the world” (Shelley [1977]) or as “a seer” whose “poetry will no longer take its rhythm from action; it *will be ahead of it*” (Rimbaud [1998], 569).<sup>9</sup>

The integration of the concept of avant-garde into the field of literature and arts leads to the emergence of the aesthetic manifesto. In the first literary manifestoes, published in the 1820s and 1830s, the term is used to designate affirmative texts presenting an authoritarian academic critique of new aesthetic ideas mainly stemming from romanticism. Characteristic examples of this use can be found in Auger’s *Manifeste contre le romantisme* (Manifesto Against Romanticism, 1824), Guiraud’s *Nos doctrines. Manifeste de la Muse française* (Our Doctrines. Manifesto of the French Muse, 1824) and Echtermeyer and Ruge’s *Der Protestantismus und die Romantik. Ein Manifest* (1839–1840). In the course of the nineteenth century the manifesto and other types of programmatic texts are to an increasing degree used by writers and artists to explain and justify their modern aesthetics. The emergence of the aesthetic manifesto in the nineteenth century is closely related to transformations of the literary and artistic market which made writers and artists dependent on a new public. The need to produce manifestoes is caused by a breach in the communication between author or artist and the public. The work of art no longer seems capable of mediating its own message or intention, it is in need of a meta-aesthetic discourse to fulfil this intermediary function (see Backes-Haase [1992], 11) as can be seen from the numerous programmatic texts published in this period. By the turn of the century, the manifesto has become the preferred medium for postulating and claiming radical aesthetic renewal, an inseparable part of the foundation and cultural practices of new artistic and literary “schools” representing their ideas, aims and premises in order to separate themselves from other aesthetic trends and movements. This can be seen from such characteristic texts as Jean Moréas’s “Le Symbolisme” (1886), Anatole Baju’s “manifesto” of decadence entitled “Aux Lecteurs!” (To the Readers!, 1886) and Jules Romain’s “Les sentiments unanimes et la poésie” (Unanimous Feelings and Poetry, 1905).

If Wolfgang Asholt and Walter Fähnders’s remark on the historical avant-garde, that movements, magazines and “isms” which did not publish manifestoes are rarely to be found (Asholt and Fähnders [1995], xv), also seems to count for symbolism, “*fin de siècle*” and decadence, one fundamental difference is to be noted. Although great numbers of programmatic texts are produced in the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century, only a few of these are entitled “manifestoes.” The term is primarily a “tool” of reception, which causes several methodological problems in drawing the parameters of the genre and reconstructing its history (see van den Berg [1998]). It should be stressed that a great number of texts that today are known as “manifestoes,” were originally published under other titles, although they are defined as “manifestoes” early in the

history of their reception. Well-known examples of this procedure are the “manifestoes” of Moréas and Bajou mentioned above.

The history of the manifesto in the nineteenth century appears at first glance to be the history of two unrelated genres, an assumption that may seem to find its verification for example in the strict separation of political proclamations and programmatic literary texts in the writings of Émile Zola—the political treatise “J’accuse” (I Accuse, 1898) and the literary essay “Le roman expérimental” (The Experimental Novel, 1887) providing the prime examples. At a closer look, however, the historical threads of the political and the aesthetic manifestoes in the nineteenth century prove to be interwoven in various ways. Even the literary or artistic manifestoes that declare the absolute autonomy of the aesthetic, show obvious traces of political rhetoric. In “Le Symbolisme,” Jean Moréas represents literary history as a cyclic evolution within an autonomous field, declaring that “each new phase in the evolution of the arts corresponds exactly with the senile decrepitude, the inescapable end of the school just before it” (Moréas [1966], 27).<sup>10</sup> His description of this evolution, however, is strongly marked by the military and revolutionary imagery characteristic of the political manifesto:

Thus Romanticism, after it had sounded all the tumultuous tocsins of revolt, after it had lived its days of glory and battle, lost its force and grace, abdicated its heroic deeds, became settled, sceptical and full of understanding [...] until it finally let itself be dethroned by Naturalism like a monarch fallen into infancy. (Moréas [1966], 27)<sup>11</sup>

Moréas’s text is symptomatic of a discursive shift at the end of the nineteenth century. The *analogie* drawn up between literary and political history shows an aesthetic discourse trying to separate itself from politics in order to found its own autonomous sphere. At the same time it engraves the rhetorical codes embedded in the form of the manifesto and the concept of avant-garde into its own rationality. It would be the contribution of the avant-garde movements at the beginning of the next century to reunite the concept of an aesthetic avant-garde and the literary genre of the manifesto in a programmatic manner. Through hundreds of manifestoes published and distributed all over Europe and inexhaustible self-stylizations as a cultural and spiritual avant-garde, movements such as futurism, dada, surrealism, vorticism, De Stijl and ultraism (to mention only some of the best known) establish an intrinsic relationship between manifesto and avant-garde, turning them into inseparable components of aesthetic modernity in the early twentieth century.

The historical avant-garde also marks the beginning of an extensive and targeted production of aesthetic manifestoes. Not only are most of the texts, in which the foundation of those movements is declared and their projects described, explicitly named “manifestoes.” For the first time in the history of modernism, the publication of manifestoes is accompanied by numerous poetic reflections on the genre. As W. Fähnders has pointed out: “at the beginning of the historical avant-garde movements stands not only a manifesto, but also the reflection on the writing of manifestoes, a poetics of the manifesto in nuce” (Fähnders [1997], 26).<sup>12</sup> By labelling their texts manifestoes, the avant-garde movements distance themselves from the aesthetic “manifestoes” of the “*fin de siècle*” and emphasize the political genealogy of the genre. By making the manifesto the primary medium of its aesthetic praxis, the historical avant-garde determines it as an aesthetic *and* political project. The manifestoes of the avant-garde present a radical break with the traditional function of the aesthetic manifesto as a secondary medium declaring and explaining the aesthetic means of artistic



and literary production. The manifestoes of the avant-garde are complex rhetorical performances aiming at the transformation of the modern subject. The project of the avant-garde also represents a re-definition of the political, expanding its boundaries to cover the sphere of culture in its totality. The avant-garde manifesto is the driving force of an all-embracing cultural renewal often described by the protagonists as a "spiritual revolution." A characteristic example may be found in "Manifest Proletkunst" (Manifesto of Proletarian Art), a text written by the Dutch constructivist Theo van Doesburg and published in Kurt Schwitters's periodical *Merz* in 1923, with signatures by leading artists of the international avant-garde (Schwitters, Hans Arp, Tristan Tzara and Christof Spengemann): "Art, such as we want it, art is neither proletarian nor bourgeois, because it unfolds powers which are strong enough to affect the whole of culture, instead of letting itself be affected by social conditions" (van Doesburg et al. [1923], 299).<sup>13</sup>

The expansion of the political sphere is explicitly reflected in the use of the metaphor and the concept of "avant-garde." The avant-garde movements negate the symbolist and aestheticist notion of "avant-garde" by linking their own projects with the political concept of an aesthetic "vanguard." The political concept, on the other hand, is redefined in terms of the avant-garde's project of cultural and spiritual renewal. The German expressionist Herbert Kühn proclaims: "the artists are ahead of their times, they prepare the ground, they engrave the hearts, they sow the seeds" (Kühn [1995], 178),<sup>14</sup> the Russian futurist Alexei Kruchenykh declares that "art marches in the avant-garde of psychic evolution" (Kruchenykh [1988], 70) and the dadaist Richard Huelsenbeck stresses the necessity of "constantly returning to the true interests of men to build a vanguard for a new, more fortunate time" (cited in van den Berg [1999], 283–4).<sup>15</sup> Finally one can refer to van Doesburg's "Revue der Avantgarde" from 1921, in which he defines the new avant-garde as a watchword uniting "all modern and ultra-modern groups of the whole world"<sup>16</sup> in an "International of the Spirit" (cited in van den Berg [1999], 46).<sup>17</sup>

In her analysis of the futurist manifesto, Marjorie Perloff has described the break with the political manifesto as "the transformation of what had traditionally been a vehicle for political statement into a literary, one might say, a quasi-poetic construct" (Perloff [1986], 82). The emphasis on the poetic character of the avant-garde manifesto should not lead to the conclusion that these texts must be analyzed as autonomous literary texts in a traditional sense. As Janet Lyon has pointed out, Perloff's analysis leads to her leaving aside "the politicality of the aesthetic manifesto *as well as* the literary artistry of the political manifesto: in her brief formulation, political rhetoric as art disappears" (Lyon [1999], 79). As a response to Lyon's remark it should be noted, however, that the poetic character of the avant-garde manifesto is a constitutive element of the genre. The concept of aesthetic autonomy is not strictly negated in the manifestoes, it is redefined as an integral part of the project of the avant-garde, the aesthetic devices embedded into the genre playing a central role in the creation of a new *aesthetic* culture. The avant-garde manifesto marks the emergence of a new conception of aesthetic activism. The paradigmatic shift in the history of the genre related to the aesthetic praxis of the avant-garde consists, as Hanno Ehrlicher has pointed out, in the transformation of the manifesto from a medium for proclaiming radical renewal into "a medial event of the 'new'" (Ehrlicher [2001], 89).<sup>18</sup> The genre is based on an "aesthetic will to power which no longer only tries to elucidate its phantasies to the public, but to pull them through by means of activism" (Ehrlicher [2001], 89).<sup>19</sup> This represents at once a radical break with the traditional conception of the aesthetic manifesto as a secondary medium and an attempt to surmount the instrumental conception of language

inherent to the political manifesto by a “subversive resignification” of its rhetoric. By transforming the historical event traditionally declared in the political manifesto into a poetic event, the historical avant-garde defines language itself as the driving force of history, thus making revolutionary action inseparable from the linguistic performance of the manifesto itself: the manifesto is simultaneously the declaration and the execution of its own revolutionary action.

In order to describe the relevance of the manifesto for the project of the avant-garde it is necessary to analyze it in its own specificity as a poetic genre. The avant-garde manifesto is based on a complex conception of the relationship of aesthetics and politics, it is a textual medium of “poeticized action” (Tzara [1981], 211),<sup>20</sup> to cite a formulation of Tristan Tzara. Tzara’s concept describes the attempt of the avant-garde to “rise against the mechanical materialism”<sup>21</sup> of modernity in order to “escape history and violate it, to surmount it and stamp one’s own will on it” (Tzara [1981], 211).<sup>22</sup> By stressing the meaning of the “will,” Tzara points to the key role of the manifesto in the project of the avant-garde, its function as an irrational and aesthetic device to “stamp one’s own will” on history. The manifesto is a radical manifestation of the anti-determinism lying at the core of the aesthetics of the avant-garde, the textual embodiment of its belief in the possibility of changing the course of history by aesthetic means. The manifestoes of the avant-garde are an attempt to open ways out of the “absolute determinism” (Aragon [1924–1925], 23)<sup>23</sup> of modern society, texts marked by a profound belief in the revolutionary power of language, in which the determinist conception of history as a “superior and external force” (Tzara [1981], 211)<sup>24</sup> ruled by mechanical laws beyond the range of the creative faculties of the human subject is negated.

The project of the avant-garde is related to different irrationalist theories in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which present a radical critique of “determinist” conceptions of history and stress the importance of the human will. This does not only refer to well-known theories such as Nietzsche’s “will to power,” Schopenhauer’s conception of the “world as will and idea” or Bergson’s theory of “creative evolution,” but also theories from different scientific fields such as biology, political theory, occultism and philosophical pragmatism. To get a deeper understanding of the poetics of the manifesto it is necessary to analyze how such irrationalist and anti-determinist theories are appropriated in the manifestoes of the historical avant-garde.

The transformation of the manifesto through the historical avant-garde finds an exemplary expression in the writings of the Italian futurist Filippo Tommaso Marinetti and his ideas about the “art of making manifestoes” (Marinetti [1986a], 144).<sup>25</sup> Through the publication of “Le Futurisme” — better known as “The Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism” — in the French daily *Le Figaro* on 20 February 1909, Marinetti not only opened the field for the hundreds of avant-garde manifestoes published in the following years, but also played a fundamental role in fixing the rhetorical, structural and aesthetic characteristics of the genre. This is not to say that the “Manifesto of Futurism” must be read as a prototype of the avant-garde manifesto but rather that later avant-garde movements presenting their programs in this genre needed to define their texts in confrontation with the futurist manifesto. This was partly done in an affirmative way, but more often in a critical appropriation of the futurist genre. Marinetti’s rhetoric and his conception of the “art of writing manifestoes” thus offer the possibility of analyzing the poetics of the avant-garde manifesto in its formation. Furthermore, the aggressive tone of Marinetti’s texts reflects the theoretical basis of the genre with a clarity not often found in the writings of other authors of the avant-garde. It should be noted, that Marinetti’s texts are characterized by a monophonic rhetoric which is often broken up in the praxis

of later avant-garde movements, such as dada for example, through polyphonic, ironic and playful modes of representation.

Looking back at the beginning of futurism in *Guerra sola igiene del mondo* (War, the World's only Hygiene, 1915), Marinetti asserts: "My Italian blood took a leap, as my lips discovered aloud the word Futurism. It was the new formula of Art-action and a law of spiritual hygiene" (Marinetti [1983a], 235).<sup>26</sup> In the following passage he traces the origin of the movement back to a historic event, when, after six years of fighting for the "liberation of the Italian lyrical genius from traditional and commercial fetters," he finally understood that "articles, poetry and polemics would no longer do. One definitely had to change the method and go out on the street, attack the theatre and introduce the slap into the artistic battle" (Marinetti [1983a], 235).<sup>27</sup>

Notably, Marinetti does not see futurism only as a conscious attempt to invade the public sphere. By describing the futurist project as a means of introducing the "slap" into the artistic battle, he also refers to an ideological function which had been metaphorically coined as a constitutive trait of the avant-garde manifesto by the Russian cubo-futurists as early as 1912 with the foundation manifesto "Slap in the Face of Public Taste." Marinetti presents the foundation of futurism as a conscious break with his own symbolist experiments to revolutionize the spirit of modern man through the creation of "free verse" and other literary devices. The break with symbolism had been indicated in earlier texts, in which Marinetti had attacked Gabriele d'Annunzio as the personification of the "intellectual poisons" (Marinetti [1911], 88)<sup>28</sup> of symbolism, pointing out the paradox between his aestheticism and his political aims. For Marinetti, the works of d'Annunzio embody a failed attempt to politicize literature, because of his belief in literature's "direct influence on the masses," who in fact "live in a perfect ignorance of the poets" (Marinetti [1983b], 401).<sup>29</sup> Marinetti's critique of d'Annunzio's symbolism shows an aesthetic activist in search of new means for his battle and the emergence of a new conception of aesthetic activism aiming at the integration of aesthetics into modern life.

Marinetti's poetic reflections on "free verse" anticipate many of the fundamental aspects of futurism. In 1909 Marinetti even describes "free verse" as the origin of the futurist revolution, which had shown the "urgent necessity of totally freeing the Italian soul of the past and everyday mediocrity" (cited in Lista [1995], 130).<sup>30</sup> From Marinetti's point of view, the free verse of the later futurists represents a radical break with the aesthetics of French symbolism expressed in the "free verse" of authors such as Gustave Kahn and Jules Laforgue. He accuses the French symbolists of sticking to the idea of aesthetic autonomy, thus essentially excluding all possibilities of transferring the "creative and anti-formal individualism" (cited in Lista [1995], 129)<sup>31</sup> of free verse into other cultural spheres. For the futurist, free verse not only offers the possibility of mediating the rhythm of industrialized modernity, it is also a "perpetual dynamism of thought" (Marinetti [1911], 90)<sup>32</sup> capable of liberating the consciousness of modern man: "It is the dynamism of our elastic consciousness perfectly realized. The integral self is ceaselessly sung of, painted, sculpted in its perpetual becoming" (Marinetti [1911], 90).<sup>33</sup> Free verse is not an aesthetic procedure of stylistic or literary renewal but the manifestation of an unrestrained aesthetic imagination. The formation of the futurist manifesto presents the radicalization of the revolutionary impetus of free verse into an organized project. With futurism Marinetti aims at developing new political strategies in order to create a new powerful space for the aesthetic within modern society. Through its traditional function as a political medium revealing the "natural laws" of history, the manifesto offers ideal conditions for connecting radical aesthetic renewal and political battle. In the futurist manifesto, Marinetti forms a synthesis of the

political and the aesthetic manifesto in order to establish his revolutionary movement as an aesthetic and political vanguard.

The term “avant-garde” appears in Marinetti’s writings as early as 1906, where it is used to describe a group of modernist writers, including Charles Vildrac, Georges Duhamel and Henri Martin Barzun, known under the name “Abbaye” (see Lista [1995], 60). Marinetti belonged to a group of sympathizers who attended the meetings of this “phalanstery of artists,” as it was called by its members with reference to the utopian communities of Fourierists in the nineteenth century (see Kreuzer [2000], 269). Marinetti’s use of the term shows obvious traces of the socialist concept of an aesthetic avant-garde. In this period the term “avant-garde” is widely distributed in the discourse of revolutionary syndicalists and other radical groups in Italy, appearing for example in the name of the national-syndicalist organization “Associazione nazionale d’avanguardia” which was founded in 1910 with Marinetti as one of its founding-members (Sternhell [1994], 236). Marinetti’s connections with revolutionary syndicalism can not only be seen in the numerous texts which he publishes in their organs, but also in the extensive discussions of the relationship of futurism and syndicalism in his writings. In “I nostri nemici comuni” (Our Common Enemies), published in the syndicalist organ *La Demolizione* in 1910, he tries to mobilize the revolutionaries in art and politics in a joint revolt against the powers of the past:

The most extreme wings of politics and literature will sweep away the sky, still glowing after the blood-bath, in one frenetic blow. All syndicalists, of the hand and of the thought, of life and of art, both destroyers and creators, anarchists of reality and the ideal, heroes of all forces and all beauties, we will dance forth in one and the same superhuman intoxication toward the common apotheoses of the future. (cited in Lista [1995], 188)<sup>34</sup>

Marinetti regards futurism as the perfect frame for the joint battle of the political and the aesthetic avant-garde. Marinetti not only fixes the spiritual revolution of the avant-garde as the surmounting of the political one by describing the latter as a “minimal program” (Marinetti [1983a], 562)<sup>35</sup> — a conception later to be extensively described in Breton’s definition of the relationship between surrealism and the “minimal program” (Breton [1992], 283)<sup>36</sup> of the communist revolution. Marinetti explicitly defines futurism as “a total program [...] an avant-garde mood; the watchword of all innovators or intellectual snipers of the world.” (Marinetti [1983a], 346).<sup>37</sup> The description involves a redefinition of the relationship of political and aesthetic avant-garde. The aesthetic imagination is no longer only an important part of revolutionary politics, it is the decisive historical factor to which politics are subordinated.

Marinetti’s idea of a synthesis of political and aesthetic avant-garde is constitutive for the formation of the futurist manifesto. The genre marks a determined break with the aesthetic manifesto of the “*fin de siècle*,” it is the embodiment of a “new formula of Art-action” which is intended to establish a new aesthetic activism by founding a new generic paradigm “with its tone of force and futurist violence which distinguishes the futurist manifestoes from all this rubbish which has appeared in the world” (Marinetti [1986b], 145).<sup>38</sup> By picking up various rhetorical strategies from the political manifesto, Marinetti forms the aesthetics of futurism into an all-embracing project of cultural renewal. Through the futurist manifesto the institutional frame of art within bourgeois society is broken up by presenting new strategies that embody at once an aestheticized conception of politics and a politicized conception of art.

Marinetti's glorifying appeals to the Italian youth are of central importance in this context. The literary topic of "youth" certainly constitutes a characteristic aspect of avant-garde rhetoric in general, finding its paradigmatic expression as early as 1906 in Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's appeal to the youth to free "our lives and limbs from the long-established older powers" (Kirchner et al. [1993], 23).<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, these futurist appeals obviously allude to the "appeals" of Giuseppe Garibaldi and other protagonists of the Italian "risorgimento," often by directly picking up rhetorical formulas from them (see Lista [1995], 110). In the manifestoes, futurism is symptomatically described as an "intellectual rebirth" following the "political rebirth" of Italy in the nineteenth century, as can be seen from "Manifesto dei pittori futuristi" (Manifesto of the Futurist Painters, 1910): "Italy is being reborn. Its political resurgence will be followed by a cultural resurgence" (Boccioni et al. [2001], 25).<sup>40</sup>

The connection between the futurist manifesto and the manifestoes of Italian nationalism can be described by a short comparative analysis of Marinetti's writings and Giuseppe Mazzini's "Manifesto della 'giovine Italia.'" Mazzini declares, that in 1831 a total separation "had taken place between 'young Italy' and the men of the past" (Mazzini [1972], 176)<sup>41</sup> which had led to the beginning of a new era. He defines the coming revolution "as a declaration of war between two principles, concerning life and death" (Mazzini [1972], 176)<sup>42</sup> and maintains that the "secret to arouse it lies in the hands of those men who know how to fight and conquer at its head" (Mazzini [1972], 176).<sup>43</sup> He consequently comes to the conclusion that

for a new time one needs new men who are independent of old conventions and obsolete institutions, with the soul of a virgin and clean of self-interest, powerful in their rage and love, living only for one thought: that the secret of power lies in the belief, the true virtue in the sacrifice, the politics in the force and its manifestation. (Mazzini [1972], 176)<sup>44</sup>

By representing the futurists as "already living in the absolute" (Marinetti [1991], 49)<sup>45</sup> in their fight against "every opportunistic or utilitarian cowardice" (Marinetti [1991], 50)<sup>46</sup> and by stressing the virginity of their souls by negating that they are "the revival and extension of our ancestors" (Marinetti [1991], 52),<sup>47</sup> Marinetti determines the project of his movement as the continuation of the revolutionary politics of Italian nationalism. Mazzini's definition of the revolution as an *ideological* process is symptomatic of the aestheticized conception of politics engraved into the structure and the rhetoric of the political manifesto. Marinetti's appropriation of the genre presents a radicalization of the belief in the revolutionary function of aesthetic imagination inherent to the discourse of revolutionary modernity. For Mazzini, art is an "important instrument of enlightenment" (Mazzini [1972], 177),<sup>48</sup> but in the futurist project it is extolled as the driving force of evolution. Literature and the arts no longer serve as instruments for political propaganda, the category of propaganda itself is incorporated into the creative dynamics of the futurist project. This process finds its exemplary expression in Marinetti's appropriation of the revolutionary manifesto. He has given up the dream of surmounting political modernity through a radical renewal of traditional aesthetic means and turned to the subversive appropriation of its own revolutionary rhetoric and its primary medium: the manifesto.

In a letter to the Belgian poet Henry Maassen in 1909, Marinetti claims that in order to give a text the form of a manifesto "one needs violence and precision" (Marinetti [1986d], 143).<sup>49</sup> By using the term "precision" Marinetti points to the key role of the manifesto, a genre conceived by the authors

of the avant-garde as “a literary expression fulfilling” their “desire for directness,” to cite a retrospective description by Richard Huelsenbeck from 1958 (cited in Anz and Stark [1982], xviii).<sup>50</sup> As Marinetti emphasizes, “precision” means clearly designating the traditions, institutions and individuals attacked in the manifesto. Its significance lies in its function to direct and enforce the “violence” performed in the text. The concept of violence points to a constitutive trait of the avant-garde manifesto, its function as a manifestation of violent fantasies and terrorist activities: In the “Manifesto of Futurism,” Marinetti glorifies “the destructive gesture of the anarchists” (Marinetti [1986c], 107),<sup>51</sup> in “Second manifeste du surréalisme” (The Second Manifesto of Surrealism, 1930) Breton claims that the “simplest surrealist act consists of dashing down into the street, pistol in hand, and firing blindly, as fast as you can pull the trigger, into the crowd” (Breton [1972], 125);<sup>52</sup> the English vorticists describe their project as the battle of “Primitive Mercenaries in the Modern World” (Aldington et al. [1989], 30), claiming that “[k]illing somebody must be the greatest pleasure in existence” (Lewis [1989a], 133), and “Der dadaistische Zentralrat der Weltrevolution” (The Dadaist Central Council of the World Revolution) declares in a proclamation from 1919: “We will blow up Weimar” (Baader et al. [1995], 117).<sup>53</sup> Such formulations reveal an obvious connection between the concept of violence and the provocative rhetoric of the avant-garde. The rhetoric of violence characteristic of the avant-garde manifesto also corresponds to the roots of the concept “avant-garde” in military language and the history of the genre as a textual medium for declaring war. In order to give a closer description of the meaning of Marinetti’s assertion and to gain a more profound understanding of the relationship between violence and the project of the avant-garde, it is necessary to analyze the epistemological horizon that determines the meaning and function of “violence” in aesthetic and political discourse in the early twentieth century.

Marinetti’s concept of violence is woven into a complex intertextual web of political theories in this period. Considering his ideological background, the political discourse of revolutionary syndicalism appears to be of special interest. Important theories which constitute Marinetti’s frame of reference can be found not only in Arturo Labriola’s “philosophy of violence” presented in the organ *Avanguardia socialista* (see Sternhell [1994], 131–59), but also in one of the basic theoretical works of revolutionary syndicalism: Georges Sorel’s *Réflexions sur la violence* (Reflections on Violence, 1908). Sorel’s work presents an extensive revision of orthodox Marxism, a radical critique of the determinism which Sorel regards as dominant in its conception of history. Because of a growing disbelief in theories which maintain that the revolution will take place according to the mechanism of history itself, Sorel assigns *consciousness* a determining role in the revolutionary process. In Sorel’s theory revolutionary consciousness is no longer the product of real historical conditions, but an artificial construct based on revolutionary “myths” which shape this reality and serve as a basis for revolutionary action.

In his description of these myths, Sorel uses the socialist metaphor of an aesthetic avant-garde and defines art as the “*anticipation* of the ideal modes of production” (Sorel [1990], 247).<sup>54</sup> Through his imaginary visions the artist breaks loose from conventionalized and rational ideas, thus seeing the true laws of history and visualizing them in his creation. The revolutionary function of the aesthetic lies in the creative process itself, the true artist distinguishing himself from the mere “artisan” through the “*infinity of his will*” (Sorel [1990], 248).<sup>55</sup> It is not the work of art but the category of aesthetic imagination that is fundamental to Sorel’s theory of revolution. He consistently stresses the aesthetic character of the myth by defining it as “social poetry” (Sorel [1981], 189)<sup>56</sup> and

describes his own theory as a return to the “aesthetic” conception of history inherent to Marxism, the revolutionary and “poetic power” (cited in Ehrlicher [2001], 124)<sup>57</sup> of its politics consisting in the “attractiveness of its myths” (cited in Roth [1980], 38).

Fascination with Sorel’s theory of violence is not an isolated characteristic of futurism. It is a phenomenon of the avant-garde in general which finds its paradigmatic expression in Wyndham Lewis’s *The Art of Being Ruled* (1926), in which the vorticist maintains that “George Sorel is the key to all contemporary political thought” and describes him as “the arch exponent of extreme action and revolutionary violence *à outrance*,” a “mercenary” driven forth by a “rather mysterious, sectarian passion” (Lewis [1989b], 119). Traces of the fascination with Sorel’s theory can further be found as late as 1935 in Breton’s definition of surrealism as “a method of creating a collective myth” (Breton [1972], 210). In Sorel’s theory, the avant-garde sees the possibility of taking over a fundamental role in the revolutionary process by creating and distributing myths that shape the course of history. Sorel’s myths are not only “systems of images” (Sorel [1990], 21)<sup>58</sup> which revolutionary groups can use in their fight, the myths themselves are “historical forces” (Sorel [1990], 21)<sup>59</sup> and their revolutionary function is not to be confused with their instrumental use in political praxis. This involves a radicalization of the socialist concept of the aesthetic avant-garde: the revolutionary potential of art no longer lies in its representation of a future utopia, art itself is regarded as an integral part of the dynamics of history. Myths are images which make it possible to “understand the activity, the feelings and the ideas of the popular masses preparing to enter a decisive fight; they are not a description of things, but the expression of a will” (Sorel [1990], 29–30).<sup>60</sup> By defining myth as the “expression of a will” Sorel not only stresses its connection with the revolutionary function of aesthetic imagination, which expresses the “infinity of the will” of the true artist, he also draws a close connection between myth and the traditional function of the manifesto.

A closer look at Sorel’s theory reveals that it is marked by a profound conflict between politics and the aesthetic. Although the aesthetic imagination is assigned a revolutionary function, the definition of this function remains a matter of political authority. The liberation of literature and arts from their ineffective isolation within bourgeois society through politics thus turns out to be ambiguous. In order to integrate the political program of a fusion of art and politics into its own project, the historical avant-garde needs to claim the revolutionary character of its own aesthetic praxis against politics. It must create strategies that make it possible to replace the aestheticized discourse of politics with an original aesthetic rhetoric. In the discourse of the avant-garde this is done by deriving the revolutionary potential of art from the autonomy of the aesthetic and negating the legitimacy of the instrumental discourse of political modernity within this autonomous sphere.

In *Le Futurisme* (1911) Marinetti explicitly discusses the conflict between aesthetics and politics inherent to the instrumental conception of language characteristic of political modernity:

We are also convinced that art and literature exercise a determining influence on all the social classes, even the most ignorant, who drink them in through mysterious infiltrations. We can therefore speed or retard the movement of humanity toward this form of life freed from sentimentality and lust. In defiance of our sceptical determinism, which we must daily destroy, we believe in the usefulness of a literary propaganda. (Marinetti [1991], 100 [translation by Flint and Coppotelli slightly altered])<sup>61</sup>

The term “literary *propaganda*” underlines that the critique on the “sceptical determinism” of modernity primarily refers to political discourse. Marinetti thus seems to allude to Sorel’s critique

on the determinism of orthodox Marxism, at the same time he underlines that futurism is based on a *literary* conception of propaganda. In a speech on the “beauty and necessity of violence” held in 1910, Marinetti refers explicitly to Sorel. Defending futurism against the syndicalist’s attacks on intellectuals, Marinetti stresses the revolutionary character of the futurist project: “We artists are not so-called intellectuals. We are above all beating hearts, bundles of vibrating nerves, instincts, beings governed only by divine, enthusiastic intuition” (Marinetti [1983a], 448).<sup>62</sup> Marinetti supports Sorel’s critique on the intellectuals, but whereas Sorel defines the “soul of the revolutionary proletariat” (Sorel [1990], 254)<sup>63</sup> as the last refuge of authenticity in “the total ruin of institutions and morals,” (Sorel [1990], 254),<sup>64</sup> Marinetti defines futurism as the organic source of revolution. Violence no longer appears in an aestheticized form, but as a fictional category, its origin lying in the creative act of futurist speech: in the performance of the manifesto. Marinetti’s description of the mythical birth of futurism in the foundation manifesto of the movement is symptomatic in this respect. By recounting the “birth” of futurism as a mythical event, Marinetti not only breaks with the aesthetic manifesto of symbolism and “*fin de siècle*,” in which the foundation of new “schools” is rationally explained by referring to actual social and cultural conditions, he also declares the fictional act of narration as the mythical origin of the movement, thus describing the futurist imagination as a mystical source of total renewal.

The transformation of politics into a fictional category is not only explicitly expressed in Marinetti’s critique of political modernity, it is also visualized in the imagery of his texts. These two aspects are intrinsically related in his writings: “The anarchists are content [...] with attacking the political, juridical and economic branches of the social tree. We want much more; we want to tear out and burn its deepest roots: those which are planted into the human brain itself” (Marinetti [1911], 54).<sup>65</sup> Marinetti criticizes anarchism for attacking only the concomitants of the social and cultural misery and stresses the necessity of surmounting its instrumental rationality through an aesthetic operation of the human brain. In this respect he defines futurism as the “disinfectant” (Marinetti [1911], 48)<sup>66</sup> of politics which he declares to be “polluted with opportunism and cowardice” (Marinetti [1911], 47–8).<sup>67</sup> The disinfection of politics is executed primarily through the subversive appropriation of the political manifesto. By defining the futurist revolution as a process originating in the revolutionary linguistic performance of the manifesto, Marinetti determines the creation of the new as a pure aesthetic act, “disinfected” of all external surroundings.

The futurist project is not based on a vulgar irrational conception of language. Indications of an intuitive understanding beyond rational thought may certainly be found in Marinetti’s texts, where it is declared that “by the young, that which their brain had not understood, had been foreseen by the blood” (Marinetti [1911], 3).<sup>68</sup> The central role of the brain in the futurist imagery shows, however, that the project aims at the creation of a new aesthetic rationality through the “militarization of the brain” (cited in Lista [1995], 88).<sup>69</sup> The futurist man is “a nonhuman and mechanical being” (Marinetti [1911], 76),<sup>70</sup> whose whole organism is subordinated to the brain, the heart only being “a kind of stomach for” it (Marinetti [1911], 99–100).<sup>71</sup> At the core of the futurist project lies the symbol of a purified human brain, the idea of a return to its pure creative energy. Marinetti’s text articulates a characteristic trait of the aesthetic ideology of the avant-garde and its project of “tilling the human brain like ploughmen,” to cite a manifesto of the Russian futurists (Khlebnikov et al. [1988], 103).

In the opening passage of “Al di là del Comunismo” (Beyond Communism, 1920) Marinetti picks up the metaphor of tearing out the ideas of the past: “We Italian Futurists have amputated



all the ideologies and everywhere imposed our new conception of life, our formulas for spiritual hygiene, our aesthetic and social dynamism” (Marinetti [1991], 156 [translation slightly altered]).<sup>72</sup> Having described futurism in 1910 as a brain surgery, Marinetti can declare its successful completion in 1920, because the futurist manifestoes have fulfilled their mythical function of “amputating” the ideologies of the past. The imagery of Marinetti’s texts shows that the definition of futurism as a “law of spiritual hygiene” is conceived as an anatomical procedure. The manifestoes of the movement have the function to transform the human body, thus leading to the birth of a new man. “Birth” is not to be understood in a traditional metaphoric sense, but as one of futurism’s basic myths of historical renewal. In his preface to the novel *Mafarka le futuriste* (Mafarka the Futurist, 1910) Marinetti describes the meaning of this metaphor:

In the name of human Pride, which we adore, I declare to you that the time is near when men with huge cheeks and a chin made of steel will, in a prodigious way and through the effort of their exorbitant will alone, give birth to giants of infallible deeds... I declare to you that the spirit of man is an untrained ovary... We will be the first to fertilize it! (Marinetti [1984], 17)<sup>73</sup>

The imagery shows the futurist project as an operation on the male brain, it consists in its rhetorical conversion into a female sexual organ. These sexual aspects are continuously emphasized in Marinetti’s narrative of the birth of Gazourmah, a futurist “immortal giant with infallible wings” (Marinetti [1984], 169)<sup>74</sup> who is born through the pure will of his father, the African king Mafarka, “without the concourse and stinking complicity of the female womb” (Marinetti [1984], 169).<sup>75</sup>

The metaphor of the male spirit taking over the procreative role of the female body gives a significant insight into the poetics of the futurist manifesto. The aesthetic fantasies of the male spirit revealed in the manifestoes are the unfolding of its fertilizing energy — the texts are a process of birth, through their publication and distribution a new, futurized way of life shall be begotten. By giving birth to the futurist man through “the intensity of his creative energy” (Marinetti [1984], 222)<sup>76</sup> King Mafarka appears as an allegorical figure of the futurist artist, “standing on the last promontory of the centuries” (Marinetti [1986c], 107)<sup>77</sup> and “breaking down the mysterious doors of the Impossible” (Marinetti [1991], 49).<sup>78</sup> *Mafarka le futuriste* is a fictional allegory of the futurist myth of Creation, in which the male will replaces the female body as the source of life, thus founding a new aesthetic religion. The religious aspect of futurism is stressed by Mafarka: “The divinity and individual continuity of the omnipotent spirit of will which must be externalized to change the world!... This is the only religion!...” (Marinetti [1984], 170).<sup>79</sup> The definition of futurism as a religion of externalized will points to the key function of the manifesto in its project. The genre embodies the futurist belief in a total spiritual renewal through an aesthetic will purified of all traces of the female body. The genre is based on a phallocentric conception of creation, which traces its origin back to the virile energies of the aesthetic imagination. The futurist manifesto embodies a male fantasy characteristic of the historical avant-garde and its manifestoes, the sexual imagery of purified spiritual procreation being permanently used to define the realization of its project. Not only does Huelsenbeck claim that “Dada has given birth to the torpor and tempo of these times from its own head” (Huelsenbeck [1993], 13),<sup>80</sup> Ezra Pound also defines the human brain as “a sort of great clot of genitral fluid held in suspense or reserve” (Pound [1957], vii) and declares that the penetration of vorticism “into the great passive vulva of London” was “a sensation analogous to the male feeling in copulation” (Pound [1957], viii).

To gain a more profound understanding of Marinetti's definition of futurism as a "religion of will" it is useful to take a closer look at his vision of the "multiplied man:" "On the day when man will be able to externalize his will and make it into a huge invisible arm, Dream and Desire, which are empty words today, will master and reign over space and time" (Marinetti [1991], 99).<sup>81</sup> Marinetti stresses futurism's radical break with aestheticism by picking up and redefining Paul Bourget's diagnosis of social modernity as "a weakening of the will" (Bourget [1993], 330).<sup>82</sup> Bourget's traditional critique of modern rationalization traces the origin of cultural decadence back to the fragmentation of the modern subject and stresses the necessity of "developing the will" (Bourget [1993], 256).<sup>83</sup> Marinetti regards the multiplication of the modern subject as the emergence of a new religious subjectivity unfolding its creative energy in its full beauty.

Marinetti's conception of futurism as a mystical religion of externalized will refers to various spiritualist and occult theories in the early twentieth century. Marinetti explicitly mentions the importance of such theories in his description of the futurist man: "You can easily understand these seemingly paradoxical hypotheses by studying the phenomena of externalized will that continually reveal themselves at spiritualist séances" (Marinetti [1991], 99).<sup>84</sup> Important points of reference may be found among others in the activities of the Italian medium Enrico Annibale Butti to which Marinetti assigned an important role in the creation of a "futurist spirituality" (Marinetti [1969], 16).<sup>85</sup> Charles Prot's theory of the "multiplied man" who transgresses the limits of his body gaining insight into the occult dimension (see Lista [1980]) and the ideas of Jules Bois, with whom Marinetti had a regular correspondence, about the "externalization of the forces of the nerves and of thought" (Bois [2001], 9).<sup>86</sup> Marinetti's strategic appropriation of occult theories can be described by a short comparative analysis of his aesthetics and Bois's *L'Au-delà et les Forces Inconnues* (The Beyond and the Unknown Forces, 1902). In an imagery reminiscent of Marinetti's metaphor of the brain, Bois presents a vision of "intellectuals who do not find themselves satisfied with the paths already conquered" (Bois [2001], 9)<sup>87</sup> and tear themselves loose from the "national brain" (Bois [2001], 9)<sup>88</sup> in order to "explore the unknown" (Bois [2001], 9).<sup>89</sup> Whereas Bois's use of the metaphor of an "avant-garde" is related to occult ideas and presents a teleological model leading to the "creation of a new, superior humanity" (cited in James [1981], 31),<sup>90</sup> Marinetti redefines the concept of an occult avant-garde in terms of futurist aesthetics. Marinetti clearly distinguishes his movement from spiritualist praxis and its (pseudo-)scientific researches of the "doubling of the personality" (Bois [2001], 9)<sup>91</sup> by declaring that the futurist project consists in the abolition of everything which "holds back the pace of man and keeps him back from breaking out of his own humanity, from doubling himself, from surmounting himself in order to become what we call: the multiplied man" (Marinetti [1911], 58).<sup>92</sup> As Giovanni Lista has pointed out, Marinetti appropriates contemporary occult theories by integrating their prophetic and magical elements into the futurist project and its aesthetic conception of externalizing the will (Lista [1996], 437). Whereas Bois presents a vulgarized conception of Hegel's philosophy of history and maintains that since the idea is "the creator of the world [...] our soul ceaselessly animates the universe in the same way as it controls our body" (Bois [2001], 167),<sup>93</sup> Marinetti transforms the radical idealism inherent to occult thought into an organized aesthetic project. The "unknown forces" (Bois [2001], 167)<sup>94</sup> of the soul which Bois regards as the driving force of history are redefined from the futurist's point of view as the dynamic expression of aesthetic imagination. At the same time, the occult idea of an omnipotent will shaping the world in a mystical way is transformed into a concrete aesthetic strategy in the form

of the manifesto. Of central importance for Marinetti's appropriation of occultism is its definition of imagination as a magical faculty. By linking the project of futurism with the occult conception of imagination as a magical power, Marinetti not only defines the futurist project as a mystical process of gaining control over the external world. He also determines the manifesto as a magical aesthetic performance which transforms the course of history by reaching into the ontological dimension of the material world. The appropriation of occult ideas thus plays a fundamental role in distinguishing the futurist manifesto from the traditional political and aesthetic genre.

The analysis of the imagery of Marinetti's texts has shown that the occult idea of a transformation of the external world through the imagination is redefined in the aesthetic project of futurism as an anatomical operation. Marinetti's vision of the futurist man, whose "huge invisible arm [...] will master and reign over space and time" gains a more precise meaning when it is related with other metaphors in his writings, in which the "arm of the externalized will" is represented in its surgical activities. The fusion of anatomy and will offers the possibility to give a more concrete description of the poetics of the futurist manifesto. As the driving force of the futurist project, the manifesto is not only a medium of "spiritual hygiene," it is the textual embodiment of a surgical operation, through which "the will anatomically transforms the body" (Marinetti [1994a], 18).<sup>95</sup> The manifestation of a substantially renewed world in the futurist manifestoes is a subversive textual performance through which the conditions of life in modern society are to be futurized by magical means. From this point of view, the futurist vision of a world in which "Dream and Desire [...] will master and reign over space and time" can be declared as already fulfilled in the foundation manifesto of the movement: "Time and Space died yesterday. We are already living in the absolute, because we have created eternal omnipresent speed" (Marinetti [1986c], 107).<sup>96</sup> The text is not the anticipation of utopia, but a rhetorical act of violence in which the revolutionary power of a futurized poetic language unfolds itself.

## Notes

1. "Écrit public par lequel un ou des responsables politiques font connaître leurs vues ou expliquent leur conduite" (*Trésor de la langue française* [1985]).
2. "Das Manifest ist sicher deshalb zur Diskursform *par excellence* der Avantgarden geworden, weil es sich selbst als die Avantgarde des Diskurses betrachtet" (Leroy [1997], 277).
3. "Nous proclamerons [...] le véritable premier code de la nature" (Babeuf [1965], 212).
4. "Die Geschichte aller bisherigen Gesellschaft ist die Geschichte von Klassenkämpfen" (Marx and Engels [1976], 26).
5. "des armes de toute espèce" (Rodrigues [1966], 210).
6. "répandre des idées neuves parmi les hommes" (Rodrigues [1966], 210).
7. "nous exerçons une influence électrique et victorieuse" (Rodrigues [1966], 210).
8. "L'Art, expression de la Société, exprime, dans son essor le plus élevé, les tendances sociales les plus avancées; il est précurseur et révélateur" (cited in Calinescu [1989], 197).
9. "La Poésie ne rythmera plus l'action, elle *sera en avant*" (Rimbaud [1972], 252).
10. "chaque nouvelle phase évolutive de l'art correspond exactement à la décrépitude sénile, à l'inéluctable fin de l'école immédiatement antérieure" (Moréas [1966], 27).
11. "Ainsi le Romantisme, après avoir sonné tous les tumultueux tocsins de la révolte, après avoir eu ses jours de gloire et de bataille, perdit de sa force et de sa grâce, abdiqua ses audaces héroïques, se fit rangé, sceptique

et plein de bon sens [...] puis finalement, tel un monarque tombé en enfance, il se laissa déposer par le Naturalisme" (Moréas [1966], 27).

12. "Am Beginn der historischen Avantgardebewegungen steht nicht allein ein Manifest, sondern auch die Reflexion über das Manifesteschreiben, in nuce eine Poetik des Manifestes" (Fähnders [1997], 26).

13. "Die Kunst, wie wir sie wollen, die Kunst ist weder proletarisch noch bürgerlich, denn sie entwickelt Kräfte, die stark genug sind, die ganze Kultur zu beeinflussen, statt durch soziale Verhältnisse sich beeinflussen zu lassen" (van Doesburg et al. [1923], 299).

14. "Die Künstler gehen voran, sie bereiten den Boden, sie graben die Herzen, sie streuen die Saat" (Kühn [1919], 30).

15. "um immer wieder auf die wahren Interessen der Menschen hinzuweisen und Vorkämpfer einer neuen glücklicheren Zeit zu sein" (cited in van den Berg [1999], 283–4).

16. "alle moderne en ultra-moderne groepen van de geheele wereld" (cited in van den Berg [1999], 46).

17. "Avant-garde drukt reeds het begrip uit van een *Internationale van den geest*" (cited in van den Berg [1999], 46).

18. "zum medialen Ereignis des 'Neuen'" (Ehrlicher [2001], 89).

19. "einem ästhetischen Willen zur Macht, der dem Publikum seine Phantasien nicht mehr nur erläutern, sondern sie aktivistisch durchzusetzen versucht" (Ehrlicher [2001], 89).

20. "action poétisée" (Tzara [1981], 211).

21. "s'élève contre ce matérialisme mécanique" (Tzara [1981], 211).

22. "d'en sortir et de la violer, de la dépasser et de lui imprimer sa volonté" (Tzara [1981], 211).

23. "l'absolu déterminisme" (Aragon [1924/1925], 23).

24. "une force supérieure, extérieure" (Tzara [1981], 211).

25. "l'art de faire des manifestes" (Marinetti [1986a], 144).

26. "Il mio sangue italiano balzò più forte quando le mie labbra inventarono ad alta voce la parola Futurismo. Era la nuova formula dell'Arte-azione e una legge d'igiene mentale" (Marinetti [1983a], 235).

27. "Il giorno 11. ottobre 1908, dopo aver lavorato per 6 anni nella mia rivista internazionale 'Poesia', per liberare dai ceppi tradizionali e mercantili il genio lirico italiano minacciato di morte, sentii ad un tratto che gli articoli, le poesie e le polemiche non bastavano più. Bisognava assolutamente cambiar metodo, scendere nelle vie, dar l'assalto ai teatri e introdurre il pugno nella lotta artistica" (Marinetti [1983a], 235).

28. "poisons intellectuels" (Marinetti [1911], 88).

29. "Il attribue au livre et au poème une influence directe sur les foules. Hélas, les foules vivent dans une ignorance parfaite des poètes" (Marinetti [1983b], 401).

30. "la nécessité urgente de désengager l'âme italienne tout entière du passé et du médiocrisme quotidien" (cited in Lista [1995], 130).

31. "individualisme créatif antiformel" (cited in Lista [1995], 129).

32. "perpétuel dynamisme de la pensée" (Marinetti [1911], 90).

33. "C'est le dynamisme de notre conscience élastique entièrement réalisé. Le moi intégral chanté, peint, sculpté indéfiniment dans son perpétuel devenir" (Marinetti [1911], 90).

34. "Les ailes extrémistes de la politique et de la littérature, dans un battement frénétique, balayeront les cieux fumant encore de l'hécatombe. Tous syndicalistes, des bras et de la pensée, de la vie et de l'art, à la fois destructeurs et créateurs, anarchistes de la réalité et de l'idéal, héros de toutes les forces et de toutes les beautés, nous avancerons en dansant avec une même ivresse surhumaine vers les apothéoses communes du futur" (cited in Lista [1995], 188).

35. "programma minimo" (Marinetti [1983a], 562).

36. "programme minimum" (Breton [1992], 283).

37. "programma totale [...] un 'atmosfera d'avanguardia; la parole d'ordine di tutti gl'innovatori o franchitiratori intellettuali del mondo" (Marinetti [1983a], 346).

38. "avec ce ton de force et de violence futuriste qui distingue les manifestes futuristes de toutes ces balourdises qui ont paru dans le monde" (Marinetti [1986b], 145).
39. "Arm- und Lebensfreiheit verschaffen gegenüber den wohlangesessenen älteren Kräften" (Kirchner [1982], 18).
40. "L'Italia invece rinasce, e al suo risorgimento politico segue il risorgimento intellettuale" (Boccioni et al. [1986], 63).
41. "del 1831, s'è consumato il divorzio tra la giovine Italia, e gl'uomini del passato" (Mazzini [1972], 176).
42. "una dichiarazione di guerra a morte fra due principii" (Mazzini [1972], 176).
43. "il segreto per concitarle sta nelle mani degli uomini, che sanno combattere e vincere all loro testa" (Mazzini [1972], 176).
44. "a cose nuove si richiedono uomini nuovi, non sottomessi all'impero di vecchie abitudini, o di antichi sistemi, vergini d'anima e d'interessi, potenti d'ira e d'amore, e immedesimati in una idea: che il segreto della potenza sta nella fede, la virtù vera nel sacrificio, la politica nell'essere e mostrarsi forti" (Mazzini [1972], 176).
45. "Nous vivons déjà dans l'absolu" (Marinetti [1986c], 107).
46. "toutes les lâchetés opportunistes et utilitaires" (Marinetti [1986c], 107).
47. "le résumé et le prolongement de nos ancêtres" (Marinetti [1986c], 107).
48. "mezzo potente d'incivilimento" (Mazzini [1972], 177).
49. "Il faut donc de la violence et de la précision" (Marinetti [1986d], 143).
50. "Das Manifest als literarischer Ausdruck entsprach unserem Wunsch nach Direktheit" (cited in Anz and Stark [1982], xviii).
51. "le geste destructeur des anarchistes" (Marinetti [1986c], 107).
52. "L'acte surréaliste le plus simple consiste, revolvers aux poings, à descendre dans la rue et à tirer au hasard, tant qu'on peut, dans la foule" (Breton [1988], 782-3).
53. "Wir werden *Weimar* in die Luft sprengen" (Baader et al. [1995], 117).
54. "une *anticipation* de la plus haute production" (Sorel [1990], 247).
55. "l'*infinité de son vouloir*" (Sorel [1990], 248).
56. "poésie sociale" (Sorel [1981], 189).
57. "pouvoir poétique" (cited in Ehrlicher [2001], 124).
58. "systèmes d'images" (Sorel [1990], 21).
59. "des forces historiques" (Sorel [1990], 21).
60. "de comprendre l'activité, les sentiments et les idées des masses populaires se préparant à entrer dans une lutte décisive; ce ne sont pas des descriptions des choses, mais des expressions de volontés" (Sorel [1990], 29-30).
61. "Nous sommes persuadés d'autre part que la littérature exerce une influence déterminante sur toutes les classes sociales, jusqu'aux plus ignorantes qui en sont abreuvées par des infiltrations mystérieuses. La littérature peut donc activer ou retarder le mouvement de l'humanité vers cette forme de vie délivrée du sentiment et de la luxure. En dépit de notre déterminisme sceptique qu'il nous faut tuer quotidiennement, nous croyons à l'utilité d'une propagande littéraire" (Marinetti [1911], 77-8).
62. "Ma noi artisti non siamo i così detti intellettuali. Siamo soprattutto dei cuori palpitanti, dei fasci di nervi in vibrazione, degli istintivi, degli esseri governati solo dalla divina, ubbriacante intuizione" (Marinetti [1983a], 448).
63. "l'âme du prolétariat révolutionnaire" (Sorel [1990], 254).
64. "la ruine totale des institutions et des mœurs" (Sorel [1990], 254).
65. "Les anarchistes se contentent [...] d'attaquer les branches politiques, juridiques et économiques de l'arbre social. Nous voulons bien davantage; nous voulons arracher et brûler ses plus profondes racines: celles qui sont plantées dans le cerveau même de l'homme" (Marinetti [1911], 54).
66. "le désinfectant" (Marinetti [1911], 48).
67. "pourri d'opportunisme et de lâcheté" (Marinetti [1911], 47-8).

68. "chez les jeunes, ce que le cerveau n'avait pas compris, le sang l'avait deviné" (Marinetti [1911], 3).
69. "militarisation du cerveau" (cited in Lista [1995], 88).
70. "type inhumain et mécanique" (Marinetti [1911], 76).
71. "une espèce d'estomac du cerveau" (Marinetti [1911], 76).
72. "Noi futuristi abbiamo stroncato tutte le ideologie imponendo dovunque la nostra nuova concezione della vita, le nostre formole d'igiene spirituali, il nostro dinamismo estetico, sociale" (Marinetti [1983a], 473).
73. "Au nom de l'Orgueil humain que nous adorons, je vous annonce que l'heure est proche où des hommes aux tempes larges et au menton d'acier enfanteront prodigieusement, d'un seul effort de leur volonté exorbitée, des géants aux gestes infaillibles... Je vous annonce que l'esprit de l'homme est un ovaire inexercé... C'est nous qui le fécondons pour la première fois!" (Marinetti [1984], 17).
74. "géant immortel aux ailes infaillibles" (Marinetti [1984], 169).
75. "sans le concours et la puante complicité de la matrice de la femme" (Marinetti [1984], 169).
76. "l'intensité de l'énergie créatrice" (Marinetti [1984], 222).
77. "Nous sommes sur le promontoire extrême des siècles!..." (Marinetti [1986c], 1907).
78. "défoncer les vantaux mystérieux de l'Impossible" (Marinetti [1986c], 1907).
79. "Divinité et continuité individuelle de l'esprit volontaire et tout-puissant qu'il faut extérioriser, pour modifier le monde!... Voilà la seule religion!..." (Marinetti [1984], 170).
80. "Dada hat die Erstarrung und das Tempo dieser Zeit aus seinem Kopf geboren" (Huelsenbeck [1920], 8).
81. "Le jour où il sera possible à l'homme d'extérioriser sa volonté de sorte qu'elle se prolonge hors de lui comme un immense bras invisible, le Rêve et le Désir, qui sont aujourd'hui de vains mots, règneront souverainement sur l'espace et sur le temps domptés" (Marinetti [1911], 74).
82. "affaiblissement de la volonté" (Bourget [1993], 330).
83. "développement de la volonté" (Bourget [1993], 256).
84. "Il est facile d'évaluer ces différentes hypothèses apparemment paradoxales en étudiant les phénomènes de volonté extériorisée qui s'opèrent continuellement dans les salles spirites" (Marinetti [1911], 75).
85. "spiritualità avvenirista" (Marinetti [1969], 16).
86. "l'extériorisation des forces nerveuses et de la pensée" (Bois [2001], 9).
87. "les intelligences qui ne se contentent pas des chemins battus" (Bois [2001], 9).
88. "le cerveau national" (Bois [2001], 9).
89. "explorent l'inconnu" (Bois [2001], 9).
90. "la création d'une humanité supérieure" (cited in James [1981], 31).
91. "le dédoublement de la personnalité" (Bois [2001], 9).
92. "qui encombre la marche de l'homme et l'empêche de sortir de son humanité, de se redoubler, de se surpasser pour devenir ce que nous appelons: l'homme multiplié" (Marinetti [1911], 58).
93. "L'idée, selon Hegel, est la créatrice du monde [...] notre âme anime sans cesse l'univers comme elle dirige notre corps" (Bois [2001], 167).
94. "les forces inconnues" (Bois [2001], 167).
95. "La volontà trasforma anatomicamente il corpo" (Marinetti [1994b], 35).
96. "Le Temps et l'Espace sont morts hier. Nous vivons déjà dans l'absolu, puisque nous avons déjà créé l'éternelle vitesse omniprésente" (Marinetti [1986c], 107).

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## The Untimeliness of German Expressionism

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In recent discussions about the continuity between modernism and the present, the contemporary relevance of the historical avant-garde is no longer assessed in terms of its actuality but rather of its untimeliness (see Hüppauf [2000] and Asholt [2000]). While the concept of actuality assumes the possibility of an appropriate judgement of one's own time and of the art that corresponds to it, the more complex criterion of untimeliness oscillates between two meanings: on the one hand, it signifies a verdict of anachronism, of irrelevance to the concerns of the present; on the other, it implies a perspective of critical distance, of independence and refusal to bow to the demands of the day. The presumptuousness conveyed in the concept of actuality, which presupposes an ability to designate and name the respective here-and-now and take it as the measure of things, is also implied in judging something as untimely if one thereby means that it is unfit to meet the expectations, requirements and criteria of the present. Yet, in alluding to Nietzsche's *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen* (Untimely Reflections), untimeliness also evokes the implicit precondition that art "can only hope to speak to its time truly insofar as it does not belong to this time" (Hüppauf [2000], 564)<sup>1</sup> and does not subject itself to its fashions and dictates.

It is in light of this ambiguity between anachronism and distance to one's time that the concept of untimeliness points to the intricate relation of the avant-garde to the historical temporality of modernity. It has often been noted that the discourse on time prevalent in the various avant-garde movements is, to different degrees, fraught with a contradiction. The avant-garde problematizes and undermines the notion of a continuous, progressive time, while in the same instance deeming itself at its forefront. Thanks to its double meaning — outdatedness and resistance — the concept of untimeliness sheds light on the central paradox inherent in all avant-garde art: the claim to be the most advanced critique of modernity by deliberately departing from the modern conception of time as progress. In recent years, the contradiction inherent in this claim has often been invoked to denigrate the premises and the self-image of the avant-garde and declare it irrelevant for our time, which no longer believes in steadily advancing developments of history or art. Yet, with the dual meaning of untimeliness in mind, it is possible to go beyond a critique of the anachronism of the avant-garde on the one hand, and the insistence on its actuality on the other. Both judgements depend on the same homogenizing parameter and can be unmasked as equally normative measures that fail to do justice to the potential impact of the avant-garde on the present. Both polarize the discourse and either dismiss the avant-garde as a failed experiment and a closed episode of the past, or adapt its various manifestations to the present to such a degree that the avant-garde all but disappears in what today *is* deemed adequate and acceptable. The precondition for its continuity with the present takes place at the price of another form of disappearance: the watering down and eventual dissolution of

the avant-garde's most striking characteristics in adaptations to present-day expectations. In emphasizing those aspects of avant-garde manifestoes and artworks that display a contradictory, ironic, or self-defeating attitude towards their claims of innovation and radicalism, contemporary critics attempt to bring them "up to date" and make them fit in with contemporary ideas about time, literature, and art. But what if, rather than locating relevance in similarities to the present, the issue were to face the actual strangeness of the avant-garde, to confront it in the double meaning of untimeliness—as anachronistic challenge and as challenging anachronism—and to have it speak to us precisely there where it does *not* belong to our times?

Because of its traumatic experience of modernity and its emphatic dreams of salvation, which were often only unsatisfactorily accompanied by aesthetic innovations, German Expressionism counts for many as the most outdated of all avant-garde movements. Neither the condensed nightmare images and cries of horror, insanity and fear, nor the visions of a new humanity, the evocation of a new community or the visions of paradise which arose from them; neither the enharmonic ecstasies nor the grand, pathos-filled gestures of this art movement were able to outlive the 1920s. The discourse on Expressionism is therefore also handed down to us as a palimpsest of obituaries, which initially stemmed from its own circles, but whose controversies repeat themselves throughout the twentieth century until this day in only slightly varied forms. The alternation of judgments—waves of suspicions about an alliance with various totalitarianisms followed by rescue attempts primarily based on aesthetic criteria—which characterizes the avant-garde discourse in general, was directed at German Expressionism in paradigmatic ways, at regular intervals and with varying degrees of emphasis and intensity. Even today, the ideological colors of German Expressionism remain open to debate and no consensus has been reached as to whether Expressionism is an avant-garde movement at all—Hüppauf claims that "the 'Expressionist decade' can not be regarded as avant-garde" (Hüppauf [2000], 571),<sup>2</sup> while Eysteinnsson considers Expressionism "one of the most significant of the avant-gardes" (Eysteinnsson [1990], 158)—and whether it even really existed outside emphatic announcements, ideological polemics, and retrospective literary-historical categorizations. It is precisely because German Expressionism inherently possesses less distinct contours than other avant-garde movements and is thus more exposed to critical constructions that one can discern in the discourse about it a striking retroactive effect which simultaneously repeats and restructures the Expressionist past and the future it strove for from the viewpoint of each respective present.

This retroactive effect can also be understood in the sense of "deferred action," a notion that approximates the meaning of the German "Nachträglichkeit" and the French *après-coup*, concepts with which Freud determined, and Lacan later revised, the structure of trauma. The first experience of modernity in Germany was indeed voiced by Expressionism as a fundamentally traumatic unsettling. The imagery of violence and cruelty, the urban street scenes and ravaged portraits by Expressionist artists like Max Beckmann, George Grosz, and Ludwig Meidner powerfully convey the urban chaos and the psychological uncertainty prevalent in the years before and during World War I. The initial Expressionist premonition was that behind the smooth security of bourgeois certainties trains plunge from bridges and people fall from rooftops, that the earth breaks open and that buildings sway in the storm. Not surprisingly, such apocalyptic visions led to utopian yearnings. Later Expressionist images invoked the need for a return to a pre-modern, even pre-historic, mythical time or called for a new era of collective pacification and re-consolidation, ideas that often became

aligned with various totalitarian ideologies. Today, the traces of these threatening premonitions and their dogmatic aftermath are often treated as nothing more than overheated outbursts by hysterical, self-proclaimed prophets of darkness. Yet, German Expressionism and accusations of its allegedly totalitarian potential haunt the cultural history of the past century. Consequently, it may not be far-fetched to discern in German Expressionism the uncanny specter of European modernism.

“Gespräch mit dem Beter” (Conversation with the Supplicant, 1909), one of Kafka’s early stories, already contains the most important elements of the Expressionist iconography of doom. It stages a dialogue in which a ghostly figure, a man we first see ecstatically praying in a church, attempts to convey to his conformist vis-à-vis, the first-person narrator, the insanity of normality. The narrator, who embodies the principle of stability, is challenged by the uncanny supplicant to give up the illusion of security, which he nurtures and wants to hold on to. In a central moment of their dialogue, the supplicant recounts a harmless, banal conversation between two women: “Once when I was a child and just waking up from a short afternoon nap, still half asleep, I heard my mother calling down from the balcony in the most natural voice, ‘What are you doing, my dear? It’s so hot.’ And a woman answered from the garden, ‘I’m reveling in the grass.’ She said it quite simply and without insistence, as if it were to be taken for granted” (Kafka [1995], 14).<sup>3</sup> With the memory of this seemingly insignificant dialogue, which to him appears as the quintessence of the absurd illusion of stable everyday normality, the supplicant confesses to his interlocutor his own fundamental existential and ontological doubt. He ends his account of the scene with a pressing, almost pleading question to the one who has insisted on his unshakable stability with self-confident firmness: “Don’t you believe that people talk like that?” (Kafka [1995], 14).<sup>4</sup> Answering that this is indeed unbelievable and thereby acknowledging the absurdity of the conversation, the narrator joins the supplicant in his perception of impending doom.

This acquiescence with the supplicant’s incredulity and outrage about the women’s obliviousness leads to a short moment of accord in which both men find common ground in realizing the abysmal insanity of normality. Encouraged by the narrator’s agreement, the supplicant describes a series of Expressionist visions of a threatening and threatened world, in which stormy winds herald destruction and men turn into shadows; in which window panes rattle, lampposts bend, high buildings collapse, and death dwells in the houses of the city. When the wind starts blowing—a storm wind such as the one in Jakob van Hoddis’s prototypical Expressionist poem “Weltende” (World’s End)—the gentlemen must “firmly hold on to their hats,” says the supplicant, “but their eyes twinkle merrily as if there were only a gentle breeze. No one’s afraid but me” (Kafka [1995], 16).<sup>5</sup> Unsettled by these threatening, uncanny scenes, the narrator shrinks back and retracts his earlier agreement. The story ends with the supplicant’s unexpectedly happy reaction: he sees in the narrator’s revocation the ultimate sign that he has indeed reached him with his disturbing words. The supplicant’s joy springs from the insight that fear has made the other retract from his agreement, and that this fear shows that the narrator now truly shares his vision of a fundamentally disjointed, unsafe world. After being touched by this vision, complete denial is the only way back to the homely illusion of firmness.

The traumatic destabilization at the heart of Expressionism was already revoked by Expressionism itself in its diverse movements of flight into religion, into messianic or utopian hopes or, as with Gottfried Benn, into the “crystal” of pure form. Some reactions to the fears unleashed in the expressionist decade ended up—as had been anticipated by its most radical adversaries during the course of the Expressionism debate in 1938—in fascism proper. The history of Expressionism

evolves as a series of obituaries of which Kurt Pinthus's foreword to his Expressionist anthology *Menschheitsdämmerung* (Dawn of Humanity) in 1920 is one of the earliest. In this introduction to the most famous collection of Expressionist poems, Pinthus already foresees not only the accusations of totalitarian potential that were later voiced against these works, but also the conservative retreats that were to follow the Expressionist decade. In the foreword to the anthology's 1919 edition, entirely conceived as an obituary, he emphatically asks the future generations that will read these poems to be lenient with the Expressionist poets:

You young people who will grow up as a freer humanity, do not follow them. The poetry of our time is at once an end and a beginning. This future humanity, when it reads the book *Menschheitsdämmerung*, should not condemn the longings of these damned ones, for whom nothing remained but the hope for man and the belief in utopia. (Pinthus [2000], 32)<sup>6</sup>

His plea, which was soon to be ruthlessly rejected by the following generation of authors, literati and critics, was heard only by a very few, and even then only partially so. In 1921, Iwan Goll, in an essay entitled *Der Expressionismus stirbt* (Expressionism is dying), states that Expressionism may not have been "the name of an artistic form but of an attitude," that its deplorable consequences, however, occurred "without the fault of the Expressionists:" "The German Republic 1920... Stop sign. Pause. Please exit to the right" (Goll [1982], 108).<sup>7</sup> Goll refrains from blaming Expressionism, but he already ridicules it: "Appeal to the brother, oh Expressionist, what sentimentality! What pathos!" (Goll [1982], 109).<sup>8</sup> A decade later, when the "hope for man and the belief in utopia" turned into real horror, as realized in *New Humans* and *New Reichs*, the paths of possible escape from the Expressionist nightmare had lost their innocence once and for all. Those who did try to save the initial Expressionist impetus from being conflated with the reactionary consequences of its fear-inspiring visions did so under the sign of utopian dreams. "Since 1922," Ernst Bloch writes in 1937,

Expressionism was libeled: the desire for peace and order, the lust for possibilities of earning money and the stable facade finished it off. This lust was called 'Neue Sachlichkeit' (New Objectivity). It at times led the way from the all too whimsical dreams back to reality, but [the new sober realism that followed them] kept silent about what was rotten in this real world. (Bloch [1962], 256)<sup>9</sup>

During the restoration period after World War II, when no one wanted to read about cries and fears and much effort went into forgetting as quickly as possible the real rubble of destroyed cities and collapsed monuments, German Expressionism was out of step with the new cultural agenda. It is only in the 1970s when "what is rotten in this real world" became again the discursive and increasingly dogmatic focus of attention that an interest in German Expressionism returned. This renewed interest was typically pursued with remarkable scholarly determination, although the results were often little more than an inventory of the material, a step that rendered Expressionist art and literature harmless and palatable for consumption by an increasingly professional body of academics. Yet there were occasions when the German student revolt and its heated disputes about the relationship between aesthetics and politics created contexts in which the old polemics established by the Expressionism debate in 1938 flared up again and revived echoes of Bloch's lament over lost dreams. At the center of these debates stood the old question that framed discussions about the historical avant-garde movements in general: what is one to make of their undeniable proximity to totalitarian ideologies in the face of their actual incompatibility with existing totalitarian regimes

and these regimes' rejection of avant-garde art forms? This paradox can be outlined for Expressionism in an exceptionally pointed way: the idea of a New Human, interspersed with slogans of awakening, military metaphors, and calls to violence, was central to literary Expressionism and prefigured themes that led to millions of victims under fascism and communism. That Expressionist art was, however, to be sacrificed as "degenerate" by the one and as "decadent" by the other at the stake of the respective "cultural renewals" is one of the more striking incongruities in cultural history. "[That] neither the National Socialist nor the Stalinist Soviet state and its later German satellite could relate to the literature and art of the Expressionist decade," Michael Stark writes, "is something this historical-genetic sketch cannot explain" (Stark [1994], 154).<sup>10</sup> This phenomenon remains puzzling and gives reason to presume that the aesthetic dimension of Expressionism, so often derided, undermined any type of instrumentalization of its radical and potentially dangerous ideological contents. The unresolved remnants of this paradox characterizing German Expressionism confirm the continued validity of Richard Brinkmann's 1980 verdict, in which he speaks of Expressionism's simultaneous proximity and incompatibility with totalitarian ideologies, as a "scraggy scaffold" that is "as old as research into Expressionism and that has, *con variazioni*, not ceased to repeat itself over and over again" (Brinkmann [1980], 124),<sup>11</sup> until—one could add—it was disassembled into its parts, which could then easily be integrated in the tool shed of present critical approaches.

In order to concede to it a place of honor in the postmodern present, two different attempts have recently been made to overcome the ideological aporia of the "scraggy scaffold" and with it the outdatedness of Expressionism. One attempt mounts a rescue operation at the content level and works with analogies between Expressionist topics and elements of postmodern theories; the other searches for continuities between Expressionist and contemporary styles and modes of writing. The first approach focuses on Expressionism's concerns about the modernization of society, its critique of Western rationalism and comparable attitudes towards the "dissolution of traditional orders and meanings" (Anz [1994], 6).<sup>12</sup> Here, the emphasis on similarities between Expressionism and postmodernism liquidates what does not fit the desired continuity with the present: the traumatic and utopian aspect of Expressionist literature and art. This effort is particularly evident in how these comparisons adapt their vocabulary to the mood of the present. A good example of an attempt to make Expressionism "fit" current discourses can be found in Thomas Anz' evocation of an "*uneasiness* with social modernization" (Anz [1994], 1)<sup>13</sup> that postmodernism supposedly shares with Expressionism. In order to draw parallels between Expressionism and our own time—which has, it seems, rather smoothly aligned itself with all forms of modernization—the linguistic register must also be euphemistically cut to shape: "uneasiness" hardly grasps Expressionism's apocalyptic metaphors of doom and disintegration. A similar strategy may be observed in comparisons between Expressionist and postmodern descriptions of urbanization and the impact of technological progress and mass media, which are both characterized as "ambivalent." While contemporary literature and art largely—if often playfully—affirms these developments, Expressionism displays an extremely polarized attitude toward these phenomena of modernization, and it is misleading to call this attitude merely ambivalent. Similarly, the critique of Western rationalism, which in Expressionism led to ecstatic, mystical flights, cannot be equated with the contemporary cool deconstruction of the claims of unified logic and universal reason. This continuity between Expressionism and the present requires overlooking the threatening radicalism of the Expressionist trauma of modernity and of its dreams of escape.

The other attempt to make Expressionism fit the present focuses on formal and aesthetic characteristics and recognizes in peripheral instances of Expressionist prose the first signs of a mode of writing that would be fully deployed in postmodern literature. This construction of a line of tradition views Expressionism as a precursor of a postmodernist poetics (see Bassler [1994]) and, more particularly, finds in Expressionism a type of experimental prose that derides all hermeneutic decoding and can therefore be welcomed in the present without regard to differences in context and content. In the case of such an aesthetic updating, the Expressionist nightmares and utopian dreams are not implicitly concealed but explicitly negated. Aiming at a smooth integration of Expressionism into the present, such readings emphasize its joyful creativity and its "primacy of form," and reject all parallels between the fragmentary, shattered aspect of its narratives and the existential and ontological crisis resulting from the trauma of modernity. In *Die Entdeckung der Textur* (The Discovery of Texture), published in the same year as Thomas Anz' study quoted above, Moritz Bassler discusses experimental texts stemming from early Expressionist magazines and concludes that this prose is far from being an expression, compensation or overcoming of the crisis of modernity. Instead, he maintains, it is to be considered the result of the sheer artistic joy of experimenting and discovering new modes of writing. Only retrospectively, Bassler writes, have these texts been "happily reclaimed by the programmatic discourses of the avant-garde" or they were recuperated and "used to wrap humanitarian, political and religious messages" (Bassler [1994], 183).<sup>14</sup> From this perspective it is not surprising to conclude that the best of Expressionism survived in the form of Dadaism. The rest fell prey to a "discourse of crisis" that missed the exciting aesthetic innovativeness of modernism. For Bassler, a misguided emphasis on the traumatic experience of modernity led to interpretations of the most innovative Expressionist texts in terms of madness, fragmentation, loss and a ubiquitous crisis of language and thereby liquidated everything about it that is still relevant today. Therefore, Bassler concludes about this "discourse of crisis:" "Setzen wir es aus" or "Let's drop it!" (Bassler [1994], 183). Obviously, Bassler is after the affirmation of a continuity between German Expressionism and the present, but this selective aesthetic construction is achieved at a high price. It robs Expressionism of one of its last ideological defenses, which Hans Magnus Enzensberger formulated nostalgically in 1976 in order to rehabilitate the avant-garde as a whole: "The historical avant-garde was destroyed by its aporias. It never tried to defend itself with the excuse that what it was doing was nothing more than an experiment. That is what distinguishes it from the society of limited liability that succeeded it" (Enzensberger [1962], 80).<sup>15</sup> The "limited liability" that accompanies a purely aesthetic reading of Expressionism today hardly counts as a sign of inadequacy but is rather an entry ticket to the high canon of the best literary society.

Both the ideational and the formalist attempts to rescue Expressionism for the present disregard its core in which inextricably entangled existential traumata and mad utopian dreams preserve the shock of confrontation with the modern world. Different or even incompatible as these two constructions of an Expressionism "au goût du jour" may be, what they do have in common is that they strip it of those elements that do not fit into a continuity between modernism and the present or into current constructions of the historical avant-garde. In the first case, the sharp point of the avant-garde is dulled, and postmodernism is given more radicalism and intensity than it deserves in order to position Expressionism and the present as practically identical versions of mild anarchy. In the second case, the contents and the orientation of the avant-garde program are separated from the aesthetic form. The ideational impulses of the avant-garde are reduced to outdated political issues

and other irrelevant ways of usurping exciting textures, which allegedly arose *sui generis*, that is not from crisis awareness but from the genius of pure creative invention.

What is remarkable about both updating attempts is that they rescue the actuality of Expressionism in the name of its *modernity* rather than its avant-gardism and simultaneously create continuity between modernism and postmodernism. As opposed to other conceptions that view precisely the avant-garde rather than so-called (elitist and conservative) “classical modernism” as the precursor of postmodernism (and thus usually deny modernism its critical negativity), these approaches seem to associate the avant-garde dimension of Expressionism with those aspects that are intellectually too compromised and aesthetically too overheated to be acknowledged in the present. The creation of analogies between Expressionism and postmodernism liquidates the angst-laden and salvation-addicted excesses of the former and thus does away with the hinge between the trauma of modernity and the dream of awakening which has lent Expressionism its challenging untimeliness. Only after being stripped of its wild and pathetic gestures, only when tamed into a no longer threatening—and falsely understood—harmless “classical modernism” is Expressionism accepted as relevant for today.

Skepticism about an Expressionism tailor-made for the present does, however, lead to an even more fundamental question concerning the discourse on the avant-garde in general. Intellectual and aesthetic update attempts that understand themselves as concept-defining retrospective views from today’s perspective betray the basic premises of the avant-garde and lead exactly to the habit of neat and tidy categorization that the avant-garde wanted to subvert. Yet, such a legitimate skepticism towards continuing efforts to define the concept of the avant-garde, should refrain from jumping to circular conclusions. It may be true that speaking about the avant-garde inevitably produces new attempts to tame and dominate its anarchic gestures for the sake of making it “pass” in the present. Yet, this very “Now” is itself being produced and defined in the process of such retrospective constructions (see Plath [2000]). It is all too tempting to believe that one could—after the end of the avant-garde—declare the end of the discourse about it as well. Would that not, however, mean that, as a critic and literary historian, one has reached the goal, arrived “at the end” oneself? That one may even have crossed the finishing line first? As vanguard? “Back to the front” (Plath [2000], 653),<sup>16</sup> then, as Niels Plath ironically suggests? And where else can one go, once the historicizing reconstruction in textbook versions of the avant-garde, such as the 1200-page double volume *Les Avant-gardes littéraires du XXe siècle* (The Literary Avant-gardes of the Twentieth Century, 1984), is exhausted and the continuity-securing projection from the viewpoint of the present has become suspicious because neither the “Then” nor the “Now” can be reduced to a common or, for that matter, any kind of denominator? For some, the only trace the avant-garde leaves behind after this last theoretical dissolution is as a contrast medium for definitions of the present in which postmodernism is a “pseudonym for modernism which has freed itself from the compulsion of avant-gardism” (Bolz [2001], 99).<sup>17</sup> It is not surprising, then, that a postmodernism freed from the claims of the avant-garde turns its back on historical time altogether and proclaims a “long” (Bohrer [2001], 767),<sup>18</sup> “extended” (Nowotny [1993], 9),<sup>19</sup> “increasingly broader” (Gumbrecht [2001], 769)<sup>20</sup> and probably soon “eternal here-and-now.” If, after the diagnosis of its failure and the failure of the very discourse about it, the avant-garde, and in particular its apocalyptic-Messianic Expressionist version, still has something to say to the present, a different concept of this “Now” and of this “saying” itself is required.



"Once he was certain of his failure," Walter Benjamin wrote about Kafka in 1938, "he succeeded in everything, like in a dream" (Benjamin [1966], 764).<sup>21</sup> The failure of the avant-garde is certain both where it is drawn as a closed episode of a distant past or where it is rescued as an affirmation of the present. But once this failure has been ascertained, what could perhaps succeed is an approach that avoids either fending off Expressionism or adapting it to the requirements of the present. Such an approach might carry it along "like in a dream" and accept it as an unassimilated specter into a sobered, dreamless postmodernism. Rather than trying to save it where it confirms the present, we can regard Expressionism as a long-gone recalcitrant revenant or *Wiedergänger* that challenges the present's complacency and confidence in its unshakable stability. Then, perhaps it would not take collapsing towers to unsettle the contemporary sense of safety and normality and trigger off traumatic shocks that may again risk repressive reactions. The attempt to carry along the fears and hopes of Expressionism "like in a dream" and let their destabilizing effect help prevent comfortable illusions and new horrors would not be that far from Bloch's idea that Expressionism's mad and whimsical dreams should neither be lived out in totalitarianism nor be covered up by new conservative objectivities. Already for Bloch, these dreams corresponded to "that aspect of reality which is not determined by history as having unalterably become this and that way, but that heralds itself as something which is just approaching, breaking open" (Holtz [2000], 179).<sup>22</sup> This heralding is articulated in "daydreams, premonitions, visions that are not expressed arbitrarily or regressively" (Holtz [2000], 179).<sup>23</sup> For Bloch the awareness of these dreams comes down to an "insertion of what is no longer conscious into what is not yet conscious, of what has long been forgotten into what has not yet appeared, of archaic enclosures in an utopian revelation that would finally do it justice" (Bloch [1962], 260).<sup>24</sup> Bloch's last hope for the effects of Expressionist dreams—their power to transform archaic desires of paradisiacal fulfillment into "utopian revelations that will finally do it justice," has doubtlessly become questionable. The notion that utopias could do "justice" to anything can hardly be maintained after the end of the twentieth century. Even the radical daydreamer Walter Benjamin already put the effect of such dreams in their place, as he knew all too well that they had always "ordered wars, and that wars, in ages past, have revealed justice and injustice, yes, that they have imposed limits on dreams" (Benjamin [1977], 620).<sup>25</sup> But this insight, does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that Expressionism's "whimsical dreams" have no right to exist. Rather than banning these dreams from the reality of the day, Benjamin's sentence asks us to bear in mind that—and how—limits *can* be imposed on these dreams. This warning, finally, also addresses the conditions under which those seemingly unsalvageable angst and dream visions of Expressionism still have something to say today.

A preliminary approach to defining the preconditions under which Expressionism can be assigned a place in the present can be taken from the speech Jacques Derrida gave when he was awarded the Adorno Prize in the fall of 2001: "I speak to you, then, at night," he writes, "as if the dream were at the beginning. What is a dream? And the thinking of a dream? And the language of a dream? Is there an ethics or politics of the dream that does not hand it over to the imaginary or to utopia?" (Derrida [2002], 24).<sup>26</sup> Rather than giving an answer, Derrida makes reference to Adorno's tribute to Benjamin, which he rephrases as the task "to deny oneself the dream without betraying it, to think about what the dream makes you think, especially where it gives us the task of thinking about the possibility of the impossible" (Derrida [2002], 25).<sup>27</sup> What at first seems to get stuck in an oneiric paradox leads to an invitation: "The issue would be," Derrida continues, "to wake up and not get tired watch-

ing over this dream" (Derrida [2002], 25).<sup>28</sup> Therefore, the issue may also be not to get tired watching over the old, emotional, unsettling and dangerous Expressionist dreams, in the three-fold sense implied in Derrida's imperative: as keeping vigil over these failed hopes, as vigilance that they do not get denied and repressed and, finally, as keeping a watch on the impulses to turn them to reality, which would call reason back into the sleep producing monsters.

This threefold "watching over the dream" requires the conception of a Now that makes room for the freedom to include the past without having to repeat its course. Hannah Arendt describes such an idea of the present as a "gap between past and future" (Arendt [1968], 7), as a spatial interval which breaks through the continuity of progress as well as the continuum of the past without, however, negating the impact of historical time. In this interval, "a small non-time-space" opens up "in the very heart of time" (Arendt [1968], 14), in which a disruption of the determinations of historical time is possible. In Arendt's conception of historical time, the past is neither a burden to be liquidated nor a pulling back to regression, but a force driving forward which, if not interrupted, continues rolling into the future, dictating the course of events. In the same manner, what is to come is not an "unavoidable future" pressing forward on its own. "Contrary to what one would expect," Arendt writes, "it is the future which," if nothing is held against it, "drives us back to the past." The "gap in time" is the field of force in-between, a space for thinking which she imagines as a "parallelogram of forces" (Arendt [1968], 12) that does not break apart the continuum between past and future, but bends it in a way that marks the agency of those living in the present. This is the point from which a different *un-time*-liness could be conceived, a space of thought in which Expressionism could live on today, as a disturbing, unsettling, haunting vision. The present would be an interval in which Expressionism would neither have to be dismissed nor updated, but within which it would represent a past that, to use Arendt's words, one "becomes aware of" in a present "which is altogether determined by things that are no longer and by things that are not yet" (Arendt [1968], 13) but that is upheld all the same by "making a stand against both past and future" (Arendt [1968], 14). Arendt stresses that such a conception of the present is the realm of mental phenomena, not of action. But that is precisely why the conceptualization of this space is suitable for keeping watch over those Expressionist dreams that should neither disappear in a failed past nor be let loose unimpeded on a future which presses for them to become true. The "gap between past and future" sets free a "Now" that can accept the Expressionist heritage as trauma and a dream of modernity without banning it to a positivistic historicity or adapting it repeatedly to a respectively new today. In order to make room for a present that carries along the past like the strange dreams of the night that hue the morning without laying claim to the coming day.

## Notes

1. "Dass Literatur nur, soweit sie ihrer Zeit nicht gehört, erhoffen kann, zu ihrer Zeit zu sprechen" (Hüppauf [2000], 564).
2. "Das 'expressionistische Jahrzehnt' kann nicht als Avantgarde aufgefasst werden" (Hüppauf [2000], 571).
3. "als ich als Kind nach einem kurzen Mittagsschlaf die Augen öffnete, hörte ich, noch ganz im Schlaf befangen, meine Mutter in natürlichem Ton vom Balkon herunterfragen: 'Was machen Sie, meine Liebe. Es ist so heiss.' Eine Frau antwortete aus dem Garten: 'Ich jause im Grünen.' Sie sagten es ohne Nachdenken und nicht allzu deutlich, als müßte es jeder erwartet haben" (Kafka [1995], 14).

4. "Sie glauben nicht daran, dass die Leute so reden?" (Kafka [1995], 14).
5. "Fest ihre Hütte halten, aber ihre Augen schauen lustig, als wäre milde Witterung. Nur ich fürchte mich" (Kafka [1995], 16).
6. "Ihr Jünglinge, die ihr in freierer Menschheit heranwachsen werdet, folget nicht diesen nach. Die Dichtung unserer Zeit ist zugleich Anfang und Beginn. Diese zukünftige Menschheit, wenn sie im Buche *Menschheitsdämmerung* lesen wird, möge nicht den Zug dieser sehnstchtig Verdammten verdammen, denen nichts blieb als die Hoffnung auf den Menschen und der Glaube an die Utopie" (Pinthus [2000], 32).
7. "nicht einer künstlerischen Form sondern einer Gesinnung Name war" [dass dessen Folgen] allerdings "ohne Schuld der Expressionisten" eintrafen: "Die deutsche Republik 1920... Ladenschild. Pause. Bitte rechts hinausgehen" (Goll [1921], 108).
8. "Aufruf des Bruders, o Expresssionist, was für eine Sentimentalität! Was für ein Pathos!" (Goll [1982], 109).
9. "Seit 1922 war der Expressionismus verleumdet: der Wunsch nach Ruhe und Ordnung, die Lust an Vermögenstmöglichkeiten und an der stabilen Fassade haben ihn erledigt. Diese Lust hiess 'Neue Sachlichkeit': sie führte von allzu verstiegenen Träumen zuweilen wieder zur Welt zurück, aber sie verschwiegen den Wurm in dieser Welt" (Bloch [1962], 256).
10. "[Dass] weder der NS Staat noch der stalinistische Sowjetstaat und sein später deutscher Trabanten mit Literatur und Kunst des expressionistischen Jahrzehnts etwas anfangen konnten, vermag diese historisch-genetische Skizze nicht zu erklären" (Stark [1994], 154).
11. "dass dieses dürre Gerüst, so alt ist wie die Expressionismus-Forschung und sich seither *con variazioni* stets wiederholt" (Brinkmann [1980], 124).
12. "Zusammenbruch der tradierten Ordnungen und Sinngebungen" (Anz [1994], 6).
13. "*Unbehagen* an gesellschaftlichen Modernisierungsprozessen" (Anz [1994], 1).
14. "vom Programmdiskurs der Avantgarde freudig besetzt [...] funktionalisiert, humanitäre, politische und religiöse Botschaften in zeitgemässer Form zu verpacken" (Bassler [1994], 183).
15. "Die historische Avantgarde ist an ihren Aporien zugrundegegangen. Nie hat sie sich durch die Ausrede zu sichern versucht, was sie betreibt, sei nichts weiter als ein Experiment. Das unterscheidet sie von jener Gesellschaft mit beschränkter Haftung, die ihre Nachfolge angetreten hat" (Enzensberger [1962], 80).
16. "Und jetzt zurück nach vorn" (Plath [2000], 653).
17. "Pseudonym der Moderne, die sich vom Avantgardismuszwang befreit hat" (Bolz [2001], 99).
18. "Lange Gegenwart" (Bohrer [2001], 767).
19. "Erweiterte Gegenwart" (Nowotny [1993], 9).
20. "Die Gegenwart wird (immer) breiter" (Gumbrecht [2001], 769).
21. "War er sich einmal seines Misslingens sicher so gelang ihm alles wie im Traum" (Benjamin [1966], 764).
22. "Jenem Aspekt des Wirklichen, der nicht durch das Geschichtliche als das so und so Gewordene bestimmt ist, sondern sich als eben erst Anrückendes, Hervorbrechendes kundgibt" (Holtz [2000], 179).
23. "Tagträumen, Ahnungen, Visionen, die sich nicht beziehungslos oder regressiv ausleben" (Holtz [2000], 179).
24. "Eine Einordnung des Nicht-mehr-Bewussten ins Noch-nicht-Bewusste, des längst Vergangenen ins durchaus noch nicht Erschienene, des archaisch Verkapselten in eine utopische Enthüllung, die ihm endlich gerecht würde" (Bloch [1962], 260).
25. "Kriege befohlen und Kriege vor Urzeiten Recht und Unrecht, ja Grenzen der Träume gesetzt haben" (Benjamin [1977], 620).
26. "Qu'est-ce que le rêve? Et la pensée du rêve? Et la langue du rêve? Y aurait-il une éthique ou une politique du rêve qui ne cède ni à l'imaginaire ni à l'utopie, qui donc ne soit pas démissionnaire, irresponsable et évasive?" (Derrida [2002], 24).

27. "Bannir le rêve sans le trahir (ohne ihn zu verraten), voilà ce qu'il faut, selon Benjamin, l'auteur d'un Traumkitsch (5): se réveiller, cultiver la veille et la vigilance, tout en restant attentif au sens, fidèle aux enseignements et à la lucidité d'un rêve, soucieux de ce que le rêve donne à penser, surtout quand il nous donne à penser la possibilité de l'impossible" (Derrida [2002], 25).
28. "Il faudrait, tout en se réveillant, continuer de veiller sur le rêve" (Derrida [2002], 25).

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## Outside In/Inside Out

### Roaming the Frontiers of Modernism

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We know that Samuel Beckett once suggested the “point of view of Sirius” in order to obtain more distance from existential and artistic questions encountered by the characters in his work. The same attitude might prove to be fruitful in examining the vast problem of the frontiers between modernism and postmodernism. Both in theoretical works and in monographs on individual authors there is much confusion about the borders separating these two major orientations in twentieth-century art, be it with regard to their historical situation or the drawing up of an inventory of their different characteristics.

Even if a certain consensus on this issue seems to exist in Anglo-American criticism, in other countries, for instance France and Italy, other criteria based on a different tradition sometimes give us quite a different perspective. These deviant views as to where modernism starts and where its frontiers are to be situated should be taken into account.

These questions surface along with others in a symptomatic manner in recent critical studies about the work of Samuel Beckett. Indeed, both in his fictional or dramatic work, and in his critical texts, Beckett gives rise to an extensive discussion about his historical and aesthetic position. Whereas Carla Locatelli, for instance, emphasises the postmodern aspects in the prose texts, Martin Esslin and Enoch Brater tend to stress the modernist side of the theater. The attempt to solve the problem by claiming that Beckett evinces a development from modernism to postmodern writing, parallel with a certain historical evolution, seems to disregard the unmistakable complexity of his work.

In his article “Beckett and the modern/postmodern debate,” Andrew Kennedy tries to resume the controversy by starting from Beckett’s well-known remark equating critical neatness with “stuffing a system into a contemporary pigeon-hole” (Kennedy [1997], 255–6). Looking at Steven Connor’s approach as a typical example of a postmodern reading of Beckett and at Ihab Hassan for a more general classification of the characteristics of postmodernism, he makes an attempt to confront these criteria with the reality of Beckett’s texts. He comes to the conclusion that:

while Beckett’s work is marked by qualities admired by most postmodern critics—especially metaphysical uncertainty or indeterminacy and ceaseless innovation in form and language—those qualities go well beyond the ‘postmodern’ as an era or as a mode of writing. At the same time, all Beckett’s work—with a focus on his drama here—is rooted in both traditional and modernist aesthetic urgencies. Above all, each and every play is shaped with an inner coherence of its own vision, form and language—almost a modern version of decorum, if that term is not too offensive to a postmodern critic. (Kennedy [1997], 262)

Instead of regarding this intertwining of motifs and forms as signs of transition and mixture, we could ask ourselves if they might be an indication that Beckett is interrogating the very principles of the fundamental debate between ethics and aesthetics that traverses the entire twentieth century. Two phenomena that Kennedy mentions with regard to the later theater may illustrate more particularly how Beckett surpasses dialectical oppositions: the first phenomenon relates to the point where philosophy and literature meet, that is what Deleuze calls an encounter of the affect and the concept; the second relates to the ‘elementarisation’ we see within Beckett’s texts, that is to say the coincidence of the real in its intangible materiality and of the sign in its most reduced form. This coincidence can be observed in his later theater with its ghostly apparitions.

On the one hand these phenomena constitute the ‘strangeness’ of the ghostly apparitions, which illuminate the primordial human condition of being born in order to die (thus exploring the statement already made in *Endgame* that we engender astride the grave). On the other hand, we have the iconic mode proposed by texts such as *Not I* or *What Is the Word*, Beckett’s poetical testament. If modernism was the ultimate effort in the history of art to overcome the crisis of the scattered subject facing a world that had grown uncontrollable, Beckett showed that art cannot but manifest the necessary failure of this aspiration. If postmodernism is regarded as the systematic subversion of any consistent history—exposing the relativity of any coherent explanation and promoting the playful, ironic attitude of the post-tragic hobo merrily quoting and parodying—Beckett insists on the human being’s ‘pensum’: the ineluctable modality of the human condition to ‘go on’ in search of answers, questions, company. How this ‘pensum’ relates to the modernist/postmodernist controversy can be explored by means of the interaction between Beckett’s works and the visual arts.

### Visual Arts and Poetics

In her interesting study *The Painted Word—Samuel Beckett’s Dialogue with Art*, Lois Oppenheim (2000) discusses in detail Beckett’s relation to the major trends in twentieth-century art. She does so by focusing on the visual aspects in Beckett’s work, both in his creative texts and plays and in his writings on art or his connections with painters. According to Lois Oppenheim,

the need to situate Beckett beyond the modernist/postmodernist controversy is threefold: As we have seen, it derives, first, from an incongruence both with the modernist’s drive to extend to the aesthetic the Enlightenment values of truth and reason and with the postmodernist’s belief in their complete obsolescence. It ensues, second, from the collapse of any consistent differentiation in Beckett between the aesthetic (as the domain of imaginary representation) and the real. And it results, third, from the reductionism to which such formalist problematizing invariably leads. (Oppenheim [2000], 97)

What Beckett is engaged in is not so much the confrontation of subjectivity with the world outside of it, as the paradoxical entanglement of art and the visible. What he tries to accomplish is a “transformation of seeing into saying,” as Lois Oppenheim formulates it, “whereby the literary text is at once revelation and that which is itself revealed” (Oppenheim [2000], 43). The paradox consists in the fact that the visualisation of reality, which Beckett seeks to accomplish primarily by the constant erasure of the illusionary language of representation, by his ‘unwording,’ by his reduction of speech to word-things and of images to their basic physicality, their nude materiality,

is necessarily unsuccessful. As he tries to explain in the *Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit*, it is only in this failure to paint that modern art can be true (he refers to the paintings of the Van Veldes in particular). The human being is marked by the inevitable urge to reflect on his being and its implication in non-being, to reach for the invisible and to fail in seizing it: Sisyphus revisited. Oppenheim uses the terms “holism” and “ubiquity” to define this dimension and makes a fruitful comparison between Beckett’s *Weltanschauung* and the aesthetic phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty (as it was elaborated in *The Visible and the Invisible*): in both cases we may speak of a “grounding of mind in both a body and a world” (Oppenheim [2000], 102). This results in an art that is obliged to be self-reflexive. However, this does not emerge in a gesture of aesthetic autonomy, but in a move toward “re-essentializing” (Oppenheim [2000], 62). So art is “authentically innovative by its very failure to represent” (Oppenheim [2000], 78). To that extent it is the pre-rational seizure of the elemental.

Oppenheim’s reading insists on situating Beckett beyond the modern/postmodern binarism in its “ontological ubiquity” (Oppenheim [2000], 117). It would be quite possible to make a link with the holistic (Alain Badiou *dixit*) philosophy of Gilles Deleuze: far from focusing on separation and disconnection, Beckett tends toward an exhaustive embrace of reality, to a total immersion. His universe is a “machine désirante.” I think, however, that the notion of desire (which appears only once in Oppenheim’s theoretical construction—see Oppenheim [2000], 118, where she mentions Beckett’s desire to “displace across the arts the illusory spatiotemporal borders of our conventional a prioris”) makes it possible to surpass this somewhat teleological tendency to come to a kind of re-humanising or re-essentializing of art in Beckett’s practice. At the same time, he recognises the impossibility not only of succeeding in a total re-union, but also of giving any concrete image of whatever might figure as an object of desire. Beckett’s work is profoundly melancholic because it exhibits desire in its harsh and crude painfulness. And that is also why Beckett’s work can function as a parameter for discussions about modernism: his questioning and his craving are situated at the exact frontier of the central questions that set in motion the aesthetic reflection of the twentieth century. This accords with the following statement of the philosopher Simon Critchley in his 1997 book *Very Little ... Almost Nothing*:

What Beckett’s work offers us, then, is a radical de-creation of these salvific narrations, a paring down or stripping away of the resorts of fable, the determinate negation of social meaning through the elevation of form, a syntax of weakness, an approach to meaninglessness as an achievement of the ordinary without the rosetinted glasses of redemption, an acknowledgement of the finiteness of the finite and the limitedness of the human condition. (Critchley [1997], 179)

Beckett makes clear why modernism should bring together—among other main characteristics—fragmentation, perspectivism, artistic autonomy, readerly implication, classical reorientation, and the multitudinous small stories that replace the traditional megastories of the past. One could resume the entire scope of these explorations under the double-faced head of the presentation / representation struggle. Whereas modernists were looking for new forms of representation and whereas postmodernists resolutely denied any possibility of a faithful representation, Beckett explored both the urge to find an adequate way of presentation and its fundamental impossibility. What he re-presents is the failure of presentation, which can be regarded as the ever-melancholic craving of desire.



## Allegory of Modernism

To give a more concrete image of these implications of Beckett's work, I will briefly consider two of his most insistent works, *Ill Seen Ill Said* (the central volume of the so-called second Trilogy) and *Catastrophe* (the piece Beckett wrote in 1980 in defence of Vaclav Havel). After the visions of memory discussed in *Company*, *Ill Seen Ill Said* constitutes a step forward within the phantom world. What is being described here, for better or for worse, is an old woman sitting huddled in her cabin amidst her scanty possessions, obsessively watched by a spying observer. The text's repetitive style gives the reader the impression of participating in a ceremony. In the first paragraph the woman is presented as a kind of votaress, dressed entirely in black, worshipping Venus, the evening star. In her immobility she becomes like a statue. When Venus disappears she runs across to the other window of her dwelling to observe the moon: "How whiter and whiter as it climbs it whitens more and more the stones. Rigid with face and hands against the pane she stands and marvels long" (Beckett [1982a], 59). The enchantment of the moonlight spreads across the text and adds to the elation a sense of the uncanny. This is where the viewer's stare encounters the object of its most elementary desire, which has always been lost. The fundamental connection with the death-wish is also related to a displacement to a pre-individual scene. More than anything else, in *Ill Seen Ill Said* the whole setting is in concordance with characters gradually fading between the shades that have been called up. Beckett expresses this as follows: "Already all confusion. Things and imaginings. As of always. Confusion amounting to nothing. Despite precautions. If only she could be pure figment. Unalloyed. This old so dying woman. So dead" (Beckett [1982a], 67).

Before the observer's ever-present spying eye, this old woman, allied to moon and Venus, assumes the mother's features, wandering through the night like a shadow: "She emerges at the fringe of the pastures and sets forward across them. Slowly with fluttering step as if wanting mass" (Beckett [1982a], 70). The whole text with its painstaking observation and its stammered phrases becomes the mother's diaphanous body. The dynamic force behind this narrator's view is the journey to the tomb. When the woman is not described as sitting indoors watching the images in her photo album, spooning her slop or searching in her coffer, she is wandering around in a landscape full of stones, on her way to the tomb at the back of the pastures. She resembles that other uncanny figure, Medusa: "The long white hair stares in a fan. Above and about the impassive face. Stares as if shocked still by some ancient horror. Or by its continuance" (Beckett [1982a], 73). She comes and goes around the tomb until she has turned into a tombstone: "Frozen true to her wont she seems turned to stone." The narrator laments: "Let her but go and stand still by the other stone ... And the eye go from one to the other. Back and forth. What calm then. And what storm. Beneath the weed's mock calm" (Beckett [1982a], 74). Lighting up white in the dark, satisfying the eye, the mother has turned to stone beside the father's tombstone, while the snow spreads out its pall. Then time will stop in a mist of light, and perhaps a smile will remain to be observed, while the woman vanishes in the dark: "Off again in the dark. There top smile on. If smile is what it is" (Beckett [1982a], 89). The modernist interrogation of subjectivism comes to an imploded core: seeing and saying fade in 'lessness' ('lessness' being the word that governs the entire ending of *Nohow On*, a co-ordinating title for Beckett's second trilogy). Death and mourning invade the scene and show the ephemeral blinking of subjective utterances in the whiteness of light and stone.

This is an *allegory* of (impossible) subjectivism as it can be (ill) seen and said. Here I use the notion of ‘allegory’ the way Walter Benjamin does, for instance in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1928):

If the object becomes allegorical under the gaze of melancholy, if melancholy causes life to flow out of it and it remains behind dead, but eternally secure, then it is exposed to the allegorist, it is unconditionally in his power. That is to say it is now quite incapable of emanating any meaning or significance of its own; such significance as it has, it acquires from the allegorist. (Benjamin [1977], 184)

Beckett would prefer to speak of the ‘un-power’ of the allegorist, I presume. Allegory takes its distance from meaning here and now, from present values, postponing presentation and any virtual adequacy of the gesture of re-presentation. Beckett in this way creates an allegory of modernism and we might say that postmodernism is an endless and infinite wandering on the borderlines of these allegorical figures.

*The Unnamable* was already an example of a contemporary ‘Everyman’ — while this title exemplifies further that the ‘unsayable’ heart of darkness inside the subject is also an ‘*id.*’ If *Ill Seen Ill Said* offers another allegory of the subject haunted by its impossible presence, *Catastrophe* too allegorises the meaning of ‘representation.’ As is the case in *Play* (three talking heads in urns) and in *Act Without Words* (a wordless play), the austerity in the use of dramatic means has been strongly accentuated. There are three characters, a director (M.), his female assistant (A.) and the protagonist (P.). It is as if we are present at a rehearsal, where a last tableau is fixed (and this last tableau may as well constitute the whole of the piece in question). M. is the real embodiment of a stereotype with his fur coat, his big cigar and his abrupt manner of speaking, while A. in her white blouse, a pencil behind her ear, is only allowed to serve as a helper. Their appearance is indicated as ‘indifferent.’ P. says nothing and lets himself be manipulated. He stands on a platform and the entire play consists of the preparation of a final position for this actor. M. gives his indications concerning the taking-off of the clothes, the whitening of the skin, the position of the hands (crossed in front of the chest). He completes his direction from within the space destined for the audience: “go higher,” “bow the head,” “expose the leg,” and so forth. Everything seems to be ready and the end is repeated once more. “Il va faire un malheur,” he exclaims in the French text, meaning “he is going to have a terrible success,” but also (literally), “he is going to bring bad luck on us.” There is some applause indeed and the text ends with the following words: “P. raises his head and looks straight at the audience. The applause fades away. Silence. A long time. The head slowly disappears in the dark”. In the evolution of Beckett’s theater, this piece of 1982 can be considered as a search for ultimate theatrical austerity: the figure of the actor has been reduced to its minimum. *Catastrophe* is theater about theater where all elements are stripped to the bone, making possible a new reflection on their functioning.

In the conclusion to his beautiful study on Beckett, *Saying I no more*, Daniel Katz makes a comparable analysis of *Ohio Impromptu* (a play Beckett wrote in 1980). He starts from the more general observation

how scrupulous Beckett is in refusing to allow traditional philosophical, literary, historical, and psycho-analytic notions of subjectivity, consciousness, or intention to be turned into bulwarks of meaning to orient, control, and finally recuperate the oscillations of erasure. If the metaphysical subject remains a crucial issue for Beckett, it is largely because its deconstruction is necessary for the textual movements to be freed from an ideal tether that would prohibit their flux. (Katz [1999], 182)

This is modernism inside out, I would argue. According to Katz, Beckett's "self-cancelling" operations in theater concentrate on the literal materiality of the scenic space. *Ohio impromptu* is not only a deconstruction of the presentation of the theater in the novels of the nineteenth century (here Katz picks up a reading by Porter Abbott), it also stages (with its "Reader," "Listener" and book as characters) a derisive reversal of the traditional activity of (silent) reading. Thus it is above all another exploration of the (impossible) cohabitation of presence and representation. That the play was written especially for a conference devoted to Beckett's work adds more ironic power to it. This does not exclude the possibility that the situation on stage is also linked to Beckett's affective life (his life with Suzanne) as James Knowlson argues in *Damned to Fame* ([1996], 666).

The same intertwinement characterizes *Catastrophe* (1982). Apart from its preoccupation with theater, this play tells us the story of a human being tied up under a dictatorial regime. The dehumanisation is shown in the clothing, the whitening, the concealing of individuality (the director insists on the obligation to bow the head). The 'objectification' strikes the subject with muteness. To obtain this result it is not necessary to use archaic tools so as to gag the victim. A distant manipulation (where the assistant is so helpful) suffices. This interpretation seems to be ineluctable: *Catastrophe* is a cynical story of impotence and hopelessness that leaves us totally disillusioned. But in the last period of his writing Beckett not only gives the play its definitive title, he also adds the last lines where P. raises his head. This is a fundamental change. "We have our catastrophe," the director says: we may suppose that this word should be understood not only in its negative meaning of 'disaster' but also and especially as a technical term signifying "the dramatic dénouement of a play". Then this 'catastrophe' would paradoxically consist of a petrification, a total standstill caused by the perfect domination of any human reaction. We see that the (anonymous) audience applauds to this. At the same moment, however, another catastrophe takes place, a radical change, even if this is only a short moment of brightness, a lonely and fragile glance that will soon be obfuscated by darkness. That ultimate glance expresses a great theatrical intensity. Whether there is still any hope is more than questionable: our landscape is covered with ashes and skulls delimit the horizon. All that can be given in 'representation' (in the theatrical sense as well as in general) is this exhibition of impossibility, of total impotence. The ultimate gesture is a collapse of all representation when the actor goes beyond his assigned role. In this dead end of representation, *Catastrophe* can be read as an allegory of the paradoxical way the subject can show (or present) its very absence as the ultimate twinkling of a star that died long ago. Postmodernism takes its departure from this very point, in order to wander infinitely between the myriads of constellations where sense and presence do not cease to evanesce.

### After Proust

It has often been said that we should distinguish several periods in Beckett's work. He allegedly shows an evolution, starting from early modernist texts (written in a sort of competition with James Joyce, whose secretary he was for a time), via the central creations of the 1940s and the 1950s (marked by the crisis of modernism), to the minimalist plays and stories of the last decades of his life (characterized by reduction and erasure), which according to some critics show a clear relationship with postmodern practices. The point I have attempted to make in the preceding paragraphs is

that Beckett's production of the later period goes beyond this categorization as it concerns the very roots of the ideological system that sustains it.

I would like to add that in my view the earlier texts stem from the same attitude and implicate a constant and progressive search for those basics. Let us take an example to illustrate this continuity. Besides Joyce the main representative of modernism in Beckett's world was Proust. Although the study of this author, published in 1931, was partly an occasional text, it nevertheless gives us an image of *A la recherche du temps perdu* that has lost nothing of its originality today.

Beckett starts from the assumption that in the *Recherche* every major theme and event always occurs twice. The echoes of recognition and repetition give the work a dynamic structure. However, this also implies that there is always a reverse side, a shadow side or an unfamiliar aspect of a personality, a continual uncertainty about the 'true' nature of people and objects. For Beckett the fundamental opposition is that between habit and its painful abandonment, which also lies at the basis of every artistic experience. Breaking a habit signifies a painful disturbance of laboriously found rest and resignation. Beckett lists the positive experiences of remembrance, such as the well-known 'madeleine' episode, but according to him these miraculous experiences always have a shadow. Their exceptional extra-temporal existence inevitably entails a lack of stability, the impossibility of an absolute presence. As Beckett puts it: "Our first nature, therefore, corresponding, as we shall see later, to a deeper instinct than the mere animal instinct of self-preservation, is laid bare during these periods of abandonment. And its cruelties and enchantments are the cruelties and enchantments of reality" (Beckett [1931], 22). That is why Beckett uses a double vocabulary when he speaks of the narrator's involuntary memories: neuralgia and ecstasy merge in an "intolerable brightness" (Beckett [1931], 70). He also points out that the *Recherche* does not end with the series of positive experiences during the Guermantes reception; these are followed by the "bal de têtes" as an indispensable complement—the discovery that time (old age) has changed, in an often irre recognizable way, the people the narrator meets again during the party after an absence of many years. Beckett even suggests that this is the veritable *temps retrouvé*. It could also be said that the literary text, as a narrative in and about time, can only remove itself from this time by means of projections. The most important of these idealizations is to be found in music, about which Beckett writes: "It synthesises the moments of privilege and runs parallel to them" (Beckett [1931], 92–3). Like music, the literary text desires to eliminate death and loss by stepping beyond time, but it can only do so by continuing to relate the story of mourning and of time. The exemplary figure in which the two dimensions touch is the phantom, as an appearance beyond time and as a call to death. We already saw that this figure will increasingly appear in the foreground of Beckett's own work over the years. It is not surprising, then, that he shows himself to be particularly sensitive to the manifestations of this phenomenon in the work of Proust.

That is why Beckett insists on the fact that in the whole series of involuntary remembrances the central position is occupied by an encounter between memory and death. At the time of his second visit to the seaside resort, Balbec, the narrator has a terrible experience when he sets to unbutton his *bottines*. "But scarcely had I touched the topmost button than my chest swelled, filled with an unknown, a divine presence, I was shaken with sobs, tears streamed from my eyes" (Proust [1983], vol. II, 783).<sup>1</sup> The enrapture ("divine") and the tears are intimately connected. Once again he finds himself in the company of his grandmother, as she was during their first holiday, and the intermediate time has now utterly vanished. But it is also exactly at the same moment of her "living" presence

("I now recaptured the living reality in a complete and involuntary recollection")<sup>2</sup> that the narrator realizes she is dead. Proust summarizes this indissoluble unity of life and death as follows:

And now that this same need [to feel her arms around me] had reawakened, I knew that I might wait hour after hour, that she would never again be by my side. I had only just discovered this because I had only just, on feeling her for the first time alive, real, making my heart swell to breaking-point, on finding her at last, learned that I had lost her for ever. (Proust [1983], vol. II, 785)<sup>3</sup>

And for this reason his grief has now become indispensable, "for I was determined not merely to suffer, but to respect the original form of my suffering as it had suddenly come upon me unawares, and I wanted to continue to feel it, following its own laws, whenever that contradiction of survival and annihilation, so strangely intertwined within me, returned" (Proust [1983], vol. II, 786).<sup>4</sup>

This dimension of the *Recherche* is usually overlooked by critics. An idealistic vision of ultimate unity gained by the fusion of remembrance and writing is undoubtedly one of the elements that make the *Recherche* a modernist masterpiece. But Beckett indicates that a more fundamental questioning of presence and absence, not unlike the questioning that will conduct his own work, is at least of equal importance to Proust. Beckett could have gone even further in his reading of the episode in question, for when Proust writes about the way the living-dead image of the grandmother is ultimately assimilated, this results in a very Beckettian passage. When the vision appears during sleep, accompanied by the rhythm of the heart beat and his breathing, this leads to a situation similar to the involuntary, affective recollection:

But as soon as I had succeeded in falling asleep, at that more truthful hour when my eyes closed to the things of the outer world, the world of sleep (on whose frontier my intelligence and will, momentarily paralysed, could no longer strive to rescue me from the cruelty of my real impressions) reflected, refracted the agonising synthesis of survival and annihilation, once more reformed, in the organic and translucent depths of the mysteriously lighted viscera. (Proust [1983], vol. II, 787)<sup>5</sup>

The narrator then dreams how he has forgotten to write to his dead grandmother at her current address. In a conversation with his father, during which he expresses his ardent wish to see her again, it is made clear to him that she is now living in a very small room, guarded by a nurse, and that she is very frail and cannot endure any visits; "she is quite lifeless now," the father concludes, "I shall leave a note of the exact address, so that you can go there; but I don't see what good you can do, and I don't suppose the nurse will allow you to see her" (Proust [1983], vol. II, 789).<sup>6</sup> The grandmother has become a phantom, a shade, a "hallucination" (as Beckett, under similar circumstances, calls Albertine, the narrator's great love who dies untimely; Beckett [1931], 60). She strangely resembles the old woman in her cabin in *Ill Seen Ill Said*.

It may be clear that Beckett has put his finger on a dimension in Proust's text, which not only reflects his own radical world-view but also foregrounds the explicit intention of the author of the *Recherche*. However, a very different picture emerges from a reading of the most elaborate study on the encounter between both authors, Nicholas Zurbrugg's *Beckett and Proust* (1988). Zurbrugg's starting-point is the contrast between modernism and postmodernism, which, as he suggests, eminently distinguishes the two authors. With regard to Proust this would entail that contrast and crisis are indeed continually in question, but that eventually the positive values express the profoundest meaning of the *Recherche*. According to Zurbrugg, the role of art as a superior dimension has been rather overestimated in previous criticism, and he claims that it is precisely the successful interhu-

man relationships which form the essence of Proust's vision. This interpretation marginalizes art because, when the descriptions of individual creations or of the creative process in general in the *Recherche* are more closely investigated, the work of art appears to be covered in shrouds and can only overcome time by descending into the underworld (irrespective of whether we are speaking of Elstir's paintings, of Vinteuil's music, or of literature). However, in order to optimize the positive message within the personal constellation of Proust's work, Zurbrugg has to resort to rather curious legerdemain. For example, he boldly asserts that the importance of the relationship with Albertine has been greatly exaggerated, and that other unfavorable portraits, such as those of Odette, of Charlus, or of the cynical nobility serve mainly as counterparts in order to highlight the ascending movement. To him the culmination of the *Recherche* is to be found in two episodes which he makes the most of and to which he refers repeatedly so that it seems we are made to forget that they occupy no more than a modest position in Proust's work.

First of all there is the friendship between the narrator and Saint-Loup. Zurbrugg underlines the richness of this affective link. He might have added that this relation offered a possibility for Proust to insert a positive image of male friendship as a transitional form to homosexuality. The very complexity of dialectic feelings occurring in this context nevertheless lends a profound ambiguity to their encounters. The second episode regards the grandmother and the contact the narrator made with her during the first stay at Balbec by knocking on the wall. But in looking more attentively at this scene we can observe that it is already tainted with the imminent loss. The knocking becomes the sound of a Poltergeist, the voice of the grandmother sounds definitely *other*, similar to the way it struck the narrator when she rang him up; the image on the photograph shows the "contraction" of approaching, ever-present death. According to Zurbrugg, Beckett was insensitive to the positive aspects of the *Recherche* which feature in these episodes, and which are underpinned by the ecstatic experiences in the face of nature (blossoming pear-branches, the beauty of the hawthorn, the glow of the sea).

With reference to the assessment of modernism's frontiers it seems important to point out that Beckett does indeed mention the epiphanies, but that he reads Proust according to the dynamic, fundamentally ambivalent lines that give the novel its dramatic power (including the disenchanted Bois de Boulogne and the withered blossoms). Going back to the dichotomy modern / postmodern, I think the opposition Zurbrugg establishes between Proust as a modernist and Beckett as a postmodernist ought to be put into perspective. As I have tried to demonstrate, Beckett goes beyond this binary opposition by interrogating the very principles on which the opposition is founded. His reading of Proust enables us also to distinguish in the *Recherche* — closely intertwined with a modernist telology — a rhizomatic wandering that may resemble postmodern ambivalence, but that interrogates first of all the limits of presence and representation. This may be elucidated by means of a closer examination of the interaction between literature and music in Beckett's and Proust's works.

## Words and Music

An interesting aspect of the relation between Beckett and Proust is discussed in Catherine Laws's *Beckett and Music*. She brilliantly compares in detail Proust's ideas on music as expressed in the *Recherche* with what Beckett says about them in his *Proust* and with his own practice. For Proust she comes to the following conclusion:

The separation of the signifier and the signified opens up a gap which results in the fragmentary nature of the self, the subject-object relationship, and the structure of the work as a whole. Yet, as Derrida has shown, 'metaphysics has never ceased to impose on semiology the search for a transcendental signified, a concept independent of language'; in a sense, *A la recherche* enacts that search, and Proustian music, through its elimination of intermediary semantics, sustains the possibility of success. (Laws [2002], 33)

Music certainly is an outstanding example of a modernist key in the *Recherche* as it suggests perpetual instability and multiplicity (especially in the case of the Vinteuil septet), concomitantly with its function "in the background as an intimation of the possibility of salvation" (Laws [2002], 36). Music seems to promise what "the literary work can never actually achieve." Laws sees in Beckett's *Proust* a demonstration of the fact "that Beckett's pessimism highlights the comparative insufficiency of linguistic signs and hence the dependence upon the musical model" (Laws [2002], 40).

What then about Beckett's own involvement in music? For him, suspicion regarding words is radical and precludes the appreciation of music if it depends on them, to the extent that his own work gradually evolves in the direction of non-referential sounds. In his later works "Beckett negates the referential content of his expressive forms and moves towards the state of music" (Laws [2002], 52). Laws interprets this evolution as follows: "Beckett thus develops an orientation away from the designative interpretation and towards alterity and the true recognition of difference; he gradually dismisses the modernist need for overall unity effected by the affirmation of coherent meaning and the justification of motivation through the appeal to the transcendental" (Laws [2002], 53). Laws therefore concludes:

In this way Beckett provides a link between modernism and postmodernism, examining the preoccupations of the former before dismissing them in favour of the open conditions of multiplicity and play, and at the root of this process is the model of music and Beckett's developing perception and acknowledgement of it. It could even be suggested that Beckett effectively carries music forward from its appropriation by modernist literature into the postmodern world, where it should find itself embraced through its natural resistance to definitive interpretation. (Laws [2002], 53)

I quite agree with this analysis, but again, as was the case with the reading of Lois Oppenheim based on vision, I think it is possible to go a little bit further. To begin with we should return to the *Recherche* once again. Music may be an idealistic horizon for Proust, yet at the same time (and this is the richness of Proust's complexity) it offers a cutting inscription of mourning and non-being, a cry of loneliness. This is the situation of Swann at the end of *Swann in Love* when he has lost his great love Odette and listens once more to the 'anthem' of their love story, Vinteuil's sonata for violin and piano. The musicians play this air and "[s]uddenly it was as though she had entered, and this apparition was so agonisingly painful that his hand clutched at his heart" (Proust [1993], vol. I, 375).<sup>7</sup> The music "without pity for his present situation"<sup>8</sup> resuscitates every detail of his past with Odette. The meaning of the word 'apparition' in the French text is emphasized as being intimately connected to the universe of phantoms by Swann's remark when a lady says to him she never heard anything as "strong" as this since her experience with "turning tables". Swann remarks that he sees in these words a sense that is more profound than this lady could have intended. Finally, after having experienced once more all the ecstatic pleasure and grief the melody offers him, Swann comes to the conclusion that "the feeling which Odette had once had for him would never revive, that his hopes of happiness would not be realized now" (Proust [1993], vol. I, 384).<sup>9</sup>

Vinteuil's work is full of sorrow and mourning, for this artist created his music in circumstances of deep distress. And for the narrator the sonata and the septet are closely linked to Albertine. It was when he talked to her about Vinteuil that he discovered her relation with his daughter, a relation that would cause him immense grief. Afterwards when she has fled and has been killed in an accident, her pianola will be the object in his apartment that most insistently recalls her presence and her vanishing. In his memory he sees her again sitting near her instrument, "immobile and smiling, an angel of music", but he realizes that his efforts to resuscitate her are in vain as she irremediably disappears in that "darkness that would finish never more".

Having stressed the idealistic dimension of music in his *Proust*, Beckett ends his essay by concluding that music ultimately reveals the meaning of the word 'defunctus,' the term Schopenhauer uses to define the end of the lifelong 'pensum.' This is an ironic remark of course, a playful way to say "the end," but it also implies that death literally 'has the last word.' On the other hand, if it is correct to say that, in Beckett's later works, music increasingly functions as a concrete dimension, it is also continuously linked to questions about absence and presence. This is particularly true for his use of Beethoven's Fifth Piano Trio known as "The Ghost" in his television play *Ghost Trio*. Beckett 'quotes' very 'musically' the repetitive insistence of a short phrase in the adagio that, with its sombre tremolos, creates an ambience of fright and anguish. In his television plays Beckett undertakes a fundamental interrogation of the nature of images, their persistence, their illusory presence, their relation with 'being' (as was already the case in *Film*, to which Bishop Berkeley's "Esse est percipi" gave its philosophical dimension).

In general terms, one may conclude that Beckett's aesthetic attitude towards the binary opposition, looking at it from the "point of view of Sirius" and questioning the very principles on which the opposition is based, is relevant to the study of modernism in general. His work, in its multiple forms, functions as an allegory of modernism. What we see is a projection of the infinity of signifying as materialized allegorically in the constant interrogation and reaffirmation of the subject that modernism explores in its major realizations (and Beckett permits us to read Proust along the same lines of ambivalence). Beckett really is a *transmodern* artist.

## Notes

1. "Mais à peine eus-je touché le premier bouton de ma bottine, ma poitrine s'enfla, remplie d'une présence inconnue, divine, des sanglots me secouèrent, des larmes ruisselèrent de mes yeux" (Proust [1987], vol. III, 152).
2. "je retrouvais dans un souvenir involontaire et complet la réalité vivante" (Proust [1987], vol. III, 153).
3. "Et maintenant que ce même besoin renaissait, je savais que je pouvais attendre des heures après des heures, qu'elle ne serait plus jamais auprès de moi, je ne faisais que de le découvrir parce que je venais, en la sentant pour la première fois, vivante, véritable, gonflant mon cœur à le briser, en la retrouvant enfin, d'apprendre que je l'avais perdue pour toujours" (Proust [1987], vol. III, 155).
4. "car je ne tenais pas seulement à souffrir, mais à respecter l'originalité de ma souffrance telle que je l'avais subie tout d'un coup sans le vouloir, et je voulais continuer à la subir, suivant ses lois à elle, à chaque fois que revenait cette contradiction si étrange de la survivance et du néant entrecroisés en moi" (Proust [1987], vol. III, 156).
5. "Mais dès que je fus arrivé à m'endormir, à cette heure, plus véridique, où mes yeux se fermèrent aux choses



du dehors, le monde du sommeil (sur le seuil duquel l'intelligence et la volonté momentanément paralysées ne pouvaient plus me disputer à la cruauté de mes impressions véritables), refléta, réfracta la douloureuse synthèse de la survivance et du néant, dans la profondeur organique et devenue translucide des viscères mystérieusement éclairés" (Proust [1987], vol. III, 157).

6. "Du reste, tu sais, elle est très éteinte. Je te laisserai l'indication précise pour que tu puisses y aller; je ne vois pas ce que tu pourrais y faire et je ne crois pas que la garde te la laisserait voir" (Proust [1987], vol. III, 159).

7. "Mais tout à coup ce fut comme si elle était entrée, et cette apparition lui fut une si déchirante souffrance qu'il dut porter la main à son cœur" (Proust [1987], vol. I, 339).

8. "sans pitié pour son infortune présente" (Proust [1987], vol. I, 339).

9. "A partir de cette soirée, Swann comprit que le sentiment qu'Odette avait eu pour lui ne renaîtrait jamais, que ses espérances de bonheur ne se réaliseraient plus" (Proust [1987], vol. I, 347).

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## Modernism at the Crossroads

### Types of Negativity

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#### THIS IS JUST TO SAY

I have eaten  
the plums  
that were in  
the icebox  
  
and which  
you were probably  
saving  
for breakfast  
  
Forgive me  
they were delicious  
so sweet  
and so cold.

(William Carlos Williams [1986], 372)

Let us imagine two opposing, if not mutually exclusive, readings of this exemplary work of modernism. In one, there is a productive conflict between the poem as indicating a scene reducible to its literal action and its simultaneous displacement of that scene into a work of art. The poem presents a choice that can happily be understood as undecidable, with multiple reinforcements between its meaning as a scene and its status as a work that lead to its pleasure and difficulty, as well to its esteem (Altieri [1981], 160–75). In the second, the poem withholds basic information necessary for its interpretation on either level; it is an exercise in construction predicated on a fundamental absence at its core. The poem, rather than presenting a decision between quantifiable options, thus rests on missing contexts so that “this is just to say” may mean “anything but this.” The poem initiates a series of options that cannot be described as a mere set of oppositions; rather, it opens an unresolved series of questions about context that must continually shift because of its constitutive undecidability (Watten [1989]). Let us call the first of these readings “modernist” and the second “postmodern.” Is it not the burden, and the promise, of any new account of modernism to show how these seemingly opposed readings may be resolved?

Let us imagine too that “the new modernist studies” represents a sustained, multi-faceted attempt to reconcile these positive and negative readings, so that the modernist work will be at once intentional and textualist, undecidable and contextualist. It is for this reason that the new modernist studies underwent a sustained critique of the certainties of modern authorship, form, and, finally, agency that sought new values for the exemplary status of the modernist work in relation to contingent and historical contexts. In the process of opening up modernism, in showing both its constitutive negativity and dependence on contexts, modernism would thereby be reinvented — as a register of the aporia of the modern, rather than a defense against it. In a cunning of modernist exemplarity, the self-undoing authorship, self-canceling forms, and other-directed negativity of the postmodern would thus turn out to have been anticipated, in their major features, in the precedent mode. Having survived its critique, modernism would thereby be reinstated as a historically contingent, rather than universalist, model of literary and cultural value.

Anticipating this reversal, a collection of essays titled *The Future of Modernism* (Witemeyer [1997]) begins by referring, in as broad terms as possible, to debates where “post-modernism has generally taken an oppositional or antagonistic view of modernism.” As a result, according to the lead essay by Sanford Schwartz, “the sheer variety of modernisms that have surfaced in the ever-widening debate over the post-modern indicates that the issue of modernism [...] is far less settled than [many] would like to believe” (Schwartz [1997], 9). In these debates postmodernism is typically presented as a species of generic, one-size-fits-all negativity that pursues “the unpostmodern practice of employing traditional antinomies to define the difference between them,” leading to the list of familiar oppositions that are often used to distinguish between the two modes:

Modernism was associated with identity, unity, and homogeneity, postmodernism with difference, multiplicity, and heterogeneity [...]. These dichotomies were buttressed by related pairs imported from fields such as rhetoric (metaphor/metonymy, paradox/aporia), linguistics (hypotaxis/parataxis, signifier/signified), and literary criticism (symbol/allegory) and put to work to distinguish the modernist fidelity to totality, hierarchy, and closure from the postmodernist emphasis upon fragmentation, subversion, and open-endedness. (Witemeyer [1997], 11–12)

If such a list now seems more frustrating than useful, it may be because its overarching framework of binary opposition has not only served its purpose but was mistaken from the outset.

What then *was* modernism, before the vicissitudes of the negative unraveled its contradictory construction? For the volume’s editor, modernism was a concept among students of “British, Irish, and American literature” defined as “an experimental trend in English-language literature that flourished from about 1890 to 1945” (Witemeyer [1997], 2). Attitude as well as form characterizes this period; modernism is first revolted by “urban, industrial, bourgeois society, with its technologies of mass warfare;” second, attracted to “archaic cultures and ancient mythologies;” third, fascinated with “unconscious and irrational activities of the human psyche;” and fourth, reacting against “post-Renaissance techniques of naturalistic representation in favor of spare, elemental, disjunctive and ironic modes.” If these criteria seem more descriptive than formal or critical, a list of names will guarantee that we know what we mean when we speak of modernism: Yeats, Joyce, Eliot, Pound, Williams, Stevens, Cummings, H.D., Moore, Stein, Woolf, Forster, Lawrence, Conrad, Ford, Lewis, Faulkner, and Hemingway. These are the authors of the exemplary works that define the field. If it is true that most of the contributors to the anthology “employ the term *modernism* in this general

sense,” what could they possibly have learned from the challenge of the postmodern—except that they have survived it? Having absorbed the antagonism of the postmodern, modernist studies can only continue to “emphasize the complex and vital legacy of the major modernist authors” (Witemeyer [1997], 2). Modernism is only enhanced by the critiques leveled against it, while the irony of postmodern negativity is that it “has undercut its [own] constitutive opposition to modernism,” recognizing the former’s precedence (Witemeyer [1997], 9).

What’s wrong with this picture is, first of all, the “author”—that union of agency and interpretation Foucault would rename the “author function.” Authorship is defined by affiliation, both personal and political, as a field comprising authors who share period or formal concerns and who later came to be seen as representative of national canons. Just as whatever is experimental or innovative among these authors is sacrificed toward the wider horizon of the authorial name, so critical interventions against modernism could only reinforce its underlying order. Modern authorship became the site of a grand defense of that which would contest it, on two levels: formal innovation and theoretical critique. As a result, the univocal defense of modernist authorship guaranteed that form and critique will have something important in common—precisely their negativity toward authorial horizons and their displacement toward larger contexts. If the overarching value claim of Ezra Pound’s *Cantos*, that it is a “poem including history” where only “what thou lovest well remains,” is the *locus classicus* of a defense of the author against the negativity of history through the containment of form, history will get its revenge via the negativity of construction and critique.

It is by virtue of this negative relation that critics (after Theodor Adorno) such as Eugene Lunn (*Marxism and Modernism* [1982]) and Astradur Eysteinnsson (*The Concept of Modernism* [1990]) emphasize modernist negativity as the intersection of both form and critique. In his account, Lunn presents a list of necessary and sufficient criteria of modernism, for example, that goes far beyond associations of author, attitude, and period. Modernism has four major formal/critical dimensions in a complex that is both subject and object: first, “aesthetic self-consciousness or self-reflexiveness”; second, “simultaneity, juxtaposition, or ‘montage’”; third, “paradox, ambiguity, and uncertainty”; and fourth, “dehumanization and the demise of the integrated individual subject or personality” (Lunn [1982], 34–7). Such abstract criteria explain a wider range of cultural production, a wider range of modernist examples than the traditional canon of names, as they call into question the rigidities of the canon. In Lunn’s terms, modernism is a formal construction of the subject, caught up in the moment of crisis of social modernity, that reflexively inculcates a moment of critique; modernism is exemplary insofar as it aligns with the social reflexivity of critical theory. Lunn defines a necessary first step on the way from earlier modes, such as romanticism and realism, to the abstraction later claimed as modernism’s overarching formal value, culminating in Clement Greenberg’s notion of art’s progressively self-reflexive emphasis on its medium or in Charles Altieri’s dictum that “it must be abstract.”

We may note that Lunn’s criteria pair off in binaries that are contradictory and/or complimentary. The self-consciousness of modernism, for instance, is matched by the decentering of the subject; similarly, modernism’s content or “set toward the referent” (enacted in either atemporal simultaneity/juxtaposition or temporalized montage) is offset by its referential opacity and self-contradiction. These pairs of oppositions indicate a dual crisis of the subject and object, respectively; however schematic they may be, there exists a wide range of exemplary works whose formal/critical dynamics are accounted for by them. Ezra Pound’s “In a Station of the Metro” provides just such an example:

In a Station of the Metro  
 The apparition of these faces in the crowd;  
 Petals on a wet, black bough. (Pound [1971], 109)

The poem's heightened self-consciousness is matched by the masking and shattering of the subject, just as its presentation of the image as an "intellectual and emotional complex at an instance of time" opens endlessly to a play of meanings that cannot be contained by its formal boundaries. The crude, palimpsestic overlay of the Metro station with Chinese painting, then, generates a series of oppositions that define modern subjectivity itself. I am still not satisfied, however, that the felicity of Lunn's criteria as an account of Pound's imagist poem says enough about why they work so well. Here, it is worthwhile to look at challenges to the nature of modernist form from an expanded canon, as when its autotelic, reflexive limits are compared with the prior horizons of romanticism and realism.

Imagine, for instance, works in which a fantasy of self-present subjectivity is enacted in a temporal continuity that is anything but the fractured unity of modernist form. In contrast to Pound's poem, Amy Lowell's imagist compendia, the many large volumes of period *Chinoiserie* she published in the 1910s and 1920s, contain numerous examples, one sunset on a gilded screen after another, of that which is deficiently modernist.

SHORE GRASS  
 The moon is cold over the sand-dunes  
 And the clumps of sea-grasses flow and glitter;  
 The thin chime of my watch tells the quarter after midnight;  
 And still I hear nothing  
 But the windy beating of the sea. (Lowell [2003], 200)

Similarly, the holistic continuities of postmodern romantics such as Charles Olson and Robert Duncan, their return to self-presence and the immanence of myth, mark a break from modernism and the inauguration of the "post-" (Watten [2000a]). A shift of the referent toward the world, on the other hand, is another hallmark of that-which-is-not-sufficiently-modernist. Against Pound's epiphanic moment in the Metro, Carl Sandburg's celebrations of Hungarian picnickers on Lake Michigan stands for an entire range of insufficiently modernist works recovered from the 1920s and 30s by Cary Nelson (1989, 2001), Michael Denning (1997), and others: a "social" modernism committed to class solidarity and realist ontology:

PICNIC BOAT  
 Sunday night and the park policemen tell each other it is dark as a stack of black cats on Lake Michigan.  
 A big picnic boat comes home to Chicago from the peach farms of Saugatuck.  
 Hundreds of electric bulbs break the night's darkness, a flock of red and yellow birds with wings at standstill.  
 Running along the deck railings are festoons and leaping in curves are loops of light from prow and stern to the tall smokestacks.

Over the hoarse crunch of waves at my pier comes a hoarse answer in the rhythmic oompa of the brasses playing a Polish folk-song for the home-comers. (Sandburg [1992], 20)

Such a descriptive sentimentality represents the *one* mistake not to make if you want to be a modernist: you must not confuse aesthetic form with straightforward realist ontology or direct political action. This prejudice survives as a generally unstated prohibition against specifically engaged or committed, as opposed to formally totalized, reference in contemporary writing as well. These exceptions to modernism—the fantasy of a self-present subject or the correspondence between work and world via the referent, what survives of romanticism or realism as not sublated in modernist form—demand a better account.

What is wrong with this picture, then, is likewise “form.” If neither author nor form can account for an expanded canon of what counts as modernism, what are its necessary and sufficient criteria? We may move here from ontological terms to performative ones: modernism is not so much what it *is* as what it *does*. Modernist authorship and form, certainly, have always been identified with certain kinds of direct agency; typically, the avant-garde provokes the culture at large by making art that breaks the conventions of genre. Literature, as well, has such public agency, although it was highly repressed after modernism. It is important to remember that half a decade before Jesse Helms made political capital out of the NEA’s support of avant-garde visual art, conservative congressmen read examples of intractable poetry into the Congressional Record. The agency of modernist form may be, in specific historical contexts, as much instrumental as critical, addressed to horizons of the culture at large rather than to the author or form. Imagining what such cultural horizons of modernist agency mean led to my recent essay on the disjunctive analogy between the radical negativity of Russian constructivist El Lissitzky’s *Prouns*, as predicated on revolution and inculcating social construction, and the underground electronic music culture of Detroit Techno, as enacting post-urban utopian fantasies after the experience of social collapse in Detroit (Watten [2003], 179–91). In that essay, I saw the “modernist example” of Lissitzky’s *Prouns*, as well as the sampling techniques of Techno, as conveying not only exemplary values to be imitated (or danced to), in terms of what is “right and proper to do,” but also the negativity of “a deferred or missing horizon of comprehension” that it is necessary for the percipient or culture at large to fill in (Watten [2003], 154–74; Gelley [1995], 14). In these examples, aesthetic form constructs a cultural horizon based on its radical negativity—as a wider field of comprehension and action—than that which is bounded by form. It is not only what modernist form inculcates in the subject, and what it represents of action in the world, but what it does not propose, what it leaves unfinished and undone, what it demands to be filled in. Modernist examples make their demands by means of deferred agency as much as any positive claim; in them, negativity aligns with cultural agency. In a more extended discussion, I approached the question of modernist exemplarity in this way:

The modernist example not only provides an answer to a dilemma about the proper way to act; it enacts the scene of that dilemma itself. For Alexander Gelley, ‘The rhetoric of example stages an instance of judgment [in which] the reader does not simply occupy a post of reception [but] is drawn into the process of weighing alternative arguments and cases.’ Appropriate contexts for interpreting its typical universality must, as a result, remain undecided; the example refers a presentation of an exemplary situation (parable) to an as—yet—undecided application of a rule (paradigm). ‘Yet the scandal of example, its logical fallibility, lies in the fact that this ethical summons [is] predicated not on a law or a

rule [but] on the instance in its particularity, an instance that cannot in itself suffice to justify the principle in question.' As in the linguist's "toolmaker's paradigm," where participants in communication can only know what a word for a given tool they cannot directly see means in terms of what it does, we are in a situation where an example is presented in restricted code whose general implications are not yet available [Reddy (1979)]. A relation of part to whole, thus, is crucial in exemplarity; all examples necessarily ask the question, What is this an example of?, where a judgment of wider context is forthcoming. 'Example cannot assume a whole on which it draws. Rather, it is oriented to the recovery of a lost whole or the discovery of a new one,' and 'the mimetic effect here is linked [not] to techniques of representation but to forms of behavior, to a goal of ethical transformation' (3). The example demands the interpretation of a particular (a hero, an event, a relation between things, an outcome; Christ, the crucifixion, temptation, resurrection) as necessary due to its implication of a wider whole; it addresses our 'need to think a universal that we can never know in order to be capable of speaking of any particular at all' (7). (Watten [2003], 158)

In the ethics of the example, modernism and its cultural agency align: this is an implicitly revisionary claim. Otherwise put, any criteria of modernism that fails to apply equally well to Zora Neale Hurston as to Ezra Pound is deficient. It is shocking that, in the old modernist studies, one can find, as late as 1997, the total absence of the Harlem Renaissance in the list of authors in the anthology cited above. Even in Lunn's taxonomy, which intends no cultural exclusion, the Harlem Renaissance would cause trouble due to its challenge to the autonomy of critical reflexivity in his subjective and objective criteria. How is one to describe the work of Countee Cullen as a modernist, for example, when he so often uses sentimental conventions inherited from romantic poetry and assumes a self-presentation that often seems to fail the high modernist test of self-reflexivity?

#### INCIDENT

Once riding in old Baltimore,  
Heart-filled, head-filled with glee,  
I saw a Baltimorean  
Keep looking straight at me.

Now I was eight and very small,  
And he was no whit bigger,  
And so I smiled, but he poked out  
His tongue, and called me, "Nigger."

I saw the whole of Baltimore  
From May until December;  
Of all the things that happened there  
That's all that I remember. (Cullen [1991], 90)

But Countee Cullen, in my view, should be modernist in anyone's account, and not simply for contextual or counter-canonical reasons. By virtue of its relation to the referent—the everyday life of rent parties, Harlem pimps, and railway porters—Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem* has been characterized as a species of proletarian literature. In my view, his novel is as modernist, through

immanent criteria and not merely contextual ones, as Wyndham Lewis's *Tarr*. But *Tarr*'s reference to modern social crisis is absorbed into formal values, while *Home to Harlem*'s account of the Great Migration is consigned to social history.

In placing Hurston at the center of a test of modernism, I do not think the right answer is given by expanding subjective or formal criteria to include expressivist subjectivity or its moment of cultural opposition. Certainly, Hurston is modernist to the extent that her attention to dialect is akin to the foregrounding of signification in more canonically self-reflexive works, but such reflection is as much outward, to the performance of a speech act in a social context that may or may not be felicitous (razors may be flashed) as it is inward-turning and reflexive. Hurston's use of Eatonville, as a return to an earlier state of society than the black metropolis, may parallel uses of archaism and myth in high modernism, but in Eatonville urban and folk cultures are co-present and co-determining. Finally, in Hurston, defamiliarization and representation are often aspects of the same thing or, in her terms, "two-faced." So the description of the funeral that ends "Spunk" is a perfect example, in a moment both descriptive and intertextual, of Viktor Shklovsky's concept of *ostranenie* (defamiliarization): "The cooling board consisted of three sixteen-inch boards on saw horses, a dingy sheet was his shroud. / The women ate heartily of the funeral baked meats and wondered who would be Lena's next. The men whispered coarse conjectures between guzzles of whisky" (Hurston [1995], 32). The funeral is "laid bare" in its naked cultural performativity through formal devices such as the dissociation of conventional metaphors ("cooling board"/"sixteen-inch boards") as well as intertextuality from discrepant cultural spheres, Shakespeare no less ("funeral baked meats").

The doubleness or "two-facedness" of Hurston's writing, at the level of form, may be better accounted for in its exemplary agency. Modernist exemplarity, as I have suggested, is predicated on both positive and negative aspects of agency, but this works differently in Hurston than in Lissitzky. In Lissitzky, the formal negativity of the work inculcates its deferred social comprehension. There are two reinforcing horizons in Lissitzky's construction of the *Prouns*: first, the incomplete horizon of the radical work, and, second, the deferred horizon of social revolution. Hurston's embodied contraries, on the other hand, unfold in diametrically opposed ways as models for action. Consider the following passage from "Story in Harlem Slang" on how her exemplary hero, Jelly, got his name:

His mama named him Marvel, but after a month on Lenox Avenue, he changed all that to Jelly. How come? Well, he put it in the street that when it came to filling that long-felt need, sugar-curing the ladies' feelings, he was in a class by himself and nobody knew his name, so he had to tell 'em. 'It must be jelly, 'cause jam don't shake.' Therefore, his name was Jelly. That was what was on his sign. The stuff was there and it was mellow. Whenever he was challenged by a hard-head or a frail eel on the right of his title he would eyeball the idol-breaker with a slice of ice and put on his ugly-laugh, made up of scorn and pity, and say: 'Youse just dumb to the fact, baby. If you don't now what you talking 'bout, you better ask Granny Grunt. I wouldn't mislead you, baby. I don't need to—not with the help I got.' Then he would give the pimp's sign [see footnote] and percolate on down the Avenue. You can't go behind a fact like that. (Hurston [1995], 82–3; Hurston's note)

This paragraph is about as two-faced as Hurston gets. It is addressed, in radically opposite ways, to two disjunct speech communities, registering the contexts of segregation in the South and racism in the North: a white readership whom Hurston is trying both to impress and distance through her heightened performance of racialized slang; and a black audience who can both see the language for what it is and identify with Hurston's strategy. Between the two, there is a marked frame shift that



will be reenacted or imitated by all readers competent in standard American English who are also competent in African-American sociolects (at the present time, most speakers of both, although in the 1940s this may have been less true). Hurston's irony, between two horizons of language, takes place by means of the simultaneous foregrounding and redundancy of her denaturalized, idiomatic expression. For both speech communities, the work as exemplary both *is* and *is not* imitable: for standard English speakers, the foregrounding of opaque idioms denaturalizes what would be its otherwise realist aesthetic; for African-Americans, the unnatural foregrounding and flagrant display of privileged cultural codes lays bare what auditors in the white world think they are hearing, and is thus not imitable in a second sense. The story becomes an example of Harlem culture in two ways: it is both a virtuosic rendition of heightened exoticism misrecognized as colloquial, and a parody of that misrecognition.

Published by H. L. Mencken in *The American Mercury* in July 1942, the story comes complete with its own glossary of slang and explanatory notes. Hurston became, in fact, a source for African-American dialect in editions of *The American Language* after that date (Mencken [1995] also used the Beat Generation as a source for hipster slang). An auto-ethnographic note to the above passage, for instance, reads,

In Harlesemese, pimp has a different meaning than its ordinary definition as a procurer for immoral purposes. The Harlem pimp is a man whose amatory talents are for sale to any woman who will support him, either with a free meal or on a common law basis; in this sense, he is actually a male prostitute. (Hurston [1995], 128)

The glossary and notes have the effect of foreclosing interpretation by objectively stabilizing it, as much as they point to the absurdity of ethnographic distance from what is, after all, lived experience. A disjunctive analogy here could be made between these notes and Eliot's to *The Waste Land*; of a similar pimp figure, for example, Eliot writes: "Tiresias, although a mere spectator and not indeed a 'character,' is yet the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest. Just as the one-eyed merchant seller of currants, melts into the Phoenician Sailor [...] so all the women are one woman, and the two sexes meet in Tiresias" (Eliot [1998], 72–3). But while Eliot's notes work to establish a (deficient) correspondence theory of the poem, as register of its simultaneous contemporaneity and classical pedigree as they stabilize its meaning, Hurston is working between two communities, both of which are in fact privileged. On the one hand, Hurston takes on the mantle of ethnographic authority in her recording of Harlem slang, addressing her work to the horizon of what I will call Culture I, that of the literary work as "the best that has been thought and said"; she is classicizing the caught moment of cultural performance for the ages. On the other, she parodies the distance of ethnographic perspective in exaggerating the capacities of native speakers, within a horizon of Culture II where culture is "lived experience." Rather than merely acting out a transgression of standard English, the kind of counterplay Michel de Certeau (1984) labeled the *péruque*, Hurston has created a work that is split between registers of agency but united in a form of linguistic use. At the crossroads between two cultures, Hurston places her example.

That is why Hurston is a modernist. It is not because she enacts a crisis of "the subject," because there are two subject positions for the story's exemplum, and a decision between them — which one to imitate? — must be made. The example splits agency; at the exemplary crossroads of the work, there is a cultural unfolding that could go either way. One road could be taken of increasing opacity

and hysterical compression, an increase in the social tension surrounding linguistic codes. Another road to take would be that of an unfolding horizon of linguistic change, in which neither perspective from which the story unfolds is marked as discrepant. A third choice renders either outcome impossible, and consigns the story to an ethical crisis in which outcomes hang suspended in their deferral of enactment—finally, I believe, Hurston’s goal. Such an agonistic reading, based on the non-identical performative duplicity of the narrator and her language, begins to suggest that a crisis of exemplary cultural agency rather than of author or form is determinate of modernism. Baudelairean modernism, if looked at via Hurston, is less a matter of the transitory and eternal than of opposed cultural perspectives in agonistic tension. The payoff for modernist studies, then, is at once to incorporate Hurston into modernism and to see the “transitory and eternal” as one of many instances of a dual cultural register.

By ‘modernity’ I mean the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable. Every old master has had his own modernity; the great majority of fine portraits that have come down to us from former generations are clothed in the costume of their own period. They are perfectly harmonious, because everything—from costume to coiffure down to gesture, glance and smile (for each age has a deportment, a glance and smile of its own)—everything, I say, combines to form a completely viable whole. This transitory, fugitive element, whose metamorphoses are so rapid, must on no account be despised or dispensed with. By neglecting it, you cannot fail to tumble into the abyss of an abstract and indeterminate beauty, like that of the first woman before the fall of man. (Baudelaire [1964], 13)

One would like to imagine a horizon of reading as enactment that would go substantially beyond a return to the author or the fetishization of form—that would, in fact, take place by virtue of a refusal to accede to the finality of either. Modernism has become monumentalized in a list of names; the exemplary work and its moment of crisis is suspended in a condensed horizon of comprehension. Unpacking the exemplary moment congealed in modernist form is the point of a project that continues to find use for its recondite works, and examples of cultural “paradigm shift” between one register and another, and that motivates as well the extension of that paradigm to an entire range of works not regulated by modernism. The retroactive determination of a particular cultural moment, congealed at a moment of crisis in the work, becomes the prospective enactment of its form.

But what then of the postmodern? In order to consider ways in which a revised and expanded modernist canon is not simply its sublation of the negativity of its postmodern critique, we need to distinguish the modernist example from an arguably more unstable, radical, and indeterminate postmodern one. Such a form of postmodern exemplarity, which we may measure against Hurston’s story, is provided by the poetry of Alan Davies’s *Name*, a book-length cycle by the New York language writer published by my own This Press in 1986. In form and content, and arguably in its ethical stance, *Name* is the opposite of a monument to authorship. It is written at a point of crisis of authorship, in which the “I” of narration is reduced to a moment in language and juxtaposed with an invocation of a “you” that is equally its erotic object and the reader. The language of the poem alternates between violent eruptions of id-driven come-ons, media language, dissociated scenes, and air conditioning manuals—literally, as Davies worked as an industrial air conditioning salesman at the time. The crisis invoked by the poem’s language—erotic, reified, and addressed to an unknown other—is determinate of its form:

Whatever I had  
 you could have. Whatever  
 you would have I would  
 have.  
 Every Volkswagen and  
 Subaru is on sale.  
 Dorothy had a sort of series  
 of anxiety attacks on  
 the radio.  
 There is you and I with  
 one body.  
 That won't do.  
 The carpenter puts the nail  
 in the wood. The engineer.  
 If the climate changers change  
 frost leaves our mouth and  
 we say CVHE where we  
 might have said CVHA/B. (Davies [1986], 12)

This is an example of the kind of poetic statement Davies makes in one-page units over 80-some pages. Just as each unit of meaning (phrase/line/sentence) seems to veer from a common argument within a bounded field of "meaning effects," so each completed unit of writing on the page veers from a common thematic center. As examples, each of the poem's units occurs as if there is a choice to be made, but it is unclear what a possible outcome might be. The poem constructs a carefully plotted sequence of outcomes that it then diverges from, as if to hold all decisions in a suspension of any outcome. In the above section, it is the same whether the choice is between whatever you or I could have or between different part numbers for air conditioning units. If you and I get what we want, each other, then "whatever I had / you could have. Whatever / you would / have I would have." Intersubjectivity could equally be a choice between parts in a repair manual, (CVHE or CVHA/B); the truth for both subjects will be determined by controlling "climate changers" due to whose expertise "frost leaves our mouth" and we can only name the results as preordained. The outcome hangs suspended in a warehouse of replaceable parts, an impossible situation in which subject and object are identical and a used car sale is of the same order of implication as "a series / of anxiety attacks / on the radio." The larger field of the poem's meaning effects will not be solved by a decisive action, nor does it monumentalize the agonized moment of choice. Rather, it suspends all action in an indeterminate field of erotically charged but obdurate units of potential "roads not taken." It is, of course, Davies's insight that this is a condition of postmodern love.

In order to read this poem, we have to return to its moment of crisis; as in the title of the poem, the question of the "name"—of the authorial subject, of the love object—is that which refuses determination. In this sense, it is not the meaning of any particular act but the indeterminacy of its outcome that is the poem's concern. Otherwise put, desire is not imitable: to exemplify one's desire would put an end to it; there are only the negative horizons of the consequences of the act of desire, which are not yet found out. Oedipus may act, but his knowledge of an outcome is not confined to

what he thinks is his choice. “Name” is other to one whose destiny is achieved through indeterminate acts:

You’re gone now.  
 You’re gone.  
 You’re gone.  
 You’re gone now.  
 Your reasons perambulate.  
 Your reasons might.  
 You might understand this  
 if you had been there with us.  
 Your name is Name  
 and you have only so many feelings  
 inside, inside of your name.  
 With Name in it.  
 The names that make  
 your fact, move.  
 Your name. Our name.  
 The name in the feet  
 over the water cooled  
 reciprocating  
 chiller. Ours. Our  
 feet. Centravac. (Davies [1986], 80)

The name “Centravac” at the center of this poem is close to what we may imagine as the “post-modern moment.” What counts is not what is to be determined in the crisis represented by the poem (as in Hurston); it is what cannot be determined of the outcome of that crisis. Hurston’s negativity — what her story ironizes, from two conflicting perspectives — remains a space of prospection, of unfolding meaning, even if agonistically condensed in the form of the work. Davies’s negativity neither literalizes nor ironizes, and the result is the same: the poem’s exemplarity is what it cannot say, its own name. Paul Mann (1999) writes of a postmodern ethics beyond examples or ethical decision that applies in Davies’s case; Mann proposes not an ethical reflection on the moment of decision but an “anethics” in which actions hang suspended in the self-undoing of the example and are thus destabilized by all possibilities of an outcome. In an “anethics,” the form in which action occurs in the postmodern condition, “[t]here is no decision between active and passive. We are in a zone where the most insistent actions are overdetermined effects of indetermined force” (Mann [1999], 252). If we are currently in a period where a need for resolution has created a new demand for monumental authorship, a return to its agonistic fixity, Davies’s *Name* solves the problem of the author by going beyond it, into a vacuum beyond poetic form. His solution is precisely an anethical refusal of the modernist return. As I developed the possibilities of an “anethics” in a review of Mann’s work:

*Anethics* involves this division, this back-stretched connection, between the vast field of ethical discourse and the impossibility of ethical totalization it indicates. That is why it will do no good to refine and defend a position [...] not in the name of any fashionable inconsistency but at the very limits of a discipline faced with everything it cannot dominate, even in the mere act of writing. (Watten [2000], 219)

If *anethics* is an ethics of no position, Mann immediately goes on to produce one: a crossroads of ethical decision in which agency is suspended in retroactive determination of any ultimate outcomes. Psychoanalysis, then, becomes a model for thinking, formally rather than causally, about what one will have done. In a reading of the Greek maxim “ethos anthropoi daimon” (often interpreted as “character is destiny”) both “ethos” and “daimon” become mutually constituting for the poor “anthropos” who tries to imagine any prospective agency. This is first of all a problem of ethical discourse, which tries argumentatively to erase that which is “only displaced, veiled, repressed, translated [...] the residual force of everything we believe we have left behind” (Mann [1999], 222). Agency, then, must address all possibilities of an outcome: ‘the status of the hypothetical is an ethical problem’ (226). It is here, in the relation of agency to possibility, that Mann formally reproduces what he has gone to great lengths to exclude in the entire course of his book’s argument: the *example*, which returns to re-present exactly what might be imagined as possible at the moment of action at a crossroads. The example, in a very long tradition, is a crux, but Mann wants an *anethics* without examples—even as he reproduces its formal necessity. Such reliance on an example that is none immediately recalls Mann’s initial point of departure—the avant-garde. And indeed it is my final act of revenge on the critic to show that his entire project has been to reproduce, by attempting to short-circuit his envy for the object that is the avant-garde, the avant-garde’s contribution to ethics.

*Anethics* is avant-garde ethics without guilt over recuperation (and hence defeat of agency) in its objects. It is the horizontal possibility of the avant-garde, in other words, as if its objects were entirely transparent to the crossroads of ethical decision. (Watten [2000], 219–20)

In my use of contrasting examples from Zora Heale Hurston and Alan Davies, I am arguing for rethinking modernist authorship, form, and finally agency in two ways. First, modernism in the example of “Story of Harlem Slang” is caught at the crossroads of an ethical decision—through its double-voiced performance between two divergent communities, black and white. Hurston’s example simply rejects the canonical narratives of the old modernism as an excluded candidate for admission to it; more precisely, it suggests that the rigorous formal and critical criteria Lunn proposes need to be articulated further at the crossroads of their formal and cultural horizons. Modernism may indeed be formally defined—not by objectified formal properties in the Anglo-American tradition of literary modernism, but through an expanded account of literary form derived from the Russian Formalists, in which the internalized dialectic with social and historical context specifies the nature of form. Such a consideration opens modernism to numerous works that address the conflicting claims of Culture I, a ground for cultural production in a transhistorical sense, and Culture II, the ephemeral world of lived experience in culture(s), seen as an equal in the production of value. Second, while postmodern authors like Davies invoke a similar overlay of disjunct horizons, they are organized in the work of art as a different form of example. For Hurston, a contest of horizons or “double-voiced discourse” is stabilized at the level of text; for Davies, it is not. For Hurston, one can live in the contradictions between horizons precisely because of the mediations of form; for Davies, neither affirmation of lived experience nor the negativity of critique can guarantee any form of stable result. The outcome hangs suspended. If this, in Jean-François Lyotard’s notion (1984), is the moment at which postmodernism renews the necessity of modernist form, where we want the affirmation of form as a consequence of the aporia of postmodern ethics, we are not going to get it. Davies’s poem points out an ethical attractiveness in Hurston’s story, one that is concomitant to its

risk — where we see locked in mutually constitutive contradiction the interests of two speech communities whose hierarchical relation is unstable and thus transformable. In its refusal of or failure to distinguish the interpretive stakes at its moment of decision, Davies's poem points as well to the lack of closure of postmodern ethics, which cannot finally be reduced to the retrospective guarantee of modernist stability in the dual horizons of literary form. Which ethics would you choose? The postmodern thus appears precisely as the crossroads of a modernist decision, which we are free to make in an ethical or anethical way. But what, then, is an anethical decision, and how does it bear on the nature of postmodern form?

I will end with the question that initiated my discussion on its original occasion: What's wrong with this picture? Bambi has two heads. A fish perched on a see-saw holds a kite string that arcs upward toward the sky — but there is no kite. The little girl running toward her mother has an X on her sleeve. The sky over the playground is, in fact, black. Modernism and postmodernism walk hand in hand under the weeping willow tree.

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## Thoroughly Modern Modernism

### Modernism and its Postmodernisms

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Modernism is nothing new. This would be to say that certain typical tendencies and traits associated with Modernism can be readily identified in earlier works, at least with the benefit of hindsight. Self-conscious irony is hardly exclusive to Joyce, Nabokov, and Queneau, it occurs in *Don Quixote* and Lucian's *A True Story*, to take but two examples. Deliberate syntactic gaps and slip-pages are not innovations of Pound and Rilke, for they can be seen in some of Horace's poems. Hermeticism is confined neither to César Vallejo nor to the Italian school of *ermetismo*, it can be evinced in the *trobar clus* poems of Raimbaut d'Aurenga and Arnaut Daniel. Twelve tone progressions could be heard long before Schönberg in Bach's Suites for Solo Cello. And Blake is a forerunner, of sorts, to the "multimedia" experimentations of writers and artists like Wyndham Lewis and Picasso. (And, this point about the unoriginality of Modernism is also not exactly new.) None of these examples of formalistic antecedence should prove too surprising (and such a list could easily be expanded), but they suggest a problem persistent to discussions of Modernism. By definition, Modernism is supposed to be *new*, as exemplified by Rimbaud's famous refrain at the end of *Une saison en enfer* (A Season in Hell), "[o]ne must be absolutely modern" (Rimbaud [1984], 150),<sup>1</sup> or by Pound's exhortation to "[m]ake it new." Yet even the novelty of Modernism, if construed as the proclamation of novelty and originality, is somewhat antiquated. Perhaps the single most enduring expression is the urge to establish the current generation as being different and free from its predecessors. Notions of the "modern" and of "newness" are always being, and always have been, articulated. For example, the character Aper in Tacitus's *Dialogus de oratoribus* (Dialogue on Orators) continually refutes his interlocutors' nostalgia for a bygone era of rhetorical excellence by claiming that the contemporary style of oratory is markedly superior to what had come before. As he says, "Tell me now whether you believe the temples of these times less solidly built, since they are constructed not out of rough stones and shapeless tiles but gleam with marble and glow with gold" (Tacitus [1991], 110).<sup>2</sup>

So then how could Modernism (or even Modernisms, for these are always plural) be distinct from a *querelle des anciens et des modernes*? To borrow from Richard Hamilton, just what is it that makes today's Modernism so different, so appealing? What, exactly, is so new about Modernism? And what could come next? In the Preface to an anthology entitled *The Modern Tradition*, Richard Ellmann and Charles Feidelson, Jr. state: "Modernism strongly implies some sort of historical discontinuity, either a liberation from inherited patterns, or, at another extreme, deprivation and disinheritance" (Ellmann and Feidelson [1965], vi). Such a definition of Modernism places it squarely within the



register of a Post-Romanticism (a not-uncommon problem within the genre of Modernism); indeed, this definition makes Dostoyevsky's *Underground Man* the archetypal Modernist.

The fundamental problem with Ellmann and Feidelson's definition is that earlier instances of historical discontinuity could easily be provided. One such example would be Christian Epic, which pronounces a deliberate rupture from inherited patterns in the conversion of a pagan form (Epic) to an expression of Christian truth. Unlike Prudentius, Dante, and Tasso, who relied upon allegory as the vehicle to translate Epic norms into Christianity, Milton purposefully eschewed allegory and attempted to overcome (and even, being melodramatic here, destroy) the Epic form *within* an Epic. This is clearly signalled in his second *invocatio*, not to Urania the heavenly Muse, but to "Thou, O Spirit, that dost prefer / Before all Temples th'upright heart and pure" (Milton [1963], vol. I, 16–17), that is, the Holy Spirit and not some funky, allegorised figuration of a pagan deity. Milton is thus a perfect example of Ellmann and Feidelson's Modernist liberating himself from an inherited pattern of mendacity. Stripped of his Puritan vigor, Milton might make for a good Modernist happily quaffing espresso at the Cabaret Voltaire.

As for Ellmann and Feidelson's idea of the expression of deprivation and disinheritance, one need look no further than Aper's interlocutor Messalla in the *Dialogus de oratoribus* who bemoans the passing of the formidable orators of old. An even older example can be found in the *Iliad*, which is itself a tale of bygone heroes, when old Nestor recalls the irreparable loss of "the strongest generation of earth-born mortals" (Homer [1951], 66).<sup>3</sup> By themselves, novelty, loss, and the inheritance of disinheritance do not make anything new. If it were truly new, Modernism would have to offer something other than a revolutionary overturning of an *ancien régime* (like Aper's sophists or Milton's anti-Epic) or a lachrymose nostalgia (like Messalla's or Nestor's).

Indeed, "a liberation from inherited patterns" is hardly a good definition of Modernism since many (but not all) Modernist writers have consciously and conspicuously immersed themselves within various traditions. T. S. Eliot, for one, advocated an historical sense, in no uncertain terms, of "not only the pastness of the past, but of its presence" (Eliot [1975], 38). A presence of the past might be too much to ask for, but there is an element of the repetitive in Modernism. Modernism's "novelty" seems to lie in an attitude towards the past and tradition, in other words its historical consciousness. This attitude is neither one of overturning nor one of mourning the past, which would distinguish it from the broader epistemic category of "Modernity." Modernism's newness perhaps resides in the modes in which it is not new.

Modernism does not merely repeat the past, it repeats the mistakes of the past as well. One finds a literal example of this in Pound's first canto: "Holding his golden wand, knew me, and spoke first: / 'A second time? why? man of ill star, / Facing the sunless dead and this joyless region?'" (Pound [1975], 4). The bulk of this canto is a translation into English of a portion of book XI of Andreas Divus's sixteenth-century translation of the *Odyssey* (elsewhere in this canto, Pound cites this source with scrupulous bibliographical accuracy). Pound deliberately retained a mistake that Divus had inadvertently made: in place of the Greek word *diogenès* (sprung from Zeus), the Greek text Divus relied upon incorrectly had *dígonos* (twice-born or double) (Terrell [1980], 2). The Homeric context for the passage that Pound selected is Odysseus's account of his journey to the underworld. Pound cuts off the translation during Teiresias's prophecy, which begins with the passage that contains Divus's "mistake" in translation. A more conventional and direct translation of this passage into English reads:

holding  
 a staff of gold, and he knew who I was, and spoke to me:  
 ‘Son of Laertes and seed of Zeus, resourceful Odysseus,  
 how is it then, unhappy man, you have left the sunlight  
 and come here, to look on dead men, and this place without pleasure?  
 (Homer [1965], 170)<sup>4</sup>

In Homer’s original, Teiresias greets Odysseus with praise and curiosity as to why he has undertaken a journey to the underworld. In Pound’s version, Teiresias seems to chastise Odysseus for making this unpleasant journey a second time. Therefore, in Pound’s canto, Divus’s mistake is itself *dígonos*. This repetition suggests that the *Odyssey* that Pound has inherited is not Homer’s, but rather one that has been meditated throughout the centuries, an odyssey that is always mistakenly “born again.” Pound’s odyssey begins in the plural. Hugh Kenner calls it “a second derivative, a function of a function, an inspection of what is happening derived from its way of happening” (Kenner [1971], 149). Furthermore, in the act of repetition (*dígonos*), the link to the divine (*diogenès*) is lost. If Pound’s *Cantos* begin with a heroic descent to summon truth, it is made perfectly clear that such a journey is hardly original.

Unsurprisingly, Pound’s self-conscious allusion to linguistic and historical estrangement within a translation is also hardly original. One can find a precedence for this in the oldest-known example of literary translation in the Western tradition: Livius Andronicus’s translation of the *Odyssey* into Latin (third century BC), which survives only in fragmentary form. Andronicus’s translation of the first line is quite sly:

Virum mihi, Camena, insece versutum (Warmington [1957], 24)  
 Ándra moi énnepé, Moûsa, polútropón (Homer [1917], vol. I, 1)  
 Tell me, Muse, of the man of many ways  
 (Homer [1965], 27; Richmond Lattimore’s translation)

Andronicus’s work is not just a translation, but a transposition of a Greek text into a Roman context. For example, the verse form he selects is Roman (*saturnius versus*) and in the first line he turns the Greek Muse into the Camena, Roman fountain gods. Much more interesting is his choice of the epithet *versutum* to translate *polútropón*, which literally means “man of many turns or ways” and thus implies shrewdness. The word *versutum* denotes cunning and skill and derives from the verb *verso*, which means “to turn or twist,” and thus it retains the sense of turning from the Greek verb *tropéîn*. But *verso* also means “to adapt or alter to fit the circumstances” and is thus quite apposite as a description of Andronicus’s own task of translation. Therefore, one could read Andronicus’s cunning translation as meaning: “Tell me, ô goddess, of the translated man.” Since there is an ambiguity between the passive and active voices in Latin, Odysseus is either the man who translates or the man who has been translated (Buchner [1979], 39–40). In Andronicus’s text, translation, and not the Muse, authorises and animates the text. Seen in this light, Pound’s use of Divus’s *dígonos* is all the more cunning since it registers the fact that his poetic odyssey is always doomed to be a repeat journey; his voyage *comprehends* those of its predecessors.

Pound’s acute consciousness of the weight of historical tradition, and its concomitant interference, should put paid to assertions that the project of Modernism (or of Modernisms) is to sever

itself from what has come before. But there is a different character to the historical consciousness exhibited by certain Modernists—perhaps even something new—for which Pound’s first canto provides a clue. Paul Valéry phrased this attitude quite precisely:

Perhaps an age feels itself to be ‘modern’ when it finds it can admit equally a whole host of doctrines, tendencies, and ‘truths’ all different from each other if not totally contradictory, all existing simultaneously and actively in the same individuals. (Valéry [1960b], 106–7)<sup>5</sup>

Modernist historical consciousness is perhaps paratactic. Pound’s first canto is a perfect example of Valéry’s definition in that it animates not just one Odysseus (Homer’s) but an entire phalanx of Odysseuses from all ages that have each made the journey a second time.

Pound’s retention of Divus’s *dígonos* precisely illustrates how the history of a text (such as the *Odyssey*) is a history of its various misreadings. Divus is just a gloss on an entire tradition that separates us from Homer, other members being Livius Andronicus and George Chapman, whose “loud and bold” (Keats [1990], 32) voice drowned out Homer’s—interestingly, Chapman demonstrably relied upon Divus’s Latin translation (Schoell [1926], 152–3). Furthermore, the sheer and utter comprehensiveness of Pound’s *Cantos* are perfectly illustrative of this profligate tendency Valéry described. In the first canto, Pound abandons Divus’s translation of Homer precisely at the point when Odysseus is named and then veers to a translation of the *Hymn to Aphrodite* (via another Latin translation), thereby suggesting a different frame of reference. Furthermore, the range of subject matter treated in *The Cantos* is dauntingly vast, ranging from early American history to troubadour poets to Chinese history to economic theory, and so on. In a sense, Pound’s *Guide to Kulchur* is an attempt to assemble and anthologise the cultural references requisite for a reading of *The Cantos*: “There is no mystery about the Cantos, they are the tale of the tribe [...] As history becomes better understood I think this emphasis will become steadily more intelligible to the general reader” (Pound [1970], 194).

At least initially, Pound had a guiding and unifying concept for *The Cantos*, although ultimately it became an abandoned work that Pound, nevertheless, continued until his death. The voyage set forth in the first canto bore no happy destination. The final fragmentary cantos, which drop out of the numerical sequence, register the belatedly-realised incompleteness of the project (although Pound did write a terminal, fragmentary canto in 1966 dedicated to Olga Rudge). Ultimately, *The Cantos* do not quite cohere. As with Mallarmé’s dream of the “Total Book,” *The Cantos* remain a *livre à venir* (a forthcoming book).

That I lost my center  
fighting the world.  
The dreams clash  
and are shattered—  
and that I tried to make a paradiso  
terrestre (Pound [1975], 816)

Valéry’s definition of Modernism as having an eclectic and paratactic historical consciousness is not without precedence and thus, on its own, is not enough to signal something new about Modernism. Many Renaissance Humanists worked with incredibly diverse texts and traditions. For

example, defending the wide variety of sources he employs in *De hominis dignitate* (On the Dignity of Man), Pico della Mirandola wrote: "But I have resolved not to swear by anyone's word, that I may base myself on all teachers of philosophy, examine all writings, recognize every school" (Pico [1965], 21).<sup>6</sup> Pico's rampant eclecticism was in the service of reconciling different modes of thought in order to synthesise a united and universal philosophy of self-actualisation. For Pico, man is central in the universe as "the molder and maker of thyself" (Pico [1965], 5).<sup>7</sup> In distinction, as Pound's *Cantos* ultimately suggest, perhaps the Modernist "collage" is neither quite so syncretic nor so self-centred. While there may be a remembrance of the past integral to the establishment of the "modern," it remains a clash and shatter of remembrances. The clash is Modernism's novelty.

Nietzsche provides a turning-point towards the non-syncretic clash. Near the end of "Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil der Historie für das Leben" (On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life), Nietzsche invokes the "odyssey" through history he has taken in this essay: "This voyage was perilous and exciting. How far we still are from the quiet contemplativeness with which we first watched our ship put out" (Nietzsche [1983], 116).<sup>8</sup> However, like Pound's poetic "odyssey," this too is a voyage that does not have an end. Indeed, Nietzsche pokes fun at Hegel for thinking himself to be the *summum* of history. "No, the *goal of humanity* cannot lie in its end but only in its *highest exemplars*" (Nietzsche [1983], 111).<sup>9</sup> The exemplars Nietzsche explicates are not unproblematic. He begins by stating that man is so encumbered by history that "we moderns have nothing whatever of our own; only by replenishing and cramming ourselves with the ages [...] do we become anything worthy of notice, that is to say, walking encyclopaedias" (Nietzsche [1983], 79).<sup>10</sup> We are, apparently, always doomed to make the voyage through history a second time, over and over again. Yet, "[i]f you were to venture to interpret the past you can do so only out of the fullest exertion of the vigour of the present" (Nietzsche [1983], 94).<sup>11</sup> This is to say that the past that is remembered is conditioned by the exigencies of the present, which itself exists only as a storehouse for that remembered past. Furthermore, since there is not just one past (Homer, for example) but *many* other intervening pasts (Andronicus, Divus, and Chapman, for example), the pasts that are remembered were themselves already conditioned through a (not necessarily coherent) palimpsest of other, past presents. In short, memory is always misremembrance. And under those misremembrances, there can be no true past, no link to God. The link to the divine (*diogenès*) is severed amidst repetitions (*dígonos*). Nietzsche signals at both the beginning and the end of this essay the importance of forgetting, of the ahistorical: "the unhistorical and the historical are necessary in equal measure for the health of an individual, of a people and of a culture" (Nietzsche [1983], 63).<sup>12</sup> The past thus lies lost under the contradiction between history and forgetting.

Like *The Cantos*, Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* also brings together diverse influences into a proteiform mosaic of polysemic perversity. As Joyce says: "Sleep, where in the waste is the wisdom?" (Joyce [1975], 114). This line is a reworking of a passage from the opening of T. S. Eliot's "The Rock": "Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? / Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?" (Eliot [1963], 147). Eliot posits loss as the absence of a past presence that is identifiable as a locus of absence, whereas Joyce registers the persistence of detritus. In place of the past, we have waste. Knowledge is neither achieved nor realised amidst the rubble and rabble of history. There is a cruel joke in Modernism, in the attitude registered by Valéry, that Proust describes in "Les Intermittences du cœur" (The Intermittencies of the Heart), the final section of the first chapter of

*Sodome et Gomorrhe*. Marcel has returned to Balbec about one year after his grandmother had died. At the moment when he feels returned to his younger self in the presence of his doting grandmother, he finally realises that she is dead. The moment he feels her presence is exactly when he knows she is forever gone:

I had only just discovered this because I had only just, on feeling her for the first time alive, real, making my heart swell to breaking-point, on finding her at last, learned that I had lost her forever. Lost for ever; I could not understand, and I struggled to endure the anguish of this contradiction. (Proust [1992], vol. IV, 182)<sup>13</sup>

His remembrance of her is at once an experience of both a proximity never before experienced (“feeling her for the first time alive”) and an utter, abject absence. The remembrance is a non-resolvable (or non-syncretic) contradiction.

The evolution of this contradiction between presence and absence eventually propels Marcel to become a writer. The Proustian project is the writing of the contradiction. As Beckett wrote of Proust, “the germ of the Proustian solution is contained in the statement of the problem itself” (Beckett [1957], 23). The past is only present in its absention. In *Le Temps retrouvé* (Time Regained), Marcel finally gets an inkling of this realisation after listening to Vinteuil’s musical phrase:

Yes: if owing to the work of oblivion, the returning memory can throw no bridge, form no connecting link between itself and the present minute [...] for this very reason it causes us suddenly to breathe a new air, an air which is new precisely because we have breathed it in the past. (Proust [1992], vol. VI, 221–2)<sup>14</sup>

The work of recollection is thus an odd kind of Alzheimer’s disease: an inscriptive remaking and remodelling of the past in the wake of its forgetful effacement. A connection, of a kind, is made to the past through the ongoing realisation of the lack of a connection to the past. This ongoing realisation is the work of writing the *Recherche*, a work of contradiction. In a general way then this project of writing is analogous to the shattering of Pound’s dreams in the *Cantos*: a novel profligacy of the past rendered without cohesion.

The Modernist palimpsest of history entails a similar anguish of the contradiction between past and present: the re-presentations of variegated pasts do not return anything to presence. The dreams clash and are shattered as the representations merely serve to announce and reaffirm the departure and perdition of the past. Even as technologies of representation improve, the past remains gone. A Proust armed with a digital video camera would still endure the anguish of contradiction. Writing of the gulf between us and the *Iliad*, Maurice Blanchot states: “We know that these works, even when transmitted without error, escape us and become strange to us by the reading that makes them accessible” (Blanchot [1971], 53).<sup>15</sup> As with Marcel at Balbec, the moment of representation’s greatest proximity is the moment of the greatest gulf. Seen in this way, the thing that Modernism has lost (or, is losing, is in the process of losing) is, ultimately, itself. Assimilation is co-ordinate with expropriation.

Of course, the Modernist *Gestalt* is itself an historical phenomenon that can be, and has been, historically assimilated. The problem with Modernism is that any thoroughly modern movement cannot stop time, something will always happen *next*. Every Modernism has its “post-Modernism.” The anti-normative can easily be normativised. Blanchot phrases this quite precisely:

The ideal of culture is to bring off pictures of the whole, panoramic reconstitutions that situate in the same view Schönberg, Einstein, Picasso, Joyce—throwing Marx into the bargain, if possible, or better yet, Marx and Heidegger. Then the man of culture is happy; he has lost nothing, he has gathered up all the crumbs of the feast. (Blanchot [1993], 400)<sup>16</sup>

The man of culture thus is immune to the Proustian anguish of contradiction through the ideal of lossless representation. The discordant strands of Modernism become just one of the many exhibits Modernity provides. “Our modernity makes a constant effort to defeat the exchange [...]. And even so, modernity can do nothing: the exchange recuperates everything, acclimating what appears to deny it” (Barthes [1975], 23–4).<sup>17</sup> Modernism becomes just another advertisement for Benneton, a 7–11 nightmare at 3 a.m.

What then are the possible responses to this contradiction between absence and representation that is variously registered in Modernism? In one of several possible “post-Modernist” moments, Jürgen Habermas defines Modernity in a way that is, initially, similar to Valéry’s:

Modernity revolts against the normalizing functions of tradition; modernity lives on the experience of rebelling against all that is normative. [...] the time consciousness articulated in avant-garde art is not simply ahistorical; it is directed at what might be called a false normativity in history. (Habermas [1983], 5)<sup>18</sup>

Habermas’s notion of “aesthetic modernity” begins with Baudelaire and is essentially congruent with the Anglo-American definition of Early Modernism. The contemporary moment is not defined as some synthesis of what has come before in an on-going historical sublation (*Aufhebung*), as Pico had essayed, but rather it is a non-syncretic repository, history’s waste-bin. Modernism’s originality lies precisely in its mode of eclectic unoriginality. In this way, Modernism “drops out” of tradition, not because it is disconnected from history due to a supposed radical novelty, but rather because it is differently-cathected to tradition. That the past does not cohere is the Modernist contribution.

Habermas goes on to describe, and condemn, a specific process of “anti-modernism” that establishes itself over the ashes of Modernism (that is, over the realisation of a non-normative historical consciousness):

The ‘young conservatives’ recapitulate the basic experience of aesthetic modernity. They claim as their own the revelations of a decentered subjectivity, emancipated from the imperatives of work and usefulness, and with this experience they step outside the modern world. (Habermas [1983], 14)<sup>19</sup>

Seen in this way, anti-Modernism depends upon the precedence of a Modernism against which it rebels. Ihab Hassan unwittingly provides an example of this parasitic rapport to a supposedly dead Modernism in a schematic table illustrating the differences between Modernism and Postmodernism. Among the binary pairs he lists are: “Design” versus “Chance;” “Hierarchy” versus “Anarchy;” “Mastery/Logos” versus “Exhaustion/Silence;” “Metaphysics” versus “Irony;” “Determinacy” versus “Indeterminacy;” and “Synthesis” versus “Antithesis” (Hassan [1987], 91–2). Hassan’s association of synthesis with Modernism and antithesis with Postmodernism demonstrates the tendency Habermas described: he voids Modernism of its anti-syncretic comportment and gives this privilege to Postmodernism through a crass dialectic. In short, Hassan is much like Tacitus’s Aper, an unabashed apologist of novelty for novelty’s sake.

Against these anti-Modernist tendencies, Habermas attempts to define an enduring vitality and role for Modernism. Habermas construes Modernism as an Enlightenment project gone bad. Initially, the disappearance of unifying and normative *Weltanschauungen* entailed a possibility of “communicative action” whereby different fields could be ethically adjudicated “for the rational organization of everyday social life” (Habermas [1983], 9).<sup>20</sup> In place of God, we have communication as a true consensus finally becomes possible on the basis of a recognition and appraisal of differences. In a sense, Habermas’s man of “communicative action” is much like Blanchot’s “man of culture,” gathering up the crumbs for a meal. It is important for Habermas’s notion of Modernism that incoherence and ethics are still, somehow, commensurable. For Habermas, this “rational organization” was compromised and forestalled by the disillusionment of early twentieth-century artistic movements, such as Surrealism, that emphasised dissolution and loss. Proust’s anguished contradiction interferes with communicative action. Habermas’s Modernism, with its emphasis on communicative action, is a realisation of negativity (the negation of normalisation) that is still resolvable without remaining a contradiction. Habermas’s Modernism is thus a positivism. This positivism is ruined by the nattering nabobs of negativity that are known as the avant-garde and the Postmodern. Modernism, for Habermas, thus remains an “incomplete project” precisely because of anti-Modernists and Postmodernists (in this camp he names Bataille, Foucault, and Derrida and, although unnamed, Blanchot would certainly belong here). Habermas thus mourns for the Enlightenment that has been obscured by Postmodernisms.

In response to Habermas, Jean-François Lyotard has proposed a vigorous defence of the Postmodern. In *La Condition postmoderne* (The Postmodern Condition), Lyotard defines the Modern as

any science that legitimates itself with reference to a metadiscourse of this kind making an explicit appeal to some grand narrative, such as the dialectics of Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth. (Lyotard [1984a], xxiii)<sup>21</sup>

In the absence of one single meta-narrative or *Weltanschauung* (God, for example), there are now many. In contrast, Lyotard defines the Postmodern as an “incredulity toward metanarratives” (Lyotard [1984a], xxiv).<sup>22</sup> Unsurprisingly, for Lyotard Habermas’s communicative action is unworkable because it relies upon “the validity of the narrative of emancipation” (Lyotard [1984a], 60).<sup>23</sup> For Lyotard, Habermas’s dream is but one of the meta-narratives that lies shattered in the Postmodern world.

In a subsequent essay, “Réponse à la question : qu’est-ce que le postmoderne?” (Answer to the Question: What is the Postmodern?), Lyotard directly addresses Habermas’s condemnation of Postmodernism by changing his definition of the Modern condition. Instead of relying upon the legitimating force of a meta-narrative, the Modern is now the art of the Kantian sublime: “I shall call modern the art which devotes its ‘little technical expertise’ (*son ‘petit technique’*), as Diderot used to say, to present the fact that the unrepresentable exists” (Lyotard [1984b], 78).<sup>24</sup> Lyotard’s definition of Modernity has thus become a bit closer to Habermas’s since it is now also anti-normative. However, Lyotard phrases this anti-normativity in explicitly Kantian terms: “modernity takes place in the withdrawal of the real and according to the sublime relation between the presentable and the conceivable” (Lyotard [1984b], 79).<sup>25</sup> Lyotard lists several possible reactions to this withdrawal (that is, several possible “post-Modernisms”) and, using Proust and Joyce as privileged examples, he defines Postmodernism as the fulfilment of Modernism (rather than as the sceptical repudiation of Modernism, as he had outlined in his earlier work):

The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable. (Lyotard [1984b], 81)<sup>26</sup>

Lyotard's Postmodern differs from Hassan's in that it does not represent a further step in the history of thought. Rather than proffer novelty for novelty's sake, Lyotard's Postmodern eschews Habermas's consensual communicative action in order to emphasise and aggravate the anguished contradiction of Proust. Although, in a sense, Lyotard's project is perhaps just as ethical as Habermas's, albeit in a somewhat different vector, since he specifies a course of action: "Let us wage a war on totality; let us be witnesses to the unrepresentable; let us activate the differences and save the honor of the name" (Lyotard [1984b], 82).<sup>27</sup> Indeed, in *Le Différend* he attempts to realise this call-to-arms. Since contradictions can never be resolved, he attempts to propose a type of Wittgensteinian language game that can "save the honor of thinking" granted "the absence of a universal genre of discourse" (Lyotard [1988], xii).<sup>28</sup> The repetition of "honor" from the earlier essay is telling: Lyotard is attempting to propose a praxis of honorable communicative action, but one in which differences remain as differences and are not reconciled in the service of a societal good (that is, in a narrative of emancipation).

In sum, Lyotard has articulated a mechanism for coping with the Proustian anguish of contradiction that purports to maintain the "honor" (the negativity) of this crisis. The problem is, as he admits, formidable: how to imagine an ethics of crisis that does not revert to a positivism, or become appropriated by culture (as Blanchot had warned). Jacques Derrida, too, has articulated an ethical Postmodernism, a post-crisis ethics. For Derrida, the crisis of contradiction calls for a response of responsibility. Perhaps the most explicit articulation of this ethical dimension is in Derrida's essay on Paul de Man's wartime writings (in one of the few passages in his works where he actually uses the term "deconstruction"): "in my view, deconstruction consists in nothing less than putting this responsibility to work, especially when it analyses traditional or dogmatic axioms concerning the concept of responsibility" (Derrida [1989], 259 n. 44).<sup>29</sup> Deconstruction is the operationalisation (*mise en œuvre*) of the responsibility which arises out of the powerlessness of the encounter with irreducible alterity. Furthermore, this operationalisation is never consistent; the only consistency in deconstruction is rigor, and not doctrine. For Derrida, responsibility arises out of conflict (or resistance), specifically in a conflict against some notion of a totalising law. The power of responsibility thus comes from the powerlessness of response.

Of course, this strategy of reading could itself be, and indeed has become, a law unto itself, another course at the cultural banquet. Derrida explicitly signalled this tension in his contribution to a colloquium on the "States of 'Theory,'" held in the Spring of 1987 at the Critical Theory Institute at Irvine. Derrida began his contribution by highlighting all the contradictions both signalled and reconciled by the colloquium's title: "I presume that they didn't want to appear to be presuming that there might be a single possible state of theory — *the* theory — that is the possibility of totalizing all theoretical phenomena [...] in a chart [...] which would [...] allow for the reading of taxonomic tabularity" (Derrida [1990], 64). In other words, while the colloquium organisers hoped to elicit a plurality of voices, the very act of naming the subject of the colloquium projects a normalising tendency towards unification: there are states, plural, and these can and will be comprehended



(*e pluribus unum*). The implication is that the colloquium and the Institute aim towards *diction* (in the singular) rather than the agony of a Proustian *contra-diction*. Theory, whatever it may not or may be, might find itself gone in the midst of the colloquium it has purportedly consecrated. Indeed, in the introduction to the volume of the colloquium's proceedings, David Carroll frets that "the fact that theory was being given a privileged status and assigned *a state* within the university system of research units were signs of the normalization of theory" (Carroll [1990], 5). Like Modernism, theory, it seems, runs the risk of normalisation, that is, the disappearance of exactly that which made it different. Its negativity can be easily appropriated as "something good."

Derrida describes the operation of critical theory as a series of mutually interfering, mobile, and asymmetrical forces he calls "jetties." While these jetties can be categorised or tabulated, they are ever-changing and mutually metonymic. In the absence of a regulating meta-narrative (or *Weltanschauung*), each jetty "claims to comprehend itself by comprehending all the others" (Derrida [1990], 65). Each jetty is a *Weltanschauung* unto itself. The polemic between Habermas and Lyotard is a good example of such activity: each of them claimed more properly to comprehend, in order to repudiate, the other's theoretical ground. Each jetty states itself by *enstating* its competitors. But, paradoxically, even as the jetty tends towards stabilisation, it is also a force for destabilisation since its very operation demonstrates the *absence* of an adjudicating meta-narrative or meta-language (Derrida [1990], 85–6). The *state* of theory is thus the perpetual destabilisation of enstatement. This is what Derrida enstates as the case of deconstruction:

For instance, one assertion, one statement, a true one, would be, and I would subscribe to it: Deconstruction is neither a theory nor a philosophy. It is neither a school or a method. It is not even a discourse, nor an act, nor a practice. It is what happens, what is happening today in what they call society, politics, diplomacy, economics, historical reality, and so on and so forth. Deconstruction is the case. I say this not because I could demonstrate it if we had time, but also to give an example of a statement in the static form of the jetty. (Derrida [1990], 85)

This was just the sort of statement that would be expected of Derrida by Carroll: a thesis, a jetty in its static state. The point is that *contra-diction* happens, it is the case, and this happening testifies to the absence of a single *Weltanschauung*. This is the Postmodern condition or what happens in the wake of the epistemic rupture of Modernism: rampant contra-dictions in the face of no single diction (or *dictum*). But this possibility of contra-diction had already happened even under the auspices of a dominant *Weltanschauung*.

As an example I take a passage from Saint Augustine's *De doctrina christiana* (On Christian Doctrine). Augustine's text illustrates Derrida's notion of the jetty in that it tries to comprehend and enstate the rules and procedures of Classical Rhetoric in the service of Christian teaching. As with Christian Epic, Augustine tries to convert a pagan form to Christian use. The problem is that the (pagan) procedures it tries to enstate have a destabilising effect that potentially undermines the articulation of the divinity to whom Augustine is beholden. While Augustine admits that eloquence is necessary to communicate the divine experience effectively, he takes great pains to warn that eloquence on its own is detrimental to the truth. He illustrates this with an analogy to cosmetics (a common trope in the denunciation of rhetoric). Make-up distorts natural appearance by supplementing and dissimulating the face that God had created. Furthermore, citing Saint Ambrose, Augustine adds that make-up does not even succeed in its deceit or dissimulation: "The woman who wishes

to change her nature makes a prior judgment on herself. And so in her eagerness to please another man, she begins by not pleasing herself" (Augustine [1995], 265).<sup>30</sup> Make-up is a destabilising jetty: rather than project beauty, it testifies to the absence of beauty that lies underneath the paint. Make-up contra-dicts beauty and is thus not persuasive. However, Augustine claims that Ambrose's argument *is* persuasive: "It is clear enough, I think, that women are strongly urged by this rhetoric not to contaminate their bodies with cosmetics, and moved to shame and fear" (Augustine [1995], 267).<sup>31</sup> Make-up thus lacks the persuasive eloquence of Ambrose's argument. Following that logic, the problem with make-up is not that it distorts the truth, but rather that it does not succeed in distorting the truth *enough* in order to be able to be effectively persuasive. The problem with make-up is that it does not go far enough. While Augustine obviously would not accept this possibility, it is a potential implication of argument here. Just as make-up testifies to an absence of beauty, Ambrose's eloquence might testify to the absence of a God.

The example from *De doctrina christiana* suggests an interesting consequence for Derrida's argument. If a jetty destabilises, it does so only through the projection or suggestion of a stabilising *Weltanschauung*. The jetty is a hypostasis (*hupóstasis*: "foundation" or "origin"). In Augustine's case this is clear enough: God is the hypostasis that grounds discourse (and cosmetics). For Derrida, the hypostasis is self-referential. Echoing Wittgenstein's dictum that "[t]he world is everything that is the case" (Wittgenstein [1922], 31),<sup>32</sup> deconstruction is the case: after the crisis, the only world that is the case is the destabilising operation of the jetty. The world is a world of contra-diction and not a world of Divine diction, but it is still nevertheless a world. And, as Derrida states in his ethical turn, this world of contra-diction is a world to which we are responsible and beholden.

Perhaps, like cosmetics, the problem with Derrida's jetty is that it does not go far enough. Jean Baudrillard takes a different approach by suggesting that it is no longer possible to distinguish between the jetty and the *Weltanschauung* it purportedly hypostasises. The dissimulatory aspect is now so effective that it dissimulates the very fact that it is a dissimulation. In other words, make-up is *very* good now. "Ideology corresponds to a betrayal of reality by signs; simulation corresponds to a short-circuit of reality and to its reduplication by signs" (Baudrillard [1983], 48).<sup>33</sup> Proustian contra-diction is no longer possible when, every diction is a dissimulation. There is no contradiction between the past and the present, only contradictions between dissimulations of presences. If, for Lyotard, Habermas's project remained just a meta-narrative, then for Baudrillard, meta-narrative is no longer even possible. There is no need for a past when every thing can be made present. Designation is futile when there is only an endless activity of immediated designation. "Of the same order as the impossibility of rediscovering an absolute level of the real, is the impossibility of staging an illusion. Illusion is no longer possible, because the real is no longer possible" (Baudrillard [1983], 38).<sup>34</sup> The hypostasis has been removed from the hyperreal when information replaces metaphysics. Or, as Joyce said: "Sleep, where in the waste is the wisdom." The future of the ideal and the future of the illusion are no more in the hyperreal, the more real than real. The hyperreal marks the final crisis of representation which inflicts a "hallucinatory resemblance of the real with itself" (Baudrillard [1983], 42).<sup>35</sup> The crisis cannot even be designated since it has been simulated as a resemblance with itself. The simulation even effaces itself into a vanishing point. The sublime literally becomes ridiculous. Now, this is negativity.

However, Baudrillard blinks at this realisation of negativity and offers a mournful, if not nostalgic, strategy of resistance. In the brief essay "Pourquoi la théorie?" (Why theory?) he states that

the only available role for theory is a strategic and cunning complicity with the mendacity of the hyperreal: "It must become simulation if it speaks about simulation, and deploy the same strategy as its object" (Baudrillard [1987b], 98).<sup>36</sup> In this way, the fatal strategy of theory is a kind of narcotic that "can perhaps protect us from this inexorable reality, this objectivity, from this brilliance of the world, whose indifference would enrage us if we were lucid" (Baudrillard [1987b], 100).<sup>37</sup> In short, Baudrillard, like Derrida and Lyotard, posits an ethical dimension to theory, something protective, a call-to-arms, a response to crisis and contradiction, even when contradiction has been dissimulated.

The question with which I began this essay, concerning the "novelty" of Modernism, is a question of world-view or *Weltanschauung*: how is the world viewed and constructed differently under Modernism? The tentative answer would involve the recognition of contradiction amongst the various *Weltanschauungen* we have inherited. Rather than attain a sense of "the presence of the past," as Eliot had claimed, there would be a kaleidoscopic presence of the absence of multiple pasts, or, as Joyce would have it, a "collideorscape" "in the panaroma of all flores of speech" (Joyce [1975], 143). The various strands of "post-Modernisms" I have discussed dealt with the aftermath of the recognition of the inefficacy of a single, normative *Weltanschauung*, that is, how to respond and proceed amidst a plurality of *Weltanschauungen*. For Habermas, we have communicative action; for Lyotard there is disputation; for Derrida there is the responsibility of disempowerment; and for Baudrillard there can be only the fatal strategy of a capitulation to the hyperreal. I would like to conclude by questioning the idea of the *Weltanschauung*, what is this world that is pictured?

In "Die Zeit des Weltbildes" (The Age of the World Picture), Martin Heidegger argues that the very concept of a *Weltanschauung* is modern, that is there was no *Weltanschauung* before Modernity. "As soon as the world becomes picture, the position of man is conceived as a world view [*Weltanschauung*]. [...] The fundamental event of the modern age is the conquest of the world as picture" (Heidegger [1977], 133–4).<sup>38</sup> This is only possible when man takes on a position of subjectivity, that is, when man becomes conscious of himself:

What is decisive is that man himself expressly takes up this position as one constituted by himself, that he intentionally maintains it as that taken up by himself, and that he makes it secure as the solid footing for a possible development of humanity. [...] That the world becomes picture is one and the same event with the event of man's becoming subiectum in the midst of that which is. (Heidegger [1977], 132)<sup>39</sup>

The very possibility of a *Weltanschauung*, even in the plural, is predicated upon the stability of an anthropocentrism (Pico provides an obvious example of the anthropocentric hypostasis). Even in the plural, *Weltanschauungen* are stable. Man is the hypostasis of the *Weltanschauung*. In this way, the various Postmodern polemics would just be squabbles over the fine-tuning of subjectivity.

It is easy to see Heidegger as being just wistfully nostalgic for "Greek apprehending" rather than "modern representing" (Heidegger [1977], 131),<sup>40</sup> for an age when the world was not a picture and when man apprehended "that which is." But, there is also something Proustian to Heidegger's philosophy. He recognises the irredeemable withdrawal of early Greek thinking. In his essay on the Anaximander fragment, which he names as "the oldest fragment of Western thinking" (Heidegger [1984], 13),<sup>41</sup> he pares down the fragment to argue that it already articulates the destiny of Western Metaphysics:

Oblivion of Being belongs to the self-veiling essence of Being. [...] This means that the history of Being begins with the oblivion of Being, since Being—together with its essence, its distinction from beings—keeps to itself. The distinction collapses. [...] even the early trace of the distinction is obliterated when presencing appears as something present. (Heidegger [1984], 50–1)<sup>42</sup>

Heidegger then claims that even as the Anaximander fragment destines the West to the oblivion of the ontological difference, a trace of another possibility remains latent in its language. This trace can be heard only through thinking, which is to say for Heidegger, poetising: “Thinking of Being is the original way of poetizing” (Heidegger [1984], 19).<sup>43</sup> As with Proust, the method of articulating the problem of oblivion provides the germ of its solution. Perhaps then, Proust and Heidegger, and maybe also Joyce, are the most Postmodern of all thinkers, thinkers of what might lie apart from the world’s pictures. Modernism may have been opened up by Pico, as a syncretic eclecticism, only to be closed off, by Proust, Heidegger, and Joyce (there would be, obviously, others), with the incoherence of man and his worlds.

## Notes

1. “Il faut être absolument moderne” (Rimbaud [1984], 150).
2. “quid enim si infirmiora horum temporum templa credas quia non rudi caemento et informibus tegulis exstruuntur sed marmore nitent et auro radiantur?” (Tacitus [2001], 68).
3. “kártistoi dé keînoi epichthoníon tráphen andrôn” (Homer [1920b], vol. I, 266).
4. “chrúseon sképtron échon, emè d’égno kaì proséeipen / ‘[diogenès] Laertiádé, poluméchan Odusseû, / típt aût’, ô dústéne, lipòn pháos éelíoio / éluthes, óphra idéi nékuas kaì aterpéa chôn” (Homer [1917], vol. XI, 91–4).
5. “Une époque, peut-être, se sent ‘moderne,’ quand elle trouve en soi, également admises, coexistantes et agissantes dans les mêmes individus, quantité de doctrines, de tendances, de ‘vérités’ fort différentes, sinon tout à fait contradictoires” (Valéry [1960a], 1327).
6. “At ego ita me institui, ut in nullius verba iuratus, me per omnes philosophiae magistros funderem, omnes schedas excuterem, omnes familias agnoscerem” (Pico [1942], 138–40).
7. “plastet et fictor” (Pico [1942], 106).
8. “Gefährlich und aufregend war diese Fahrt. Wie fern sind wir jetzt der ruhigen Beschauung, mit der wir zuerst unser Schiff hinaus schwimmen sahen” (Nietzsche [1972], 320).
9. “Nein, das Ziel der Menschheit kann nicht am Ende liegen, sondern nur in ihren höchsten Exemplaren” (Nietzsche [1972], 313).
10. “aus uns haben wir Modernen gar nichts; nur dadurch, dass wir uns mit fremden Zeiten, Sitten, Künsten, Philosophien, Religionen, Erkenntnissen anfüllen und überfüllen, werden wir zu etwas Beachtungswertem, nämlich zu wandelnden Encyclopädien” (Nietzsche [1972], 269–70).
11. “Nur aus der höchsten Kraft der Gegenwart dürft ihr das Vergangene deuten” (Nietzsche [1972], 289–90).
12. “das Unhistorische und das Historische ist gleichermaßen für die Gesundheit eines Einzelnen, eines Volkes und einer Cultur nöthig” (Nietzsche [1972], 248).
13. “je ne faisais que de découvrir parce que je venais, en la sentant pour la première fois, vivante, véritable, gonflant mon cœur à le briser, en la retrouvant enfin, d’apprendre que je l’avais perdue pour toujours. Perdue pour toujours ; je ne pouvais comprendre et je m’exerçais à subir la souffrance de cette contradiction” (Proust [1989], vol. III, 154–5).

14. “Oui, si le souvenir, grâce à l’oubli, n’a pu contracter aucun lien, jeter aucun chaînon entre lui et la minute présente [...] il nous fait tout à coup respirer un air nouveau, précisément parce que c’est un air qu’on a respiré autrefois” (Proust [1989], vol. IV, 449).
15. “Nous savons que ces œuvres, même transmises sans erreur, nous échappent et nous sone rendues étrangères par la lecture qui nous les rend accessibles” (Blanchot [1971], 53).
16. “L’idéal de la culture, c’est de réussir des tableaux d’ensemble, des reconstitutions panoramiques qui permettent de situer dans une même vue Schœnberg, Einstein, Picasso, Joyce — et, si possible, Marx par-dessus le marché et, mieux encore, Marx et Heidegger : alors, l’homme de culture est heureux, il n’a rien perdu, il a ramassé toutes les miettes du festin” (Blanchot [1969], 588).
17. “La modernité fait un effort incessant pour déborder l’échange [...] Et pourtant, rien à faire : l’échange récupère tout, en acclimatant ce qui semble le nier” (Barthes [1973], 35).
18. “Die anarchistische Absicht [...] das sich gegen die Normalisierungsleistungen von Tradition auflehnt, das aus der Erfahrung der Rebellion gegen alles Normative lebt [...]. Freilich ist das Zeitbewußtsein, das sich in der avantgardistischen Kunst artikuliert, nicht schlechthin antihistorisch; es richtet sich nur gegen die falsche Normativität” (Habermas [1992], 35–6).
19. “Die *Junkonservativen* machen sich die Grunderfahrung der ästhetischen Moderne, die Enthüllung der dezentrierten, von allen Beschränkungen der Kognition und der Zwecktätigkeit, allen Imperativen der Arbeit und der Nützlichkeit befreiten Subjektivität zu eigen — und brechen mit ihr aus der modernen Welt aus” (Habermas [1992], 52).
20. “eine vernünftige Gestaltung der Lebensverhältnisse zu nützen” (Habermas [1992], 42).
21. “Quand ce métadiscours recourt explicitement à tel ou tel grand récit, comme la dialectique de l’Esprit, l’herméneutique du sens, l’émancipation du sujet raisonnable ou travailleur, la développement de la richesse, on décide d’appeler « moderne » la science qui s’y réfère pour se légitimer” (Lyotard [1979], 7).
22. “l’incrédulité à l’égard des métarécits” (Lyotard [1979], 7).
23. “la validité du récit de l’émancipation” (Lyotard [1979], 98).
24. “J’appellerai moderne, l’art qui consacre son ‘petit technique,’ somme disait Diderot, à présenter qu’il y a de l’imprésentable” (Lyotard [1982], 364).
25. “la modernité se déroule dans le retrait du réel et selon le rapport sublime du présentable avec le concevable” (Lyotard [1982], 365).
26. “Le postmoderne serait ce qui dans le moderne allègue l’imprésentable dans la présentation elle-même; ce qui se refuse à la consolation des bonnes formes, au consensus d’un goût qui permettrait d’éprouver en commun la nostalgie de l’impossible; ce qui s’enquiert de présentations nouvelles, non pas pour en jouir, mais pour mieux faire sentir qu’il y a de l’imprésentable” (Lyotard [1982], 366–7).
27. “guerre au tout, témoignons de l’imprésentable, activons les différends, sauvons l’honneur du nom” (Lyotard [1982], 367).
28. “Etant donné 1° l’impossibilité d’éviter les conflits (l’impossibilité de l’indifférence), 2° l’absence d’un genre de discours universel pour les régler ou si l’on préfère la nécessité que le juge soit partie, trouver, sinon ce qui peut légitimer le jugement (le ‘bon’ enchaînement), du moins comment sauver l’honneur de penser” (Lyotard [1983], 10).
29. “la déconstruction est à mes yeux la mise en œuvre même de cette responsabilité, surtout au moment où elle analyse les axiomes traditionnels ou dogmatiques du concept de responsabilité” (Derrida [1988], 224 n).
30. “Prior enim de se pronuntiat quae cupit mutare quod nata est. Ita dum alii studet placere, prius ipsa sibi displicet” (Augustine [1995], 264).
31. “Satis, ut existimo, apparet feminas ne suam fucis adulterent formam et ad pudorem et ad timorem hac facundia vehementer impelli” (Augustine [1995], 266).
32. “Die Welt ist alles, was der Fall ist” (Wittgenstein [1922], 30).
33. “L’idéologie ne correspond qu’à une malversation de la réalité par les signes, la simulation correspond à

un court-circuit de la réalité et à son redoublement par les signes" (Baudrillard [1981], 48).

34. "Du même ordre que l'impossibilité de retrouver un niveau absolu du réel est l'impossibilité de mettre en scène l'illusion. L'illusion n'est plus possible, parce que le réel n'est plus possible" (Baudrillard [1981], 36).

35. "l'hallucinante ressemblance du réel à lui-même" (Baudrillard [1981], 41).

36. "Elle doit se faire simulation si elle parle de simulation, et user de la même stratégie que son objet" (Baudrillard [1987a], 84).

37. "peut-être nous protège de cette réalité inexorable et de cette objectivité du monde, de cette brillance du monde qui, si nous étions lucides, devrait nous faire enrager par son indifférence" (Baudrillard [1987a], 86).

38. "Sobald die Welt zum Bilde wird, begreift sich die Stellung des Menschen als Weltanschauung. [...] Der Grundvorgang der Neuzeit ist die Eroberung der Welt als Bild" (Heidegger [1972], 86–7).

39. "Entscheidend ist, daß der Mensch diese Stellung eigens als die von ihm ausgemachte selbst bezieht, sie willentlich als die von ihm bezogene innehält und als den Boden einer möglichen Entfaltung der Menschheit sichert. [...] Daß die Welt zum Bild wird, ist ein und derselbe Vorgang mit dem, daß der Mensch innerhalb des Seienden zum Subjectum wird" (Heidegger [1972], 84–5).

40. "griechischen Vernehmen" "neuzeitliche Vorstellen" (Heidegger [1972], 84).

41. "der älteste Spruch des abendländischen Denkens" (Heidegger [1972], 296).

42. "Die Vergessenheit des Seins gehört in das durch sie selbst verhüllte Wesen des Seins. [...] Das sagt: die Geschichte des Seins beginnt mit der Seinsvergessenheit, damit, daß das Sein mit seinem Wesen, mit dem Unterschied zum Seienden, an sich hält. Der Unterschied entfällt. [...] wird auch die frühe Spur des Unterschiedes dadurch ausgelöscht, daß das Anwesen wie ein Anwesendes erscheint" (Heidegger [1972], 336).

43. "Das Denken des Seins ist die ursprüngliche Weise des Dichtens" (Heidegger [1972], 303).

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## Chapter 4

### Time and Space

The social, scientific and technological transformations and the psychological disruptions that took place at the end of the nineteenth century profoundly changed common perception and experience of time and space. The notion of time as a steady course of continuous moments and the sense of space as an objective and fixed phenomenon, but above all the distinctiveness of the temporal and spatial dimensions of reality were fundamentally disrupted. The establishment of an objective global dateline and new conceptions of space and time stressing their dependency on the observer and the contexts in which they operate radically undermined the certainties built on the idea of a stable universe and a rationally fixed perception of the world. Modernist artists captured these transformations and experimented with alternative temporal and spatial constructions of reality. The loss of stable parameters of reality caused both anguish and disorientation, which gave rise to various forms of rupture and fragmentation in modernist works of literature, but these works also gave expression to the widespread and varied experience of liberation from old frameworks of perception. Newly gained insights into the intertwinement of time and space corresponded to the artistic exploration of multiple types of “space-time” in the visual arts and in literature. The innovative renderings of time and space became crucial parameters in the study of modernist literature, Joseph Frank’s essay “Spatial Form in Modern Literature” (1945), being a landmark study in this regard. Recent developments have broadened the scope and variety of these approaches. While earlier explorations of temporal and spatial disruptions in literature were primarily conducted for descriptive purposes and in formalist terms, more recent studies of the impact of the changing perceptions of space and time on literature link it to larger social, psychological and historical issues.

In the modern novel, the traditional symmetry of life and narrative—whereby the account of the former takes the form of the latter, whose logic basically parallels the temporal order of human life—has been broken up. The traditional realm of “scenes and settings” tends to be emancipated from plot and to impart significance as an autonomous field of aesthetic composition. **Frederik Tygstrup** argues that this strategy is especially apparent in the “literary still life” conceived of as a tableau that is autonomized, where the text no longer follows a narrative path but instead dwells on details and organizes the presentation of that tableau. What results is an image, not in any visual sense—the text is no *ekphrasis* of a real or fictional canvas—but as a schematization of a field of reality whose order is examined through artistic presentation.

The “urban novel” was always a strong discursive presence in both the production and reception of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century fiction. Urban literature from the second half of

the nineteenth century onwards attempts to cope with a culture split into shards and rendered ever more complex by the increasing influence of consumption practices, by the diversification of social life and by the growing complexity of the economic world. **Bart Keunen** shows how the textual construction of this literature displays the workings of the modern consciousness. By integrating a number of available world making strategies, the modernist city novel reflects a typically modern mode of self-questioning that arose in the late-capitalist world of epistemological doubt.

**Katrien Vloeberghs** explores the interferences between childhood and modernist literature through an investigation of childhood figurations in texts by André Gide, Franz Kafka, Else Lasker-Schule, Marcel Proust, Rainer Maria Rilke, Gertrude Stein and Virginia Woolf. The tension between the painful loss of stability and orientation in the modern world on the one hand and a desire for the innovative and the 'newborn' triggered by a dissatisfaction with the old order on the other hand, is constitutive of modernist literature and the 'Zeitgeist' in which it came into existence. The analysis focuses on the connection between the characteristics of modernist poetics and the way in which child subjects, childhood memories and children's language are staged. Modernist figures of childhood repeatedly appeal to the motif of parthenogenesis as an expression of resistance against a patriarchal order. They thereby link up with modernist subversions of nineteenth-century bourgeois poetics. Vloeberghs argues that the figurations of childhood in modernist literature buttress the simultaneously megalomaniac and infantile pursuits and realizations of literary modernism still hailed with fascination today.

The suggestion that modernist literature is particularly apt for representing traumatic experience has surfaced with special emphasis in critical studies of modern poetry. **Ulrich Baer** explores how modern poetry might offer a privileged perspective from which to investigate this link. An examination of the paradigmatic lyrics of Baudelaire and Celan suggests that the unique aspect of the modernist representation of trauma is the startling difficulty of distinguishing between one's experience and understanding of an event, and that actual event. Viewed in this sense, modernism responds to and thematizes a crisis of reference rather than of truth. In fact, the traumas of modernity are characterized by the way in which they disrupt established and conventional ways of human remembrance and forgetting, and in which this disruption can itself be traumatic.

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## Still Life

### The Experience of Space in Modernist Prose

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In nineteenth-century novels, scenes and settings are usually, as Gérard Genette once put it, “ancilla(e) narrationis” (Genette [1969], 47), servants of the plot. Descriptions of the spaces, places, and objects surrounding the characters provide a scene of the actions which, in turn, determine the significance of the fictional universe issued by the descriptions. This hierarchy reflects the prerequisite role of storytelling, the ordering of subsequent situations and actions in a causal and teleological structure that represents a world of human action and experience. When literary theorists make plot, *diegesis*, the “master” of the narrative discourse, they draw on a massive tradition, from Aristotle onwards, confining these two characteristics to the nature of narrative: that it consists in the configuration of successive events in a logical sequence, and that this sequentiality in turn corresponds to the temporal nature of human life.

In the modern novel, though, it is as if this symmetry of life and narrative — whereby the account of the former takes the form of the latter — has been broken up. The traditional realm of “scenes and settings” tends to be emancipated from plot and to impart still more significance as an autonomous field of aesthetic composition, thereby challenging interpretive strategies based on dynamic models of narrative. “Spatiality” and a tendency towards “pictorialism” are terms often used to characterize the attenuation of plot-structure in twentieth-century literature and the re-emergence of scenes, situations, and images that are no longer obviously subordinated to a narrative chain. In the wake of narrative time, the notion of space provokes a new set of questions, concerning the spatial organization of the textual field, as well as representations of space that are no longer intermediary to the actions of a plot. Furthermore, as the old Lessingian distinction between narrative sequentiality and pictorial contemporaneity loses its culturally normative stance, exchanges between narrative and imagery accelerate in the twentieth century’s intensified dialogue between literature and painting, as well as in the growing interest in word/image-relations in recent theory.

These historical tendencies and theoretical debates form a background of what follows; I will not, however, attempt to rehearse the numerous positions and insights within this field of research, but instead try to displace the inquiry and focus on what happens, throughout the development of modern fiction, to the traditional “symmetry” of life and narrative inherited from the fictions of the nineteenth century. To do this, I will try to contextualize the regimes of temporal/narrative form versus spatial/“pictorial” form in relation to the wider historical regimes of (aesthetic) experience (in parts 1 and 2) and their manifestations in the historical transformations of the

novel (part 3). I will also discuss the problem of “pictorialism” in modern literature, not in a technical way bearing on the transformations of the boundaries of the respective media of textuality and visuality, but on a more general level as questions concerning principles of aesthetic composition that seem crucial to their reciprocal developments (part 4). On this backdrop, I will take up the notion of “still life” as discussed by art-historians to show how a number of aesthetic and compositional qualities of still-life painting seem relevant to conceptualizing the representation of space in modern literature (part 5). The literary still life is not, I will argue, a pictorial writing, but a writing oriented towards representation of reality. The literary still lives I will briefly discuss are animated by a phenomenological yearning for insight, for modes of intuiting and evaluating pieces of reality, no longer in terms of how it is appropriated through temporal practice, but in terms of how constructions of spatial relations and their still life might disclose access to the milieus of human agency not founded on the logic of action but on the imaginary resources of aesthetic composition.

## Two Versions of Experience

The concept of experience holds a peculiar position in the universe of philosophical notions. It is not a concept of the sort that immediately makes you think of a specific philosophical context or system like, say, intentionality, speech-act, or rhizome. At a first glance, it seems closer to ordinary language, because of its wide semantic range and its dependency on the context in which it appears, but it also carries a considerable weight in a wide range of philosophies in which it performs central, but very dissimilar roles. Most of the countless concepts and definitions of experience can be tentatively reduced to one of two general types: temporal and spatial. For the temporal type, experience stands out as a process of accumulation of insight that can be reinvested into practice, whereas the spatial type focuses on the individual instances of insight produced through the encounter between a human subject and the surrounding reality. In both cases, the notion of experience is intimately linked to a notion of subjectivity, experience simply designating what takes place when a subject tends to apprehend some piece of objectivity before it. Therefore, experience is a modern concept, emerging alongside the need to thematize the idea of man as an epistemological core-piece, that is, when truth no longer prevails as a solid firmament over-arching human life.

Historically, the notion of experience was dominated by spatial models until the end of the eighteenth century, heavily marked by the empiricist analyses of the emergence of human judgment through observation and recurrence, and culminating in the Kantian critique of the conditions of possibility of experience. The focus for these contributions was the thorough dissection of the anatomy of the individual encounter—given a subject and an object—determining what precisely went on in the subjective apprehension and how an insight could be formulated from this. The leap to a temporally oriented concept of experience emerges with Hegel as he shifts attention from the way consciousness considers the objective world to how consciousness considers *itself* as a subject of attention. Hereafter, accumulation of experience is no longer primarily a question of piling up insights born out of a number of encounters with objective reality, but rather of “sublating” the individual point of experiential content, rearranging the entire universe of experience as an ongoing progression towards knowledge, not “more” knowledge in a quantitative meaning, but more complete

knowledge, according to Hegel's peculiar idea of quantity reversed into quality. Anyone rereading Hegel's text on the science of experience today will find it, I assume, very speculative and very odd indeed. Nonetheless, its historical significance remains impressive as he considers experience not only as the acquisition of knowledge and insight in a general way, as did his predecessors, but also relates this acquisition to *life* as a process involving growth, finality, and an ongoing reflection on the process in action. This temporalized notion of experience might not have been a dominant theme in post-Hegelian philosophy, but it has nonetheless set an agenda for an ongoing discussion throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries of how to conceive of a finite subject at odds with the objective world of possible experience around it, precisely as a temporal predicament. Thus, the Hegelian idea of experience re-emerges in the way in which the nineteenth century reinvents history as a discipline of genealogy, making history a fate and the notion of identity relative to national and historical filiation. And it reappears in the ontology of existence, as it is formulated in early Heidegger, where the concept of experience is itself not highlighted (in the way Heidegger highlights concepts), but where the ideas of "projection" (*Entwurf*) and of "care" (*Sorge*) rephrase the synthesizing function of a temporally conceived notion of experience, meaning here simply the interpretation (*Auslegung*) of the world as it appears in the light of existential self-construction. If subjectivity in the modern period is essentially determined by the condition of finitude, that is, precisely, as subjected to finitude, the early Heidegger radically faces the consequence of this by analyzing existence as "being-towards-death" (*Sein-zum-Tode*) and by insisting that any such thing as meaning only occurs as an experience that takes place within the temporal synthesis of existence and can never be generalized beyond the context of interpretation of the individual existence.

Historicism and existentialism thus mark out the horizon of a modern, temporalized notion of experience hypostatizing finitude, perspectivism, and synthesis of meaning. Throughout the twentieth century, however, it seems that the ancient spatial notion of experience has undergone a certain revival. It might not be quite wrong to consider the twentieth century as the century of phenomenology — not phenomenology in a narrow philosophical sense, but as a general preoccupation with the actual physiognomy of things in the human life-world, with sensation and perception, and with the bodily horizon of human interaction with, and participation in, the surrounding reality. Here, the primitive encounter of subject and object moves back into focus, not as a re-enactment of ancient empiricism, but as a new way of approaching the very encounter, now with a specific interest directed at the *mediality* of the interface between subjectivity and objectivity. Furthermore, the presupposition of positing the two as pre-established entities is called into question; it is rather the ways in which they intertwine, blend and only stand out as positions, not prior to the encounter but at its eventual outcome, that are examined.

These two sets of questions are related; the focus on mediality is intended to examine the interface of subjectivity and objectivity, and the way it forms and formats what experience can be in areas ranging from sensation to language, from media of action and behavior (say, street-cars, shopping-malls, or system-planning) to media of communication in the broadest sense. This very focus on interface necessarily raises the question whether the two poles of subjectivity and objectivity really stand out as neatly individualized positions, or if they should not rather be seen as positions that are produced as interaction goes along, really epiphenomena to the historical media through which they crystallize. It is difficult to evaluate this re-spatialisation of the notion of experience. It can be seen as a response to an increasingly complex life-world characterized by the emergence

of still more heterogeneous situations and surroundings and the intensive mediatisation of human agency. And it has therefore also been seen as a decay of experience, that is, as refraining from the ambition of synthesizing what happens to a human life in a harmonious context of meaning.

The transformation of experience in twentieth-century culture seems to be a condition that necessarily defies our image of the human subject. It might thus be asserted that we have witnessed a certain displacement of the key-terms through which we conceive of subjectivity. Instead of anchoring subjectivity in the temporal transcendence of the self, we might have become slightly more attentive to subjectivity's determination through the spatial immanence of the body; instead of determining the notion of being through the project of a "then," grounding it on the possibilities of a "now"; instead of seeking affirmation of the self through experience, exploring the appearance of different virtual selves through variegated experience.

### Thinking of Art, Thinking with Art

These rapidly sketched tendencies are still unsure and only vaguely outlined in present culture, although the questions they express reach far back into the early twentieth century. In what follows I will not pursue some general cultural diagnosis, but instead try to show how such a transformation of experience is adapted within the realm of aesthetic experience. This demands, however, a brief prefatory clarification of how "aesthetic experience" is to be understood in the first place.

The term itself has different components, corresponding to its own immanent ambiguities; thus, the "aesthetic" can be understood either as related to *aisthesis*, that is, to sensation and sensual experience in a broad sense, or as related to art. When focusing on the specific questions of art, aesthetic experience can again be understood either as an experience *of* the aesthetic, or as an experience *through* the aesthetic, considering art either as an *object* of experience or as a *medium* of experience. To evoke again, however briefly, some philosophical positions, the first version parallels Kantian aesthetics that examines the type of judgment involved in the consideration of art; this is the approach that highlights the question of interpretation, maintaining that in the sphere of art the beholder undergoes a process of experience quite different from the one involved in practical and epistemological judgments. And this is also the approach that matches the increasing autonomy of modern art and the aesthetic positions that respond to this development. Art, here, stands out as a realm of its own where one can approximate a liminal experience, whether of mystic extraction, as maintained in much of modernist poetics; as an experience of non-identity, for which Adorno's influential aesthetics could be quoted; or even as a rare experience of beauty, as maintained, with a slant of bourgeois cynicism, by the German philosopher Odo Marquard, who considers art simply a sphere of recovery (*Erholung*) from the rough everyday rationality (Marquard [1982], 32).

When art is considered as a medium of experience, on the other hand, we come closer to an aesthetics that bestows a certain epistemological function to art, not unlike Hegel, although he restricted the predominance of this function to a limited historical epoch. This epistemological idea of art does not deny, to be sure, the specificity of the work of art as compared to other expressions of human insight. It does not deny the historical fact of autonomy and its advantages, only maintaining that aesthetic experience is not an experience of something altogether different from prosaic human reality, but an altogether different way of experiencing it.

It is certain, though, that however meticulously one tries to sort out these semantic layers of the concept of aesthetic experience, they will soon enough become re-entangled in any particular analysis. Nonetheless, I will have as my main perspective in the following the problem of the artwork as a medium of experience, in a double meaning: as a medium that communicates a certain experiential content, and as a medium that through its formal principles organizes this material in specific ways, thus being a field for the construction of models of human experience.

### The Novel and Aesthetic Experience

This interplay of worldly experience and aesthetic experience is nowhere so manifest as in the novel; novelistic fiction directly flanks the prosaic sphere of everyday life and exposes a vast repertoire of the immediate human situations and conditions that make up historical reality. The more our interest in history is directed towards the facticity of human lives, the sensual and affective reality of a chaotic and multifarious life-world, the more we realize the potentials offered to historians by the novel, which insistently enters the fictional universes through this basic level of brute experience. On the other hand, the logic of the fictions that unfold on the basis of this material is never restricted to this documentary level. The building of fiction starts from here, but it also invariably goes beyond in the design of fiction that precisely *organizes* this material in some form set up to interpret it, an aesthetic logic aimed at bringing about an interpretive intervention into the depicted fragments of an everyday life-world. The novel stands out in this respect as a conspicuous example of an art-form intervening in the historical conditions of subjective experience and endowing them with images of possible models of human existence. This, in fact, comes very close to a traditional definition of the novel: a fiction imagining and constructing possible courses of human life within a range of constraints delineated by historical contingency.

The immense success of the novel as a genre in the nineteenth century, as it became one of the most central and widely circulated art-forms after having led a much more marginal existence throughout the preceding centuries, mirrors the way in which it came to match the requirements of the new reading public. Two features stand out here: first, the prosaic nature of the actions and situations represented in the novels would appeal to the growing social layer of bourgeois men and women (especially women) by reflecting an immediately recognizable world of action and experience, and second, the stories narrated in the novels would serve as demonstrations of how such situations should be managed and interpreted. One could, then, somewhat bluntly, spell out the social success of the novel in the nineteenth century in terms of recognition and pedagogy: to the up-coming social type of the bourgeois woman, novelistic fiction became a mirror of the conditions of her life and a guideline for how to manage that life.

Or to put it differently: the novel won its central position by offering a powerful cultural tool for articulating the content of the modern conception of subjectivity. And by filling this function it became the culturally dominant symbolic form for the idea of a temporalized human experience. My earlier statement that we do not really possess a philosophical notion that matches the immense preoccupation with experience considered as a temporal process of growth and becoming throughout the nineteenth century, is particularly contrasted by the novel, which seems to be the cultural form that has embodied this quality.



The logic of temporalized experience is accommodated in the novel through the basic mechanism of plotting; the narrative plot performs, as recently shown with much eloquence by Paul Ricoeur (1983–97), a peculiar act of judgment. Given the heterogeneity of sensations and situations taken from the sphere of everyday life, the insertion of a plot is a means of interpreting these punctual data by constructing an overarching totality through which they can be assessed. Whereas the potentials of any given situation are as countless as the directions in which it could be unfolded, the logic of the plot effectively ranges the situation into a temporal sequence where the ancient law of narrative causality rules. Through the application of this law, the individual situation is fixed, as it were, as a station in a sequence of other situations. This assures a hermeneutic relationship between parts and whole, where the latter, the entire narrative, is produced through the individual parts, and conversely, the parts are legible as moments in the realization of the whole.

This logic is almost invariably set up in the rendition of the course of a human life, so that the narrative configuration of events forms an image, precisely, of a temporally unfolded process of subjective experience. Thus, the events presented in the novel can be assessed in two dimensions. In the first, they appear as evocations of everyday situations and sensations that can be, to some extent, recognized, depending on the design of fiction and the techniques of the rendition. In the other dimension, that of “plotting” proper, the fictional events are organized as elements in an imaginary construction representing a process of experience emerging out of the encounter with the everyday-like universe. The aesthetic experience peculiar to the novel, as it happened to develop from the eighteenth through the nineteenth centuries, is this very experience of how the encounters and obstacles of everyday life can be seen as converging in the perspective of an existentially construed time.

The novel’s role as a major symbolic form mediating an idea of temporalized human experience is not, however, invariable in the history of the novel. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, novels were much less concerned with temporality as the crucial dimension in which meaning could be assessed, and the panoply of forms was much wider, corresponding to the different agendas of, say, rendition of exotic locations, satire, chivalric romance, philosophical conversation, and so on. Conversely, the temporal organization of narrative also seems to wither away again in the twentieth century. It is perhaps the major scandal of the modern novel that plot becomes a marginal feature in narratives that no longer follow the famous red thread once launched by Goethe, but, in Robert Musil’s equally notorious phrase, rather spread out in an infinitely interwoven surface.

This historical development very accurately parallels the shift in the cultural paradigms of experience outlined above. One may argue, of course, that the role exercised by the novel in the nineteenth century is taken over in the twentieth by film, the novel thus being relegated to a more modest position in the cultural field. Whether this is true or not, the novelists seem to contend that the traditional function of novelistic fiction no longer matches the reality of the twentieth-century life-world, that the proud logic of configuring a continuous and growing curve of human experience in time has fallen into desuetude. Instead, we have seen in the “modernist” novel an intense experimentation with alternative techniques of organizing the novelistic material, refraining from the sequentiality of narrative causality so that the artistic totality of novelistic prose no longer represents a temporal synthesis, but outlines other ways of intuiting and synthesizing the presented material in spatial constellations. This of course alters the image of novelistic aesthetic experience, that is, the very sig-

nificance of the ways in which the material of everyday life is organized and articulated within the formal framework of the narrative.

### Literature and Space in Twentieth Century

To literary historians, the spatialization of the modern novel is a relatively well-described phenomenon, although the notion of space is often used somewhat hazily simply to designate something no longer conceivable in terms of time. What stands out, nevertheless, is that the situations, sensations, and reflections within the universe of a novel are somehow to be considered as contemporaneous. In Proust, for instance, any given passage that describes in detail some view, or emotion, or whatever arrests attention, combines, as it unfolds, material from a large number of other situations, whether they are close or distant, prior or posterior to the actual passage. In this process, the individual passage is dislocated from the coordinates of time and space; it no longer merges into a global spatio-temporal chart but gives its own, specific version of time and space, the entire novel thus being a huge system of competing, virtual versions of time and space. Spatialization, here, means the presentation of such countless parallel universes.

Another example would be the novels of Virginia Woolf, where the individual situations and events are often considered through a number of different perspectives and anatomized as they reverberate and open up different universes of associations and imagination in different consciousnesses, which leads the action off the path of consecutive situations and into some dream-like stillness, where the interesting thing is no longer where the situation will lead the action, but how the many possibilities latent in a situation can be brought forth. Whereas in Proust, every situation is, so to speak, saturated with subjectivity, even to the point where the narrator-hero individualizes a new subject for each situation, becoming multiple, in Woolf, the situations are conversely intended at a level that transcends subjectivity, each situation standing out, alongside the neighboring ones, in its own statue-like objectivity, not as a link in a chain of action, but as a self-enclosed monument. When the situations represented stand out as individual "scenes" that are not hinged upon neighboring scenes through action, the traditional concepts designed to analyze the individual scenes of a sequel prove less adequate. Most theories of literary "description" are derived from the structural analysis of narrative and conceive of description in terms of functionality for the narrative (see Genette [1969], Barthes [1970]). But when the individual scene is meticulously isolated from the narrative dynamism and furthermore seems to engage in different kinds of relations with other scenes than those conceivable in terms of plot, other conceptual tools are needed. The presence in modern literature of this new kind of spatiality, the composition of situations not sequentially, but alongside each other, has evoked a parallel to painting, whereby literature and painting in the twentieth century become "sister arts." This encounter of modern literature and painting in the field of spatial composition has elicited a huge wave of theorizing on the problem of "pictorialism" in literature, taking up Lessing's old question of the differences between the media of literature and painting in a variety of details.

One should be cautious, however, not to stress this filiation too heavily and treat the isolated literary scene as analogue to the visual field of painting, making literary description equal to an act of *ekphrasis*, or conceive of the literary image as a representation of visuality. The literary scene forms an image in its own right as it presents an imaginary construction that schematizes intuitions and

relations among the intuited elements; it is not a visualization of an imaginary piece of reality, but an autonomous means of conceiving of a reality that sometimes coalesces with visibility, sometimes not. Thus, in considering the filiation of painting and literature in the twentieth century, I will not venture into the discussion of visibility and textuality but instead focus on the kinship between literature and painting on the more general level of aesthetic composition.

This kinship is highlighted conspicuously both in Proust and Woolf, to stick now to these authors, where a commentary on painting seems to provide an opportunity for making meta-aesthetic observations. Here is Marcel in the painter Elstir's studio:

At the hotel in Balbec, there had been mornings [...] or evenings [...] when an effect of sunlight at my bedroom window had made me see a darker area of the sea as a distant coastline, or filled me with joy at the sight of a zone of liquid blue which it was impossible to say was either sea or sky. The mind quickly redistributed the elements into the categories which the impression had abolished. [...] Those infrequent moments when we perceive nature as it is, poetically, were what Elstir's work was made of. One of the metaphors which recurred most often in the sea-pictures which surrounded him then was one which compares the land to the sea, blurring all distinctions between them. And it was this comparison, tacitly, tirelessly repeated in a single canvas, imbuing it with its powerful and multifarious unity, which was the source of the enthusiasm felt [...] by many lovers of Elstir's painting. (Proust [2002], vol. II, 415)

Evidently, this description verges on a poetics. The program of decontextualizing immediate sensation, isolating it from the explanatory guidelines of intelligence and pragmatic guidelines of action, in order to re-contextualize it in relation to other elements to which it holds *poetic* relations, comes very close to Proust's own technique when composing the individual passages of the novel. This does not mean that he works visually, leaning on the medium of painting, but that he discloses a similarity in the aesthetic attitude, reorganizing the "scene," the represented, not in keeping with laws of representation that transcend and frame the scene, but through the immanent organization of the scene unfolding the possible interplay of consonances and dissonances between the individual elements.

A similar function can be seen in Woolf's description of Lily Briscoe painting in *To the Lighthouse*:

[...] she scored her canvas with brown running nervous lines which had no sooner settled there than they enclosed (she felt it looming out of her) a space. Down in the hollow of one wave she saw the next wave coming towering higher and higher above her. For what could be more formidable than that space? Here she was again, she thought, stepping back to look at it, drawn out of gossip, out of living, out of community with people into the presence of this formidable ancient enemy of hers—this other thing, this truth, this reality, which suddenly laid hands on her, emerged stark at the back of appearances and commanded her attention. (Woolf [1992b], 172–3)

Here, painting stands out as a practice excavating a singular space of a particular significance that rises above the space in which ordinary kinds of attention are unfolded. In this space where "truth" and "reality" prevail, the ordinary space of everyday actions and social roles is transfigured, transvaluated as it is captured by art. This, of course, is again very close to Woolf's poetics, where a certain affect, a certain sensation, is wrested from the individual subjects and isolated as a para-subjective, "pure" sensation. Painting becomes meta-poetic through its very gesture of composition, of formal arrangement to capture this sensation, of disclosing a space offered to aesthetic experience.

In both instances, painting is invoked as an illustration of how a space emerges in the artistic

process, of how the organization and juxtapositions of the material—the painter’s material, and, by analogy, the writer’s material—construct an aesthetic space that is governed by its own specific laws, whether through the blurring of sensation or through the very spontaneity of the artistic gesture. With painting as a kind of metaphor for composition, Proust and Woolf—not only for themselves, but, I contend, paradigmatically for a large portion of modern literature—point towards the necessity of reconsidering the formal side of literature, of how the no longer plot-borne novel creates its very own space of aesthetic experience. This leaves open, in any case, the question of how the novel can render an aesthetic experience of space, and corollary to this, how it can contribute to the modern preoccupation with space, just as the novel of the nineteenth century gloriously stood forth as the central symbolic form of experience in time and of time.

### Still Life

I have now come to the concept I would like to explore, the literary still life. The concept of still life is, of course, borrowed from art history, and must be taken with the precautions already mentioned, that is, not as a pictorial pre-text for the literary text, but as a model of a certain aesthetic attitude. In painting, the still life is a so-called minor genre that can be traced in the history of painting from ancient roman *xenia*-images—wall paintings of food and domestic goods—to cubism and beyond, with a certain culmination in seventeenth-century Dutch and Spanish art. As a peculiarly non-pathetic genre, arranging flowers and figs, poultry and game, glasses and pipes, cheeses and oysters, the still life has not really been theorized until in recent decades. It has led its own silent existence alongside the more dramatic genres of portraits and history painting and has been considered a field of technical exercise in composition and surface-effects.

However, throughout the second half of the twentieth century, art-historians have insisted on the significance of the still life as a genre in its own right and tried to re-establish its proper formal and historical characteristics (Schapiro [1978], Alpers [1983], Bryson [1990]). This renewed interest in still life painting stems, it seems, from two distinct inspirations. On the one hand, a solid trend in modernist painting, say, from Manet through Cézanne to Braque and Chirico, seems not only to break off from the inherited principles of representation in Western art—dismissing the “symbolic form” of linear perspective to use Panofsky’s famous phrase (Panofsky [1991]) and the dominant sphere of iconological convention—but also to establish a positive link to tradition by reinvigorating the techniques and the objects of still life. Thus, the modern “emancipation” of painting from one dominant paradigm of representation seems to ally with another, less conspicuous historical tenet, finding in the still life the resources to explore new sides of the phenomenon of painting, the basic composition of the two-dimensional plane of the canvas, and the perception of basic relations between objects. Modern painting, one might say, reinvents the still life, thereby making the minor genre readable for art historians in a new light.

Another reason for the new interest in still life painting is methodological in nature, related to recent historicism and its sensibility to the historical significance of everyday life. Here, still life painting is a favorable object of study as it exposes, not the official and monumental self-representation of a given historical epoch, but the ephemeral sphere of everyday objects, reflecting the perception of basic human needs and habits, of food, its handling and hierarchies of value, of

the social institutions of shared meals and rituals of hospitality, and of an entire field of unimpressive paraphernalia, the ready-to-hand objects of the immediate, sensuous experience. The social embeddedness of art, here, points towards the entire stratum of material existence in its dumbness and insignificant corporeal intimacy, rather than monumental representativity, thus opening a set of new directions in the understanding of artistic creation in the context of social life.

The historical marginality of still-life painting is traditionally attributed to its lack of human presence and of symbolic or allegorical significance. This (alleged) double deficiency and the tendency to characterize still life painting in negative terms reflect a certain malaise in interpreting it. Had some human figure been present, goes the implicit argument, then the depicted objects would serve as accessory material for determining the signification and orientation of a subjective meaning and action. Had some symbolic convention been assignable (setting aside the overexploited theme of *vanitas*), then the arrangement of objects would be readable in relation to the language of this convention. The deficiency, or, less emphatically, the role assigned to still life as a “minor” genre, thus stems in both cases from the absence of a transcendent level of decoding (transcendence here meaning the historical systems of signification transcending the level of depicted objects and gestures of painting). It is precisely this deficiency that in turn undergoes a certain re-evaluation in the new interest in the genre, as it offers the beholder an imagery that is no longer pre-packaged with interpretation, disclosing a layer of brute historical materiality that takes us close to the concrete reality of historical existence, exposing it without assigning any particular value or significance to it, and exposing, as Norman Bryson puts it, a “technology of painting” (Bryson [1990], 14) where the artistic spontaneity of arrangement, stroke, and color is free to pursue its proper resources.

These two qualities of the still life might seem contradictory, though, pointing respectively in the direction of historical materiality and free artistic spontaneity. If, however, still life retains actual interest, it is not due to either of these two qualities taken separately, but to their peculiar conflation. This conflation can be assessed through the effect of estrangement inherent in the very isolation and hypostatizing of ephemeral everyday objects. Still life renders the unnoticed objects of immediate tactile experience remarkable by transposing them from the mute sphere of everyday life to the stern light of artistic exposure. This transposition is somehow *contra naturam*, as the meaning of these objects resides precisely in the universe of acting, using, and eating. Therefore the effect of estrangement: it is as if you *see* them for the first time, but subjected to a strange transformation, their visibility being paid, as it were, by sacrificing their meaningfulness. They are significant only when left unnoticed, managed in corporeal intimacy, whereas when transposed to the representational sphere of painting they become monstrous, almost uncanny in their distant fluorescence. Thus emerges a kind of dialectics peculiar to still-life painting, between mute and ephemeral things on the one hand and a certain idealization through painting on the other. This idealization does not, however, operate through transcendence, by conferring a significance on the objects depicted by way of an act of interpretation, but through the very defamiliarizing depiction, an idealization without ideal, so to speak. This dialectics of estrangement functions differently, to be sure, in different historical contexts, but one function stands out, namely a certain liberation of the representational technique. Deprived of any coercive order of organization emerging from the defamiliarized objects, and of effective ideals, that is transcendent principles of idealization, representation turns back on itself and becomes *presentation*, the important thing being the very composition of the visual field, unregulated by anything but aesthetic judgment (Bryson [1990], 82).

The dialectics of still-life painting consist not only of this liberation of painting through the free disposal of defamiliarized material, however. When the aesthetic organization of the field of presentation intervenes in the order of insignificant things, the still life also virtually becomes a means for interpreting the isolated fragments of everyday life it depicts. Thus, the liberation of some pure aesthetic judgment of painting is no longer a question concerning painting alone, but also a question of investing the techniques deriving from aesthetic judgment into the understanding of those impure and trivial objects of everyday life. This function is stressed heavily in the cubist still life-montage which conspicuously launches an autonomous plane of composition where everyday objects issued from a varied and not necessarily immediately compatible set of contexts are juxtaposed. Here, the possibilities of the defamiliarizing decontextualisation of things whose meaning is otherwise intimately restricted to their context are radically unfolded. By no longer just exhibiting the objects, but also suggesting ways of combining them and establishing relations between them despite their incompatibility, cubist still life sets up a framework for interpreting the tacit sphere of everyday life, re-opening, as it were, a field of unnoticed familiarities, resonances, and possible experiences residing in the rude materiality of our surroundings.

In a recent article on Pierre Reverdy and Juan Gris's collective works, Jennifer Pap quotes Reverdy: "The relation between two *distant* objects makes the image," and comments that "[t]he image, then, is not a copy but a *new* relation of two elements" (Pap [1996], 188). This stands out as a properly cognitive function of still-life painting: the confrontation with a field of uncertain possibilities of experience within the panoply of everyday objects, and the determination of these possibilities *through artistic composition*. This is the point at which liberated aesthetic judgment returns to the sphere of human life: where it produces, by means of its own spontaneity, models of intuition that disclose for the beholder virtual layers of reality buried in the insignificant and disorderly sphere of distracted living.

Through the interplay of artistic composition and presentation of everyday objects, still life painting opens up the space of the everyday world; it constructs models of new spatial relations designed as means to inhabit this world in alternative ways. On this level of generality, considered as a compositional design, the notion of still life seems to apply perfectly to modern literature. Three parallels are striking: the focus on non-significant materials, the intention to present the material in some brute form, not subordinated to a representational plot-structure, and the interest in disclosing spatial patterns of experience rather than temporal organizations of existential time. These directions are spelled out rather explicitly by Proust:

At the end of lunch, I was inclined now to sit on as the tables were cleared; and [...] my eyes looked on things other than the sea. Since seeing such things in the water-colours of Elstir, I enjoyed noticing them in reality, glimpses of poetry as they seemed: knives lying askew in halted gestures; the bell-tent of a used napkin, within which the sun had secreted its yellow velvet; the half-emptied glass showing better the noble widening of its lines, the undrunk wine darkening it, but glinting with lights, inside the translucent glaze seemingly made from condensed daylight [...] I tried to find beauty where I had never thought it might be found, in the most ordinary things, in the profound life of 'still life.' (Proust [2002], vol. II, 447–8)

What is interesting here is of course not only the explicit evocation of still life, however fascinating, but the insight that still-life technique can be a paradigm of how things suddenly stand

out with vivid pregnancy when fixed in this space of aesthetic experience. One finds a similar idea in Musil who talks about “the enigmatic demonic power of painted life” and affirms that “every still life paints the world from the vantage point of the sixth day of creation: where God and the world were still alone together, without man” (Musil [1978], vol. I, 1230, my translation). In both instances, the absence of human agency — and the absence of any impulses that would stir the logic of plot (Proust gives a simple model of how to achieve this absence by simply letting his protagonist remain seated after the meal instead of dashing along) — leaves the represented space in suspense, given over to aesthetic composition, and thereby pointing towards an interpretation through aesthetic intervention.

On a technical level, literary still life must be conceived of as a description or a tableau that is autonomized, where the text no longer follows a narrative path but instead dwells on details and organizes the presentation of the tableau. What results is an image, not in any visual sense — the text is no *ekphrasis* of a real or fictional canvas — but as a schematization of a field of reality, whose order is examined through artistic presentation.

Such autonomized tableaux can serve different goals, but their common stake seems to be precisely to reevaluate some piece of reality arrested in the still life. In Proust, the still life is steadily performing a double practice of devaluation and revaluation, devaluating the pragmatic context of the tableau and revaluating the elements in it as they can be used for other purposes. When, in the first part of the novel, we are introduced to Combray through the sensations of Marcel as a school-boy, we get, for instance, a detailed description of the St. Hilaire church with historical facts, legends of the religious images, and architectural particularities. This description, though, is radically different from any encyclopedia-like description; it is filtered through the child’s non-participation in whatever happens on Saturday morning and linked up to his different preoccupations, so that the resulting arrangement of the description assumes its own fuzzy logic, still life-like in that it makes arrangements according to principles alien to the immediate meaning of the object. The revaluation of the (re)presented elements can thereafter be unfolded, as they are taken up again at other points of the narrative where they are entered into a constellation of new elements. For example, portraits of the window-panes evoke (and interpret) other characters, legends parallel actions and rumors of later incidents, and so on, so that the still life of the church is gradually reinvested with signification, and its space is transformed into one of virtual becomings in the life of Marcel.

Robert Musil expresses, on one of the first pages of *Der Mann Ohne Eigenschaften* (The Man Without Qualities), the desire to “give a sleeping-draught to life” so that it stands out “rigid, perfectly correlated within itself, clearly outlined and still immensely meaningless in its entirety.” (Musil [1953], vol. I, 23). When sedated, life becomes distinct and obscure; as opposed to the logic of the narrative, where the contingent ensemble of the situation demands a perspective of temporal transcendence to realize its potentials, the technique of “arrested life” refrains from such a realization, whose production of meaning necessarily leaves behind what does not fit into the meaning produced. When immobilizing the situation it becomes “immensely meaningless,” but at the same time it exposes a panoply of inner tensions and relations that can be analyzed by a prose that does not succumb to the temptation of narrative meaning. The entire novel is a network of such situations: an archipelago of situations rather than a universe of meaningful action, consisting of relatively short tableaux of five to ten pages with uncertain relations of time and space between them, all focused on the minute scrutinization of internal “correlations.” Musil’s reasons for applying this technique

are twofold: the first is the very cognitive function of myopia, the primitive disclosing of unknown worlds of reality that are normally hidden by habit to the myopic glance. When he dissects the unnoticeable, monstrous and fascinating particles emerge and incite what Musil calls “the sense of the possible”, that is, the desire to rearrange these particles in new formations. The second reason is of a less theoretical nature, as Musil in fact invests this technique in a historical analysis.

*The Man Without Qualities* was conceived as a monument. It was written in the 1920s and 30s, but takes place in Vienna during the last year before the outbreak of World War I. To Musil, the Austrian *fin de siècle* and the pre-war period formed an era of extreme tension embracing a great many tendencies in culture and politics, on the one hand preparing the catastrophe, as the retrospec-tor would know, but on the other hand also embracing the hopes and enthusiasms for the new century, the imaginary twentieth century that was (intellectually) prepared but never realized. Musil planned the novel (although he eventually left it unfinished at his death in 1942) as a historical will, dedicated, as he once wrote, to the German youth of his day who would, after the devastations, have to start all over again. Thus, what he really aims at by applying the still-life technique, is the preservation of historical possibilities, the passing on to posterity, through these distinct and obscure situations, the unsolved problems, the potential insights, the forgotten sensibilities, the questions for which no answer was ever given, the image of an era that never realized its potential.

However, Musil’s still lives are rarely devoid of human figures. Rather, he seems to experiment with endowing his characters with the qualities of still life objects, that is, stripping them from the individualizing propulsion towards action and mastery of the surroundings. He treats his characters, in a distinctively empiricist way, as inert objects. They merge into the setting, disempowered bearers of a cultural signification they are no longer capable of managing, statue-like torsos of a meaning that uncompromisingly wither away. The cultural aplomb of the characters, bearers of qualities that no longer can be converted into a meaningful self-fashioning, stands out with a touching refinement that verges on ridicule as it disentangles from the meaning in the culture that engendered them, only to leave them there, orphan-like, deprived of the cultural habitat where they should flourish.

The still lives where situations merge into images are frequently presented as tableaux, as theatrical immobilizations of possible action. The theatre scene is a predominant metaphor and the evocation of the theatre often coincides with a moment of self-reflection for the characters, a moment not only for acting, but also for seeing oneself acting on a stage and in a plot designed by somebody else (Musil [1953], vol. I, 180–1). But theatricality is also a regularly applied technique for presenting a scene that is precisely set up to analyze the distinct-and-obscure experiences that pass unnoticed in the interstices of human action, those pauses and intervals where nothing really takes place and the space is “perfectly correlated within itself” that are not activated in a sequence of events. One of these intervals occurs just after a session in the patriotic *salon* of Mrs Tuzzi, who organizes the endless (and fruitless) gropings for an adequate idea to crown the Austrian Emperor’s anniversary, where she finds herself alone with the Prussian industrialist Dr. Arnheim:

in these minutes between the guests’ departure and the consolidation of the situation that then remained [...] Arnheim smilingly followed Diotima [the novel’s nickname for Mrs Tuzzi] with his gaze. Diotima felt that her flat was in a state of trembling motion; all the things that had had to leave their places on account of the event were now brought back together, it was like a big wave ebbing down the sand again out of countless little hollows and ditches. (Musil [1953], vol. I, 214)



The disorder and the unruly state of transition that shatter the usual ways of seeing and feeling make Diotima prey to a vision that transforms the space of her apartment into an image: “her now empty flat, from where even her husband was missing, seemed to her like a pair of trousers into which Arnheim had slipped” (Musil [1953], vol. I, 214). The image launches the possibility of adultery that haunts the relationship between the two characters and, although never consummated, furthers a rich rhetoric of spiritual kinship and contemplation. But the temptation of the image and the feeling it promotes is checked by Arnheim’s controlled appearance: “Arnheim was not in the slightest aware of this. His trousers stood, in impeccable perpendicular lines, on the gleaming parquet, his morning-coat, his cravat, his calmly smiling patrician head, were devoid of utterance, so perfect were they” (Musil [1953], vol. I, 214). He does not step into the mutual space of feeling, but stands out distinctly in the middle of the vacant drawing room. As in countless other situations between these two characters, nothing happens, and what is left is a still life of hesitating gestures, a fossilized feeling that is not set in motion, only sketched as a mere virtuality in the historical image:

Upward from the vertical crease of his trousers Arnheim’s body seemed to stand there in the solitude of God in which the mountain giants stand; united with him by the wave of the valley, on the other side Diotima rose, luminous with solitude—her dress of the period forming little puffs on the upper arms, dissolving the bosom in an artfully draped looseness over the stomach and being caught in to the calf again just under the hollow of the knee. The string of glass beads in the door-curtains cast reflections like ponds, the javelins and arrows on the wall were tremulous with passion, and the yellow Calman-Lévy volumes on the table were silent like lemon-groves. (Musil [1953], vol. I, 217)

The still life fixates, as one fixates light-beams on a photographic plate, the image of a feeling—and of a way of feeling—with its characteristic historical ingredients of sensitivity, clichés, sublimations, and fetishes prompted by the obscure inner tensions within the distinct setting of an inconspicuous scene. Merging a vague sentimental hesitation, the insecure sensation arising from the alteration of the habitual décor and Arnheim’s pants, Musil operates a still-life organization where everything, characteristic patterns of feeling, physical appearances, wallpapers and book designs are all leveled to the presentation of a historical sensibility, an archaeology of how settings, sentiments and social rituals intertwined at a forgotten historical moment.

These two ways in which the literary still life endows an experience of space—focusing respectively on the places of individual reminiscence and becoming (in Proust) and on the analysis of cultural formations (in Musil)—merge beautifully in Woolf’s posthumous *Between the Acts*. The novel is set somewhat parallel to Musil’s, in one of the last weeks before World War II, which is, as in Musil, almost unthematized although providing the implicit horizon of the action. It takes place during a single day, in a modest manor where the village pageant is taking place. The pageant, performing famous scenes from British history, is not crucial in the novel; the interesting thing is what takes place between the acts, or rather, the way in which nothing really takes place. The material of the text is everyday-like preoccupations (for example, serving of tea, the distribution of chairs, contemplating weather-forecasts, activities that have taken on a slightly uncomfortable note because of the pageant), interrupted currents of idle-talk, and the characters’ ruminations on their respective feelings of attraction and repulsion, sympathy and disdain. All this is arranged, as it were, in a single 125-page still life, a composition of purely insignificant details aimed at producing a specific

*mood*. The way in which the narrator hovers over the entire scenery demarcates, without ever making explicit, the crucial points where convergences, dissonances, and discrete effluences of despair and irresolution mark out the presence of something ominous that is never said.

In Woolf, the literary still life has a privileged object in those reified—literally thing-like—words and sentences iterated in everyday, idle-talk, what Heidegger famously dubbed *Gerede* (idle talk). Words are, after all, what is exhibited in literature, a feature that has been exploited still more intensively in the wake of Flaubert's technique of innocuously quoting the *bêtises* (ineptitudes) and insipid received ideas of his characters. This technique of unmasking conversation by letting its babbling expose itself is consequently applied in *Between the Acts*. Nobody ever communicates, rather they talk according to their own habitual schemes, already knowing which schemes of the others these will trigger, as in the case of old Bartholomew and his sister at the manor: "But, brother and sister, flesh and blood was not a barrier, but a mist. What she saw he didn't, what he saw she didn't—and so on, *ad infinitum*" (Woolf [1992a], 18). All the characters say what they have to say, and what they have already said many times before, not to address anyone, but to assess themselves. The same logic of *Gerede*, of self-affirmation through reiteration, works in the inner reflections of the characters, who never really pertain to what they experience, but strive to insert themselves into whatever goes on by finding a momentum, a *feeling* that enables them to go on performing the rituals of everyday life. This panorama of outer and inner language is the material of Woolf's still life: a halo of words and sentences that rises like a bell-jar over Pointz Hall and together with settings, habits, and rituals maintains an immutable form of life inadaptable to any real event that would change things.

The evaluation of this mimetic content is very discrete in Woolf's novel; no explicit irony makes it stand out, and no blatant symbolism denounces it, apart from the constantly resurfacing doubt as to whether it really would be worthwhile to maintain habit. Woolf's method privileges two approaches: given the characters' comforting universe of *Gerede*, she examines how it clashes with the sensuous details of the surroundings, and how it clashes with the vague, inner displacement of moods. The novel exposes a recurrent interest in *sensation*: the handling of objects (newspapers, sandwiches, hair brushes), the observation of shifting light, changing shades, and the behavior of the cat, savors and smells, and so on; but this thick layer of sensation is never really absorbed into the conscious universe of *Gerede*. It is as if sensation has to pass some barrier, a languid zone of indistinction through which sensational experience stands out distinctly but also distantly, sensation that only vaguely bears upon the experiencing subject. This inner distance splits up the individual characters and projects their sensational activity onto the surroundings where bits and pieces of sensual content are left behind and recorded only by the text as traces of a virtual experience. If what emerges from the senses never really reaches the characters, the same mental aloofness can be seen in regard to impulses that do not come from the outside, but from the inside: the feelings and affections that grope in the individual characters, one who might be faintly in love, another vaguely annoyed, yet another feeling a glimpse of curiosity, and so on. Here, again, the affective impulses, however imperious they appear and notwithstanding the truth they might convey, dry out from the lack of elaboration and are left behind as strange or exotic caprices, as aborted experience. As with the sensations, these whimsical affections are only preserved in the literary image and used to tint and articulate the massive presence of the immutable normality, that is to articulate the virtual contents of the slice of frightening normality arrested in the still life.

The scene of *Between the Acts* verges on the problem of reminiscence as it attempts to portray “what the afternoon was like,” which does not coincide with how things were, but how they fused into this sensation, this mood, by reconstructing the space of the scene with an acute attention to the intimate interrelation of the “setting” and the mood. And at the same time, there is a strong strain of cultural analysis detecting ominous signs in the blind everydayness of the entire event, again, recasting, as it were, insignificant moments as elements of a significance unacknowledged by anyone present.

In these three texts, insofar as can be judged from such rapid presentations, the concept of the literary still life imposes itself, not only because the three authors seem fascinated with the term and the phenomenon of still life painting, but also because the techniques of still life coincide with their compositional work in a number of instances. The literary still life is not a pictorial writing, but an organization of non-coordinated material issued from the sphere of inconspicuous everyday life, which outlines a spatial field of virtual experience, revaluating the everyday. What stands out here is that the experience of space they offer—that is, the way in which the space of literary experience implies an aesthetically mediated experience of space—is dramatically different from the paradigm of experience launched by the nineteenth-century novel. The reversion from a temporal to a spatial perspective of experience is one thing, but these texts also seem to reverse the relation of subjectivity and experience. Whereas the temporalizing paradigm of experience invited one to consider experience as a quality, or even a faculty, of a subject that emerges as it masters the world in the process of experience, the experience of space now conversely determines how a subject could eventually emerge at a specific place. These novels no longer confront a world to be accommodated by some subjective pursuit of the self in a process of realization, but a world in which the still life of things invites the attentive beholder to become something different from himself. Not to realize himself in time, but to get lost in space. To find, eventually and at best, something better.

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## Living with Fragments

### World Making in Modernist City Literature

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The “urban novel” or “city novel” was always a strong discursive presence in both the production and reception of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century fiction. Academic literary criticism made the phenomenon even more pervasive, through a flood of studies on fictional cities and urban conditions. However, although nearly all literary trends and movements showed an interest in urban imagery as well as the ethical and religious connotations of the literary metropolis, most of the attention was focused on literature that also thematized the condition of modernity. The study of urban literature from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards offered a particularly promising opportunity to gauge the modernity of a literary text. The main reason is the exceptional social status of the metropolis: it is not so much a “spatial entity with sociological consequences” but “a sociological entity that is formed spatially” (Simmel [1903], 35; quoted in Frisby [1986], 77). Urban space is the process of modernisation writ large, in Georg Simmel’s words it is the “point of concentration of modernity” (Frisby [1992], 69). Research on urban fiction is therefore more than a specific branch of thematic studies: it is a gateway to understanding the complex dialectics of modernism and modernity.

This close connection with social modernity puts urban fiction studies squarely in the camp of heteronomist theory. Work on urban literature, like modernist criticism in general, is divided by what Astradur Eysteinsson presents as an opposition between two attempts to situate the phenomenon of modernism in literary history (Eysteinsson [1990], 19). On the one hand, there are a number of “heteronomist” theories, which study the phenomenon in tandem with generalizing narratives on “modernity” and “the modern condition” by such sociologists and urban theorists such as Georg Simmel, Max Weber, Jürgen Habermas, Louis Wirth, or Lewis Mumford. Heteronomist theories (and theorists) are not seldom accused of reductionism and of paying insufficient attention to the specifically literary qualities of the modernist text. On the other hand, there is what might be called the autonomist tendency, which conceptualises modernism as an aesthetic heroism that promises salvation to modern humanity in a fragmented world, through the construction of an autonomous, aesthetic order. Autonomist theories build on the sense of aesthetic autonomy that is part of the legacy of romanticism and is based on “a confidence in the ability of literature to impose order, value, and meaning on the chaos and fragmentation of industrial society” (Graff [1979], 33); see also Brooker [2002], 27). As a result, autonomist theories often limit themselves to establishing the nature of “the modern condition” and subsequently focusing almost exclusively on the self-evident value of specifically literary qualities.

There is no need, however, to aggravate the contrast between autonomist and heteronomist approaches to modernist literature. Instead, I would like to propose a theoretical framework for the study of modernity in urban prose that focuses on both the autonomous power of fiction (its ability to create a *sui generis* world model) and the discursive context of fiction, generating a kind of ortho-world-model. Mikhail Bakhtin's quasiformalist concept of the chronotope will be used to unite the autonomist and heteronomist approaches. The fictional chronotope can be seen as a narrative instrument, creating a fictional world, and at the same time as a cognitive tool, shaping the relationship between the artistic and the broader social system. On the basis of this Bakhtinian view of world making strategies in fiction, I will attempt to identify a number of categories in the corpus of modernist urban literature. Initially, I will use a broad concept of modernism to show how the social world between roughly 1850 and 1930 is reconstructed in a specific way. Secondly, the world making strategies of these modernist constructions will be compared to the cognitive peculiarities of so-called high modernist writers. In this way, I hope to show that the relationship between modernism and modernity is characterised by great diversity, both because of the wide variety of fictional world models and because authors were very selective in representing the many kinds of fragmentation that confront the modern subject.

### Modernity: The Culture of Fragmentation

Literary critics are right to associate modern literature with a general condition of fragmentation. Writers of the post-romantic period can be said to participate in a discourse on fragmentation that circulates within the broad field of cultural criticism. Nevertheless, in most theories, the concept of fragmentation remains too vague and generalizing. Therefore it is good to remind ourselves of the first attempts to objectify the discourse on fragmentation and revisit the observations of the founding fathers of modern sociology. In the social sciences, the concept of fragmentation covers three phenomena that are relevant to literary studies: the division of the social field into various subsystems (functional differentiation), increasing tensions within moral discourse (which are directly linked to functional differentiation), and the fragmentation of subjective (self-)perception.

#### *Fragmentation of the social world: functional differentiation and commodification*

The pivotal sociological observation concerning the Western modernization process is the fragmentation of the social world, due to a process that is labelled "functional differentiation." In *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893), Emile Durkheim relates the phenomenon to the growing complexity of modern societies. During a long-term process, starting with the Italian quattrocento and reaching its mature form around the middle of the nineteenth century, social activities—at first functions within jurisprudence, economy and politics, then scientific and artistic functions—crystallize into societal subsystems. According to Max Weber and Jürgen Habermas, two social theorists who built on Durkheim's insights, this fragmentation process implied a growing gap between public and private life. This particular aspect of modernization has had enormous consequences for individual experience: "To be a child no longer," as the leading Belgian cultural sociologist Rudi Laermans reminds us, "means to grow slowly but surely into the adult order of function-specific, non-affective social positions, ruled by universalist norms and focused on individuality and

achievement" (Laermans [1992], 29).<sup>1</sup> In a complex modern society, traditionally subjective attitudes (affective response, assignment of prestige, voluntary submission to collective value patterns) are banished to the closed sphere of the nuclear family and private life. This break with tradition is first felt in cities: the urban environment is explicitly conceptualised as a heterogeneous, overly complex, and even chaotic sphere. As the various waves of suburbanisation since the second half of the nineteenth century show, individual and family life are experienced as threatened enclaves of authenticity, which must be protected against the onslaughts of a complex, alienating urban world.

However, functional differentiation only partially explains the feeling and fact of fragmentation. The second important factor that helps to clarify the association of social modernity with fragmentation is the process of commodification, first noted by Karl Marx and Georg Simmel and defined more extensively by Weber. Modern societies, led by the great nineteenth-century metropolises, were dominated by the money economy and the utilitarianism of the bourgeoisie. Marx, Simmel, and Weber argue that this domination eventually leads to the undermining of all value systems, a kind of institutionalised anomie: "The pure objectivity of the treatment of people and things leads to an indifference as to what is distinctive since money transactions are concerned only with exchange values" (Frisby [1986], 80). Via the money economy, institutionalised anomie spread rapidly across the Western world, and urbanisation played an important part in this process. Because the power of the money economy had a free reign in the metropolis and its implications were most clearly visible there, urban modernity during the second half of the nineteenth century quickly gained the reputation of being an objectified environment, indifferent to values. It was

the genuine showplace of this culture which grows beyond all that is personal. Here, in buildings and educational institutions, in the wonders and comforts of space-conquering technology, in the formations of communal life and in the visible state institutions, there is offered such an overpowering wealth of crystallised, impersonalised mind that the personality, as it were, cannot maintain itself when confronted with it. (Simmel [1950], 410)

*Fragmentation of the private life world: "moral decline" and "neurasthenia"*

Besides the changes in social role models and the growing impersonality of social interaction, individuals are confronted with two implications of social differentiation and commodification, implications that reveal two other connotations of the concept of fragmentation: the differentiation of moral discourses and the perceptual chaos of modern life. In contrast with the first form of fragmentation (which is thematized almost exclusively in sociological circles), these aspects of the modern condition are explicitly discussed by the broader intellectual community.

Moral fragmentation, to begin with, has been one of the key topics in literature since romanticism. In his study of the concept of modernism, Eysteinsson refers to a very lucid observation by Hermann Broch to illustrate this conceptual nexus. In a commentary on his cycle of novels *Die Schlafwandler* (The Sleepwalkers), Broch mentions the "breakdown of values" and associates this phenomenon with a "four-century-long process which under the guidance of rationality dissolved the Christian-platonic cosmology of medieval Europe, an overwhelming and terrifying process, ending in total fragmentation of values" (cited in Eysteinsson [1990], 36). Sociological theory makes this observation explicit by situating the fragmentation of values within the broader context of the secularisation process, which is conceptualised as resulting from the fragmentation processes



mentioned before. A second explanation lies in the fact that moral values become detached from concrete practices. Talcott Parson explains that moral consensus within a functionally differentiated society is only possible at a highly abstract level and that, as a result, collective consciousness focuses more and more on abstract and undecided discourses (Parsons [1971], 59). The process of modernization creates an intellectual climate—what Peter Zima calls a socio-linguistic situation (Zima [1980] and [1997], 29–34)—in which moral discourse is seen as fundamentally heterogeneous, criss-crossed by class distinctions, different educational backgrounds, and metaphysical-religious differences.

Simmel and—from the perspective of cultural philosophy—Walter Benjamin emphasize that the impersonal relationships characteristic of social modernity have certain consequences for the perceptual situation of the modern individual, even more so for the urban subject. In *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1935) Benjamin argues that sense perception is linked to the subject's social and historical situation: "During long periods of history, the mode of human sense perception changes with humanity's entire mode of existence" (Benjamin [1974], 439).<sup>2</sup> He reaches this conclusion through his reading of Simmel, using the sociologist's insights to link the excessive susceptibility to impressions with the global condition of commodification and alienation. For Simmel, urban experience is a kind of synthetic symbol for both phenomena; it articulates how the subject is threatened by objective culture. The impersonal nature of social interactions and the sense of losing control over one's own life, however, go hand in hand with another aspect of modern perception, namely the aestheticization of everyday existence:

The lack of something definite at the centre of the soul impels us to search for momentary satisfaction in ever-new stimulations, sensations and external activities. Thus it is that we become entangled in the instability and helplessness that manifests itself as the tumult of the metropolis, as the mania for travelling, as the wild pursuit of completion and as the typically modern disloyalty with regard to taste, style, opinions and personal relationship. (Simmel [1978], 484)

The impersonal world of modern consumer society is not just an empty, meaningless one but paradoxically also an environment teeming with uncontrollable perceptions and multiform practices, a "chaos of impressions and interactions" (Frisby [1992], 71). The modern subject's reaction, according to Simmel and Benjamin, is to focus increasingly on momentary and extremely heterogeneous ways of giving meaning to existence.

The chaos of impressions and interactions is the object of the third and perhaps strongest current in discourses on fragmentation. The category of "impression" is, according to Lothar Müller, the most important concept in the discourse on social fragmentation at the turn of the century (Müller [1990], 42–5; see also Müller [1988] and Mattenklott [1987]). Müller refers to now forgotten theorists such as George Beard (and his theory on neurasthenia in *American Nervousness*, 1881), Willy Hellpach (*Nervosität und Kultur*, 1902), Richard Hamann (*Der Impressionismus in Leben und Kunst*, 1907), Karl Lamprecht and Oswald Spengler. Apparently, the debate on the fragmentation of experience accommodates a wide variety of evaluations, ranging from utopian and marxist visions to cultural pessimism and extreme conservative reactions, oscillating between euphoria and despair. But all literary theorists agree on the heart of the matter: the tragic fate of the modern subject. Objective culture has become so refined and complex that the subject begins to resemble Goethe's (and Disney's) sorcerer's apprentice: "the deepest problems of modern life derive from the claim of

the individual to preserve the autonomy and individuality of his existence in the face of overwhelming social forces, of social heritage, of social culture, and of the technique of life" (Simmel [1950], 409). Things are out of joint, the subject cannot hold.

## The Dialectics of Modernity and Modernism

The observation of modern fragmentation is a constant in intellectual responses to social modernity from philosophers, sociologists, journalists, and artists alike. The two implications of the social process of fragmentation, those concerning the "life world" of modern man, serve as both the object of cultural criticism and as a yardstick for the experience of modernity: moral consequences (the fragmentation of moral discourse) and social-psychological ones (the chaos of impressions and interactions). In literary criticism, theories that focus on symbolism and avant-garde movements tend to favor the social-psychological notion of fragmentation, whereas theories on realistic representations of the city concentrate on the moral implications of the phenomenon.

### *Social-psychological fragmentation in literature*

In studies of the historical avant-garde and symbolist and aestheticist authors, it is Simmel's views on fragmented subjectivity that seem to shape the debate. The reason for this predominance of social-psychological conceptualizations of fragmentation is no doubt the fact that romantic literature often serves as the frame of reference. It was, after all, during romanticism that powerful statements on modernity and fragmentation were first formulated—Wordsworth's arguments in his famous introduction to the second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* can serve as a prototypical example (Wordsworth [1996], 575). It is no coincidence that the urban condition bore the brunt of criticism in that context. Gusdorf argues that the myth of fragmented city life was born in eighteenth-century pre-romanticism. Psychopathological diagnoses were applied to the city, which bestowed upon urban experiences the connotation of "unhealthy" or "depressing." Referring to Germaine de Staël and Rousseau, he concludes that this metropolitan spleen is connected with the contrast between urban artificiality and idyllic rural life:

sickness of life, 'mal du siècle', becomes a sickness of the city. [...] The revolt against the city is the revenge of sensitive souls on enlightened minds. There is an urban conscience, unhealthy, superficial, alternating between an artificial exultation and a no less artificial depression, and a rural conscience, in harmony with the world because it is in conformity with the vital rhythms of nature. (Gusdorf [1976], 375–6)<sup>3</sup>

Pre-romantic and romantic cultural philosophies are omnipresent in literary studies of modernism. They relate modern literature to the fertile soil of art, the culture that Marshall Berman calls the "maelstrom of modern life" (Berman [1982], 16). The model par excellence for most theorists to illustrate this romantic inheritance is Baudelaire's vision of modernity. Baudelaire suggests in "Le 'Confiteor' de l'artiste" (The Confiteor of the Artist) one of the programmatic texts from *Le Spleen de Paris*, that modernity is primarily an aesthetic problem: "The study of the beautiful is a duel in which the artist, just before being beaten, screams in fright" (Baudelaire [1958], 7).<sup>4</sup> It is in urban life that the "Entmächtigungserfahrung" (danger of disempowerment) vis-à-vis modernity (Brüggemann [1985], 19, 145) takes the most radical forms. To critics like Brüggemann (following Walter

Benjamin) the structural role of the spleen-motif is the key to summarizing the social influence of modernity on modernism. It is the pivotal point where “the crisis between art and history” (Bradbury and McFarlane [1976], 29) is most symptomatically revealed.

The other side of the impressionist thesis on cultural fragmentation, the more or less euphoric variant, serves equally as an important diagnostic instrument within the corpus of modernism/modernity studies. One of the best examples can be found in Arnold Hauser’s analysis of impressionism:

Modern technology [...] introduces an unprecedented dynamism in the whole attitude to life and it is above all this new feeling of speed and change that finds expression in impressionism. [...] Impressionism is an urban art, and not only because it discovers the landscape quality of the city and brings painting back from the country into the town, but because it sees the world through the eyes of the townsman and reacts to external impressions with the overstrained nerves of modern technical man. It is an urban style, because it describes the changeability, the nervous rhythm, the sudden, sharp but always ephemeral impressions of city life. (Hauser [1951], 168)

This kind of argumentation is still used in recent studies on modernist city images (see Hauser [1990], Vietta [1974]). Manfred Smuda, for instance, argues that the city is not only an important theme in avant-garde art, but that it is also the source of inspiration for the new narrative techniques. As city life generates specific perceptual problems, it implies the production of new perceptual models and, hence, new representational techniques (Smuda [1992], 137).

#### *The fragmentation of moral discourse in literature*

The study of moral fragmentation in modern urban literature does not so much use Simmelian concepts but instead relies implicitly or explicitly on Durkheimian or Marxian observations. With its fragmentation of social relationships and ideological discourses, modernity constitutes the most important meaning horizon for the realist novel; it is a cultural condition which is felt to be problematic by the characters. “As a result of the objective structure of this economic system, the surface of capitalism appears to ‘disintegrate’ into a series of elements all driven towards independence. Obviously this must be reflected in the consciousness of the men who live in this society, and hence too in the consciousness of poets and thinkers” (Lukács [1994], 32). Not coincidentally, one of the favorite topics of this kind of diagnostic theories is the role of urbanization in the realist novel (see Greenslade [1994], 47–53; Williams [1985], 222–35; Kähler [1986], 217; Forderer [1992], 27). In this context, the urban condition is seen as symptomatic of the fact that realist authors seek to map the social trajectory of the modern individual: “They were writers who distilled collective intricacies in individual instances of complexity, making the individual problematic cases into archetypes for a continuous and extended moral trauma” (Nalbantian [1984], 15; see also Levy [1978], 73).

However, most theoreticians do little more than establish that literature thematizes moral fragmentation. Peter V. Zima, on the contrary, offers a more solid literary-sociological reading. Zima has traced the development of the novel in terms of an historical evolution that moves from ambiguity to ambivalence with respect to the question of moral values (Zima [1980]). This development can also be applied specifically to the authorial treatment of city images. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, novelists still perceived possibilities for transcending ambiguity through a kind of Hegelian synthesis. There was still a lingering nineteenth-century belief in transcendent truth,

transcendent value. Although appearances gave rise to a sense of ambiguity, there was still a conviction that “seeming” could be sublimated into “being.” Thus, specific urban heroes were documented in ways that were expected to reveal the underlying, deeper essence of urban life as a whole. In a second, early-twentieth-century, ambivalent phase, this possibility of a synthesis became increasingly problematic. In much high modernist fiction, the difference between “seeming” and “being” is no longer simply a given and the reader is confronted with a non-hierarchical juxtaposition of perspectives. City representations, as will become clear below, came to insist on their necessarily fragmented status. Nonetheless, they were still informed by an encompassing impulse: they retained the idea of the city in its totality as a symbol of modernity. Implicitly, many modernist writers strove to reassemble the fragmented city experience through their art.

### *High Modernism and the culture of fragmentation*

In the nineteenth century the novel progressively becomes less of a direct “sociological” instrument and the problematic hero of the realist novel changes in shape; from the late nineteenth century on, he seems to be assailed by a subjective process of disintegration. He becomes a subject that almost frantically looks for a solid subject position in a society that is progressively considered as oriented towards objectification. This evolution explains why social-psychological diagnoses like Simmel’s seem the most adequate for dealing with symbolist or avant-garde literatures. For Lukács, this shift towards the realm of the social-psychological in literature and criticism was a reason to speak of a conservative ideological tendency in Western literature, while other literary sociologists (Goldmann, Jameson, Eagleton and Zima) continue to evaluate the modernist problem of the subject as a critical reconstruction of the problem of modernity. The apparent depoliticization and the relapse of the sociological perspective can still serve as starting points for dealing with the dialectics of modernism and modernity. Jameson, for instance, affirms that the relation between literature and social codes changes thoroughly just before and after the turn of the century: “The perfected poetic apparatus of high modernism represses History [...]. The political, no longer visible in the high modernist texts, any more than in the everyday world of appearance of bourgeois life, and relentlessly driven underground by accumulated reification, has at last become a genuine Unconscious” (Jameson [1981], 280). According to Jameson, as well as to most late twentieth-century literary sociologists, ideological criticism is still at work, even if it has moved underground, because the novel testifies to the *condition humaine* under capitalism. The quest for truth, which was typical of realist novelists, is continued in a moderate form, namely in the pursuit of a mimetic reconstruction of “authentic experiences.” High Modernists create an empire of authentic subjective experiences, because they seem to expect that this strategy can counter the disenchanted, rationalized market society. In that sense, they strive for a utopian compensation for the decline of subjectivity in the fragmented modern world.

### **World Making in Modern City Prose**

All of the theories I have just outlined are powerful tools for understanding the relationship between modernism and modernity. Nevertheless, there is one important limitation: they do not allow us to synthesize the differences between the various literary traditions in a single theoretical frame-

work. My alternative is to take a closer look at the construction of the fictional world behind the city image, as a way of processing constructions of reality that emerged outside the literary field. This should bring us closer to a general theory of modern culture, one that acknowledges artistic strategies as autonomous acts within a general modern condition. The foundation of this alternative is the theory of “the autonomy of the literary field,” along with the assumption that the cognitive strategies within this field are connected with information gathered in a social environment that is not exclusively literary.

The proper starting point for analyzing the dialectic between modernism and modernity is, from my point of view, the fact that the literary field from the late eighteenth century onwards is heavily influenced by the process of functional differentiation. Liberated from external influences such as bourgeois morality and patrons, writers put greater emphasis on concepts like “autonomy” and “genius.” This new situation was extremely important to the aesthetic evolution of modernist fiction. It implied a growing interest in everyday experience, since the autonomously generated aesthetic norms and values forced the artist to see the world in his or her own, unique way (see Sanders [1987], 212). From this perspective we can understand why the city and the modern world in general became thematically interesting in the first place.

Particularly from the moral perspective of eighteenth-century neoclassical and pre-romantic representations, the city was the epitome of the unaesthetic, so this novel attention to the ugly and banal world of the everyday was an important reversal in literary attitude. Pierre Bourdieu rightly notes that a genuine artistic perspective can only prove itself when it is capable of elevating vulgar and “low” subjects to a higher level (Bourdieu [1992], 190; see also Hoffmann [1987], 44). By transmuting the ugly, empirical world into the stuff that art is made of, the autonomous artist exhibits his superiority over other social actors. Because it emerged as an autonomous social subsystem, literature was strongly shaped by a self-reflexive discourse regulating the confrontation of the aesthetic with the non-aesthetic. The various nineteenth-century aesthetics attempt to assert beauty by confronting that which is not beautiful—including social fragmentation—as though wanting to legitimize the literary subsystem over and against its *Umwelt*. Hence, discourses on the “fragmentation of the modern world” are an important resource for sharpening our understanding of theories of art.

From an elementary, epistemological point of view, statements concerning modern reality are fictions. Referring to the biological systems theory of Maturana, Siegfried Schmidt has defined reality as follows:

Each living system constructs his own world-model according to the innate (biological) and acquired (socialized) acting preconditions in his cognitive domain. By means of socialization, interaction, and consensual communication certain features of private world-models become consensual within a social group (or even within a whole society) and figure as [an] ortho-world-model. (Schmidt [1980], 533)

The perception of the modern world as a fragmented reality is thus a construction that is relative to the participants in the intellectual debate. The discourse on fragmentation refers not to “the world” but to one or more world models that were developed in the broader intellectual community. If we want to relate these ortho-world-models concerning “modernity,” fragmentation and urban experience to modernism, things become still more complicated. Besides these models, there are several others that are specific to the literary community. Fictional discourse offers different strat-

egies for dealing with “reality”: it can stick to consensual models of reality, construct totally different world models, or combine both. According to Schmidt, “the system of literature seems to be the only place where the construction of world-models as such becomes thematic, and where this thematization can bear upon all positions from ortho-models to remote fantasy worlds” (Schmidt [1984], 265). For a theory that tries to shed light on the dialectic between modernity and modernism, this epistemological insight can be of great value. Fictional worlds from different modern(ist) texts can be seen as autonomous cognitive operations that pretend to transcend ortho-world-models by adding a surplus value. This value is sometimes located in the diagnostic qualities of art (as in realism or naturalism), but can also be found in an attempt to offer remedies for the ailments of social modernity (as in aestheticism). In order to study world making strategies in modern(ist) texts, I will make use of Bakhtin’s concept of the chronotope. According to Bakhtin, narrative action has to be conceptualized as embedded in the construction of the spatio-temporal images that accompany a fictional story. Darko Suvin summarizes Bakhtin’s take on narrative fiction as follows: “[a story is a] finite and coherent sequence of actions, located in an overarching chronotope, and proceeding from an initial to a final state of affairs. Its minimal requirements would be an agent, an initial state changing to a commensurate final state, and a series of changes consubstantial to varying chronotopes” (Suvin [1989], 37). This definition implies that, within a Bakhtinian framework, texts require a new way of reading. Apart from plot and character, two types of chronotope need to be considered. Crucial to the chronotope concept, as I understand it, is the fact that it functions both on the level of small text units and on the level of an “overarching” world model. In simple terms, one might define the chronotope on the first level as a four-dimensional mental image, combining the three spatial dimensions with the time structure of temporal action. In many realist and modernist novels, for example, the image of the protagonist arriving in the big city is created through descriptions of urban space that contextualize the (temporal) process of the encounter with the metropolis (Chanda [1981]). It is obvious that any work of literature evokes several chronotopic images, as is clear from meticulous readings of city images in recent studies (for instance Wirth-Neisser [1996], Barta [1996], Donald [1999]). Bakhtin points out that they usually appear in multitudes, which gives rise to the phenomenon of what we might call, in analogy with his notion of polyphony, “polychronotopia” (Bakhtin [1981], 252; see also Pearce [1994], 174).

On a second level, a chronotope should be considered a text’s fundamental image of the world. The dialogue between chronotopes, created in the text by its producer, causes the reader to experience one particular type of image as dominant and to select it as the “overarching chronotope”: “Within the limits of a single work [...] we may notice a number of different chronotopes and complex interactions among them, specific to the given work [...]: it is common moreover for one of these chronotopes to envelop or dominate the others” (Bakhtin [1981], 252). The overarching chronotope plays an important part in the process of interpretation, because the nature of its spatial indications (an idyllic setting, a commercial-industrial environment, a desolate landscape, the simultaneous chaos of a city) and its specific vision of temporal processes (the cycles of nature, the historical development of society, the subjective moment, the discontinuous temporal experience of a dream or of intoxication) set the boundaries within which fictional events can take place. In a sense, the overarching chronotope connects the temporal processes and spatial selections of literary reception with an ortho-world-model. I will refer to this illusion of reality as “the fictional world model” and proceed to investigate its most important manifestations during the period from 1850 to 1930.

The fictional world model is a fundamental analytical instrument to study the processing of modern experience in general and of urban fragmentation in particular. Although this experience is an inescapable presence in modern prose, there are nevertheless important differences in the overarching chronotopes used by the different aesthetic currents.

The fragmentation of social space provoked the nineteenth-century moderns with its complexity and made them vacillate between a critical confrontation with moral issues within the ortho-world-model (as in Balzac or, more strongly, in naturalism), on the one hand, and resignation to the psychological condition of modernity in the autonomous sphere of the aesthetic (as in Baudelaire and, more prominently, in symbolism), on the other. Avant-garde strategies (in futurism, expressionism, and surrealism) aim for a third option: idolization of the perceptual chaos of the urbanized world. In other words, the “hero of modern life” takes on several different guises, which can be considered homologous to different aesthetics in general and changes in chronotopic preferences in particular. The most important demarcation line, however, is to be found in the contrast between the cognitive strategies just mentioned and those of the prose writers of the period between the wars. Here, we find a more reflexive attitude that produces statements on the fragmented condition of modernity, as if the high modernist has been convinced by the scientific work of early sociology. All the problems of modernity, including the often neglected moral fragmentation, become relevant all at once.

#### *Documentary Chronotopes in Realist-Naturalist City Images*

In novels from the second half of the eighteenth century the development of the protagonist is closely tied to a world model dominated by an idyllic setting and cyclical time processes. Bakhtin calls this model the “idyllic chronotope” because it shows “a grafting of life and its events to a place, to a familiar territory” (Bakhtin [1981], 225). Central to these narratives are the intimacies of life in a small community in the country or in a non-urbanized culture. The flight from the city to the country house is a recurrent theme, used to illustrate the moral concerns of romantic-realist writing. Urban spaces may also embody the idyllic chronotope but only in urban milieus where cyclical regeneration takes place: intimate enclaves such as middle class houses, suburban villas, parks, and historical monuments. Other aspects of the city are avoided or function as symbols for banal and unaesthetic experiences. Urban modernization processes are associated with the downswing of cyclical time and described as phases of decay. In those cases the development of the protagonist is described as a process of resignation: he takes on the appearance of a victim who is forced to withdraw from a society plagued by modernization.

In a large number of novels that belong to the French realism of the first half of the nineteenth century (Balzac) and to French naturalism (from the 1860s on), the urban hero strongly resembles the protagonist of romantic-realist novels. The plot of the realist novel, like that of the Bildungsroman, is constructed around the moral development of the protagonist, who, in his struggle with the social world (often symbolized by the city), reaches maturity or resignation. The urban individual is at the mercy of an ethically superficial and often threatening city. This is certainly the case in Anglo-Saxon naturalism: the confrontation between the individual and the city often takes the shape of a tragic conflict, from which the individual barely escapes (Williams [1985], 235; Göbel [1982], 90–2).

The difference with earlier representations of the city, however, is that the naturalist-realist novel is structured by specific spatio-temporal coordinates. What makes the realism so specific is that

this tragic relationship between the individual and the fragmented urban experience is represented through documentary descriptions: “It is essentially through description that the city penetrates literature, and literature our perception and understanding of the city. To convey information about the city, the text must stop the story, temporarily suspend the action, and describe places and spaces” (Moretti [1983], 111; see also Zérafra [1975], 194). Moreover, these descriptions are strongly focused on those aspects of the world that aroused moral indignation in eighteenth-century writers. Balzac, Zola, and Gissing usually focus not on idyllic community life or the flight from the city, but on the most advanced stages of modernization and the concrete spaces where this process takes place. Bakhtin’s work suggests that these particular chronotopic images can be analyzed as the reverse of the idyllic chronotope:

here the issue is primarily one of overturning and demolishing the world view and psychology of the idyll, which proved increasingly inadequate to the new capitalist world. [...] We get a picture of the breakdown of provincial idealism under forces emanating from the capitalist center. (Bakhtin [1981], 234)

In his study of the Bildungsroman, Bakhtin builds on this argument and points to the fact that the realist novel is capable of reading buildings, streets, works of art, technology, and other social organizations as signs that refer to historical developments concerning moral fragmentation: the changing nature of people, the succession of generations and eras, class conflicts (Bakhtin [1986], 25).

This historical interest shows up in its most pronounced form in Zola’s preface to the second part of *Les Rougon Macquart*, which explicitly declares his aim to illustrate historical developments during the second empire (Zola [1960], 367). In order to lend greater depth to his illustrations, Zola studied historical documents in archives, conducted interviews, and went exploring in Paris. It is with this kind of thoroughness in mind that I propose to call the realist-naturalist world models “documentary chronotopes.” The documentary chronotope differs from the idyllic chronotope in its reliance on cultural documents, rather than the laws of nature, the mainstay of the romantic-realist movements. Documents are at the heart of naturalist world models, not because of their supposed mimetic references to social reality but primarily because they illustrate cultural history. Typically, the historically charged worlds of the documentary chronotope imply the presence of global historical processes. The social segments in the city novels of Zola, for instance—the world of fashion in *Au bonheur des dames* (The Ladies Paradise), small businesses in *Le ventre de Paris* (The Belly of Paris), the stock exchange in *L’Argent* (Money) are not just descriptions of customs and mores in contemporary Paris. They also serve as a synecdoche for the sum total of socio-historical developments. Realists and naturalists make heroic attempts (often through cycles of novels) to present the city at the cutting edge of historical development. Their documentary observations transcend the protagonists’ local set of problems. The city becomes a privileged symbol charged with information relevant to the phenomenon of moral fragmentation.

### *Self-Referential Chronotopes in Aestheticist City Images*

A second mode of world making can be conceptualized in studying the construction of self-referential chronotopes. The central element in this type of world making is the processing of subjective impressions. Although “impressionistic” cityscapes already show up in Balzac, descriptions



of shifting modes of visual perception begin to dominate from the late 1860s onwards (Caramaschi [1977], 59). This period initiates an explosion of urban representations sketching a pleasant sensorial environment, which might be called “sensorial urban idylls,” by analogy with romantic descriptions of nature. The wide spread of impressionistic sensitivity to this urban idyll is clear from Oscar Wilde’s *Decay of Lying*, a programmatic text that made waves all over Europe: “Where, if not from the Impressionists, do we get those wonderful brown fogs that come creeping down our streets, blurring the gas-lamps and changing houses into monstrous shadows? [...] The extraordinary change that has taken place in the climate of London during the last ten years is entirely due to a particular School of Art” (Wilde [1961], 26-27). Wilde’s observation shows that aestheticist authors like to represent the city as a simulacrum: they construct an environment filtered through an artistic world model. The interest of this world lies not just in its aesthetic qualities per se, but also in the fact that impressionistic images allow for the expression of correspondences. Programmatic statements of symbolist authors, for instance those by the young Emile Verhaeren (see Michaud [1961], 753-4), make clear that, by the end of the century, the ability to see impressionistic observations as vehicles for correspondence became the distinguishing feature of symbolism versus realism. The aestheticist hero takes on the guise of an aesthetic observer, whose observations symbolically correspond to subjective moods, often in the course of an existential crisis that could be read as an illustration of Simmel’s depersonalization-syndrome.

In aestheticist and symbolist texts, as Walter Benjamin rightfully states, the city is a world absorbed by a Bergsonian kind of “expanding internal time” or “durée,” a world in which most images are contaminated by the temporal experience of spleen (“Das Zeitbewußtsein des Spleen”; Benjamin [1974], 1187). This melancholic vision of modern experience finds its strongest expression in George Rodenbach’s *Bruges la morte* (Bruges the Dead) from 1892, in which the moribund, foggy city (with its deserted streets, squares, and parks and its lonely figures against a dark background) displays a medieval stillness that correlates with the suffering, the confusion, and sometimes the redemption of the main character. In contrast, for example, to the foggy cityscape in the opening passage of Dickens’s *Bleak House* (1853), where the mist symbolizes the impenetrability of legal institutions to the average citizen, impressionist observations feed the “Verelendung” of the protagonist. The cognitive strategy behind these impressionist observations can easily be linked with Simmelian observations. “Disorientation,” James Donald notes in a recent study, “produces a retreat into an interiority, either mental or physical, or both, and a disabling inability to admit feelings. Life in the city becomes un-narratable, and so, in a more acute sense, un-imaginable” (Donald [1999], 136). The focus on individual interiority runs parallel to the construction of “the closed worlds of Modernist art” (Beebe [1974], 1077) and can be seen as an anticipation of the “inward turn” of some exponents of high modernism (Lehan [1998], 76). That the closed world model is very different from the romantic-realist chronotope is clear from Bakhtin’s observation that a great deal of modern literature shows a preference for the “interiorised idyll” (Bakhtin [1981], 230). He notes the pivotal role of Rousseau in this respect. Rousseau not only creates the idyllic literary world as a mimetic representation of the “beautiful” aspects of the everyday world; he consciously thematizes the idyllic as a subjective construction, as the material “for constituting an isolated individual consciousness” (Bakhtin [1981], 230). Space often loses its “natural” and cyclical character in the process, to make way for an internal cyclicity of the recurrent and repeatable psychic processes of observing and remembering.

It goes without saying that the self-referential world model stands in stark contrast to the great city novels of realism. Aestheticist-realist novels are marked by the rebirth of a character or an individual insight, by a dynamics contained within individual consciousness. The “outside” world is static and devoid of any supra-individual development or moral specifications. While in realism an individual grows through interaction with the city and undergoes a learning process, in aestheticist urban novels the confrontation with the city is limited to the observations and psychological processes of a monadic soul. Because the texts of aestheticist writing emphasize semantic material within the boundaries of the subject, their chronotopes might be called self-referential. The world is reduced to a series of impressions that are processed and stored in memory, from which they can be retrieved at will. Consequently, this world model has a specific spatio-temporal structure: its spatial coordinates are provided by subjective observation and/or recollection, while a personal or fictitious biography informs temporal progression.

*Hyperrealist Chronotopes: The Heritage of the Historical Avant-Garde*

The final world model that reveals a clear predilection for a specific overarching chronotope was developed by the historical avant-garde movements. The spatial and temporal dimensions of this model are characterized by discontinuity. It is a world in which the spatial and temporal continuity of ordinary empirical observation is distorted. In everyday perception, successive spatial impressions are linked by causal relations projected on an uninterrupted time axis. In the hyperreal chronotope, however, there is an attempt to link fragments of reality in a combination that is as complex and dynamic as possible. The mainstay of this world making strategy is the construction of urban situations (Butler [1994], 134–7). The city world of the avant-garde is not an aesthetically unified world model but a collection of reality fragments in an artificial collage. The physical elements of the city are compressed at the speed of light, so that the reader is made to observe the city in a dream-like state or through a sense of intoxication (see Martens [1971], 188–204). Through this process, the writer manages to create a sense of dynamism (futurism), intoxication (dadaism, unanimism), pathos (expressionism), or dreaming (surrealism), which makes the montage-world a realm of extraordinary, yet at the same time quotidian, experience, a world of hyper-real perception.

In terms of temporal development, the hyperreal chronotope is characterized by the simultaneous or quasi-simultaneous presentation of different observational elements (Kemper [1974], 31–2). Avant-garde manifestoes call this “simultanism” (dadaism), “parola in liberta” (futurism), or “Reihungsstil” (expressionism). The central concept is Simmelian to the bone: “tempo.” In this context, the topos of “speed” refers to the hypermodern aspects of the city (like the traffic at Berlin’s Potsdamer Platz; see Bienert [1992], 66), especially the potential of the industrial and commercial metropolis to generate a hyperreal intensity. There is great dynamic potential in an urban environment, because its multiplicity and fast-paced variety transcend ordinary modes of experience or make them seem inadequate. It becomes impossible, for example, to establish stable spatial coordinates in the middle of modern traffic. By making space appear to dissolve in a quick succession of observations, the avant-garde artist suggests a despatialised world or, in more modest manifestations, a world in which the intensity of extraordinary, chaotic spaces is highlighted. Avant-garde literature aims to represent this condition as faithfully as possible, without losing the actual experience of the city in the process of literary transposition. The main objective behind this kind of city imagery is, as Richard Murphy has rightfully stated, to “deconstruct” the dominant social

discourses and develop a counter-discourse. The counter-discourse of avant-garde city literature is not only “an avowedly formal opposition” but also an attempt to undermine the claim “of possessing a coherent, non-contradictory and final knowledge of reality” (Murphy [1998], 99). The point of departure for the construction of this subversive discourse, however, can be found in the reality constructions that emerged from the discourse on fragmentation.

### On the Dialectics between High Modernism and Modernity

Polychronotopia lies at the core of nearly all modern novels. Bakhtin noted that texts are chronotopic battlefields and that one of the chronotopes often tries to dominate the others (Bakhtin [1981], 252). Nevertheless, as I have shown for the texts in the previous section, it is usually possible to establish the hegemony of a particular world model. This is not the case in the modernist novel. For literature written since the interbellum it has become difficult, if not impossible, to determine what “overarching chronotope” dominates the narrative. A lot of high modernist texts are characterized by a radical pluralism with regard to world models. Proceeding from an Archimedean point of departure, several cognitive strategies and corresponding world models are tested and often simultaneously put into position in the same work. It seems that in high modernism the interest in monolithical chronotopical constructions as instruments to articulate a specific position within the aesthetic realm is waning, and that aesthetic concerns are formulated in a totally different way. High Modernism seems to have lost its faith in the power of world making. As I have shown in the previous part, a belief in an aesthetic restructuring of our understanding of the perceptual and social conditions of the modern world was an important symptom of post-romantic aesthetic programs. Baudelaire had an enormous faith in the power of aesthetic analogies and correspondences. Zola had a comparable trust in his own reportage skills. Expressionist poets in their turn believed in their mimetic ability to render hectic modern life into seemingly chaotic and vitalistic representations. Dos Passos, Döblin and Joyce do not share this optimism. High modernists advocate a different form of world making than previous literary currents: they no longer draw on a universe dominated by a specific aesthetic program but on a world that cultivates the priority of independent intellectual judgments (Fokkema [1984]).

Consequently, modernist authors allow themselves to thematize highly subjective combinations that are effective for the intellectual issue of their choice. The high modernist novel shows that the world can no longer be unequivocally understood and that the representation of epistemological processes may be our only recourse. Therefore, as Douwe Fokkema (referring implicitly to the last chapter of Erich Auerbach’s *Mimesis*) explains, the novel focuses on a semantic universe that centers around the notion of awareness, which includes detachment and observation (Fokkema [1984], 34). Referring to Virginia Woolf’s essay “Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown” (1924), Peter Brooker confirms this hypothesis on the growing subjectification and intellectualisation of modern literature: “The job of the ‘modernist’ artist was not to represent the modern panorama but to render the shifting internal life of an individual consciousness, to present ‘the spasmodic, the obscure, the fragmentary, the failure’” (Brooker [2002], 25). The literature of high modernism, however, is not merely a copy of the “closed worlds”-representations of the symbolist tradition (Zmegac [1991], 165); it has also incorporated the strategies of the historical avant-garde movements and of the realist trad-

ition. High modernism is at the same time aestheticist (because of its self-referential stance), hyper-realistic (due to its epistemological scepticism towards reality constructions) and realistic (it tries to present a mimetic picture of modern subjectivity and of the diversity of moral discourses). Rather than a specific world making strategy, it epitomises an intellectualist stance by pointing at the diversity of cognitive strategies.

To understand this remarkable and still under-theorized move in literary history, I would like to invoke a parallelism with the above-mentioned thesis of Fredric Jameson concerning the quest for authentic subjective experience. Skepticism and resistance to clear aesthetic choices can be seen as the result of meditations on the human condition in an evermore complex "life world." In a progressively complex social world and an equally sophisticated artistic field, the confrontation with the diversity of aesthetic remedies is an almost existential problem. To illustrate this confusing situation, the modernist writer seems to be left with one aesthetic strategy: the juxtaposition of different types of fictional worlds, the dramatization of a confused and confusing panorama of heterogeneous cognitive instruments. This existential issue implies a new conception of modernity. In high modernist literature the observation of the fragmentation of moral discourses is doubled by an articulation of aesthetical fragmentation. Starting from a skeptical attitude towards all collective aesthetical answers, high modernist writers seem to come to the conclusion that aesthetical remedies for the problem of modernity are made impossible by modernity itself. This is why a highly idiosyncratic eclecticism seems to be the only formal solution left for authors to deal with modernity in general and with urban experience in particular. By showing the complexity of the conceptualization of the social world and the complexity of psychological reactions to the modernization processes, writers evoke an image of the modern subject as it is pictured in sociology: heroic in its ambitions, tragic in its failures. They concentrate—as if they have interiorized both the Durkheimian and the Simmelian theories of modernity—on the problematic conceptualization of modern experience, and therefore can only explore several world making strategies at the same time.

#### *High modernist city representations and the impossibility of world making*

From this view on high modernism, we can tentatively explain the shifts in the domain of literary representations of the city. The modernist writer has an implicit and sometimes explicit intuition about the pluriformity of the aesthetic reactions towards modernity. All of the aspects mentioned above can be found as frames of reference in modernist city novels, shaping the presuppositions of all the literary truth claims that make up the foundation of any literary world model. Just like sociologists who accentuated the growing complexity of urbanized society, modernist writers became conscious of the fact that modern city life could not be dealt with through simplifying diagnoses. The high modernist city novel (*Berlin Alexanderplatz*, *Manhattan Transfer*, *Petersburg*, *Ulysses*, *Mrs. Dalloway*) seems driven by a lucid desire to thematize the complexity of the social system, by evoking the fragmentation of moral discourse (see Scherpe [1988a]) and subjective identity (the multiplicity of perceptual situations, the diversity of individual activities).

The world model of the high modernists therefore no longer has an overarching chronotope. Time becomes a multifaceted phenomenon (cyclical as well as simultaneous, historical as well as internal experience of duration) and spatial selection is also subjected to strategies of multiplication. I need only refer to the contradictory interpretations of the novels I have mentioned. Döblin's urban novel, for example, can be read from the perspective of his preference for typically naturalist

selection (Kähler [1986]; Freisfeld [1982]; Klotz [1969]) but also from an impressionistic-aestheticizing point of view (Donald [1999], 136; see also Keunen [2000]). The same goes for *Manhattan Transfer* (see Keunen [2001]; Brooker [1996], 53) and Bely's *Petersburg* (Brooker [1996], 53; Barta [1996], 19–46). This kind of city novel conscientiously guards the heritage of modern literature, but at the same time it does not make any clear choices. Dos Passos, Döblin, and Joyce either juxtapose an “old-fashioned” world model to another, competing model, or they put world models into perspective by giving their descriptions a hybrid character. As in novels that consistently make use of interior monologue, hybrid world constructions that are simultaneously documentary, self-referential, and hyperreal emerge. Hana Wirth-Neisser has rightly pointed out that modern urban novels are composed of self-referential and historical-documentary worlds at the same time, thereby transcending the old opposition between individual and city:

the private self in conflict with a public world, a self bent on carving out a suitable private enclave, is replaced by a self that both constructs and is constructed by the cityscape. At times the plot itself unfolds as a sequence of perceptions of place, of actual movement through the cityscape and ‘readings’ of the urban environment. (Wirth-Neisser [1996], 21)

The same kind of hybridity can be attained by means of a fusion of hyperreal and documentary chronotopes. Analysing the use of the stream of consciousness technique in Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer*, Hartwig Isernhagen observes that the described processes are not merely an evocation of an intoxicated or neurotic perception of reality but are construed as illustrations of the most important social events in the text. In the midst of a seemingly chaotic whirl of impressions, the ambitions of urban dwellers, architectural and technological highlights of urban culture, and the social struggle for life are all distilled into a discontinuous series of impressions (Isernhagen [1983], 98). In addition, and this is perhaps their most important high modernist intervention, the novels use a macro-syntactic technique that makes the dominance of one or other chronotope impossible. The montage-structure of the high modernist city novel radicalizes its polychronotopia. This is most clearly noticeable in the multiplicity of its characters, who move from one world model to the next. Considering the large number of characters and the absence of an overarching plot structure, this technique automatically creates a pluralistic universe. The very essence of montage is to represent discontinuous elements within the artificial continuity of narrative development. The composition of the “fragmented, modernist text” (Barta [1996], 46) clearly fits this description: it shows hardly any of the narrative characteristics of the realist-naturalist (linearity) or aestheticist novel (unity of the aestheticizing observer).

Despite its pluralism the plotless structure of the high modernist city novel explains *something*. In a sense, it follows the adage of Gertrude Stein: “composition as explanation” (Klotz [1969], 472). The novels show that the city is a complex whole of overlapping plots (lives) and crossing paths: “the city exists in lives as complex, as opaque, and as painful as the novels depict” (Donald [1999], 138). Thus, the different world models converge in a construction that reveals the complexity of the world in all of its aspects: social fragmentation, commodification, moral heterogeneity, diversity of experiences and psychological disorientation. The modern world is not only a chaotic complexity but also a complicated network of individuals, actions, observations, and situations. In this sense, the textual construction explains the workings of modern consciousness. By integrating existing world making strategies, the high modernist city novel reflects a typically modern mode

of self-questioning. The heroic self-affirmation vis-à-vis objective culture of which, among others, Simmel and Weber dreamed (and of which the romantic hero is the prototype and the realist, aestheticist, and avant-garde heroes are variations) is no longer a priority, since our culture has been split into shards and is rendered ever more complex by the increasing influence of consumption practices, by the diversification of social life, and by the growing complexity of the economic world (Featherstone [1995], 5). Whereas coping with objective culture seems to be the central problem of aesthetic programs from romanticism to surrealism, the heterogeneity and complexity of the late-capitalist world has become the source of epistemological doubt. This altered situation may explain why the literary world takes on the form of multiple chronotopes. After all, literary communication that emerges in a time in which cultural answers and strategies can no longer be unambiguously formulated or programmed can no longer function as a cultural alternative for the non-literary world, for modernity. In a certain sense, the high modernist writer could be compared with the city dweller mentioned by Andrei Bely: "The tinkle of the doorbell was heard, surely, someone uninvited was giving a reminder of his existence; he wanted to come in here from the grey, wicked fog and from the slush of the street, but nobody responded to his request" (Bely [1978], 156).

## Notes

1. "Niet langer kind zijn, betekent langzaam maar zeker ingroeien in de volwassen orde van functioneel-specifieke, niet-affectieve door universalistische normen geregeerde, tevens ik- en prestatie-gerichte sociale posities" (Laermans [1992], 29).
2. "Innerhalb großer geschichtlicher Zeiträume verändert sich mit der gesamten Daseinsweise der historischen Kollektiva auch ihre Sinneswahrnehmung" (Benjamin [1974], 439).
3. "Le mal de vivre, le mal du siècle, apparaît comme un mal de la ville. [...] La révolte contre la ville est la revanche des âmes sensibles sur les esprits éclairés. Il y a une conscience de la ville, malsaine, superficielle, alternant entre l'exaltation artificielle et la non moins artificielle dépression, et une conscience campagnarde, en harmonie avec le monde parce qu'elle se conforme aux rythmes vitaux de la nature" (Gusdorf [1976], 375–6).
4. "L'étude du beau est un duel où l'artiste crie de frayeur avant d'être vaincu" (Baudelaire [1958], 7).

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## Figurations of Childhood in Modernist Texts

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### “Der Weltverlorene,” “der Erstgeborene”

At the beginning of *Also sprach Zarathustra* (Thus spoke Zarathustra), the unconventional prophet of a new era and alter ego of Friedrich Nietzsche calls for the process of a three-fold metamorphosis of the spirit. In the famous and central “Rede von den drei Verwandlungen” (Speech of the three metamorphoses) he evokes how, in a significant adaptation of the Hegelian dynamic, the spirit turns from camel into lion and from lion into child. Contrary to the accepted cultural-historical conceptions of child and childhood during the Enlightenment, the Romantic period and the bourgeois second half of the nineteenth century, Friedrich Nietzsche puts the figure of the child at the end of a desirable development of the spirit. “But say, my brothers, what can the child still do, that the lion couldn’t? Why should the plundering lion still become a child? Innocence is the child and forgetting, a new beginning, a play, a wheel rolling from oneself, a first movement, a sacred yes. Yes, for the play of creation, my brothers, one needs a sacred yes: the spirit now wants his will, the one-lost-to-the-world wins his world” (Nietzsche [1994], 26, my translation).<sup>1</sup>

In an entirely different context and a different discourse, Walter Benjamin relates the act of creation to the end of a development and to the figure of a child, the first-born. The short text “Nach der Vollendung” (After completion) sketches the last stage of creativity as the rebirth of the author in the work of art. “The creation namely shapes in its completion the creator anew. [...] Not where he was born is his heimat, but he comes into the world where his heimat is. He is the male firstborn of the work he once received” (Benjamin [1972], 438, my translation).<sup>2</sup>

In this passage, Benjamin reactivates the age-old motif of parthogenesis or self-creation and locates the corresponding capacity in the figure of the child, just as Nietzsche does in Zarathustra’s “Speech of the three metamorphoses.” Nietzsche finds himself at the beginning of literary modernism and the development of the *fin de siècle*, Benjamin is one of the most lucid observers and critics of the same era.

The experiences, fears and desires, the towering artistic ambitions, the simultaneously megalomaniac and infantile pursuits and realizations of literary modernism that are still hailed with fascination today are situated chronologically as well as conceptually between the rhyme of “der Weltverlorene” (“lost to the world”) from the “Rede von den drei Verwandlungen” and “der Erstgeborene” (“the firstborn”) from “Nach der Vollendung” (After completion). The tension between the painful loss of stability and orientation in the modern world on the one hand and a desire for the new, the innovative and the ‘newborn,’ itself triggered by a dissatisfaction with this old world, on the other hand, is constitutive for this literature and the *Zeitgeist* in which it came into existence.

Nietzsche's "Weltverlorene," Benjamin's "Erstgeborene": this rhyme spans the whole gamut of child figurations that take on capricious contours and various colors in these texts. Three levels of reflection on the field of child and childhood turn up time and again: the conceptualization of child-like subjectivity and observation processes, of childlike temporality and memories of a biographical or fictional childhood and of the infantile, pre-linguistic state or the budding linguistic competence of the young child. Fragments from the work of André Gide, Franz Kafka, Else Lasker-Schule, Marcel Proust, Rainer Maria Rilke, Gertrude Stein and Virginia Woolf display the connection between crucial ambitions and characteristics of the modernist poetics and the way in which child subjects, childhood memories and child language are staged: they show the pale lonelyish boys in the past glory of cottages and country houses, in places called Combray or Ulsgaard, the self-appointed stepchildren, the youngest sons and daughters—with all their toys, their little languages, like the shuffling of feet on gravel, their Bilder-Bücher, their kaleidoscopes and magic lanterns.

### Subjectivity and Observation Processes

Because of the way they function in the modernist texts, the metaphors of the kinetoscope in Marcel Proust's work and those of the kaleidoscope in André Gide's turn out to be charged with a poetical dimension. It is no coincidence that both are closely linked with the figuration of child and childhood and with a reflection on its written representation. The deployment of the two optical metaphors turns out to clarify the conceptualization of childlike observation and expresses the tension that is constitutive for modernism: between vertigo and creation, being dominated and dominating, "Weltverlorener" and "Erstgeborener."

In André Gide's biographical writings, intense sensory experiences are evoked along the lines of an unmistakably modernist poetics. In the scene of the kaleidoscope, the figure of the child becomes the carrier of a perspectival, dynamic observation of reality. The narrator of *Si le grain ne meurt* (If the grain does not die) recalls how, for hours and days on end, he would be submerged in the observation of the characteristics and possibilities of the kaleidoscope he had received as a present. He experiences an untamable fascination and intensive curiosity: "Without leaving my eyes from the scene, I softly turned around the kaleidoscope, softly, and admiring the swift modification of the colours. Sometimes the insensitive displacement of one of the elements brought with it overthrowing consequences. I was as intrigued as stupefied" (Gide [1939], 36, my translation).<sup>3</sup>

Gide's description of the lonely but rich hours which he spent experimenting with the kaleidoscope and Proust's famous scene of the 'lanterna magica' not only represent the fictional or biographical evocation of long afternoons of a solitary childhood. The affirmation of boundless intensity and excess in the sensory observation and experience of the modernist child subject also offers powerful resistance to the traditional notions of bourgeois moderation. "At once vulnerable because of hypersensitivity and dangerous because of his desire for ever greater intensity of sensation, the authentically modern subject thus seems to slip the social moorings of the rational bourgeois self and its 'counting-house morality'" (Nicholls [1995], 8). Fascination makes room for gaping fear in the performance of the 'lanterne magique' in Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* (In search of lost time), which the child protagonist experiences as "an intrusion of mystery and beauty" (Proust [1987], 10, my translation).<sup>4</sup> In the alienating light, the space of his room seems to become bound-

less, the defenseless walls give ground to the imperturbable deforming capacities of the many-colored projections: "Golo's body himself [...] modified itself from any material obstacle, from any hindering object which he encountered in taking it as his texture and interiorizing it" (Proust [1987], 10, my translation).<sup>5</sup> Because the kaleidoscope as well as the magic lantern appear at the beginning of a work in which the theme of subjective recollection takes a central position, the intense childlike observation can be read as the staging of an alternative subjectivity, embodied by the figure of the child.

In the next movement, the figuration of these overwhelmed children turns out to acquire a meta-reflexive meaning for the poetics of the work and the author's oeuvre. Right before the scene with the 'lanterna magica,' Proust uses another optical metaphor, the kinetoscope, for the way in which the narrating subject has a confusing, disorienting experience at a twilight moment, in between waking and sleeping. The walls and objects of his room start to turn and move like the props on a revolving stage when it is time for the next act: "around him the invisible walls, changing places according to the shape of the imagined space, whirled in the darkness" (Proust [1987], 6, my translation).<sup>6</sup> Crucially, the places toward which the narrator moves himself in his imaginative half-sleep and which he revives with his sensory observation are the places of episodes in his life, places that not only direct and structure the imaginary rotation of the walls of his room but also the literary work itself. "These whirling and confusing evocations took only some seconds, often my brief uncertainty about the place where I actually was didn't distinguish better the one from the other supposition than we isolate, in seeing a horse running, the successive positions which the kinetoscope shows to us" (Proust [1987], 6, my translation).<sup>7</sup> The spatial and temporal displacement of the subject is experienced as a chaotic vertigo, as the kaleidoscope of darkness, but in its linguistic description it is analyzed as a serial, slowed-down succession of memories of childhood abodes in Combray up to the moment of the narrated time, the successive positions which the kinetoscope shows to us.

There is a tension between these two aims. On the one hand, there is a representation of a subjective bewilderment, caused by a kaleidoscopically observed reality of a whirlwind of spaces, colors and times that connect in ways that cannot be reconstrued — seemingly supernatural, many-coloured appearances, like the projections of the *lanterna magica*. On the other hand, a movement in the opposite direction starts to vibrate: the structuring of the chaos that is to a certain extent inevitable in and through the act of writing; the aim to fragment the flow of impressions that is experienced as natural and uninterrupted. The description of the way Gide, the author, guides the gaze of Gide, the boy, through his kaleidoscope spans both extremes in a similar way: a chaotic fusion of the many-sided reality that can never be viewed in its entirety at the one pole of modernist subjectivity and alienating brokenness in the representation as a literary construct at the other pole. As opposed to the other children, the child protagonist is not satisfied with the dizzying display of color of the toy, but rather starts to dismantle and analyze it. Reducing the number of glass pieces, he gets an — equally exciting — insight into the working of the object. Indeed, the next step in the description refers to the affinity between the alternative conceptualization of subjective experience and perception, and a creative activity: "Then I desired to replace the little glass pieces by the strangest objects: a feather, a fly wing, the butt of a match, a leaf of grass" (Gide [1939], 36, my translation).<sup>8</sup> The child protagonist deforms and reforms his observation and his relationship with the reality he observes as a subject, just like the authors of modernist texts that stage the figuration of child and time.

Between kaleidoscope and kinetoscope, the pendulum of the multiplication of a phantasmagorically observed reality on the one hand, and the fragmentation of a flowing movement in seemingly unrelated constellations on the other, guide the conceptualization of subjectivity in modernist literary texts. At times, this mode of experience whirls, at other times it stammers. It either ruthlessly drags the subject along or stands in its way, irritates, gives offence. Both textual stagings of the experiencing and observing subject disruptively transform the rhythm of bourgeois moderation and the subject-object relationship in bourgeois-realist poetics. Both are realized in the figuration of child and childhood in modernist texts.

## Temporality

The modernist crisis of Modernity's continuous conception of time and history appears in two different forms that seem mutually incompatible at first sight. In their function and development, both share a disruption of continuity. The fierce desire for a new and naked beginning—"tabula rasa"—for freedom and independence of cultural, political and literary traditions and for the dominion of the sons is intertwined in a conflicting manner with the creative and selective adoption of old cultural forms, such as mythology, and of the literary heritage—smashed to pieces, scattered and exiled, but present nonetheless. In the desire for the absolutely new, as well as in the destructive and disrespectful transformation of a tradition which remains present as a powerful influence, a discontinuous conception of time and history becomes visible, which is part of an "aesthetics of interruption" (see Astradur Eysteinnsson [1990]). In modernist literary texts, the display of a child protagonist or the insertion of childhood memories, of textual material that refers in content and/or in form to the field of childhood, topicalizes and stages such a dis- or interruption of temporal continuity.

Any analysis of the figuration of child and childhood in a certain discourse or cultural-historical period is closely related to the meaning which this discourse or period ascribes to the process of individual maturation and collective history, with the prevailing conceptions of time and historicity. In *fin de siècle* thinking and writing, however, the complexity of the relationship between child and temporality increases in comparison to other periods in Western cultural history. In modernist texts, the consciousness of this interaction between the conceptualization of temporality and the figuration of child and childhood is played out on a meta-level. Authors ascribe a two-fold critical potential to child protagonists, which is aimed at content as well as form. Likewise, the textual characteristics that relate to the semantic field of child, child language and childhood become strongholds of resistance against the domination of patriarchal genealogy on the one hand and the bourgeois mimetic poetics that holds on to a straightforward, uninterrupted, causality-governed flow of time on the other hand.

Modernist texts feature various other motifs or textual operations to express the resistance against a temporal continuity at the level of content and form, such as the representation of the alternative or fragmentary experience of time of female protagonists or narrators, the narratological strategy to weave several time levels into the plot without notice, or the option to reflect on temporality by representing the stream of consciousness during an endlessly drawn-out now. However, the resistance against continuity that is located in the figuration of child and childhood is of a specific nature. Other

than the literary strategies or narrative points of view mentioned, the figuration of the child forms a powerful alliance with the focus on the possibilities and limitations of memory. The exploration of the characteristics of memory in general and memories of childhood in particular constitutes a crucial aspect in modernist literature.

Just as the childlike subjective observation processes in these texts refer to perspectivism and fragmentation as literary strategies at a meta-level, the conceptualization of a temporality that is deemed to be childlike acquires a poetical dimension. The validity and/or desirability of a continuous passing of time and of the literary representation that construes this temporality as an uninterrupted stream are undermined in the modernist figuration of child and childhood. Just as the projection of Golo in Combray's famous nursery does not let itself be hampered by any kind of limitation, just as the kaleidoscope invites young Gide to perceive reality as a motley and capricious pattern of anorganic and organic fragments (pieces of glass and pieces of feather), the temporality of child figurations resists smooth integration into a biographical model with clear boundaries and separate stages. In this respect, literary modernism pays tribute to Sigmund Freud and Friedrich Nietzsche's conceptualizations of temporality.

The Freudian structure of "après-coup," of an unwanted memory that turns up unannounced, stages the disruption of a continuous flow of time and the release of temporal boundaries. Even though the phenomenon of memory by definition breaks up the time line and makes what is past present again, the disruptive power is much stronger when it concerns a memory that has not been integrated and tamed by consciousness and individual biographical construction — memories of a childhood that has been lived in a pre-subjective and a-historical manner. Starting from the Freudian definition of childhood memories as inevitably subjective fantasies that are tinged with repressed drives and desires, modernist texts set up an analogy between mental and textual processes of origin and development: the evocation of childhood memories reflects the construction of the literary work and the mode of the writing act. A transformative and creative energy is hidden in the structure of the process of memory.

In his *Malte* novel, Rainer Maria Rilke compares childhood memories to an entanglement of seaweed that is suddenly — in this case triggered by a fever attack — fished up from the sea of oblivion, flotsam which washes up on the shore and which is reminiscent of a shipwrecked childhood that had been given the free rein on the bottom of the sea: "And with what comes, a whole tangle of confused memories, which is intertwined with it like wet seaweed with a sunk object. Lives of which one would never have heard of, emerge and mingle with what has been" (Rilke [1994], 55, my translation).<sup>9</sup> This quotation shows the transgression of time and the transformation *through* time in the confused experience of "belatedness," "Verspätung," "après-coup." The imagery of "sinking," "surfacing," "rising" represents the unfettered temporality of childhood memories in a vertical dynamic. Rilke's description of "lives of which one would never have heard of" and the mixing with "what has been" implies deviations from the (fictional) historical reality and points at the actual import of childhood memories in numerous works of the modernist canon. The eyewitness account of the disruption and deformation that are inextricably bound up with the process of memory in general and the revocation of childhood in particular is more important than the representation of a certain childhood experience and the pretence of a regressive, unbroken return to this past.

The phenomenon that psychoanalysis calls "Verspätung" ("belatedness," "après-coup") and its staging in modernist literary texts breaks up and perverts the romantic association of the child figure

with originality and exposes the arrival of maturity as an illusion of the Enlightenment's teleological ideology of progress. The literary staging of childhood memories is an extreme evocation of the impossibility of a return to the origin. The origin becomes secondary, postponed, and ultimately remains unknowable as it is transformed by condensation and displacement throughout the process of remembering. The arrival as a complete victory and integration of experiences and memories in a linear, flat biography equally turns out to be an unreachable illusion in the spirit of the Enlightenment—and in this context, it squares remarkably well with psychoanalytic therapy. In the confrontation with the figure of the child, the boundaries of time become permeable: childhood does not let itself be summoned or stopped by the voluntaristic act of a rationally acting adult. Modernist literary representations of temporality take shape in the tension between two impossible desires: the unmediated return to the origin or the story of progress of self-restrained adulthood. Despite the impotence vis-à-vis the time that is always already lost, the analogy between the transformative power of childhood memories and the creative process of a literary text retains the possibility of a potential resistance in the child figurations.

In Nietzsche's concepts of "active forgetfulness" and "becoming-the-child" as well in their literary staging, this (re)creative potential is radicalized. The protagonist of Rilke's rewriting of the parable of the prodigal son at the end of his *Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* (The notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge) shows how the combination of a desired forgetfulness and the return of the child creates the possibility of an alternative biography and embodies a liberation from the linear causality and the chains of the patriarchal, genealogical model. Nietzsche's appeal to and ideal of the active and desired forgetting of the past captures the condition to move one step ahead in the constitution of the self, in order to throw off a genealogy that has not been chosen, a new opportunity for childhood. In this formulation of a never to be perfected imperfect tense, the future dimension which is expressed in the gerundive "zu vollendendes" (to be completed) is ruled out by the absolute denial of "never," as well as by the power of the imperfect form, the unfinished past. For Malte, Rilke's protagonist who is confronted with destabilizing childhood memories, "avant" embodies the compelling command of a complacent, familiar voice—the voice of the father?—which he cannot but obey with a reflex reaction. "Into the silence, a superior, complacent voice which I thought to know, spoke: 'Say the word: avant. Spelling it: a-v-a-n-t'" (Rilke [1954], 53, my translation).<sup>10</sup> Nietzsche's "es war" (it was) and Rilke's "avant" (before) express the conception of a time which never passes and which is always irrevocably past—imperfect past, forever unfinished but indelible.

Facing the magnetizing and compelling power of "es war" and "avant," Nietzsche formulates in one of his speeches of his alter ego Zarathustra, namely in the "Rede von den drei Verwandlungen," the alternative of "becoming a child," "zum Kinde werden," which is not identified as regression, nor does it coalesce with an enlightened teleological line of thinking or a neglect of what is behind us. "Innocence is the child and forgetting, a new beginning, a play, a wheel rolling from oneself, a first movement, a sacred yes" (Nietzsche [1994], 26, my translation). When the spirit creates itself as a first movement, as a new beginning, he has become a child and he has lifted the weight of what is past—which is repeatedly called the "Geist der Schwere" (spirit of heaviness) in *Thus spoke Zarathustra*. Malte's and Rilke's quest for (literary) strategies to throw off the burden of the past, of "avant" (Rilke [1994], 53), of "es war" (Nietzsche [1972], 212), requires a temporality that is different from the sterile "pull of sequential time, of chronology" (Gilbert [2001], 55), a narrative

structure that differs from the straightforward teleological storyboard: “how can he finish *Malte*’s childhood without betraying it to narrativity and teleological demand?” (Gilbert [2001], 55). The idiosyncratic rewriting of the parable of the prodigal son can be read as such an alternative temporality. In an inversion and confirmation of the process of growth and maturation, the lost child indeed returns. The lost son actively wants to forget his past which has almost become the future: “To take this upon him once more and now really, was the reason why the alienated returned home” (Rilke [1994], 200, my translation).<sup>11</sup> Just as Nietzsche’s conceptualization of the child metaphor in the “Rede von den drei Verwandlungen” at once perverts and confirms the teleological line of thinking, by construing the intrinsically regressive dynamic of becoming a child as an objective and utopian ideal, Rilke’s *Malte* novel can be read as textual attempts “seine Kindheit [zu] leisten” (to manage his childhood).

## Representation

Modernist texts criticize the realist, representational poetics in which the author offers a fictional reality with an uninterrupted connection to reality as it is known. The exclusive attention for language in its referential meaning potential in bourgeois poetics is denounced as the negation of linguistic materiality: richness of sound and musicality, visual characteristics of written characters, the performative power of textual forms, material reminiscences of a mode of meaning outside the symbolic referentiality and arbitrary conventionality between signifier and signified. One of the textual processes that focus on and display this alternative conception of language in modernist poetics consists of giving voice to the pre-linguistic and speechless, the *infans*, the child. The specificity of the relationship between child and language in modernist texts is determined by the condition of original speechlessness, the condition of “not yet” having acquired symbolical language in all its aspects. The conceptual framework of such a referential system of signs has “not yet” organized and categorized reality, the child has “not yet” connected itself to a consensually construed notion of reality as the basis for intersubjective communication.

The subversive visualization of the insufficiency and arbitrariness of referential structures of meaning and the exploration of the possibilities of language as an iconic medium that is meaningful in itself determine the double mobilization of the motif of the childlike pre-linguistic state or the language of children in modernist literary texts. First of all, the highlighting in matters of content and the evocation at the level of form of infantile linguistic processes such as Gertrude Stein’s obsessive repetitiveness turn out to go hand in hand with the liberation from fixed narrative ordering systems that dominate late-nineteenth century bourgeois poetics. A second poetical dimension of linguistic iconicity is related to the sensitivity to linguistic sounds and verbal musicality. In Julia Kristeva’s psychoanalytically oriented reading of Marcel Proust’s structures of the memory (Kristeva [1994]), these aural characteristics function as reminiscences of libidinal processes in early childhood. Finally, in the attention for the visual materiality of the linguistic signs, in the staging of their status as an orthographical image in the work of Else Lasker-Schüler, the figuration of the child and its exceptional use and conception of language once again play a crucial role. The reminiscences of the arbitrariness of the construction and hence the changeability of linguistic referentiality and the activation of a semiotic undercurrent of language challenge the (exclusive) dominion of the



symbolic signs of language and charge the figuration of the childlike pre-linguistic state with a subversive and creative power.

### *Textual Form*

The formal principles of aimless circularity and obsessive repetitiveness that structure Gertrude Stein's *A Circular Play* and *The Making of Americans*, respectively, resist the functionalization of language as the representation of a well-ordered reality or plot that develops in a linear and progressive fashion. In order to unchain the motley parade of wayward signifiers, the beginning of *A Circular Play* creates a free word space in the sphere of child and childhood. A temporary bracketing of parental supervision — "papa dozes mamma blows her noses" (Stein [1993], 327) — initiates a choral dance of verbal circles, fragmented nonsense-sentences, shreds of external reality. A second structuring principle in Gertrude Stein's entire oeuvre is an insistent, enchanting repetitiveness: sentence structures, word clusters and entire paragraphs are resumed. The manner in which they vary every time they are repeated determines the thematic and formal progression of the text, which is explicitly focused on by Stein: "Always, one having loving repeating to getting completed understanding must have in them an open feeling, a sense for all the slightest variations in repeating, must never lose themselves so in the solid steadiness of all repeating that they do not hear the slightest variation" (Stein [1993], 60–1). The variations cause the same words to acquire different meanings in different constellations, so that language surfaces in a range of semantic possibilities. The text called "Play" increases the number of functions and meanings of a single signifier to such an extent that they collapse in meaninglessness and make visible the arbitrary connection between signifier and signified in a referential language system as well as making them performatively accessible. "Certainly every one wants you to play, every one wants you to play away, to play every day, to play and play, to play the play you play every day, to play and remember it and ask to play it and play it and to play away and to play every day and to-day and all day" (Stein [1993], 147).

The literary and discursive genre of biography is the genre that represents narrative coherence and progressive development *par excellence*. Moreover, it is an inevitable vehicle for a certain conception of growing up, maturation and intergenerational relationships. Many modernist texts have chosen the biography as a starting-point for a text that gradually acquires an autonomy vis-à-vis this model, as borne out clearly in the structure of Virginia Woolf's linguistically experimental novel *The Waves*. Initially, Stein conceived of *The Making of Americans* as a prototypical family epic (Stein [1993], 19, remark by editor Dydo), which by definition narrates the development and rise of a mostly paternally determined line. The "Martha Hersland" chapter has been received as the turning point at which the reader's expectations are destabilized by fragmentation, a stammering repetition and a stubborn hold onto the obsessively present participle (Ruddick [1990], 102). It is no coincidence that it is also the locus in Stein's oeuvre where the fascination for repetition as the evocation of an auto-erotic poetics is made explicit for the first time, a "loving repeating," the libidinal basis of which can be retraced to an infantile mode of being. "Always from the beginning there was for me all living as repeating. [...] Loving repeating is always in children. Loving repeating is in a way earth feeling" (Stein [1993], 62). When Stein absorbs these reflections on the specificity of the childlike mode of being into a writing style which is undeniably driven by an undercurrent of repetitiveness, she identifies this poetical principle with a re-activation of the infantile energy that has been repressed and pushed away to the subconscious during the maturation process. Stein's aware-

ness of this mode of writing's potential of resistance is named explicitly: "Loving repeating being is more of that kind of being that has resisting as its natural way of fighting" (Stein [1993], 63). "[The] incantatory style throughout, by reactivating the reader's infantile pleasure, undoes the repression. This is the lesson of the undervoice in *The Making of Americans*" (Ruddick [1990], 91). The formal principle of the incantatory repetition not only resists the linear and progressive narrativity of bourgeois poetics, but through the association with childlike libidinal processes it also makes audible a semiotic undercurrent in a subversive way ("undoing the repression").

### *The Sound of Words and Musicality*

Not only can modernist literary texts give room to such an "undervoice" by undermining narrative textual patterns, a sensitive openness to sound and rhythm as a second level of linguistic iconicity is also related to the sphere of child and childhood. Adam Piette recognizes the use and staging of the musicality of language and its rhyming rhythms as a central force behind the modernist manipulation of language: "at that heart [of modern writing] lies a mysterious acknowledgement of the rhyming nature of memory, the remembering work of prose rhymes [...] a kind of literary practice, a mimesis that hears as well as sees the murmurs of the mind, a difficult music of remembered connotations and selves fugitively united" (Piette [1996], 45). The focus on the characteristics of the memory and on processes of remembering in word and rhyme links the activation of linguistic musicality to the figurations of child and childhood in modernist literary texts. Marcel Proust focuses on the materiality of language and manipulates the literary staging of the linguistic competence of early childhood as an alternative for referential representation. Proust describes how linguistic sounds regain their musical and rhythmical sensuousness, their sonority, in the process of remembering. The lifelessness of syllables in a referentially signifying system can be visualized as well as counteracted in a modernist poetics by re-activating the sensitivity for sounds and connecting it with the sphere of the pre-linguistic, the *infans*, the child.

### *Orthographical Images*

There is yet a third level of iconicity, related to the characteristics of the written sign, the materiality of writing, which is charged with a poetical dimension in the modernist figuration of child and childhood. The seemingly nonsensical iconicity of language as matter on the one hand, and the apparently meaningful referentiality of language as a system of signs (which ultimately relies on a nonsensical convention) on the other hand, are played off against each other. In an appeal to childlike lucidity, the constitutive relationship between image and writing is put on display. In an outstanding analysis of Else-Lasker Schüller's prose, and more specifically of its creative gesture, Marianne Schuller characterizes this modernist author as a life-long writer of "picture books": "During her whole life, Else Lasker-Schüller has written ImageBooks (picture books) articulating the constitutive relationship between writing and image. Or more accurately: because her texts evoke this constitutive relationship, they are children's books alike" (Schuller [1995], 238, my translation).<sup>12</sup> Lasker-Schüller's "Kinder-Bilder-Bücher" (children's picture books) come into existence as texts that long for visual power, as if they were letters that are cold without a shawl. In a childhood memory, Else Lasker-Schüller describes how she experienced the exposure of the letters to cold arbitrariness and how she tried to alleviate it, to cover it up: "When I was four years old, a nanny taught me to write. I drew a scarf around every letter's neck, it was freezing, it was winter" (Else Lasker-

Schüler [1961], 518, my translation).<sup>13</sup> In this act of covering up, dressing up, the cold conventional arbitrariness and hence changeability of the relation between signifier and signified is paradoxically uncovered.

The semantic field of child and childhood not only points at the artificial character of every system of meaning, but it also shows the poverty and the neglect of the potential of language when it is used and viewed exclusively in its naked, functional referentiality. In the conceptualization of representation in modernist literary texts, the desire that speaks from the material language signs, the letters' unspoken winter wish for a shielding shawl that has been picked up with unerring instinct by the four-year-old child is connected to the unconscious memory of a primary stage of development. The presence of linguistic iconicity at several levels of the modernist poetics activates memory traces of a mode of being that precedes the acceptance of the symbolic order. Nevertheless, the modernist child figuration does not cancel the material reality of linguistic signs out of a one-sided nostalgic desire for an unmediated mode of being, an original unity of signifier and signified. On the contrary, modernist figurations of child language in the staging of non-linear textual forms, musical sonority and meta-linguistic reflection of the orthographical image offer a subversive invitation to rediscover what has been represented as a contingent, conventional and therefore changeable construction and to use another language to create another, new world.

In modernist literary texts, the poetical appeal to the creation of a new language is repeatedly connected to child figurations, for example with the fragmentary babbling of monosyllabic words in Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* and Gertrude Stein's *A Long Gay Book*. The character of Bernard, who as a narrator and writer can very well be seen as a spokesperson for Woolf herself, has grown tired of all the long, carefully construed stories of bourgeois realist poetics of the late nineteenth century. He longs for a "little language," broken words, shuffling meanings: "I begin to long for some little language such as lovers use, broken words, inarticulate words, like the shuffling of feet on the pavement" (Woolf [2002], 227–8). Elsewhere in Bernard's monologue, an echo of this statement resounds, which links up the libido, the child figure and the expressivity of language in its iconicity: "I need a little language such as lovers use, words of one syllable such as children speak when they come into the room and find their mother sewing [...] I need a howl, a cry" (Woolf [2002], 192). Gertrude Stein radically puts into practice what Virginia Woolf's novel formulates as a poetical appeal:

Little b and a a coat, little b and a a cat, little b and a a coat cat, little be cat, little be coat little be and cat and cut and hat, little be and hat and a pear and a pear, little b and a pear and a coat, little be and a coat and grape cat grape cat, little b and a coat grape cat, little be and a cat pear coat hat grape, little grape and a coat grape cat, little coat and a pear and a hat grape coat, little pear and a be at hat, pear [...] All I say is begin. (Stein [1993], 253)

Throughout the evolution in Stein's oeuvre, language progressively becomes the malleable material for the shaping of a new reality, a carnivalesque and libidinally determined language space, "such as lovers use" (Woolf [2002], 228): "a world of magnificent, joyous chaos where no connections are given, no relations taken for granted, and everything is perceived anew every day in all its heterogeneity" (Ulla E. Dydo in Stein [1993], 15). In the ambiguous command "All I say is begin," author activity and passivity have become inextricably intertwined. Not only is this imperative to start situated at the end of the one-hundred-page *A Long Gay Book*, the author appears here as an "erste

Bewegung,” like Nietzsche’s creating child in Zarathustra’s speech “Von den drei Verwandlungen.” Paradoxically, the imperative indicates a loss of control, a safeguard for the aimless and idiosyncratic dynamic of an alphabet that has been turned upside-down, “little b and a,” and of monosyllabic “kiddy language” across the page. Like single-celled organisms, without a meaningful, signifying connection to each other, linguistic signs grow rampant on the page. Linguistic elements create themselves, proliferate and multiply. In the literary staging of self-creation or parthenogenesis, literary modernism discovers yet another radical motif that links the poetics of disruption with the figure of the child.

### Parthenogenesis

As the ultimate self-reflection, as a very advanced form of self-staging on the part of the author, narrator or protagonist, self-creation—which takes the narrative shape of self-generation, self-birth—signifies an extreme “no” to the patriarchal order and the conception of an organically developing continuity. To resist patriarchy and nineteenth-century bourgeois poetics in a creative textual and performative way, modernist literature repeatedly appeals to the motif of parthenogenesis.

“Often the decision of great works of art has been conceptualized in the image of birth” (Benjamin [1972], 438, my translation).<sup>14</sup> The start of Walter Benjamin’s argument in his “Nach der Vollendung” (After completion) unambiguously evokes the iconography of spiritual birth and determines it as an influential tradition, which comprises a female and a male dimension: “[This image] comprises the process toward two sides” (Benjamin [1972], 438).<sup>15</sup> At first sight, Walter Benjamin merely seems to repeat and continue the traditional dichotomy between female and male, passive and active. In a first movement, he speaks of “schöpferische Empfängnis” “aus der dunklen Tiefe des Mutterschoßes,” in which the life-giving principle is associated with the female energy of the genius and in which it is neutralized in the perfection of the work of art: “This female element in the genius exhausts itself with completion. It gives life to the work, then it dies away” (Benjamin [1972], 438, my translation).<sup>16</sup> The process of perfection initiates another birth in a second movement, in the inner part of the work: “Also here one can speak of a birth. The creation in its perfection gives birth to the creator. Not according to his femininity in which it was conceived, but in its male element” (Benjamin [1972], 438, my translation).<sup>17</sup> In this passage, the reversal, which is typical of literary parthenogenesis, becomes visible: in the work of art, the creator recreates himself, in other words, the work recreates the creator. The conception of the spirit (“die Schöpfung,” the creation) becomes a creator itself, a creator of his creator. “Not where he was born is his heimat, but he comes to the world, where his heimat is. He is the male firstborn of the work which he had once conceived” (Benjamin [1972], 438, my translation).<sup>18</sup> Even though Walter Benjamin connects this second birth with the male element, which may suggest a patriarchal attitude for which he may be reproached (see Weigel [2000]), the position of the created, the child, gradually starts to dominate; in and because of his own creative force, it turns the creator into a child, into the male first-born of his own work.

Rather than with the transition from the female to the male dynamic, the dialectic reversal is more concerned with the thwarting of natural genealogy, which gives pride of place to the fusion of both sides, of female as well as male material. It is no coincidence that Benjamin announces the third synthetic movement, the attention shift to the child as (female and male) creation and creator,

by referring to a transgression of the natural order. Facing the darkness of the first creation, which is associated with the mother, Benjamin places a “brighter range”: “because this existence, which he received first from the dark depth of the womb, he will now owe to a brighter range” (Benjamin [1972], 438, my translation).<sup>19</sup> The structure of the complicated final sentence plays out passive naturalness against creative activity; at the same time it marks a withdrawal from an exclusive patriarchal attitude, in which the male principle is considered to be dominant in relation to the female. It is neither the child-bearing mother womb, nor the male act of creation that is in the middle of the sentence and at the center of the entire thought, but it is the child, the first-born, who, in a parthenogenetical movement, is created and creating at the same time. The child may be male, it is the first-born son, but even so, it is nothing but a child.

In this context, Kafka’s “Elf Söhne” (Eleven sons), which has been interpreted and commented on many times, presents a remarkable staging of parthenogenesis. The text can also be interpreted as an ingenious questioning of the possibility and the tenability of the paradoxical phenomenon of self-creation. When the modernist author throws off the patriarchal yoke by creating a text autonomously as a son—a dynamic that assumes a crucial position in Kafka’s oeuvre—he soon finds himself in the position of the (spiritual) father of his own creation. Already in the first sentence of this eerie story, the narrator puts it in a lapidary manner: “I have eleven sons” (Kafka [1972], 158, my translation).<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, these sons, these protagonists in the descriptive portrait, refuse to be the sons of their father in many ways and to many different degrees. Confronted with each of his children, the narrator seems unmoved while expressing an uncontrollable experience of alienation, an indefinable threat to the solidity of family structures. He is bothered by a minimal irregularity in his second son’s gaze, by the immoderateness of the third, by the superficial lightness of one son, by the exaggerated self-contentment or hidden underhandedness of another. The increasing destabilization of the father and narrator reaches its climax and is formulated most explicitly in the presentation of the youngest son, number eleven.

The description the father-narrator gives of his youngest and seemingly weakest child is connected to the iconography of the picaresque. The son is far removed from the vigorous desire to take power and establish a new hierarchical dominion, the relations of which are equally authoritarian. Nevertheless, he radicalizes the uncertainty and the eventual self-loss of his father, who is also the narrator of the text. “My eleventh son is soft, the weakest among my sons, but only seemingly weak: at times he can be strong and determined, but even then his weakness is somehow constitutive” (Kafka [1972], 162, my translation).<sup>21</sup> The characteristics of weakness and indeterminacy signify his fundamental strength and subversive potential in a paradoxical way: “Is not the readiness to fly a weakness, as it is a staggering and an indeterminacy and wavering? My son shows something similar. The father is not happy about such characteristics, they apparently lead to the family’s destruction” (Kafka [1972], 162, my translation).<sup>22</sup> The imagined fear of the father-narrator to lose his superiority will do the rest: eventually, the text stages a radical interruption of generational continuity, at the expense of the narrator’s authorial power and his position as the patriarch of the heritage and his progeny. The first sentence of the text, “I have eleven sons” has undergone a meaningful transformation into a more detached statement that is no longer possessive: “Those are the eleven sons” (Kafka [1972], 162). The narrator puts down his pen and the father submissively lowers his arms. In order to keep the child from becoming a new father, the textually staged parthogenesis undermines the power of the author over his own creation in an ineluctable fashion.

“Elf Söhne” shows father and son in their paradoxical relationship. The text thrives on an inef-faceable ambiguity. The dynamic that is characteristic of the destabilization of authority and authorhood becomes even more complex when the author, Kafka, the narrator, and the father of the eleven sons join their creative forces and give birth to themselves again, in and through their creation, the text. From this perspective, the father-narrator’s loss of power in the final sentence may not only refer univocally to the death of the author, but—in a parthogenetic dynamic—also to his rebirth. The father reads the eleventh son’s gaze as a threat: “Sometimes he looks at me, as if he wanted to say to me: ‘I will take you with me, father’” (Kafka [1972], 162, my translation).<sup>23</sup> But do we need to read it from the perspective of the father? Perhaps the threat is not a threat but a promise, perhaps the Benjamin of his family takes his father to a place where the father is brought into the world.

*Translation: Bert Bultinck*

## Notes

1. “Aber sagt, meine Brüder, was vermag noch das Kind, das auch der Löwe nicht vermochte? Was muss der raubende Löwe auch noch zum Kinde werden? Unschuld ist das Kind und Vergessen, ein Neubeginnen, ein Spiel, ein aus sich rollendes Rad, eine erste Bewegung, ein heiliges Ja-sagen. Ja, zum Spiele des Schaffens, meine Brüder, bedarf es eines heiligen Ja-sagens: seinen Willen will nun der Geist, seine Welt gewinnt sich der Weltverlorene” (Nietzsche [1994], 26).
2. “Die Schöpfung nämlich gebiert in ihrer Vollendung den Schöpfer neu. [...] Nicht wo er geboren wurde, ist seine Heimat, sondern er kommt zur Welt, wo seine Heimat ist. Er ist der männliche Erstgeborene des Werkes, das er einstmals empfangen hatte” (Benjamin [1972], 438).
3. “sans quitter la scène des yeux, je tournais le kaléidoscope doucement, doucement, admirant la lente modification de la rosace. Parfois l’insensible déplacement d’un des éléments entraînait des conséquences bouleversantes. J’étais autant intrigué qu’ébloui” (Gide [1939], 36).
4. “intrusion du mystère et de la beauté” (Proust [1987], 10).
5. “Le corps de Golo lui-même [...] s’arrangeait de tout obstacle matériel, de tout objet gênant qu’il rencontrait en le prenant comme ossature et en se le rendant intérieur” (Proust [1987], 10).
6. “autour de lui les murs invisibles, changeant de place selon la forme de la pièce imaginée, tourbillonnaient dans les ténèbres” (Proust [1987], 6).
7. “Ces évocations tournoyantes et confuses ne duraient jamais que quelques secondes; souvent, ma brève incertitude du lieu où je me trouvais ne distinguait pas mieux les unes des autres des diverses suppositions dont elle était faite, que nous n’isolons, en voyant un cheval courir, les positions successives que nous montre le kinétoscope.” (Proust [1987], 6).
8. “Puis le désir me vint de remplacer les petits morceaux de verre par les objets les plus bizarres: un bec de plume, une aile de mouche, un bout d’allumette, un brin d’herbe” (Gide [1939], 36).
9. “Und mit dem, was kommt, hebt sich ein ganzes Gewirr irrer Erinnerungen, das daranhängt wie nasser Tang an einer versunkenen Sache. Leben, von denen man nie erfahren hätte, tauchen empor und mischen sich unter das, was wirklich gewesen ist” (Rilke [1994], 55).
10. “[In] die Stille sagte eine überlegene, selbstgefällige Stimme, die ich zu kennen glaubte [...] ‘Dites-nous le mot: avant.’ Buchstabierend: ‘a-v-a-n-t’” (Rilke [1954], 53).
11. “[D]ies alles noch einmal und nun wirklich auf sich zu nehmen, war der Grund, weshalb der Entfremdete heimkehrte” (Rilke [1994] 200).

12. "Bilder-Bücher in einem das Konstitutionsverhältnis von Schrift zu Bild artikulierendem Sinn hat Else Lasker-Schüler Zeit ihres Lebens geschrieben. Genauer gesagt: Weil ihre Texte dieses Konstitutionsverhältnis in Szene setzen, ähneln sie Kinder-Bilder-Büchern" (Schuller [1995], 238).
13. "Im vierten [Jahr, KV] lernte ich zum Zeitvertreib von der Gouvernante schreiben. Jedem Buchstaben malte ich ein Tuch um den Hals, da er fror, es war im Winter" (Else Lasker-Schüler [1961], 518).
14. "Oft hat man sich die Entscheidung der grossen Werke in Bild der Geburt gedacht" (Benjamin [1972], 438).
15. "[dieses Bild] umfasst den Vorgang nach zwei Seiten" (Benjamin [1972], 438).
16. "Dieses Weibliche [im Genius] erschöpft sich mit der Vollendung. Es setzt das Werk ins Leben, dann stirbt es ab" (Benjamin [1972], 438).
17. "Und auch hier ist von einer Geburt die Rede. Die Schöpfung nämlich gebiert in ihrer Vollendung den Schöpfer neu. Nicht seiner Weiblichkeit nach, in der sie empfangen wurde, sondern an seinem männlichen Element" (Benjamin [1972], 438).
18. "Nicht wo er geboren wurde, ist seine Heimat, sondern er kommt zur Welt, wo seine Heimat ist. Er ist der männliche Erstgeborene des Werkes, das er einstmals empfangen hatte" (Benjamin [1972], 438).
19. "denn dieses Dasein, das er zum ersten Mal aus der dunklen Tiefe des Mutterschosses empfing, wird er nun einem helleren Reiche zu danken haben" (Benjamin [1972], 438).
20. "Ich habe elf Söhne" (Kafka [1972], 158).
21. "Mein elfter Sohn ist zart, wohl der schwächste unter meinen Söhnen; aber täuschend in seiner Schwäche; er kann nämlich zu Zeiten kräftig und bestimmt sein, doch ist allerdings selbst dann die Schwäche irgendwie grundlegend" (Kafka [1972], 162).
22. "Ist nicht zum Beispiel auch Flugbereitschaft Schwäche, da sie doch Schwanken und Unbestimmtheit und Flattern ist? Etwas Derartiges zeigt mein Sohn. Den Vater freuen natürlich solche Eigenschaften nicht; sie gehen ja offenbar auf Zerstörung der Familie aus" (Kafka [1972], 162).
23. "Manchmal blickt er mich an, als wollte er mir sagen: 'Ich werde dich mitnehmen, Vater'" (Kafka [1972], 162).

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## Modernism and Trauma

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The twentieth century is marked by vast, possibly unprecedented disasters. Unlike previous eras, it is also characterized by a novel determination to recollect these disasters, and by a remarkable eagerness to testify to, and to learn more about their impact on individuals and collectives. If modernity is the age truly characterized by unprecedented atrocities, mainly committed by countries that defined themselves as paragons of civilization, it is also a period that gave rise to the means by which these traumas can be expressed in fiction and poetry. It has been suggested that modernist writing offers a particularly pertinent means of expressing these traumas and that as a response to the traumas of our age, modernist fiction and poetry themselves function as a kind of post-traumatic discourse.

The suggestion that modernist literature is particularly apt for representing traumatic experience has surfaced with special emphasis in critical studies of modern poetry. The modern lyric, it appears, might offer a privileged perspective from which to investigate this link. In examining whether modernist writing is particularly suited to represent trauma or, inversely, whether such writing constitutes a response to the traumas of modernity, it is useful to begin by looking at an enormously influential study of modernist poetry. Hugo Friedrich's *The Structure of Modern Poetry* (1956) is a forceful commentary on the unifying features of European lyric poetry from 1850 to 1950. Friedrich's deliberately non-historical book attempts to isolate and classify the structures and traits that characterize modernist lyric poetry beyond the confines of particular authors, languages, or cultures. Among these identifying elements, Friedrich highlights rhetorical figures and verbal effects such as "estrangement," "depersonalization," "fragmentation," jarring juxtaposition, condensed metaphors, the deliberate suspension of reference, and investment of private allusion with symbolic resonance for poetic effect (Friedrich [1974], 18). The book's virtue consists in its ability to survey the canon of post-1850 European lyric poetry without relying on dominant theoretical vocabularies or methodologies. Friedrich's main argument centers on modernist poetry's deliberate obscurity. Friedrich identifies this trait as the modern poem's wish to leave something unspoken, and to rhetorically throw into relief without articulating the invisible and inaudible regions of modern experience and memory. A centrally placed quote by the French symbolist poet Charles Baudelaire works to this effect: "There is a certain glory in not being understood" (cited in Friedrich [1974], 5).

Baudelaire was the first to define his historical period as the age of "modernity," and to explore this category systematically in *Le Peintre de la vie moderne* (The Painter of Modern Life, 1863) from an aesthetic and an historical perspective. He did "more than anyone in the nineteenth century to make the men and women of his century aware of themselves as moderns" (Berman [1988], 132). But at the heart of this age lies an experience that undermines the very notion of what is experienceable and thus challenges the use of such experience as the foundation of historical self-understand-

ing. To be a modern artist, for Baudelaire, means to seize what is “transitory, fugitive, contingent” (Baudelaire [1976], vol. II, 695).<sup>1</sup> To be modern, in Baudelaire’s vocabulary, means to be subject to events that threaten to overwhelm, and existentially and historically unsettle, the individual. The resulting condition is one of historical groundlessness, where language itself attains the role of anchoring both reference and identity. In this regard, Baudelaire’s “modernité” is truly a trans-national phenomenon that leaves behind the confines of a region or idiom, even if its original shocks register first for and in the language of a decidedly French poet. At the heart of Baudelaire’s modern poetry, one hears the utterances of those figures such as Baudelaire’s lover Jeanne Duval who are yet to be fully accepted as French and European.

Unarguably, Friedrich’s assessment of modernist poetry as a rupture with localized movements is correct. Baudelaire’s significance as the first modern poet who identifies, in and as modern poetry, a general sensibility rather than a particular (regional, idiomatic, personal) mood, is first recognized by Paul Valéry: “But with Baudelaire French poetry imposes itself as the very poetry of modernity” (Valéry [1957], 598).<sup>2</sup> While T. S. Eliot dismisses Baudelaire’s “heredity and nerves” and seeks to stress the formal achievement and “objective truth which [Baudelaire] perceives,” he agrees with Valéry’s assessment in characterizing Baudelaire as the “greatest example of modern poetry in any language” (Eliot [1932], 67). In an essay on the *Flowers of Evil*, Erich Auerbach regards Baudelaire’s work to be “paradigmatic for the whole age” (Auerbach [1984], 226). When asserting that “with Baudelaire, French poetry became a matter of concern for all Europe,” Friedrich thus echoes other historically oriented surveyors of modern literature who ascribe to Baudelaire the significant position of inaugurating the modern lyric (Friedrich [1974], 19).<sup>3</sup> Poetry becomes truly *modern*, in this genetic scheme, with Baudelaire’s successors Rimbaud, Verlaine, and Mallarmé. Mallarmé’s work, in particular, is characterized by all these critics and poets as displaying a heightened degree of difficulty and a tendency toward hermeticism that they find to be only latent in Baudelaire. “Mallarmé confessed,” Friedrich reports, “that he had to start where Baudelaire left off” (Friedrich [1974], 18).<sup>4</sup>

Much of Baudelaire’s oeuvre published in the 1850s and 1860s, indeed, hinges on a celebration of darkness. Ultimately, however, Baudelaire’s *Flowers of Evil* makes every effort to be understood. The poems’ great achievement, indeed, is the successful communication to bourgeois readers of what had previously been considered off-limits to their consideration: the debris of urban existence, the sordid desires of upper-class minds, the marginalized and minoritized figures of modern alienated existence. By attributing to the modernist poem the tendency to foreclose understanding, Friedrich sought to instruct and influence, with remarkable success, a generation of puzzled readers and subsequent scholars to abandon the search for conclusive meaning and identificatory pleasure with the poet’s presumed experience.

There are two difficulties with Friedrich’s account. First, the neat historical narrative from Baudelaire to Mallarmé and beyond rests on a notion of progress and intellectual, thematic or stylistic advancement presupposing literary traits that can be transcended, or improved upon. In the case of Baudelaire, however, there remains a fundamental darkness and obscurity that even Mallarmé did not necessarily penetrate. In a critique of Friedrich’s schematic account of how modernist poetry evolved from Baudelaire to Mallarmé and its beyond in twentieth century avant-garde writing, Paul de Man argues that there remains a “dark zone” in Baudelaire which Mallarmé could not assimilate (De Man [1983], 183). De Man writes: “[Baudelaire] is not the father of modern poetry but an

enigmatic stranger that later poets tried to ignore by taking from him only the superficial themes and devices which they could rather easily 'go beyond'" (De Man [1983], 183).

In addition to the simplifying historical scheme that presupposes literature to advance according to a model of refinement and progress, the narrative *from* Baudelaire as the first modern poet *per se* to Mallarmé and into the modernist beyond relies on elements which, in their authors' estimation but without their acknowledgment of this fact, elude temporalization altogether. T. S. Eliot and Hugo Friedrich consider the "inner disorder" and the "depersonalization"<sup>5</sup> and "derealization" of Baudelaire's work to ground the poet's historical position (Eliot [1980], 375; Friedrich [1974], 19). Leo Bersani locates Baudelaire "at that critical moment in our culture's history when an idealistic view of the self and of the universe is being simultaneously held onto and discredited by a psychology of the fragmented and the discontinuous" (Bersani [1977], 4). Bersani relies on the fact that psychoanalysis is a decidedly modern way of looking at modern experience. But the very historicity of psychoanalysis may foreclose an external standpoint that readily permits the "modernity" of Baudelaire's poetry to be understood as a historical category. Eliot, Friedrich, Bersani, and Auerbach respectively historicize Baudelaire as the paradigmatic poet of modernity because his work registers experiences that elude conscious recall and control.

Paul de Man further points out that Friedrich offers "no theoretical reasons to explain why the loss of representation [...] and the loss of self [for Friedrich the cause of what de Man calls a 'specifically modern kind of obscurity'] are thus linked. He gives instead the crudest extraneous and pseudo-historical explanation of this tendency as a mere escape from reality that is said to have become gradually more unpleasant ever since the middle of the nineteenth century" (De Man [1983], 172). De Man is more interested in the theoretical shortcomings of Friedrich's book and its considerable impact on subsequent estimations of modern literature. For de Man, the neat genetic pattern that supposes modernist literature to abandon representation in favor of more modern, nonrepresentational rhetoric fails to account for the complex relation between representational and non-representational, or literary and figural language. For de Man, Friedrich's understanding of Baudelaire's oeuvre as the first conscious gesture away from representational poetry toward a language privileging its effects over the claims of reference remains a wishful dream, or an evasion of reality. Friedrich's claim that "modernity is a form of obscurity is to call the oldest, most ingrained characteristics of poetry modern" (De Man [1983], 186). These characteristics are the allegorical elements of poetic speech that blindly repeat rather than transcend representational modes, and that cannot be resolved by engaging both elements in a "mutually clarifying dialectic" (De Man [1983], 185). Ultimately, de Man's widely influential studies suggest that modernism might well constitute a historical category but that the common understanding of "history" and "historical" is insufficiently theorized. For de Man, history is too frequently simply equated with chronological succession. A consideration of trauma thus emerges as the way to rethink the relation between history and literature, and between modernity and literature in particular.

Baudelaire's *Flowers of Evil* encourages a poetics of dissonance and startling juxtapositions hitherto all but unread in Western culture. His poetry paves the way for the kind of wrenching and uncouth thematics later explored by modernist writers as diverse as Joyce, the surrealists, and the German expressionists. As Walter Benjamin was first to point out, however, Baudelaire's work is fundamentally invested in the experience of shock, and even trauma. "Baudelaire placed the shock experience at the very center of his artistic work" (Benjamin [1969], 163).<sup>6</sup> In his seminal essays on Baudelaire,

Benjamin relies on a new vocabulary whose birth occurs just after the publication of Baudelaire's major works in the 1860s. For Benjamin, Baudelaire is the first lyric poet to write under the conditions of high capitalism, and the first to address explicitly an increasingly urban readership still struggling to adjust to the alienating experiences of mass existence. Benjamin's essay also attempts to develop a conceptual vocabulary for the type of fractured experience chronicled by Baudelaire. This vocabulary derives from psychoanalytic terminology about trauma. Benjamin relies on Sigmund Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, where the father of psychoanalysis develops a theory of the death drive and identifies the phenomenon of trauma as a defining conundrum of modernity. Freud's terminology, Benjamin suggests, allows for an understanding of Baudelaire's "modernity":

The question suggests itself how lyric poetry can have as its basis an experience for which the shock experience has become the norm. One would expect such poetry to have a large measure of consciousness; it would suggest that a plan was at work in its composition. This is indeed true of Baudelaire's poetry [... Baudelaire's] work cannot merely be categorized as historical, like anyone else's, but it intended to be so and understood itself as such. (Benjamin [1969], 162)

Walter Benjamin's seminal studies of Baudelaire thus define his work historically by identifying the shattering of experience through "traumatic shock" as a constitutive element in his work.

In addition to introducing into the modern canon images previously considered off-limits for poetic reflection, then, Baudelaire writes a poetry of trauma and of shock. A specific sonnet by Baudelaire, Benjamin writes, "supplies the figure of shock, indeed of catastrophe" (Benjamin [1969], 169).<sup>8</sup> Baudelaire's work is characterized by a startling chasm between the poet as an empirical person and his verse: it is clear even to a superficial reader that the poetic confessions in *Flowers of Evil* are not only highly staged but ring deliberately untrue. The point of this poetry is no longer to revel in and reflect on experience but to underscore the suddenly opened gap between experiences under modern conditions and their understanding. Baudelaire's poetry can thus be considered most "modern" where it takes stock of the widening discrepancy between lived reality and our understanding of it. The most extreme cases, to which Baudelaire was attuned and which Benjamin discusses in his study, are the traumatic shocks that occur when what is seen or experienced radically falls outside of established and accepted parameters of experience. In Benjamin's reading, these parameters were loosened or entirely lost with the onslaught of anonymizing mass existence under the inhospitable conditions of the industrial age. Unlike Friedrich, however, Benjamin identifies these conditions quite precisely and names the experience to be a form of psychic trauma.

Baudelaire did not retreat from the challenge created by these circumstances. Instead, he made them the center of his poetic work and inscribed their effects — of depersonalization, jarring breaks, dissonance, absence of beauty or redemptive features — as the structure of his verse. What makes Baudelaire a modern poet is his acceptance of the conditions of modernity, and his ultimate success in turning these utterly artificial conditions into a fertile hothouse for his poetry. Baudelaire's achievement, then, is to locate modern poetry in the gap between an experience and its understanding, and to find a language that could measure the extent of that gap. His work thus indicates already the eventual extreme poles of both modernist poetry and prose: the utter abstraction of a language no longer wedded to a subject, and the radical hermeticism and opacity of a language no longer tied to experience.

In Friedrich's seminal survey of modern poetry, the vocabulary of trauma does not occur. Friedrich does not rely on nor refers to psychoanalysis and does not cite Benjamin, whose essays on

Baudelaire dating back to the 1930s were available in German by 1956, when Friedrich completes his book. Freud is referenced only in passing in a remark on dreams as the background of surrealist poetry. Nonetheless, Friedrich's version of Baudelaire agrees in virtually all respects not only with the critical assessments of Valéry and Eliot published in the preceding decades: it also shares, uncannily, with Benjamin's reading of Baudelaire the principal emphasis on experiences of "depersonalization" and "derealization" (Friedrich [1974], 20).<sup>9</sup> These terms, incidentally, are terms principally used in psychoanalysis to describe the effects of severe trauma. For Friedrich, the escape from intolerable reality is one of the main achievements of modernist poetry; he thus identifies "depersonalization" and the poetic "process of depriving something of its reality as the poet's 'dictatorial act'" (Friedrich [1974], 18). Although Friedrich avoids identifying psychoanalysis as a possible source of his concepts, his key terms correspond to those used by clinicians to describe the state of consciousness after traumatic shock. Judith L. Herman explains that in a post-traumatic state of consciousness, they would signal the renunciation of volition: "These detached states of consciousness are similar to hypnotic trance states. They share the same features to surrender of voluntary action [...] including depersonalization, derealization, and change in the sense of time" (Herman [1991], 43).

In effect, then, Friedrich's anatomy of the modern lyric identifies Baudelaire as the poet of shock and trauma without naming these categories directly. In the period of *modernity* from 1850 to 1950, however, the magnitude of traumas suffered by individuals and collectives had horribly expanded. If in Baudelaire's day particularly psychic "trauma" was first given serious scientific status, by the 1950s all of Europe had suffered at least two traumas of lasting impact. During World War I, with its use of mechanized warfare and unprecedented human losses, the category of "shell shock" first enters popular discourse when vast numbers of soldiers suffer peculiar stress syndromes. Much of Freud's work on trauma, indeed, is a direct response to the mass phenomenon of trauma in the wake of World War I. During World War II, the genocide of the Jews at the hands of Germans is a watershed event that defines the modern age as an age of extremes. As an event that continues to defy full historical explication or understanding, the historical rupture of the Holocaust raises the question whether the modernist poetics of depersonalization, estrangement, jarring syntax, and abstracted language can serve to express this event. Friedrich's 1956 study, which mentions W. H. Auden's 1946 poem "Age of Anxiety," dismisses the efforts by younger post-war European poets who address anxiety because of its timeliness as "adolescent" rather than as the expression of a "fundamental experience" (Friedrich [1974], 136).<sup>10</sup>

In light of both its influence and its importance, Friedrich's analysis of the modern lyric prompts the question whether there might not be a different kind of "anxiety," a differently "impossible homecoming," an unprecedented sense of "dehumanization" and "exile" experienced in the aftermath of World War II (Friedrich [1974], 135, 136, 139).<sup>11</sup> When Friedrich writes that "modern poetry compels language to take on the paradoxical task of expressing and concealing a meaning" and that "[o]bscurity has become the predominant aesthetic principle," the retreat from representational language is given only the vaguest of historical causes (Friedrich [1974], 178).<sup>12</sup> But already in Baudelaire, there is more than the deliberate cultivation of obscurity. This is only one aspect of Baudelaire's achievement. His project was finally also to penetrate and render expressive the inarticulate regions of experience, to "lay bare his heart," as the title of his prose writings puts it, in a project of simultaneously "vaporizing and centralizing the *self*" (Baudelaire [1976], vol. I, 676).<sup>13</sup>

From Benjamin's studies, the obscurity and cultivation of silence in Baudelaire's work can be understood as more than aestheticism; it is the way the historical circumstances of fractured experience are inscribed into the poet's work. Drawing on this insight, it is possible to consider the history of modernist poetry as a history of the increasingly urgent consideration of shock and trauma as defining experiences. In addition to de Man's critique of Friedrich's thesis as an insufficiently theorized conception of the relation between rhetorical modes and historical circumstances, Friedrich's evasion of the vocabulary of trauma and shock in his book might also signal a greater reluctance to regard the Holocaust as an event that could challenge or upset established, historicizing thought.

The poet who most forcefully seizes on and transforms the modernist legacy of Baudelaire is Paul Celan, a Romanian-born poet writing in German who survived the Holocaust but lost both parents, and spent his post-war adult life in Paris writing increasingly difficult poetry in German. In a significant lecture later published under the title "Meridian," Celan offers a theory of modernist poetry that differs significantly from Friedrich's *Structure of Modern Poetry*. Emphatically, Celan argues for the modern poem's effort and aspiration to be understood, in spite of and even because of its darkness. This darkness and obscurity, Celan explains elsewhere, result from the "horrible falling silent" and "thousand darknesses of deathbringing speech" of the German language and the Germans during World War II (Celan [2001], 395).<sup>14</sup> Celan explains the increasing obscurity of contemporary poetry (in the 1960s) as aiming at "an encounter, by a perhaps self-devised distance or strangeness" (Celan [2001], 407).<sup>15</sup> Poetry must break through the darkness required to penetrate the events of our age but not in order to leave representational language behind. Instead, in the wake of extreme experiences that exceeded previous conceptions of reality, the possibility of such language must be recovered in order to testify to extreme experiences. In the "Meridian" speech and throughout his poetry, Celan insists on the historical violence that shapes his poetry and shaped his life; as two of his translators in English state, for Celan "the place of vulnerability is also the place of poetry" (Popov, in Celan [2000], xiii.) For Celan, the great traumatic events of the twentieth century—the Holocaust and the nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki—required a new kind of poetic writing. This new poetry draws on modernist principles and techniques such as the emphasis on language as a force shaping and undoing reality, the cleavage between experience and the individual prompted by the specific event of the persecution and attempted extermination of the Jews of Europe, and the resulting alienation that finds expression in depersonalized language. But instead of simply continuing the modernist project of earlier poets, Celan stresses "perhaps what's new for poems written today is just this: that here the attempt is clearest to remain mindful of such dates" (Celan [2001], 408).<sup>16</sup>

In fact, Celan's project might be characterized as accentuating the impact of historical experience in and on modernist writing. He clearly positions his work (through direct and oblique references and syntactical patterns) within a modernist tradition inaugurated by Baudelaire. But he also seeks to carve out room to address experiences which originated in that tradition, and seem to exceed most of the tradition's means of expression. Celan's experience remains not unspoken even though the crimes and suffering to which he aims to testify in his poetry cannot be put directly into words: "[language] gave back no words for that which happened [... it] passed through and could come to light again, 'enriched' by all this" (Celan [2001], 395).<sup>17</sup> In light of this awareness, Celan's aims each poem at "that 'Other' which it [the poem] deems reachable, free-able, perhaps empty and thus turned [...] toward it, toward the poem" (Celan [2001], 409).<sup>18</sup> For Celan, the poem's obscurity, which Friedrich had identified as a purely aesthetic act for Baudelaire, is historically necessitated.

Its ambition to remain comprehensible to the reader is inseparable from this obscurity and motivated by history as well; his poetics is a poetics of testimony in which the poem bears witness to experiences of depersonalization and dehumanization understood in ways far more concrete than in Friedrich's book.

The modernist project of accounting for the splitting of experience from knowledge, and of abandoning the pre-modernist premise of grounding literary expression in subjective experience is here put in the service of testifying to overwhelming trauma. For Celan, trauma describes experiences where language failed, and where individuals suffered the impact of events of such violence that they could not readily integrate them into existing explanatory frameworks. If Baudelaire broke in his poetry with Romanticism because the experiences of modernity could no longer be translated smoothly into a deeply personal and authentic voice, Celan makes this break between the experience and our knowledge thereof into his poetic theme. Ultimately, his poetry retains some tenets of modernism—multiple perspectives on the same event, fragmented sense of self, a dissected language whose particles attain equal significance—to convey a sense of the specific trauma of the Holocaust in poetic speech. Celan's poetry is modernist but not timeless or ahistorical. Celan testifies to an event that is not easily integrated into existing historical narratives and commonly considered a rupture and radical break. For this reason, Celan reminds us: "certainly [... a poem] seeks to reach through time—through it, not above and beyond it" (Celan [2001], 396).<sup>19</sup>

Celan qualifies as properly the *last* modern poet who inherits a poetic tradition that has pushed its alienation from the meaningful to the point of being little but "the dead bodies of words swollen with etymologies and devoid of logos, borne by the drift of the tests: such is modernity, in its painful break with discourse [...] degenerating into elementary truths and fashionable banter" (Levinas [1996], 4).<sup>20</sup> Celan frequently relies on contemporary specialized idioms as varied as those of technology, aviation, botany, and mineralogy to write poems of astounding range and impressive formal coherence. His poetic project, in effect, consists in writing modernist poetry to "enable us to divine, behind the downfall of discourse [in postmodernist prose], not the end of a certain *intelligibility* but the dawning of a new one" (Levinas [1996], 4).<sup>21</sup> This new intelligibility contrasts explicitly with what Friedrich identified as the presumed emphasis on darkness and deliberate occlusion of comprehensibility of Celan's modernist precursors. It also differs from de Man's understanding of all poetry as inevitably falling into the blindness prompted by the undecidability between figural and literal speech. "A poem—under what conditions!—becomes the poem of someone (ever yet) perceiving, facing phenomena, questioning and addressing these phenomena; it becomes conversation—often despairing conversation" (Celan [2001], 410).<sup>22</sup> By being the last modern poet, Celan locates his work in a space that cannot be understood without reference to the preceding modernist tradition but neither allows a continuation of or re-entry into that tradition.

There is darkness in Celan's poems and "a strong bent toward falling silent," to be sure, but it is a darkness and increasing reticence in the service of testifying to an unprecedented reality (Celan [2001], 409).<sup>23</sup> The linguistic scraps that had turned the modernist poem into the protocol of fractured consciousness are in Celan's work the building blocks toward dialogue and communication. For Celan, poetry must find and establish "a place where a person [is] able to set himself free as an—estranged—I" (Celan [2001], 407).<sup>24</sup> Alienation and a sense of depersonalization provided the condition for Baudelaire's poetic project and led him to arrive at a decidedly modernist poetics. Celan, in contrast, seizes this modernist syntax to write from the position of historically inflict-



ed and radically divergent experiences of depersonalization in order to reach his audience. It was Celan's avowed ambition, not unlike that of the majority of modernist European poets, to think "Mallarmé through to the end" (Celan [2001], 405).<sup>25</sup> This effort, however, ultimately constitutes not a further advance in the genetic movement from Baudelaire over Mallarmé to a yet uncharted beyond in postmodernity. Rather, Celan's attempt to go beyond Mallarmé inevitably leads back to what remains obscure for and in Mallarmé: the enigma that is Baudelaire as the poet who inaugurates a tradition that no longer allows for its dialectical overcoming.

The foregoing account is staked on an implicit notion of progress from Baudelaire to Celan. It is a corrective vision to still influential theories of modern poetry which continue to regard modernist poetry and literature as *deliberately* difficult, rather than explaining the relative prevalence of obscurity on the basis of historical circumstances. Yet this narrative is ultimately a myth that relies on a notion of progress in literature. It implies, as for example Theodor W. Adorno does in his *Aesthetic Theory*, that Celan's oeuvre constitutes an advance or at least the culmination of the Baudelairean project of modernist verse: "what Benjamin noted in Baudelaire, that his poetry is without aura, comes into its own in Celan's work" (Adorno [1997a], 322).<sup>26</sup> But this version of literary history turns the Holocaust into a kind of negative lesson, where modernist writing's propensity to account for a traumatized psyche suddenly discovers its true object and purpose. Secondly, if the modernist modes of writing are indeed particularly suited to address the phenomenon of trauma, it would be difficult to tell apart instances of depersonalized rhetoric used for aesthetic reasons, and such rhetoric employed to depict actual acts of depersonalization. It might not be entirely inaccurate to consider all modernist writing as a kind of writing specifically fueled by experiences of traumatic loss and shock. In an essay where he examined possible congruencies or discrepancies between pre-war writing and post-war literary works, Theodor W. Adorno writes that "one cannot simply pick up after thirty or forty years where things had been left off, after the total break, is self-evident" (Adorno [1977], 505).<sup>27</sup>

Yet the question arises how distinctions can be made between different modernist texts, and their presumed representation of trauma. Whether it is the thematically explicit war poetry of Siegfried Sassoon, the day experienced by Ms. Dalloway in Woolf's novel, or the beginning of Joyce's *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*, as Christine van Boheemen has argued: these texts all harbor the recessed memories of different traumas (Boheemen [1999], 5).

But if there is no evident distinction between the modernist poetics inaugurated by Baudelaire in the 1850s to the late, or last, modernist project manifest in the work of Paul Celan, this circumstance might itself stem from the way in which the Holocaust disrupts the possibilities of historicizing thinking. The very notion of trauma, indeed, is historicized only with great difficulty and much contention. As Judith Herman shows, the term itself undergoes a cyclical pattern of discovery and repression that is determined partly by a given society's or collective's need to recognize or deny certain traumas in their midst, or suffered by them: "the study of psychological trauma has a curious history—one of episodic amnesia" (Herman [1991], 7). Celan's project, if one were to generalize, is not invested in shocking the bourgeois or dissipating the constricting notion of a unified subject exploded by various modernist experiments. His task is that of testifying to great crimes, of writing in the name of and on behalf of the dead, and to recover a subjectivity that had been depersonalized and dehumanized nearly beyond recovery. Modernism's principal insights into the arbitrariness of the play of the signifier and the possibility of writing deliberate dark verse in order to tap into regions of silence are here employed to address areas that are unspeakable in ways hardly imag-

ined by Baudelaire. Nonetheless, the modernist project is often invoked and indeed credited with an uncanny foresight into the effects of the Holocaust on the possibility of art itself. Thus Adorno can write “it is certain that after Auschwitz, because Auschwitz was possible and remains possible for the foreseeable future, lighthearted art is no longer conceivable [...] In fact, this impossibility [of lighthearted art after Auschwitz] was sensed by great literature, first by Baudelaire almost a century before the European catastrophe” (Adorno [1992], 251).<sup>28</sup> Others have argued that virtually the entire canon of European modernism expresses a post-traumatic state without the promise of redemption or full recovery:

more experimental, nonredemptive narratives are narratives that are trying to come to terms with trauma in a post-traumatic context, in ways that involve both acting out and working through. This is a perspective through which you can read a great deal of modern literature and art, as a kind of relatively safe haven in which to explore post-traumatic effects [...] in modernism itself, you can find these elements. (LaCapra [2001], 179–80)

Hayden White writes that the representation of the Holocaust, while this event is no “more unrepresentable than any other event in human history [...] requires the kind of style, the modernist style, that was developed in order to represent the kind of experiences which social modernism made possible” (White [1992], 52). These suggestions imply that the kind of dark knowledge afforded by trauma finds adequate and appropriate expression in the slightly jarring syntax and self-reflexivity that characterizes canonical modernist texts. Yet the experience of trauma is clearly not reducible to a sublimated version of linguistic stammering, and the condition known clinically as post-traumatic stress disorder far exceeds in terms of psychic disturbance what is achieved in the more cryptic texts by the likes of Artaud, Beckett, or Bataille. When it is suggested that literature provides a safe haven from the effects of trauma that nonetheless allows for their expression and recognition, literature is understood as either an evidentiary mode or as the psyche’s acting out in print. In this view, literature is reduced to a fortuitously phrased symptom, and its successful interpretation depends on biographical information about the writer. But such references are notoriously unreliable and leave unanswered the question of what kind of knowledge or experience is described by trauma. When Virginia Woolf’s abuse as a child is invoked in a reading of *To the Lighthouse* to show how Woolf “traces the effects of trauma and somehow, at least linguistically, tries to come to terms with those effects,” the relation between traumatic effects and figural language remains all but unquestioned (LaCapra [2001], 180). Why is it that trauma seems to cause the psyche to veer into a mode of reception that bypasses perception, consciousness, and thus understanding, and another kind of memory “in the form of a perpetual troping of [the event] by the bypassed or severely split (dissociated) psyche” (Hartman [1995], 537). Literature, however, is only partly described as the attempt to trace and cope with these effects. Its use of language is not only a “coming to terms” with the effects of a trauma already known or later detected by biographers (Woolf’s abuse as a child). Literature registers forms of knowledge that take the shape of story and symbolization, and that rival in validity for the experiencing subject the kind of happening-truth commonly established by less symbolically invested forms of discourse. Instead of being an evidentiary mode that discloses knowledge, literature *testifies* to the presence of something which remains unknowable (Felman [1992], xvii). “The symbolic” mode of literature in the context of trauma, Geoffrey Hartman explains, “is not a denial of [what is] literal or referential but its uncanny intensification” (Hartman [1995], 547).

Modernist literature might display a particular affinity for the kind of creative distortion that both propels the literary imagination and prompts the puzzling effects by which trauma is troped, in the form of haunting resonance, in the psyche.

The suggestion that modernism might be more apt to express trauma than previous modes, however, begs the question of whether anything changed, either in the nature of experience or in literary style between 1850 and 1950. When Hayden White identifies the middle voice (a rhetorical mode where the agent remains enmeshed in the action being described) resurfacing in modernist prose that is particularly suited to represent the catastrophes of the modern age, he invokes a category that is not tied to a historical period (White [1992], 52). In a response to Roland Barthes, who tried to identify the resurgence of the middle voice as a specifically modernist phenomenon, de Man claimed that this mode is not tied to a historical period that begins with Mallarmé; it is already found in much earlier writing and to similar effect (De Man [1972], 150). But surely things have changed between 1850 and 1950, both in matters of aesthetics and of historical experience. Yet it is as surely possible to find premonitions and elements of modernist techniques in Romantic and even earlier writing as the catastrophes of the twentieth century are not without precedent in earlier times. Until the late nineteenth century, however, literary style and psychic experiences might not have corresponded as neatly *in their incommensurability*. That is, what is unique about the modernist representation of trauma is the startling difficulty of distinguishing between one's experience and understanding of an event, and that actual event. Viewed in this sense, modernism responds to and thematizes a crisis of reference rather than of truth. In fact, the traumas of modernity are characterized by the way in which they disrupt established and conventional ways of human remembrance and forgetting, and in which this disruption can itself be traumatic. Modernist writing does not suspend reference but leaves undecided whether the imposition of meaning is overwhelming (whether the psyche is overwhelmed by reference), or whether the words on the page bear no relation any longer to comprehensible reality. The urge to explain trauma fully, and "to demystify" it, "may itself be an effect of traumatic dissociation, a compulsive, belated effort to master the split between experience and knowledge by asserting *in theory* the convergence of a phenomenal cause [...] and a trauma" (Hartman [1995], 545). Modernist literature might offer heightened awareness of the processes of symbolization that seem to mirror some of the effects of trauma on the psyche. It has even been suggested that after the Holocaust where "the world survived its own demise [...] art [could supply] the unconscious history writing" of our age (Adorno [1997], 506).<sup>29</sup> It can only rarely establish the presence of trauma; its contribution to our understanding of trauma consists in the deliberate blurring of the distinction between experienced and comprehended, symbolized reality which traumatic experience also blurs. Modernist literature remains a startling parallel script for the ravaged past century that deepens our sense of its traumatic dimensions and indicates to what degree our understanding of symbolic processes has been impacted by historical violence.

## Notes

1. "La modernité, c'est le transitoire, le fugitif, le contingent" (Baudelaire [1976], vol. II, 695).
2. "Mais avec Baudelaire, la poésie française [...] s'impose comme la poésie même de la modernité" (Valéry [1957], 598).

3. "Mit Baudelaire wurde die französische Lyrik zu einer europäischen Angelegenheit" (Friedrich [1985], 35).
4. "Mallarmé [...] bekannte, daß er da angefangen habe, wo Baudelaire aufhören musste" (Friedrich [1985], 35).
5. "Entpersönlichung" (Friedrich [1985], 36).
6. "Baudelaire hat also die Chockerfahrung ins Herz seiner artistischen Arbeit hineingestellt" (Benjamin [1977], 193).
7. "Die Frage meldet sich an, wie lyrische Dichtung in einer Erfahrung fundiert sein könnte, der das Chockerlebnis zur Norm geworden ist. Eine solche Dichtung müsste ein hohes Mass von Bewusstheit erwarten lassen; sie würde die Vorstellung eines Plans wachrufen, der bei ihrer Ausarbeitung im Werke war. Das trifft auf die Dichtung von Baudelaire durchaus zu" (Benjamin [1977], 192).
8. "So stellt das Sonett die Figur des Chocks, ja die Figur einer Katastrophe" (Benjamin [1977], 200).
9. "Mit Baudelaire beginnt die Entpersönlichung der modernen Lyrik" (Friedrich [1985], 36).
10. "Jünglingspoesie [...] Grunderfahrung" (Friedrich [1985], 173).
11. "Angst [...] nie mehr möglich[e] Heimkehr [...] Exil" (Friedrich [1985], 173, 177).
12. "Moderne Lyrik nötigt die Sprache zu der paradoxen Aufgabe, einen Sinn gleichzeitig auszusagen wie zu verbergen" (Friedrich [1985], 178).
13. "De la vaporisation et de la centralisation du Moi" (Baudelaire [1976], 676).
14. "furchtbares Verstummen [...] die tausend Finsternisse todbringender Rede" (Celan [1992], 186).
15. "um einer Begegnung willen aus einer — vielleicht selbstentworfenen — Ferne oder Fremde zugeordnete Dunkelheit" (Celan [1992], 195).
16. "Vielleicht darf man sagen, dass jedem Gedicht sein '20. Jänner' eingeschrieben bleibt?" (Celan [1992], 196).
17. "[Die Sprache] ging hindurch und gab keine Worte her für das, was geschah; aber sie ging durch dieses Geschehen" (Celan [1992], 186).
18. "[Das Gedicht] hält unentwegt auf jenes 'Andere' zu, das es sich als erreichbar, als freizusetzen, als vakant vielleicht, und dabei ihm, dem Gedicht [...] zugewandt denkt" (Celan [1992], 197).
19. "Gewiss, [das Gedicht...] sucht, durch die Zeit hindurchzugreifen — durch sie hindurch, nicht über sie hinweg" (Celan [1992], 186).
20. "cadavres des mots enflés d'etymologies et privés de logos portés par le ressac de texts" (Levinas [1976], 10).
21. "— voilà la modernité dans la rupture douloureuse du discours don't témoignent certes ses plus sincères représentants, mais qui déjà se monnaie en vérités premières et bavardage à la mode" (Levinas [1976], 4).
22. "Das Gedicht wird — unter welchen Bedingungen! — zum Gedicht eines — immer noch — Wahrnehmenden, dem Erscheinenden Zugewandten, dieses Erscheinende Befragenden und Ansprechenden; es wird Gespräch — oft ist es verzweifelter Gespräch" (Celan [1992], 198).
23. "eine starke Neigung zum Verstummen" (Celan [1992], 197).
24. "den Ort, wo das Fremde war, den Ort, wo die Person sich freizusetzen vermochte, als ein — befremdetes — Ich?" (Celan [1992], 195).
25. "Mallarmé konsequent zu Ende zu denken" (Celan [1992], 193).
26. "zu sich selbst kommt, was Benjamin an Baudelaire damit bezeichnete, dass dessen Lyrik eine ohne Aura sei" (Adorno [1970], 477).
27. "Dass man nach dreissig oder vierzig Jahren, nach dem totalen Bruch, nicht einfach weitermachen kann, wo aufgehört ward, ist selbstverständlich" (Adorno [1977], 506).
28. "Übrigens ist solche Unmöglichkeit von der grossen Dichtung, zuerst wohl bei Baudelaire, fast ein Jahrhundert vor der europäischen Katastrophe gespürt worden" (Adorno [1981], 604).
29. "Weil jedoch die Welt ihren eigenen Untergang überlebt hat, bedarf sie gleichwohl der Kunst als ihrer bewussten Geschichtsschreibung" (Adorno [1977], 506).

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## Chapter 5

### Mind and Body

Modernism has often been seen as an art of interiority and subjectivity, and its literary poetics as expressive of an “inward turn.” Still, attention to the streams of human consciousness, to the life of the mind, appears to us only as *expressed* by language (as well as other media in the case of drama, music, and the visual arts)—that is, as it appears in a process of signifying gestures, as it is written in various ways. When taking a closer look, we may begin to suspect that rather than mediating the inner motions of the mind, modernism is attending to the invisible and slippery border between the inner and the outer self—a border that also winds its way through language.

**Dirk Van Hulle** argues that an intensified concentration on human consciousness has an effect on modernist authors’ attitude toward their own writings: the work of literature is increasingly regarded as a process, rather than a product. While numerous modernist authors studied the effects of time on the activity of the mind, they fully realized that the very same mechanics also applied to the composition history of their own works. The resulting poetics of process implies an acute awareness of the roads not taken. Especially when such an awareness becomes thematic as an inherent part of the published text, this poetics of process proves to be a significant aspect of literary modernism, implying a ‘subtextual’ yet unmistakable critique of Modernity’s illusion of progress.

In response to the limitations perceived in a formalist approach to modernism, **Ernst van Alphen** argues for an alternative reading of modernist authors and for a reversal of how traditional criticism of modernism has defined the relationship between the features of literary modernism and history. He suggests a “contextual” reading of modernism, an inclusion of aspects such as a heterogeneity of materials, montage techniques and orientation towards everyday life and speech that would seem to contradict modernism’s emphasis on formal mastery and purity. In this new light, modernist authors can be understood in an otherwise unexamined historical context and offer different texts than those already in place. The individual self that emerges becomes less “the triumphant rational subject” formalist readings would have it to be, but a self that functions as a protection, a defence against the loss of self that the modern subject experiences in the maelstrom of modernity.

Of all the visual signifiers of self-identity the human face, because of its seemingly boundless ability to communicate the thoughts and emotions of the human condition, has most strongly intrigued the faculties of imagination that produce meaning. **Holger A. Pausch** explores how the cultural construction of the face in Modernity manifests itself as a linguistic image and how it is kept in tension between two opposing forces. On the one side, we find the traditional procedures of describing the face as a literary portrait. On the other, we see the fragmentation of the traditional

literary portrait into unrecognizable shards of meaning and signification. Trapped between these two limiting approaches, the image of the face is left with only one escape: the continuous and incessant reinvention or transformation of itself into new images with new aspects of meaning.

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## Modernism, Consciousness, Poetics of Process

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When Jonathan Swift coined the term “modernisms” on 23 July 1737, in a letter to Alexander Pope, he did so in a pejorative sense, and in the plural. Just like Russian formalism, modernism finds its origins in a disapproving label regarding formal aspects of writing. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* the first meaning of the word “modernism” is “a usage, mode of expression, or peculiarity of style or workmanship, characteristic of modern times.” This essay is an attempt to study literary modernism from the perspective of textual genetics, focusing on writing methods and “workmanship”—which was already the focus in Swift’s “Full and True Account of the Battle Fought last Friday, Between the Ancient and the Modern Books in St. James’s Library” (1704). In this *Battle of the Books*, the spider, as a representative of the Moderns, scorns the bee’s method of gathering material from everywhere to make honey. He calls this method a “universal plunder upon nature” (Swift [1965], 111), contrasting it with his own work, “built with my own hands, and the materials extracted altogether out of my own person” (112). More than 200 years later a similar battle was fought between Wyndham Lewis and James Joyce. The latter has almost become a prototype of the modernist author, but in fact Swift’s image of the Ancients suits him better. At least, that is the impression created by Wyndham Lewis’s “Analysis of the Mind of James Joyce” (1927). This analysis serves as a starting point to try and find out how “modern” this mind was and what this may yield to the definition of literary modernism. Since Lewis’s analysis is part of his study on *Time and Western Man*, time is a first element to be taken into account.

The second element is consciousness, an important aspect of the workings of the mind. Lewis’s critique of his contemporaries was that they focused too exclusively on time. He called them “proustites,” after the author of *A la recherche du temps perdu* (In search of lost time). “An hour is not merely an hour,” Proust famously wrote, “it is a vase full of scents and sounds and projects and climates, and what we call reality is a certain connection between these immediate sensations and the memories which envelop us simultaneously with them” (Proust [1989], vol. III, 924). Proust’s observation implies an enhanced awareness of the way human consciousness works and influences how we experience reality. The concept of time, in combination with the awareness that a simple *Nacheinander* does not do justice to the complexity of the way we experience reality is the key to the stream-of-consciousness technique, which Joyce applied with great success in *Ulysses*.

It is no coincidence that both consciousness and time are presented as a “stream” or “flux,” expressing the idea of a flow. This idea corresponds with a “poetics of process,” which will be discussed in part three. This poetics of process characterizes several modernists’ writings: the writing is seen as a process rather than a product and this process becomes thematic. By studying the effects



of time, many modernists became increasingly aware that these effects also applied to the composition history of their own works, meaning that writings about time cannot ignore the time it took to write them. As a consequence the textual genesis is an inherent part of their works.

### Time: An Hour Is An Hour

In *Time and Western Man* (1927), Wyndham Lewis lodges a voluminous complaint against what he sees as a conspiracy of time-obsessed authors, such as Gertrude Stein and James Joyce, and the “mystical time-cult” they produced (Lewis [1993], xviii). Lewis criticizes what he refers to as “the ‘transitional’ chaos,” “the ‘mind’ of this restless chaos” and “the Time-mind” (xv, xix). Repetition is a crucial aspect of this “Time-mind,” and in *Composition as Explanation* (1926), Stein elaborates on this concept. Lewis renounces the repetition in Stein’s work, yet in order to make his point he deems it necessary to quote the same passage from *Composition as Explanation* twice:

There must be time [...] This is the thing that is at present the most troubling and if there is the time that is at present the most troublesome the time-sense that is at present the most troubling is the thing that makes the present the most troubling. (Stein, cited in Lewis [1993], xiv and 55)

Marcel Proust is another author whose excessive preoccupation with time is criticized. According to Lewis, “Proust embalmed himself alive” (Lewis [1993], 249) by living in the past and thus distracting the reader from the present. This distraction is referred to by Lewis as “hypnotism,” and “[t]he intelligence to which this method is natural is the opposite of the creative, clearly” (249). Lewis does not explain here why the historical method is “clearly” the opposite of the creative method, but in his “Analysis of the Mind of James Joyce” ([1993], 73–110) he is more explicit: No matter how innovative Joyce’s work may seem, it is built on “local colour” and material of the past “scraped together into a big variegated heap to make *Ulysses*” (Lewis [1993], 81). Therefore, Lewis concludes that Joyce is “not so much an inventive intelligence as an executant” (88):

What stimulates him is ways of doing things, and technical processes, and not things to be done. Between the various things to be done he shows a true craftsman’s impartiality. He is become so much a writing-specialist that it matters very little to him what he writes, or what idea or world-view he expresses, so long as he is trying his hand at this manner and that, and displaying his enjoyable virtuosity. Strictly speaking, he has none at all, no special point of view, or none worth mentioning. (Lewis [1993], 88)

Most of this cannot be denied, and Joyce indeed did not even object to it. He rather pushed Lewis’s point to the limit by using the very vocabulary of Lewis’s “Analysis” in *Finnegans Wake* (*FW*), deliberately scraping together odd phrasings and recombining them in his last work. This way, he neutralized the criticism and immunized his work against it on the principle of vaccination.

One year before the “Analysis” in *Time and Western Man*, Lewis had already launched a mild attack against Joyce and Stein in *The Art of Being Ruled*. Here, Lewis fulminates against what he calls the “Great God Flux” and the “proustites” worshipping this Time god (Lewis [1926], 397). Joyce recycled for instance the word “flux” by jotting it down in his notebook (Joyce [1977–9], vol. 33: 359) and transforming it into “Flu Flux Fans” (*FW* 464.15).<sup>1</sup> But Joyce also reacted with some more substantial replies in the form of two fables, “The Mookse and the Gripes” and “The

Ondt and the Gracehoper” as part of *Work in Progress*. The latter is a variation on Aesop’s fable of the ant and the grasshopper, applied to the abstract notions of time and space. Not unlike the bee in Swift’s *Battle of the Books*, the carefree Gracehoper is a “freebooter over fields and gardens” (Swift [1965], 149). He has no home, no fixed place from where he could look at the world and express a stable “world-view.” When the summer is over, however, the happy spendthrift has no more food and visits the real estate of the spatially oriented Ondt, who did save enough food for the winter, but refuses to share. The Gracehoper, apparently accepting his fate, takes his leave with a song that ends with the memorable lines:

*Your genus its worldwide, your spacest sublime!*  
*But, Holy Saltmartin, why can’t you beat time?* (FW 419.07–8)

This question had occupied Joyce’s mind for a long time. In the third chapter of *Ulysses*, Stephen Dedalus, walking on Sandymount beach, already pondered over the “ineluctable modalities” of the visible and the audible, echoing Lessing’s notions of *Nacheinander* (one after another) and *Nebeneinander* (co-existing). In *Der Zauberberg* (The magic mountain), Thomas Mann discusses the same subject in the first section of chapter seven, interestingly called “Strandspaziergang” (beach walk). Wyndham Lewis quoted this passage as one of the epigraphs of “An Analysis of the Philosophy of Time” (Book II) in *Time and Western Man*:

time is the medium of narration, as it is the medium of life. Both are inextricably bound up with it, as inextricably as are bodies in space. Similarly, time is the medium of music: [...] music and narration are alike, in that they can only present themselves as a flowing, as a succession in time, as one thing after another. (Lewis [1993], 126)

“One thing after another” is Lewis’s translation of *Nacheinander* (Mann [1990], vol. III, 748). During his career as a writer, Joyce did not stop looking for new ways to combine the *Nach-* and the *Nebeneinander* in the linear medium of writing, creating the illusion of simultaneity. Samuel Beckett called this illusion of simultaneity the *Miteinander* in his German diaries (26 March 1937) when he realised

how *Work in Progress* is the only possibility [possible] development from *Ulysses*, the heroic attempt to make literature accomplish what belongs to music — the *Miteinander* and the simultaneous. (Beckett, cited in Knowlson [1996], 258)

As Beckett indicates, the resonance of different meanings and their polyphonic ensemble in the Wakean technique of the portmanteau is an extreme consequence of the more cautious experiments in *Ulysses*. One of these experiments is the appearance of a cloud in the blue sky over Dublin on 16 June 1904. Because chapter 1 and 4 take place at the same moment, both Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom notice the cloud simultaneously, and yet with an interval of some forty pages. Simultaneity is paradoxically presented by means of a succession in time, combined with perspectivism. Joyce is always aware of the restrictions of our subjective point of view, the prejudices of what Lewis called a “special point of view” (such as for instance Lewis’s own flirtations with fascism).

With regard to perspectivism, an important motif in *Ulysses* is the word “parallax,” which keeps crossing Leopold Bloom’s mind. He knows the word from one of the books on his shelf: *The Story*

of the Heavens by Sir Robert Ball. The book is written for a general audience and describes the notion of parallax by means of a simple example:

Stand near a window from whence you can look at buildings, or the trees, the clouds, or any distant objects. Place on the glass a thin strip of paper vertically in the middle of one of the panes. Close the right eye, and note with the left eye the position of the strip of paper relatively to the objects in the background. Then, while still remaining in the same position, close the left eye and again observe the position of the strip of paper with the right eye. You will find that the position of the paper on the background has changed. [...] This apparent displacement of the strip of paper, relatively to the distant background, is what is called parallax. (Ball [1892], 151–2)

In astronomy, the parallax is used to measure the distance of a celestial body to the earth. Joyce uses this concept in the reverse way to measure differences in perspective and fathom the consciousness of the observers. When Bloom and Stephen see the same cloud, the object is described in identical words: “A cloud began to cover the sun slowly, wholly” (Joyce [1984], 8 and 50). The observation of the same object causes a moment of thought in both Stephen’s and Bloom’s minds, but evidently their thoughts are shaped by personal memories and result in two completely different streams of consciousness. This form of perspectivism is one of the attempts made by many modernists to find new forms of expressing not so much reality but the way they experienced it. Thomas Mann formulated this feeling in the words of Hans Castorp in *Der Zauberberg*:

I shall never cease to find it strange that the time seems to go so slowly in a new place. [...] when I look back—in retrospect, that is, you understand—it seems an eternity back to the time when I arrived [...] That has nothing whatever to do with reason, or with the ordinary ways of measuring time; it is purely a matter of feeling. (Mann [1960], 105)

This matter of “reason” versus “feeling” corresponds with the conflict between time (as an uninterrupted succession of moments) and the way it is experienced, which marked a decisive moment in the history of literary modernism: the moment when James Joyce, after abandoning the novel project “Stephen Hero,” took it up again in 1907 to create *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. He did not simply continue where he left the project in 1905; this time, he tried out a more experimental, episodic format, which became paradigmatic of literary modernism. Instead of following all the stages of the artist’s life, Joyce now focused on the young man’s consciousness. Because the action is presented as a collection of separate fragments or episodes from Stephen Dedalus’s life, the narrative is characterized by constant interruption. The tension between the rational systematization of time and the way it is experienced is a key element in a second modernist focal point: consciousness.

### Consciousness: “Une heure n’est pas qu’une heure”

The etymology of the word “consciousness” dates back to the Latin notions of “cum” (together with) and “scire” (to know). “In the original sense,” Eric Lormand notes, “two people who know something together are said to be conscious of it ‘to one another,’ with the irresistible connotation that they are privy to a scandalous secret” (Lormand [1996]). In order to investigate this concept and

examine the still cloudy concept of “poetics of process,” it is useful to look at it from a different perspective and change from doxa to paradoxa, focusing on the more peripheral genre of detective fiction. As Astradur Eysteinsson argues, “the entire issue of modernism is especially momentous and foregrounded in the case of narrative, for the aesthetic proclivities of modernism seem bound to go against the very notion of narrativity, narrative progression, or storytelling in any traditional sense” (Eysteinsson [1990], 187). The detective story is an example *par excellence* of narrative progression and plot, according to the fixed formula of introduction, detection, investigation, announcement of the solution, explanation of the solution, and finally the dénouement. It is not a coincidence, therefore, that Edgar Allan Poe, the inventor of the “tales of ratiocination,” also wrote “The Philosophy of Composition,” which will be the starting point for my discussion of the poetics of process.

In “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” (1841), the first of what Poe called his “tales of ratiocination,” the actual story of Auguste Dupin only begins on the fourth page. It is presented as a mere illustration of Poe’s theories of intellectual analysis, explained on the first three pages: “The narrative which follows will appear to the reader somewhat in the light of a commentary upon the propositions just advanced” (Poe [1997], 414). In these propositions Poe explains that “the faculty of re-solution” (411) is based on “[t]he necessary knowledge [...] of *what* to observe” (413). The drive toward a solution and knowledge of what happened or “whodunit” evidently needs its counterpart: that which is “full of not knowing,” the etymological meaning of “uncanny.” (The word “uncanny” is derived from the Old English root *cunnan*, related to the verb ‘to know’ in the sense of ‘being familiar with’.)

The trick of traditional detectives was not to get involved too deeply in the uncanny. The detective was supposed to be immune. Significantly, this changes in the 1920s, with the rise of the hard-boiled detective. Slavoj Žižek has drawn attention to the fact that the moment the detective story was replaced by the detective novel coincides with the moment the realistic novel was superseded by the modernist novel (Žižek [1991], 48). While modernist novelists tried to find new techniques to express the way they experienced reality, writers of detective fiction were faced with similar problems. The awareness that the complexity of reality required a more elaborate way of storytelling resulted not just in a quantitative increase (from story to novel) but also in deviations from the traditional, linear formula.

Apart from these narrative deviations, another characteristic of modernist novels is their increasing self-reflexivity. According to Michel Raimond, this self-reflexivity characterizes the so-called crisis of the novel after the climax of naturalism. One of the symptoms of this crisis is what he calls the “roman du roman,” the novel in which the act of writing becomes thematic (Raimond [1966], 243–4). Hans Magnus Enzensberger notes that many works of literature contain some form of reflection on their genesis (Enzensberger [1962], 61). He refers to Poe’s “Philosophy of Composition” as an obvious example, but in a way this self-reflexive aspect has always been part of the tales of ratiocination, being essentially stories about stories. The tale is not finished when the reader knows “whodunit” but when the detective is finally able to recapitulate what “really” happened in a linear way. Readers of detective fiction expect this explanation, relying as they do on the private eye’s superior intellect to solve the mystery. The detective’s intellect is supposed to be the supreme example of “inter-legere” [to select], assembling only the relevant information from a chaos of data. But apart from mere intellect or the triumph of reason over irrationality, the self-reflexive element plays an important role as well. Knowledge and intentionality are only two of the four main

philosophical topics for which the term “consciousness” is employed, according to Eric Lormand. The other two are introspection and phenomenal experience. According to Descartes “to be conscious is both to think and to reflect on one’s thought” (Descartes [1985], Vol. III, 335), and in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, John Locke defines consciousness not just as “what passes in a man’s own mind” but as “the perception of” this inner activity. According to Locke it is

impossible for anyone to perceive without perceiving that he does perceive. [...] For since consciousness always accompanies thinking, and it is that that makes everyone to be what he calls self, and thereby distinguishes himself from all other thinking things: in this alone consists personal identity, i.e. the sameness of a rational being. And as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person: it is the same self now it was then. (Locke [1993], 180)

This last conclusion is not that evident and has been questioned thoroughly in modernist writings. Since a person constantly changes, it is sometimes hard to believe the self coincides with its younger self. When the narrator in Proust’s *À la recherche du temps perdu* discovers that the famous painter Elstir is the same person as the silly young man that used to visit the Verdurins, he can hardly believe it. Elstir’s reaction is significant:

There is no man, [...] however wise, who has not at some period of his youth said things, or lived a life, the memory of which is so unpleasant to him that he would gladly expunge it. And yet he ought not entirely to regret it, because he cannot be certain that he has indeed become a wise man—so far as it is possible for any of us to be wise—unless he has passed through all the fatuous or unwholesome incarnations by which that ultimate stage must be preceded. (Proust [1989], vol. I, 923)

The narrator describes his discovery of the painter’s identity as a “disturbing” experience. The generation gap between the ways in which Elstir and the younger narrator deal with the non-identical versions of the same identity may reflect a more general epochal difference. Elstir’s point of view is significantly retrospective. From this perspective it seems evident that his “self” inevitably had to become the man he now is. He knows who he once was and who he has become; everything in between seems to be a rectilinear progress. For the narrator, on the other hand, the situation is “full of not knowing.” As a confrontation with what he did not know, the narrator’s “disturbing” discovery is very literally uncanny. His mental portrait of the artist as a young man conflicts with the image of the same artist as a wise man. The traditional *Bildungsroman* development toward a complete personality coinciding with itself is questioned by means of Elstir’s crucial self-interruption between dashes: “so far as it is possible for any of us to be wise” indicating the “disturbing” realization that even the admired Elstir may not be completely identical with himself, and that his previous selves may always resurface unexpectedly. The “remembrance of things past” or the “recherche du temps perdu” has a psychoanalytic side that makes the narrator’s experience “uncanny” in the sense of the German translation “unheimlich.” In his 1919 essay on “Das Unheimliche” Sigmund Freud starts his interpretation of E. T. A. Hoffmann’s story “Der Sandmann” (The Sandman) with a quite elaborate etymological consideration concerning the paradoxical meaning of the word “heimlich”: what belongs to the house (Heim) is both familiar (to those inside) and unfamiliar (to those outside). The word “heimlich” already implies its negation. According to Freud, the prefix “un-” therefore marks the return of the repressed, of something that was once familiar or homely (Freud [1972], 267).

On a very literal level, Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902) is an interesting example of "Unheimlichkeit." Sherlock Holmes is confronted with the uncanny in the form of a fierce, undomesticated dog. According to local superstition a curse rests on the house of the Baskervilles: every member of the family who dares to go too far from the familiar "Heim" at night will be devoured by the hound. Sir Charles Baskerville is believed to have been killed in this way, but it turns out that he actually died of a heart attack, frightened to death when he saw the "unheimlich" beast. Superstition is the cause of death and the crime Holmes has to solve is in fact the exploitation (by a man who calls himself Stapleton) of superstitious and irrational human behavior. Eventually he discovers that the real motive of the crime is a banal matter of inheritance. But perhaps the matter is not that banal after all. Stapleton turns out to be a descendant of the Baskervilles himself, who feels deprived of his home. He is simply after the house of his ancestors. The near-homophony of "Hound" and "House" in the title *The Hound of the Baskervilles* implicitly contains the etymological paradox of "heimlichkeit" — homely from the inside but uncanny from the outside.

The last chapter of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* is called "A Retrospection." This retrospective point of view characterizes the poetics of the finished product that is not only typical of traditional detective fiction, but of most nineteenth-century literature. Poe's popular poem "The Raven" is a good example. After its publication, Poe explained the "making of" in "The Philosophy of Composition" (1846). As in Holmes's after-the-fact recapitulation, this reconstruction of the writing reduces a complex process to a rectilinear story. According to Poe, the plot must be fully worked out: "Nothing is more clear than that every plot, worth the name, must be elaborated to its *dénouement* before anything be attempted with the pen." (Poe [1846], 163). According to Poe, "The Raven" was written backwards, starting "at the end, where all works of art should begin" (165).

Poe presents writing as a mathematical problem, which is in itself a remarkable achievement as it demystifies the romantic concept of inspiration. Almost eighty years later, this concept was still predominant as is evidenced by the Prague author Hermann Ungar's description of Thomas Mann's manuscripts, written in 1925. Ungar mentions the still predominant belief that studying the manuscripts will deprive the literary work of its magic. By analyzing the manuscripts of the self-styled "Zauberer" (magician) Thomas Mann, Ungar invites his readers to have a look into Thomas Mann's workshop ("Ein Blick in die Werkstatt Thomas Manns"). The notion of "workshop" in this subtitle highlights an important aspect of modernist writing: the emphasis on what T. S. Eliot called "*métier*" (Eliot [1975], 40) and the role of the author as a craftsman rather than a divinely inspired genius.

Poe's "Philosophy" is an important step in this direction, but his account of the actual writing process is nicely polished and does not show much of a workshop. For instance, he keeps silent about the most interesting part as he hardly makes mention of hesitations, cancellations, dead ends, and so on. Only once does the literary mathematician admit a slight hesitation: at one point he considered using a parrot as the "non-reasoning creature" uttering the recurrent refrain "Nevermore." But this idea was "superseded forthwith" by the more suitable Raven. Poe's account of the writing process is a tale of ratiocination in itself, and the parrot may be regarded as the equivalent of a red herring in detective stories — too colourful and harmless to fit in the picture. But the potential of this genetic digression is neglected. In retrospect it seems unlikely, but there was a moment when "The Raven" could have been called "The Parrot" — until Poe decided which creature was to speak nevermore. Nonetheless, in the narrative structure of this genetic tale of ratiocination, Poe's parrot

appears at the investigative stage, by far the most interesting part of the detective formula because it is marked by trial and error. It is the proto-version of what would later be referred to as “stream of consciousness.”

Whereas nineteenth-century narrativity focused on the causal chain of events, as it is clearly formulated for instance in the detective’s explanation of the solution, modernist authors revalue the experientiality of the investigative stage as a form of narrativity in its own right. In this investigative stage the importance of the red herring becomes more prominent, not only in detective fiction, but also in modernist fiction. Poe’s parrot thus announces an interesting aspect of modernism by signalling an element of potentiality. James Joyce is one of the modernist authors who has exploited this quality by giving his finished texts some of the characteristics of the manuscript and leaving open as much potentiality as possible. This quality underpins what Eco called “the poetics of the open work” (see Eco [1989]). “In *Finnegans Wake* we are faced with an even more startling process of ‘openness,’” Eco writes, “the work is *finite* in one sense, but in another sense it is *unlimited*. Each occurrence, each word stands in a series of possible relations with all the others in the text” (Eco [1989], 10). This is the same potentiality that gives drawings and drafts by Rembrandt or even older masters a more “modern” aspect than their finished paintings. In the visual arts this potentiality became functional in the work of Jackson Pollock, who read Joyce’s work (even *A Skeleton Key to ‘Finnegans Wake’*) and listened to Joyce’s recording of *Anna Livia Plurabelle* (Landau [1989], 172–4). Significantly, there is hardly any exhibition of his work without at least some of the famous photographs by Hans Namuth of the artist at work. The creative process is an inherent aspect of the artifact.

This is the complete opposite of Poe’s “Philosophy of Composition”: Poe advises not to put pen to paper before the plot is fully elaborated, whereas in modernism elaboration increasingly becomes a plot in and of itself. This evolution was reflected in criticism as well. In 1924 Reinhold Backmann argued that a published text, “like any other finished product,” is always a compromise: “It is the face the author wishes to show to the public; the true face, however, is visible in the manuscripts, especially those that are the furthest away from publication” (Backmann [1924], 638). Consequently, Backmann concludes that the process of coming into being offers a deeper insight into the “fixed” product than the study of the final publication.

Evidently, every writing process is unique. Siegfried Scheibe distinguishes two basic types of literary composition:

One encompasses authors who have already completed or largely composed the work in their heads before they begin to write it down. [...] Authors for whom the work process takes place largely on paper conform to the second type. They wrestle with the individual words and sentences in the writing and bring the work gradually to the desired form” (Scheibe [1995], 195).

To denote these two types, Almuth Grésillon uses the terms “écriture à programme” and “écriture à processus” (Grésillon [1995], 103). An example of the first type, according to Grésillon, is Thomas Mann; as a representative of the second type she mentions Marcel Proust. At first sight *À la recherche du temps perdu* may give the impression to have been conceived in accordance with a poetics of the finished product. The title of the last part, *Le Temps retrouvé* (Finding time again), sounds very much like a *dénouement* and hints at the formulaic structure of the detective story, which is to a large extent driven by a cognitive kind of homesickness. Genetic research, however,

shows that incompleteness is a fundamental character of Proust's writing, which has been described as endless writing or "écrire sans fin" (Warning and Milly [1996]). Proust could keep on writing, but in order to do so he paradoxically needed an end to write toward. The promise of finding the lost time generates a search that becomes autokinetic. The end is endlessly postponable, as unreachable as is the turtle for Achilles in Zeno's paradox. Proust thus pokes fun at the linear structure directed toward a *dénouement* by means of the narrator's decision, after a few thousand pages, to finally start writing, so that the case is reopened and the whole *Recherche* can start over again. This circularity can be seen as a witty assessment of modernity's focus on progress, and as a critique of an idea that is implicitly, though probably less consciously, contained in the Holmes stories: Holmes cannot stop solving mysteries. As soon as he has solved a case, he lapses into a state of lethargy and stays in his chaotic room, lying listlessly on his sofa and waiting for a new case. One could therefore argue that he secretly (*heimlich*) longs for something uncanny to breach his lethargic state of *Heimlichkeit*—Holmes sweet Holmes. This interpretation sheds some light on the remarkable fact that so many detective stories are conceived as a series. Detectives are serial solvers, which makes them a prototype of modernity, according to the definition of David Harvey: "Since modernity is about the experience of progress through modernization, writings on that theme have tended to emphasize temporality, the process of *becoming*, rather than *being* in space and place" (Harvey [1989], 205).

The idea that *Heimlichkeit* already contains its own negation recurs in Joyce's fable of "The Ondt and the Gracehoper," as the latter's home is called "Tingsomingenting" [Danish for "a thing like no thing"] and the former's "Nixnixonundnix" or "Nichtsichtsundnichts" (Joyce [1975], 414–16). Nietzsche explicitly stated the absence of a unifying principle; implicitly, this absence is also noticeable in many modernist texts, structured around a void. Modernism is marked by the remembrance of some lost center, which makes itself felt as a form of phantom limb pain. In Joyce's case, *Finnegans Wake* can be seen as a gigantic network of rumors, circulating around a lack of information: the protagonist HCE's alleged crime in Phoenix Park may never have taken place at all. If there is any unifying principle in this chaosmos, it is an absence. To what extent the circulation of rumors is a nostalgic search for some lost essence or a celebration of this loss is difficult to say. This ambivalence is a crucial characteristic, not only of Joyce's but of many modernists' writings. As Zygmunt Bauman notes in *Modernity and Ambivalence*,

modern consciousness is the suspicion or awareness of the inconclusiveness of extant order; a consciousness prompted and moved by the premonition of inadequacy, nay non-viability [...] of the randomness of the world and contingency of identities that constitute it. (Bauman [1991], 9)

If *Finnegans Wake* is a yearning for the truth about the original sin, it is certainly also a radical literary and linguistic equivalent of the abolishment of a gold standard. The *Wake*'s portmanteau words are an adequate attempt to provide an alternative: the value of a concept is always relative to its context. The intricacy of phonetic and semantic associations based on a Wakean word like "meandertale" and generated by its relation to, and deviation from, the lexeme "Neanderthal" is characterized by a constant interaction of meanings, visualized by Umberto Eco in *The Limits of Interpretation* ([1990], 141). More than in any other text, the meaning of a word depends on a semantic exchange rate between vocabularies, symbolic capital, and cultural stock-in-trade. The idea of a unifying principle is replaced by verbal interaction, but the loss of this unifying principle still organizes the network.



In *Ulysses*, Leopold Bloom's errancy is the avoidance of his home. From a Freudian perspective his concern not to disturb his wife's sexual adventure with Blazes Boylan might be interpreted as an Oedipal search. Freud links the private aspect of *Heimlichkeit* to the private parts. He builds his theory on the accounts of neurotic male patients who experienced female genitalia as something uncanny. The uncanny thus becomes the entrance to a homeland, the "Heimat des Menschenkindes" (Freud [1972], 267). From this psychoanalytic perspective, it is probably not a coincidence that Bloom's stream of consciousness after he sees the cloud in chapter four leads him straight to the "cunt of the world" (Joyce [1984], 4: 50). And the quest for the original sin in *Finnegans Wake* is of course to some extent a literary equivalent of Gustave Courbet's quite explicit visualization of "L'origine du monde," referring to the secret subject of the children's triangular measurements in the Euclid lesson, the shape of their mother's delta, the triangular opening of the Anna Livia Plurabelle chapter (*FW* 196):

O  
tell me all about  
Anna Livia! I want to hear all

In the context of human consciousness, it seems not more than fair to confront this Freudian interpretation of the initial O with Margaret Atwood's short comparison of the female with the male brain in "The Female Body":

each of these brains has two halves. They're joined together by a thick cord; neural pathways flow from one to the other [...] How does a woman know? She listens. She listens in. The male brain, now, that's a different matter. Only a thin connection. Space over here, time over there, music and arithmetic in their own sealed compartments. [...] This is why men are so sad, why they feel so cut off, why they think of themselves as orphans cast adrift, footloose and stringless in the deep void. What void? she says. What are you talking about? The void of the Universe, he says, and she says Oh. (Atwood [1993], 44–5)

With reference to the question of consciousness, however, the private parts seem to be a less adequate subject of investigation than the private I. In the last part of *Finnegans Wake* Joyce writes: "An I could peecieve amonkst the gatherings who ever they wolk in process" (*FW* 609.30–1). In one single trait, the I/eye homophony condenses the crisis of modernity: the conscious I, perceiving its own act of perceiving, constantly changes and never quite coincides with itself. The same applies to words, as they do not coincide with what they refer to. In "The metaphysics of Modernism" (under the heading "The linguistic turn"), Michael Bell refers not only to Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* and Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, but also to Joyce's *Ulysses*, pointing out how "its linguistic self-consciousness reflects an epochal ambiguity" (Bell [1999], 16). The crisis of language, expressed by Hugo von Hofmannsthal in his *Chandos-Brief* (1901), culminates in the tragicomic nominalism of authors such as Joyce and Beckett. The awareness that words are merely labels did not paralyse them, as it did Lord Chandos, but stimulated them to try and interrupt the habitual way of using language as a transparent medium. A "work" thus becomes a "wolk," even a "wolk in process." With Stephen's and Bloom's perceptions of the same cloud in mind, the "wolk" (Dutch for "cloud") is perceived by different readers in different ways. "Texts are not self-identical," as McGann argues in *Radiant Textuality* ([2001], 149). As a distorted reference

to the “work in progress,” “work in process” not only implies this non-self-identity at the level of literary reception, but also a “walk,” or a form of “procedere,” a process. As a consequence, the title of the book *Finnegans Wake* is a label that always implies the many versions that preceded it during the writing process.

At first sight, this focus on becoming and process seems to comply with David Harvey’s characterization of modernity. But Harvey makes no distinction between “progress” and “process.” Whereas “progress” implies the enlightened belief in constant amelioration, “process” (especially in conjunction with the self-reflexive I/eye) merely implies that “something is taking its course”—as Hamm formulates it in *Endgame* (Beckett [1986], 107). The process simply goes “on,” continuing on a narrative level what took place in the writing process. If the crisis of modernity leads to the insight that progress is in fact process, final products are merely another version in the writing process. This “on” is the key to what Peter Sloterdijk describes as the kinetic utopia of modernity: autokinetics or motion for the sake of greater motion.<sup>2</sup>

Joyce applied these autokinetics to his own writing. In *Finnegans Wake* the encyclopedic idea is driven round the bend in the circular structure of the “riverrun,” which corresponds in many ways to the image of the escalator, Peter Sloterdijk’s metaphor for the “kinetic utopia” of the modernist project (Sloterdijk [1989], 23). The crisis of modernity—which is probably the shortest definition of modernism—culminates in the realization that this project has become autokinetic, to the extent that it becomes unstoppable, as Malone fears: “I wonder if I shall ever be able to stop” (Beckett [1976], 232). Like Malone, modernist authors may not be able to stop this process, but by making it thematic they draw attention to it and create a kind of Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*. In “Form as Social Commitment,” Umberto Eco summarizes the problem as follows:

The artist realizes that language, having already done too much speaking, has become alienated to the situation it was meant to express. He realizes that, if he accepts this language, he will also alienate himself to the situation. So he tries to dislocate this language from within, in order to be able to escape from the situation and judge it from without. (Eco [1989], 154)

This form of linguistic *Unheimlichkeit* or dislocation from within is what Joyce calls his “process verbal” (FW 515.15). How this is brought into practice is described in the last part of *Finnegans Wake*:

Our wholemole millwheeling vicociometer [...], autokinatonetically preprovided with a clappercoupling smeltingworks exprogressive process [...] receives through a portal vain the dialytically separated elements of precedent decomposition for the verypetpurpose of subsequent recombination. (FW 614.27–35)

To make this abstract description more concrete: after having decomposed Wyndham Lewis’s critique by separating elements from *The Art of Being Ruled* and copying them in his notebook (VI.B.20), Joyce subsequently recombined them in his drafts according to a process that is “exprogressive” and goes on “autokinatonetically.” For instance, Joyce’s focus on the workings of consciousness and time was criticized by Lewis as the “exploitation of madness, of ticks, blepharospasms, and eccentricities of the mechanism of the brain” (Lewis [1926], 388). After having jotted down the word “blepharospasm” (Joyce [1977–9], vol. 33: 361) Joyce not only mocked Lewis’s bombastic style by transforming it into “blepharospasmockical suppressions” (FW 515.16), but he

simultaneously made this textual remembrance thematic by linking it in the same sentence to the very act of textual processing:

Happily you were not quite so successful in the process verbal whereby you would sublimate your blepharospasmodical suppressions, it seems? (FW 515.15)

### Poetics of Process: “Une lueur n’est pas qu’une lueur”

By giving expression to their “fatigue with linear sequence” (Quinones [1985], 52) and by confronting the linear narrative sequence with its often chaotic textual history, modernist authors created a tension between an aesthetics of the finished product and an alternative poetics of process. When Hans Castorp in *Der Zauberberg* sees the X-ray of his cousin Joachim, he feels “stirrings of uneasy doubt, as to whether it was really permissible and innocent to stand here in the quaking, crackling darkness and gaze like this” (Mann [1960], 218). That experience takes place in the chapter entitled “Mein Gott, ich sehe!” which has been translated by Helen Lowe-Porter as “Sudden Enlightenment.” The effect of this sudden enlightenment was what Wyndham Lewis aimed at when he wrote his “Analysis of the Mind of James Joyce”: an X-ray of his colleague’s mind was to reveal nothing but an interest in “ways of doing things,” no ideas whatsoever. Lewis’s approach, however, was apparently based on a poetics of the finished product, according to which the text is the result of a quest for the best representation of a pre-existing idea. What Lewis could not appreciate was that Joyce’s mind worked on the page. For Joyce, the act of writing was a way of thinking, the way in which an idea could gradually come into existence.

This is a fundamental difference. The process of putting thoughts into words is not unidirectional. Thoughts are not always preformed in the mind and subsequently put on paper; the process of putting them on paper can generate the development of new ideas. Proust and Joyce counted on this mechanism, which is one reason why the writing process of their works took so much time. They were extremely well aware of what Jerome McGann calls the “algorithmic character of traditional text”: “Text generates text, it is a code of signals elaborating itself within decisive frames of reference” (McGann [2001], 151).

The awareness of this self-generative textual mechanism is characteristic of a modernist poetics of process that is the result of a combination of time and consciousness. According to Weldon Thornton, the “modernist crisis, which has been gathering momentum for several centuries” is focused on the “status of consciousness,” more precisely the “unbridgeable gap between our lived experience, and our attempts to ‘give an account’ of that experience” (Thornton [1994], 27). Especially the experience of time seems to have preoccupied modernist authors. One of the methods of dealing with the “worn-down homogeneity of experience” was to “look for the permeable presence of the past, undying and strangely reappearing in the unthinking moments of the present” (Quinones [1985], 73).

The combination of consciousness and the preoccupation with time is not only expressed by the content of modernist works. It is also noticeable in their form: the “permeable presence of the past,” most poignantly expressed in Proust’s idea of the involuntary memory, also applies to the past of the texts in which this idea was given shape. For instance, genetic research shows that the important sentence “[u]ne heure n’est pas qu’une heure” or “An hour is not merely an hour” (Proust [1987–

89], vol. IV, 467) originally did not have anything to do with time. In the manuscripts (Cahier 57) the sentence was slightly different: “Une lueur n’est pas qu’une lueur” (Proust [1987–89], vol. IV, 818). The development from “lueur” (shine) to “heure” (hour) is interesting because its rhyme in time (between different versions of the text) is a formal aspect that emphasizes an important aspect of the content: the relation between “heure” and “lueur” appears somewhat further in the text in the image Proust chooses to describe time by comparing it to the shining projection of a magic lantern (Proust [1987–89], vol. IV, 503).

Both Proust and Joyce were not merely fascinated with the mechanics of time and its deformations, they were aware that these mechanics also applied to the history of their own writing process. The poetics of process of many modernist authors implies the awareness that the creative process is an inherent part of the work of art. The double nature of *Heimlichkeit* also characterizes a literary work’s textual history and the suppressed versions that preceded the published version. Proust’s point that people are not fixed entities but several superimposed persons, that individuals are constantly alienated from themselves as they are always changing is given shape in a textual surface that subsumes its underlying layers. The notions of “succession” and “superposition” of “layers” of text often recur in the discussion of Proust’s writing method, for instance in Jean-Yves Tadié’s introduction to the second Pléiade edition (Proust [1987–89], vol. I, lxxxvi). These concepts clearly echo Proust’s frequent use of these notions in connection with the idea that any individual can be seen as the superposition of his successive states (Proust [1987–89], vol. IV, 124). This superposition, however, is constantly changing because old layers regularly appear at the surface (Proust [1987–89], vol. IV, 125). The same applies to the *Recherche*’s textual history, characterized by a textual variant of the “intermittences du coeur” that becomes thematic in the novel. The notion of the “intermittences of the heart” stands for the discontinuous activity of our emotions and their sudden awakening after long periods of emotional numbness.

A textual equivalent of these intermittences is the “fées familières” lexia in Proust’s carnet 4 (page 2v-3). In this passage, “habitual phrases” in César Franck’s music are compared to nymphs and fairies that are “familiar.” In his cahier 57 (page 3v) Proust wrote a note, reminding himself that he had not yet used this passage. His concern not to forget this passage eventually led to its double employment, once in the description of the septet (Proust [1987–89], vol. III, 763) and once in the pianola scene (Proust [1987–89], vol. III, 875). The repetition of this “familières” lexia thus creates a similar effect as the “habitual phrases” in Franck’s music. Proust translates a process of the textual genesis to the process of reading. This textual equivalent of the “intermittence du coeur” has the potential to cause in the reader’s mind the same effect as the “mémoire involontaire” does in the narrator’s mind. All of a sudden the reader re-lives a reading experience of more than a hundred pages earlier.

The repetition of something familiar (in this case the “fées familières”) has the paradoxical effect of defamiliarization: the reader encounters something he thought he knew in a completely new context. This can potentially lead to a less prejudiced reading on the principle of Elstir’s constant attempt to strip himself from the intellectual notion to which every concept corresponds (Proust [1987–89], vol. II, 191). The intellectual notion we have of something easily becomes a prejudiced way of looking at it, a habit that is to be broken.

There is a remarkable correspondence between Elstir’s poetics and Victor Shklovsky’s concept of “ostraneniye.” In his essay “Art as Technique” (1917), Shklovsky describes how this mechanism of defamiliarization works:

Habitualization devours works, clothes, furniture, one's wife, and the fear of war. [...] The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived, and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar', to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty of length and perception, because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important. (Shklovsky [1965], 12).

In German the notions of "artfulness" and "object" are translated as "das Machen" (the making) and "das Gemachte" (the artifact) (Shklovsky [1981], 15), or—applied to literature—the writing and the written. Terry Eagleton argues that defamiliarization is not an exclusive characteristic of literature, and therefore not useful to distinguish it from other cultural manifestations (Eagleton [1983], 6). Nonetheless, Shklovsky's concept of defamiliarization does serve as an excellent concept to describe a distinguishing feature of modernist fiction, which is more than a merely formal matter. As Peter Faulkner notes: "Not only did the modernist artist see himself confronted by the infinite complexity of reality, he also saw that his medium itself might be part of the problem" (Faulkner [1977], 15). This linguistic *Unheimlichkeit* and defamiliarization goes to the heart of a modernist poetics of process, linking form and content, *avant-texte* and text, writing and written. It draws attention to the material (bibliographical, genetic, textual) aspects of the text and makes them functional to its content, emphasizing that "no text is commensurate with itself" (McGann [2001], 207).

McGann illustrates "the text's non-self-identity" by means of a reference to "what Joyce once called (in the opening chapter of *Ulysses*) 'a cracked mirror'" ([2001], 206). This illustration is in itself an illustration of the point being made: the "cracked mirror" is actually a variant reading of what in the text of *Ulysses* is called a "cracked looking-glass" (Joyce [1984], 1:06). This non-self-identical mirror/looking-glass reflects an evolution in Joyce's works. In order to try and get *Dubliners* published, Joyce negotiated with the publisher Grant Richards for more than a year. On 26 June 1906 he told Richards: "I seriously believe that you will retard the course of civilisation in Ireland by preventing the Irish people from having one good look at themselves in my nicely polished looking-glass" (Joyce [1957], 64). In the meantime, Joyce was working on *Stephen Hero*, but in the fall of 1907 he decided to drastically change the realistic novel's conventional format. Also the title was to change to *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. This is the decisive moment when Joyce's book became a prototype of the modernist novel. Hugh Kenner pinpoints a linguistic instance where this transition becomes visual in the text (Kenner [1982], 24–5). On the first page of the novel, Stephen Dedalus's father is said to look at his son "through a glass." By using the word "glass" instead of "monocle", Joyce takes the viewpoint of the child: Stephen as a young boy does not know the word "monocle" yet. This change of perspectives indicates the transition from the realist to the modernist novel, requiring an active involvement of the reader. S/he has to be willing to put him/herself in the position of a child and strip him/herself from habitual or familiar ways of looking, like the way Elstir in Proust's *Recherche* tries to see what he sees, not what he knows. This defamiliarization is radicalized in *Ulysses*, where the realist "polished looking-glass" of *Dubliners* becomes a "cracked looking-glass," and in *Finnegans Wake*, where the single "glass" is deformed into the plural "glosses" in the ironical footnote "Wipe your glosses with what you know" (FW 304.F3).

Not unlike the different versions of HCE's alleged crime in Phoenix Park, the different versions of *Finnegans Wake* give shape to a multiplicity of perspectives, which does not mean that Joyce did not have a "special point of view"; different versions *are* his point of view. This multiplicity

of versions and perspectives is mirrored in repetitive strains such as the “hesitancy” motif or “the same anew” variants in *Finnegans Wake*. Repetition is not merely a dull formal or textual matter; it is made functional within the content of the work as it interrupts the habitual course of events. The phrase “the same anew” (Joyce [1977–79], vol. 63, 212) keeps recurring in the published text of *Finnegans Wake* but in always different compositions (“The seim anew” [FW 215], “The same renew” [FW 226], “And Sein annews” [FW 277], “This aim to you!” [FW 510], “To flame in you” [FW 614], and so on).

This brings us (“by a commodius vicus of recirculation” [FW 003]) back to Gertrude Stein’s *Composition as Explanation*:

There is singularly nothing that makes a difference a difference in beginning and in the middle and in ending except that each generation has something different at which they are all looking. By this I mean so simply that anybody knows it that composition is the difference which makes each and all of them then different from other generations [...] Nothing changes from generation to generation except the thing seen and that makes a composition.” (Stein [1971], 21)

If nothing has changed from Poe’s “Philosophy of Composition” to Stein’s *Composition as Explanation*, the apparent difference is due to a way of looking at the concept of “composition.” The parallax of composition is determined by the diverging perspectives on “the nothing new” (Beckett [1978], 5). Whereas Poe used repetition (the refrain “Nevermore”) because it complied with a long tradition, Stein employed it to disrupt traditional narrative structures. In *Composition as Explanation*, she applies the same technique as the one Astradur Eysteinnsson describes with reference to *The Making of Americans*: “Stein takes repetition, that basic vehicle of ideology and social assimilation, and apparent normative antithesis of modernist defamiliarization, and turns it against itself” (Eysteinnsson [1990], 155). For Poe, the refrain served as a “pivot upon which the whole structure might turn” (Poe [1846], 164), thus functioning as a unifying principle; for modernist authors such as Stein and Joyce, this pivot is absent. In *The Decentered Universe of ‘Finnegans Wake’* Margot Norris attempts to “overcome the tendency to look for its meanings in its content” and points out that “the replication of events itself becomes meaningful” in *Finnegans Wake* (Norris [1976], 27). Norris discusses this idea “horizontally” on the level of the published text, in the succession of narrated events: “there are so many versions of the event that one can no longer discover the ‘true’ one. [...] Consequently identities are unstable and interchangeable, and the self is constantly alienated from itself and fails to know itself” (Norris [1976], 120). But the idea of meaningful replication can be extended to the “vertical” superposition of textual versions. Where Poe’s concept of “composition” converges with Stein’s, a poetics of process emerges, undermining the fixed nature of the finished product. By denying its importance, “The Philosophy of Composition” unwittingly draws attention to Poe’s parrot, which will always be hidden but nonetheless remain present under the Raven’s black plumage, reminding it of what it could have become and of the textual or compositional memories that have been suppressed. Modernist authors have revalued this parrot’s function, always suggesting that there are alternatives to the course things are taking. That the writing process eventually led to the text as it is published seems an inevitable course only in retrospect. In modernist texts this awareness of the roads not taken has become part of the final result, indicating the subversive potential of the “process verbal” (FW 515.15) and its subdued critique of modernity’s illusion of rectilinear progress.

## Notes

1. The references to *Finnegans Wake* will be indicated by means of the abbreviation *FW*, followed by the page and line number.
2. “Das Projekt der Moderne gründet somit—das ist noch nie scharf ausgesprochen worden—in einer *kinetischen Utopie*: die gesamte Weltbewegung soll Ausführung unseres Entwurfs von ihr werden. Unsere eigenen Lebensbewegungen werden progressiv identisch mit der Weltbewegung selbst” (Sloterdijk [1989], 23).

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## Configurations of Self

### Modernism and Distraction

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According to present dominant visions in literary studies, high modernist fiction is characterized by formal innovation, the destruction of tradition, and above all, the radical subjectivization of literature. Modernism is said to be focused on the problem of mastering a chaotic modernity by means of formal techniques. The most characteristic formal techniques are ironic detachment, highly mediated and multi-perspectival narration, self-referentiality, stylistic ostentation, use of large-scale symbolic forms, and the dramatization of states of consciousness, including the author's own (Miller [1999], 17).

According to current academic doxa, modernism is an aesthetics of formal mastery. At first, this seems to contradict the other common wisdom about modernism, that modernism consists of a radical subjectivization of literature. However, this subjectivization should not be understood as expressive, as in the case of romanticism. For the modernist, personal vision is not proclaimed but rather *embodied in formal mastery*. Fredric Jameson formulates this as follows: "The great modernisms were [...] predicated on the invention of a personal, private style, as unmistakable as your fingerprint, as incomparable as your own body" (Jameson [1983], 114). Modernist authors try to convey their personal vision by developing an individual form of language. This unique style, is supposed to embody, to *be*, the subjectivity of the author. The modernist author metaphorically identifies herself or himself with her or his text.

This is, however, only part of the story. In 1930, in the introduction of his review of Alfred Döblin's novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, Walter Benjamin pointed out that there are two extreme tendencies in modernist fiction. These two tendencies form antithetical but equally authoritative manifestations of the modernist novel. The first tendency is the one that can be recognized in present constructions of modernism. It is marked by formal mastery and purity, and orientation toward unique interiorized experience. André Gide's novel *Journal des faux-monnayeurs* (The Counterfeiters) is for Benjamin emblematic for this tendency:

[...] Gide develops the doctrine of the roman pur. With the greatest subtlety imaginable, he has set out to eliminate every straightforward, linear, paratactic narrative (every mainline epic characteristic) in favour of ingenious, purely novelistic (and in this context this also means Romantic) devices. The attitude of the characters to what is being narrated, the attitude of the author toward them and to his technique—all this must become a component of the novel itself. In short, this roman pur is actually pure interiority; it acknowledges no exterior [...] (Benjamin [1999], 300)

Alfred Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* represents the second tendency, this one marked by heterogeneity of materials with extra-literary contents, montage techniques, and orientation towards everyday life and speech. According to Benjamin, this writing technique radically challenges the pursuit of interiority and subjectivization: "The texture of this montage is so dense that we have difficulty hearing the author's voice" (Benjamin [1999], 301).

Tyrus Miller contrasts the two modernisms as follows: "If Gide's subtle hand is discernible over all his materials, all the more so as he retreats from direct authorial address, then Döblin's authorial presence is nearly eclipsed by the heterogeneous materials he assembles." (Miller [1999] 15). Miller contrasts James Joyce and Beckett in a similar way, although the issue is now not so much unification of authorial voice by constructing a solid subjectivity and interiority, but rather unification by means of rigorous form resulting from Joyce's "mythical method". Samuel Beckett, in contrast, has challenged Joyce's modernism with the following words:

I am not interested in a 'unification' of the historical chaos anymore than I am in the 'clarification' of the individual chaos, and still less in the anthropomorphization of the human necessities that provoke the chaos. What I want is the straws, flotsam, etc., names, dates, births, and deaths, because that is all I can know. (Beckett cited in Miller [1999] 17–8)

The lack of emphasis on the second tendency in modernist fiction in later scholarly constructions of modernism, is, as I will argue, the side effect of formalist approaches, which, after having been introduced in the forties and fifties, became authoritative in literary studies in the sixties and seventies. This formalist approach was superficially very effective in analyzing the brand of modernism that distinguishes itself by formal mastery, purity and interiorised experience, because it was able to distinguish and analyze the devices by means of which modernists exercised their formal mastery. But against the other brand of modernism, the formalist approach is quite powerless, because this other modernism seems to distinguish itself by a lack of formal mastery in its random gathering of materials mounted into a text, that is, by heterogeneity of materials, montage techniques and orientation towards everyday life and speech.

In the Dutch context, Douwe Fokkema and Elrud Ibsch's construction of modernism in their *Modernisme in de Europese Letterkunde* (Modernism in European Literature) is emblematic for the strengths and limitation of the formalist approach to modernism. It is significant that those authors who, for Benjamin and Miller, are part of the first tendency of Modernism — Gide, Joyce, Proust, Woolf, Thomas Mann, Svevo — make up modernism as such for Fokkema and Ibsch. Those authors who belong to the second tendency in modernism, like Gertrude Stein, Djuna Barnes, Alfred Döblin, Samuel Beckett, Wyndham Lewis, remain undiscussed or are just mentioned as marginal figures within modernism.

Second, this formalist approach lacks the power to explain how modernism responds to its historical context. In the section titled "The historical context of modernism," Fokkema and Ibsch restrict the historical context to literary history: modernism is presented as a reaction to realism and symbolism. This is legitimated by the statement that "the influence of important developments in world history on literature goes via the cultural system, in which — besides many others — writers and readers participate" (Fokkema and Ibsch [1984], 30).<sup>1</sup> History, then, is only important in so far it has been included, let's say documented, into literary texts in a very literal way. Ultimately, liter-

ary history is seen as an internal development, with only an indirect, filtered relation to the world outside literature, which can, as a result, remain undiscussed.

Since the nineties, however, New Historicism has presented a major challenge to the limitations of formalist literary history. New Historicism views Modernism as part of the broader socio-cultural phenomenon of modernity. Modernism in literature is, then, a specific embodiment of modernity, related to other such developments such as realism or symbolism, which are all dialectically connected to modernity. This transition from formalism to New Historicism has not only led to interest in the second kind of modernism, but, more importantly, this interest has been developed in terms of the relation between literary history and its historical context.

In his brilliant study of literature and modernity, entitled *Remnants of Song: Trauma and the Experience of Modernity in Charles Baudelaire and Paul Celan*, Ulrich Baer defines the essence of modernity as the experience of shock, of experiences that register as unresolved, of traumatic experiences that elude memory and cognition (Baer [2000], 1). Charles Baudelaire and Paul Celan are for him major figures who mark the beginning and ending of modernity. Baudelaire first recognized the dissolution of experience that characterizes modern existence. Although his confrontation with the “small shocks of urban existence” (Baer [2000], 7) pale in comparison with Celan’s efforts to testify to the Holocaust, both Baudelaire and Celan inscribe the historical events they were part of as “shocking and traumatic because they occurred in complete isolation and as absolute breaks with the belief systems that grounded their worlds” (Baer [2000], 8). This diagnosis of modernity perhaps sounds far-fetched, but it can be illustrated with a description of modern man by a writer who is associated neither with the revolutionary changes in Parisian urban life nor with the catastrophe of the Holocaust, namely John Ruskin. In 1856, a year before Baudelaire published *Les Fleurs du Mal* (Flowers of Evil), he expressed the decreasing graspability of the world as follows:

Out of perfect light and motionless air, we find ourselves on a sudden brought under sombre skies... and we find that whereas all the pleasure of [earlier days] was in stability, definiteness, and luminousness, we are expected to rejoice in darkness, and triumph in mutability; to lay the foundation of happiness in things which momentarily change or fade, and to expect the utmost satisfaction and instruction from what it is impossible to arrest, and difficult to comprehend. (Ruskin cited in Baer [2000], 36)

It is in Modernism, however, that this vanishing of the “experienceability” of the world begins to have serious repercussions for the experiencing subject. This becomes very clear, for instance, in Rainer Maria Rilke’s *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* (The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge) of 1910. In the years covered by the notebooks, the narrator attempts to gain some control over the sensory impressions that initially threaten to overwhelm him. He experiences this invasion of sensory stimuli mostly in the city. In Paris he is literally bombarded by acoustic stimuli:

Electric trams go clanging through my room. Cars run over me. A door slams. Somewhere a window-pane crashes down and I hear the larger shards laugh and the smaller splinters giggle. Then suddenly, a dull muffled sound from the other side, inside the house. Someone is climbing the stairs. Comes, keeps on coming. Arrives, stays there a long time, then goes on up. And then the street again. A girl screams: Ah tais toi, je ne veux plus. The tram races in, rattling with excitement, and then rattles on, over everything. Someone shouts. People walk hard, catch up with one another. A dog barks. (Rilke [1982], 8)<sup>2</sup>

Rilke uses personification to describe Malte's acoustic experiences: shards that laugh and splinters that giggle. This personification transforms the sounds into active agents threatening to overwhelm the protagonist. It is as though the car is riding over him and the excess of acoustic stimuli makes it impossible for him to assume any distance or reflect on anything. He literally registers everything and, deprived of the capacity for reflection, loses any secure sense of himself.

The main character in this novel threatens to drown due to the sensory impressions that assault him in the modern city. Stimuli penetrate his body by way of his senses, and threaten his self with disintegration. The border between him and his external reality disappears. The subject (or the disintegration of it) presented here is no longer defined by reason, but by his senses. In Rilke's novel this situation is experienced as negative. The thrust of the novel, then, consists of the search for remedies against this feeling of being completely overwhelmed by sensory impressions.

Rilke's narrator can be seen as exemplary for a new view of subjectivity and bodily experience that became increasingly important in the course of the nineteenth century. According to this view, rationalism and cognition are no longer the foundation of subjectivity and the senses are no longer the instruments by which the rational subject can dominate its environment; on the contrary, subjecthood is formed in reaction to stimuli that penetrate the body by way of the senses. The "battle" that is thus waged through the senses is of a fundamentally different nature than it was before. While remaining the point of contact between the subject and its surroundings, the senses no longer function as an interface separating the subject from the outside world, thus enabling it to survey and control reality. Instead, the senses are now conceived of as a "channel," or door that is continually ajar, through which the outside world penetrates the body in the form of stimuli. The balance in the power struggle between the subject and the outside world would now seem to tip decisively towards the latter.

Some critics associate this nineteenth and early twentieth century concern for the role of sensory impressions in the creation of subjectivity with the social and technological developments of modernity. As a result of the industrial revolution, rapid urban expansion, the advance of capitalism and the invention of new technologies, the field of the senses changed—particularly in the latter half of the nineteenth century—at breakneck speed. The subject was increasingly exposed to new sensations that could no longer be fitted into the familiar world order. Therefore, in the words of Jonathan Crary, an essential aspect of modernity consists of:

a continual crisis of attentiveness [...] the changing configurations of capitalism pushing attention and distraction to new limits and thresholds, with an unending introduction of new products, new sources of stimulation, and streams of information. (Crary [1994], 68: 22)

According to Crary, this "crisis of the senses" is the reason why the concept of "attention" became one of the most important categories in the empirical psychology of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The American philosopher and psychologist William James (brother of modernist novelist Henry James), for instance, defined the subject in terms of attention, concentration or focalisation. Precisely at the point when the *distraction* of the subject starts to emerge as a new phenomenon in the course of the nineteenth century, he took the concentration and attention of the subject to be decisive for human subjectivity.

But not everyone sees distraction as a polar opposite of attention or concentration, or as threatening to the subject. German thinkers such as Siegfried Kracauer and Walter Benjamin consider it rather

as a liberation or emancipation of the subject than as its downfall. In his essay "The Cult of Distraction" from 1924, Kracauer tells us how the new media of his time such as radio and film bring about an intense form of distraction in the viewer or listener. Someone listening to the radio, for instance, will switch from one station to another. The idea of the uninterrupted unity of the traditional work of art is radically disrupted by the "fragmented sequence of splendid sense impressions" (Kracauer cited in Armstrong [1998], 216) that comprises the reception of film. On the one hand these ways of looking and listening are symptomatic for the fragmented character of modern life, "deprived of substance, empty as a tin can, a life which instead of internal connections knows nothing but isolated events forming ever new series of images in the manner of a kaleidoscope" (Kracauer cited in Armstrong [1998], 216). On the other, Kracauer argued that watching films would help to demolish the bourgeois worldview, "making the 'soul' flow out of itself to become a part of the material world, [...] constantly encountering material reality" (Kracauer cited in Armstrong [1998], 216).

In "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", Walter Benjamin presents the distraction of the viewer-listener less and less as the opposite of attention. Rather, being distracted is a special form of attention by which entirely different objects penetrate the subject. He compares the effect of cinema with Freud's theory of psychoanalysis, which made it possible to isolate matters that hitherto "floated along unnoticed in the broad stream of perception," (Benjamin [1969], 237) subjecting them to analysis. The fragmented structure of film carries the viewer's attention with it, and distracts it in the sense that at such moments conscious reflection is impossible. In order to illustrate this distracted manner of seeing, Benjamin quotes Georges Duhamel, who, incidentally, and unlike Benjamin, regarded film as a great danger: "I can no longer think what I want to think. My thoughts have been replaced by moving images" (Benjamin [1969], 238). But the discontinuity in the sequence of film images and the "shock" that this brings about in the viewer ends up facilitating a "heightened presence of mind" (Benjamin [1969], 238).

The distracted person, too, can form habits. More, the ability to master certain tasks in a state of distraction proves that their solution has become a matter of habit. Distraction as provided by art presents a covert control of the extent to which new tasks have become soluble by apperception. [...] Reception in a state of distraction, which is increasingly noticeable in all fields of art and is symptomatic of profound changes in apperception, finds in the film its true mode of exercise. The film with its shock effect meets this mode of reception halfway. The film makes the cult value recede into the background, not only by putting the public in the position of critic, but also by the fact that at the movies this position requires no attention. The public is an examiner, but an absent-minded one. (Benjamin [1969], 237)

At first sight, the "reception in a state of distraction" that Benjamin regarded as having been triggered by the new media takes on paradoxical forms. Because subjects are no longer capable of organizing and anticipating their own perceptions, and because they are distracted by discontinuous sensory impressions, they become capable of attaining new or higher insights. According to this notion of things, distraction is an element of attention, seen as dialectic process. The subject who gets these new insights is, however, not the same subject as the one proposed by the Enlightenment who acquired insight by means of controlled observation and rationality. The subject of modernity acquires insight while being subjected to a mechanical process, unintendedly and accidentally.

The notion of subjectivity in modernity described so far differs radically from conventional notions of the subject in modernism, for instance in the construction of modernism of Fokkema and

Ibsch. According to their view, the modernist subject is not characterized by distraction, disintegration, loss of self, and inability to experience the world, but by distanced observation, reserved intellectualism, scepticism and irony and a pursuit of an authentic self (Fokkema and Ibsch [1984], 24). These qualities seem to embody a notion of strong individualistic subjectivity, rather than the loss of it. I will, however, rearticulate these two opposed notions of subjectivity as the world-sensitive subjectivity versus the defensive subject. But how can a strong, individualistic subjectivity be seen as “defensive”?

In order to solve the apparent contradiction between modernity and literary modernism, in order to historicize, *and* in order to argue that the individualistic subject is a defensive one, I will invoke one of the most important and canonical essays written about modernity and written in the middle of it, in 1903: “The Metropolis and Mental Life” by the German sociologist Georg Simmel. Like Baudelaire before him and Benjamin after him, Simmel describes the psychological foundation of metropolitan subjectivity as determined by the intensification of emotional life due to the swift and continuous shift of external and internal stimuli. “Lasting impressions, the slightness in their differences, the habituated regularity of their course and contrasts between them, consume, so to speak, less mental energy than the rapid telescoping of changing images, pronounced differences within what is grasped at a single glance, and the unexpectedness of violent stimuli” (Simmel [1971], 325). This metropolitan life stands in sharp contrast to the slower, more habitual, more smoothly flowing rhythm of the sensory-mental phase of small town and rural existence.

But the metropolitan subject does not just let itself be annihilated by these violent stimuli. It has its defense mechanisms:

Thus the metropolitan type—which naturally takes on a thousand individual modifications—creates a protective organ for itself against the profound disruption with which the fluctuations and discontinuities of the external milieu threaten it. Instead of reacting emotionally, the metropolitan type reacts primarily in a rational manner, thus creating a mental predominance through the intensification of consciousness, which in turn is caused by it. Thus the reaction of the metropolitan person to those events is moved to a sphere of mental activity, which is least sensitive, and which is furthest removed from the depths of the personality. (Simmel [1971], 326)

Simmel sees the intellectualistic character of the mental life of the metropolitan subject as a protection of the inner life against the sovereign powers of the metropolis. But it is not only its intellectualism but also its reserve which protects the subject from being overwhelmed by modern urban life:

If the unceasing external contact of numbers of persons in the city should be met by the same number of inner reactions as in the small town, in which one knows almost every person he meets and to each of whom one has a positive relationship, one would be completely atomised internally and would fall into an unthinkable mental condition. (Simmel [1971], 331)

According to Simmel, it is because of lack of space, and due to bodily closeness in the dense crowds of the metropolis, that mutual reserve, indifference, and the intellectual distance of life become perceivable and significant for the first time. Simmel’s diagnosis of mental life in the metropolis does resolve the contradiction between notions of modernity as, on the one hand, being defined by a crisis of the senses (Crary) or by traumatic shock and the dissolution of experience

(Baer), and, on the other hand, literary modernism as it is seen by mainstream criticism. Both distanced observation, reserved intellectualism, scepticism, irony and the pursuit of authenticity that characterizes literary modernism in Fokkema and Ibsch's construction of it, as well as the world-sensitive modernism as distinguished by Benjamin, are a protection against the loss of self which threatens the subject living under the conditions of modernity. This implies a total reversal of the kind of relation between the features of literary modernism and history as postulated by Fokkema and Ibsch. For them, the independent intellectualism and reserve of the modernist subject is not a defense strategy, but the foundation of individual subjectivity as such. They explain, for instance, the allegedly marginal role of the events of the First World War in Thomas Mann's *Der Zauberberg* (The Magic Mountain) and in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* as follows:

In the modernist world of experience, everything, even the events of war, is filtered by consciousness; historical events are made subordinate to the vision of the pondering, evaluating subject, which will never give up its independence. (Fokkema and Ibsch [1984], 34)<sup>3</sup>

However, when we try to understand modernism contextually, instead of formalistically, it becomes necessary to conclude that it is not a matter of holding on to independence, as if wilfully, but of armouring the self by means of intellectualism and reserve against overwhelming threats to it. It will be clear by now that this armouring of the self does not safeguard the self. The Austrian modernist writer Hermann Broch articulates clearly why modernist intellectualism is compulsive instead of controlled: "The highly developed rationality of modern metropolitan culture does not at all mitigate the human twilight, rather it intensifies it. The accepted *ratio* becomes a mere means for the satisfaction of drives and thus is robbed of its content as knowledge of the whole" (Broch cited in Miller [1999], 40). According to Tyrus Miller, rationality had embarked on a journey to the end of the night, reducing the individual subject to (in Beckett's words) "a peristalsis of light, worming its way into the dark" (Miller [1999], 40).

This is a far cry from the triumphant rational subject to which critics tend to cling. But it is also an overcoming of the split alleged by critics more sensitive to other kinds of modernist literature, the kinds that can now be considered more daring, looking the condition of modernity more directly in the face. What I propose, instead, is that we now reread Gide, Joyce, Woolf, Mann, Svevo and Proust from the vantage point of Döblin, Beckett, Lewis, Stein and Barnes. We will discover them to be altogether different writers from the ones we may have constructed.

## Notes

1. "de invloed van belangrijke ontwikkelingen in de wereldgeschiedenis op de literatuur (loopt) via het culturele systeem, waaraan naast vele anderen, de schrijvers en de lezers tot wie zij zich richten deelnemen" (Fokkema and Ibsch (1984), 30).
2. "Elektrische Bahnen rasen läutend durch meine Stube. Automobile gehen über mich hin. Eine Tür fällt zu. Irgendwo klirrt eine Scheibe herunter, ich höre ihre grossen Scherben lachen, die kleinen Splitter kichern. Dann plötzlich dumpfer, eingeschlossener Lärm von der anderen Seite, innen im Hause. Jemand steigt die Treppe. Kommt, kommt unaufhörlich. Ist da, ist lange da, geht vorbei. Und wieder die Strasse. Ein Mädchen kreischt: Ah tais-toi, je ne veux plus. Die Elektrische rennt ganz erregt heran, darüber fort, fort über alles. Jemand ruft. Leute laufen, überholen sich. Ein Hund bellt" (Rilke (1982), 8).



3. "In de modernistische ervaringswereld wordt alles, ook het oorlogsgebeuren, door het bewustzijn gefiltreerd; historische gebeurtenissen worden ondergeschikt gemaakt aan de visie van het afwegende, oordelende subject, dat zijn onafhankelijkheid nooit prijsgeeft" (Fokkema and Ibsch (1984), 34).

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## The Face of Modernity

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The following essay is concerned with the status of the human face as text in twentieth-century literature and traces the origin of its unique forms of expression as a linguistic image in paradigm changes of knowledge. Seen within the cultural and historical context of identity formation (Taylor [1994]), it is a peculiar fact that ever since the human face was recognized in the reflection of water or polished metal as an image of the self, people have wanted to show others what they look like and perpetuate their appearance through art. Subject to forces of social shaping and construction, the human face became a locus of meaning inspired and regulated by the complex relationship between the self, its image, and the thought process producing the image—the imagination (Kearney [1998]). In other words, the meaning of self, or concepts of human identity, are based on an imagined perception of the self, the product of an image-making competence that, throughout history, incessantly engineers, expands, and modifies its ever changing sense of self, its own singular space of reality, and its disposition toward the world. Niklas Luhmann (1984), in his seminal work *Soziale Systeme* (Social Systems), describes this process of constructing the self as “autopoiesis of consciousness” (Luhmann [1995], 218–21 and 262–7).

Of all the visual signifiers of self-identity (body, sex, posture, age, rank, position, form, built, weight, and so on), above all, the human face because of its seemingly boundless ability to communicate the thoughts and emotions of the human condition (see Bruce and Young [1998]) has intrigued the faculties of imagination that produce meaning. Approximately eighty facial muscles are ready to produce signifying expressions that can change several times in a second. Because of this unique ability, the human face has been described as the smallest stage of the world, a map of the interior psychological landscape, a protocol of character, and the mirror of beliefs and passions.

Looking at mythic-religious references to the human face, it is important to realize that the face, even though it appears as such, is not a visual constant or image that is perceived the same way throughout history. Because functions of an image (in this case the face), of the imagination (forms of perception of the face), and of consciousness (forms of cognition) are interdependent, the mental realization of the face at different times in history changes according to structures and arrangements of knowledge. The emergence of the modern human face, consequently, represents one of the fundamental and seminal cultural constructs or, if you will, inventions of early modern times.

Michel Foucault describes this process in detail and thus provides an excellent introduction to the question of the emergence of the modern face (Pausch [1999]). In his highly successful and groundbreaking work from 1966, *Les mots et les choses: Une archéologie des sciences humaines* (The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences), he extensively analyses paradigm

changes from an anthropological perspective in Western European culture as exemplified by historical developments in science. In the course of this undertaking, a genealogy of the modern consciousness unfolds which, in contrast to theological viewpoints and Hegel's teleological notion of progress in history, emphasizes the unstable and coincidental, the provisional, and the retrievable in contemporary knowledge. Thus the modern world is seen not only as an illusion, as Schopenhauer would have it, but also as a depiction, as representation of cognitive fundamental assumptions, or, seen another way, as a constructed system of theories which was established mainly in the eighteenth century through the new foundations, rules, and structures of science or through the new arrangement of "narrative" knowledge (cf. Jean-François Lyotard). Like Nietzsche, Dilthey, Freud, and Benjamin, Foucault sees the course of history as beset with ruptures and faults. The historical-cultural continuum makes no sense teleologically or otherwise. Likewise, no continual, progressive course of social improvements can be detected, as the myth of the immediacy of the present would have it, where the present is seen as the climax of history to the present day. According to Foucault, history describes only the chance, undirected appearance of events, where their emergence on the horizon of occurrences is just as possible and likely as their disappearance.

In this perspective of coincidental ontology, modern consciousness fundamentally consists of linguistic images that reflect and express the foundations of modern knowledge upon which it is based. In the context of the conceivably provisional nature of this consciousness, Foucault analyzes the basic arrangements of knowledge as they have emerged in the course of the last 400 years and moulded the image of modern man. Should unforeseeable circumstances bring about the disintegration and disappearance of these basic arrangements, it can be readily assumed, according to Foucault, that the contours of our current image of man will also change:

If those arrangements were to disappear as they appeared, if some event of which we can at the moment do no more than sense the possibility — without knowing either what its form will be or what it promises — were to cause them to crumble, as the ground of Classical thought did, at the end of the eighteenth century, then one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea. (Foucault [1973], 387)

Foucault uses the linguistic image of the face drawn in the sand as an allegorical reference, as metaphor. However, what Foucault does not notice is that it is more than a mere figure of speech. Paradigm changes in the forms of knowledge and thus our world view, which in Foucault's metaphor could bring about the disappearance of modern man, lead not only logically to changed forms of cognition, but also to different ways of seeing and perceiving. For this reason, in Foucault's scenario, man's face disappears along with our current perception of him. And in this conceivable future, as hypothesized here, new significances, qualities, and representational patterns will be "seen" and discovered in man which would no longer necessarily have anything in common with the character traits we now recognize in our facial features. Where there is a new awareness of the world, a new linguistic image of the human face as text will also emerge.

Although this has the appearance of an assumption, we are not dealing with mere speculation, for an absolute optical phenomenon or a "natural" field of vision, at least in Wittgenstein's opinion, is not conceivable, as all vision is based on a process of learning that determines the way in which we see. The manner and function of vision we are familiar with was thus first learned and experienced in the final centuries of the Middle Ages, within the context of the development of modern

consciousness, and was eventually applied as a newly developed mechanism of cognitive seeing, a new cognitive-visual understanding of the world in the comprehensive spectrum of modern cultural and scientific activity after 1700 (Jay [1994]). A comparable change when knowledge seemingly attempts to seek out and test a new form (especially in the context of nuclear—and astrophysics, genetics, microbiology, information technology) has been underway since the early 1900s. Looking at this situation of revolutionary developments in the sciences of the last century, did the perception of the human face also change as a consequence? And if this is the case, what cultural conditions gave rise to this modified concept of the human face as linguistic image? What conditions have caused this change in perception in twentieth-century culture? But before I deal with these problems, I will first give a brief glance back into history.

A simple fact that may at first seem trivial can help us unravel what led to the modern literary image of the human face. None of the famous figures in the Middle High German epics—neither those of the *Nibelungenlied* (The Song of the Nibelungs) around 1200 (Sifrit, Hagene, Kriemhilde, and Prünhilde), nor those of Tristan, Isold, Iwein, Parzivâl, Gawan, Sigune, and so on—has a face that can be individually imagined. The mental patterns of the medieval imagination did not yet accommodate an understanding of the verbal sign “face” as an optically transmitted unit of meaning, or thus, as an image. The cognitive leap had not yet been completed whereby facial expressions as later seen by the physiognomists provided clues to internal characteristics (the prerequisite for portraying the face as a linguistic image). The face did not yet play a role as an erotic signal or as a sign of wickedness, kindness, arrogance, envy, and so on; that is, it did not yet have a psychological and individual significance (“Gesicht” see Grimm [1897], vol. IV, I.2, column 4087–99). For that reason, or because the potential of the subjective expression of the face as signpost to the soul had not yet been “learned,” the object of literary fancy was the beautiful body, “der scoéne lîp,” rather than the face. This optical attitude of the medieval culture explains why depictions of heroes and other people in Middle High German epics mainly include descriptions of the body surface, build, posture, agility, appearance, ornamentation, clothing, eyes, mouth, complexion, hair, brow, cheeks, temple, and so forth. In other words, depending on the person’s role, the description provides a series of specific physical details by which the character of the person in question is determined. These observations, of course, do not mean that the face was not seen as a visual object. It was “seen” but not yet “recognized,” because the visual meaning of the face was not yet connected with that system of perception, with that epistemology of recognition that developed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Foucault [1973], 40).

Thus the genealogy of the modern face has its onset in the interval between the late Middle Ages and the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when it emerges in literature. In this interval, a radical change takes place in the structure of knowledge, a change connected with the restructuring of cognitive methods. During this time, physiognomy, the study of the systematic correspondence of psychological characteristics in facial features or body structure, was developed mainly by the Italian naturalist Giambattista della Porta in his *De humana physiognomia* (On Human Physiognomy) from 1583. The newly discovered individual subject found a broader public in particular through the enthusiastic reception of Johann Caspar Lavater’s *Physiognomische Fragmente zur Beförderung der Menschenkenntnis und Menschenliebe* (Fragments on Physiognomy) from 1775–78, an extensive four-volume opus to which Goethe and Herder had also contributed. Lavater’s writings provided not only an important stimulus for the study of physiognomy, they also had a wide-ranging and funda-

mental influence on literature. They provided the imagination with a model for reading and understanding facial features as a text containing information in respect to character and individuality. In short, they functioned as a blueprint for expressions and features of a human face to be used to construct meaning. As such Lavater's *Fragmente* has influenced European literature ever since, for from then on the face was drawn for the reader as the expression of a fixed morality and ideology. In Europe, this was completely internalized despite the fact that physiognomy was denounced passionately as a pseudo-science from very early on by such writers as Georg Christoph Lichtenberg and others. Thus *Fragmente* stands at the beginning of the literary and cultural history of the modern human face, a history that reaches the present in a rather different form. And it is this difference in form, changes in representations of the modern human face as linguistic image that poses the central theme of this investigation.

Scholarly discourse regarding the human face in literature is very extensive (Breitenfellner [1999], 235–71). Peter von Matt's literary history of the human face in which he analyses and describes the function of the literary portrait in the works of Goethe, Gottsched, Heine, Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach, Kafka, Else Lasker-Schüler, Musil, and others, is an important example in this field of research (Matt [1983]). Around 1900, when the earlier unshakable belief in language as a medium of representation was replaced by the notion that language as an autonomous entity is not capable of describing reality (Göttsche [1987]), Matt observes a dramatic change in the literary portrait: authors now distance themselves from the face as an image of essential characteristics and retreat into a process of fragmenting the physiognomy of the human face along the lines of their intended literary constructions. No doubt, this process of fragmenting, rearranging, and constructing the human face can be observed throughout twentieth-century Western literature. It is one of the fundamental characteristics of the face in Modernity. However, it is not the intention of this essay to continue or modify this line of argument. Instead, I will attempt to locate and describe the cultural conditions that were instrumental in the process of fragmentation that haunts Western culture for a number of reasons.

For this purpose, and in order to begin with a representative case in point, it is helpful to turn to Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* (Remembrance of Things Past), from 1913–27, because this continuous novel encompasses the entire literary and representational history of the human face from traditional descriptions to construction and fragmentation. For instance, upon entering the garden in the "Overture," Proust portrays Swann's face with a few conventional adjectives regarding "its arched nose and green eyes, under a high forehead fringed with fair, almost red hair, done in the Bressant style" (Proust [1981], vol. I, 15).<sup>1</sup> Yet, in reference to that same face, only a few pages later the narrator explains why the whole visual appearance of Swann is actually a construct of his social environment. Reflecting upon Swann's emergence in the garden, the narrator observes that "none of us can be said to constitute a material whole, which is identical for everyone," because our social personality is a creation of the thoughts of other people. Even the simple act that we describe as 'seeing someone we know' is to some extent an intellectual process. We pack the physical outline of the person we see with all the notions we have already formed about him, and in the total picture of him we compose in our minds those notions have certainly the principal place. In the end they come to fill out so completely the curve of his cheeks, to follow so exactly the line of his nose, they blend so harmoniously in the sound of his voice as if it were no more than a transparent envelope, that each time we see the face or hear the voice it is these notions that we recognise and to which we listen. And so, no doubt, from the Swann they had constructed for themselves

my family had left out, in their ignorance, a whole host of details of his life in the world of fashion, details which caused other people, when they met him so see all the graces enthroned in his face and stopping at the aquiline nose as at a natural frontier; but they had contrived also to put into this face divested of all glamour, vacant and roomy as an untenanted house, to plant in the depths of these undervalued eyes, a lingering residuum, vague but not unpleasing—half-memory and half-oblivion—of idle hours spent together after our weekly dinners, round the card-table or in the garden, during our companionable country life (Proust [1981], vol. I, 20).<sup>2</sup>

The construction of the human face as a linguistic image that transcends the long tradition of Lavater's physiognomic rhetoric is a well known phenomenon in European literature around the 1900s, in the works of Kafka and Hofmannsthal, Joyce and D. H. Lawrence, Rolland and Gide to name but a few. Yet Proust's text is of pivotal importance because it describes for the first time in literature—at least I am not aware of another source—the construction of the face as a consequence of social dynamics in contrast to the traditional semiotic system of the face representing character traits. In Proust's narrative space, we find the construction model of the modern face. According to this model, Swann's identity is not only fluid, as a "material whole" it is non-existent because it is constructed differently in changing social spheres. Yet Proust's theory of identity construction gains even more weight if one considers the fact that it was years before even Ludwig Wittgenstein first formulated his ideas regarding the production of meaning in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921).

However, the reason why the literary construction of the human face as an autonomous, non-representational, and self-referential linguistic image became a new narrative tool around the turn of the century was not usually a philosophical insight into the nature of language, as in the case of Wittgenstein. It was much more influenced by the increasing intensity with which literature had been challenged by photography (since 1835) and by the celluloid film of cinematography (since 1895) as a medium of artistic expression. This new medium mesmerized and captivated the public because of a fascinating potential that is based on differences between the physiology of the human eye and the physics of photography. While the human eye is capable of processing only a few different pictures per second, the processing speed of the photographic camera could be more than a hundred times faster. Thus the camera is able to record image qualities that cannot be perceived by the unaided human eye. In other words, the camera opened up a whole new space of visual experience, as Benjamin describes in "Kleine Geschichte der Photographie" (A Little History of Photography; Benjamin [1977], vol. II, 368–85). In concrete terms, for example in portrait photography, the camera could capture facial expressions which were not visible to the human eye, that is, it was able to construct or produce new meaning regarding the semiotics of the face.

In general, new media have always fascinated the arts, and this case was not different. Literature was intrigued by the capability of photography to construct new meaning beyond the ordinary sphere of the physiologically perceived reality, a capability that had to be copied, modified, and enhanced if literature was still expected to be socially relevant (Pausch [2000]). In reference to city and landscape photography, the narrator in *Remembrance of Things Past* describes in detail this new potential of the camera: "the most recent applications of photography," which are able to

huddle at the foot of a cathedral all the houses which so often, from close to, appeared to us to reach almost to the height of the towers, drill and deploy like a regiment, in file, in extended order, in serried

masses, the same monuments, bring together the two columns on the Piazzetta which a moment ago were so far apart, thrust away the adjoining dome of the Salute, and in a pale and toneless background manage to include a whole immense horizon within the span of a bridge, in the embrasure of a window, among the leaves of a tree that stands in the foreground and is portrayed in a more vigorous tone, frame a single church successively in the arcades of all the others. (Proust [1981], vol. II, 378)<sup>3</sup>

The narrator observes how different photos of known sites appeared to him when compared with the actual objects—previously unseen images representing new constructs of semiotic meaning facilitated by the camera lens, innovative perspectives, and shutter speed. However, the capability of photography to capture and thus construct image qualities, or—regarding the human face—split-second expressions invisible to the human eye, is an achievement that came with a price, causing the fragmentation of the object. After that the human eye, enhanced with the capabilities of photography, could only observe specific aspects of the object and not its simple universal state, its non-fragmented natural appearance as it would be perceived unaided.

Yet, under certain conditions, the narrative gaze, influenced by the modern media of photography and cinematography, experienced a similar form of object fragmentation. Such is the case in an illustrative passage in *Remembrance of Things Past*, when the narrator describes the first kiss given to Albertine. At that moment, when the lips

began gradually to approach the cheeks which my eyes had recommended it to kiss, my eyes, in changing position, saw a different pair of cheeks; the neck, observed at closer range and as though through a magnifying-glass, showed in its coarser grain a robustness which modified the character of the face. (Proust [1981], vol. II, 378)<sup>4</sup>

The narrator explains the changes in the character of Albertine's face with the same mechanism of fragmentation as in photography:

Apart from the most recent applications of photography [...], I can think of nothing that can to so great a degree as a kiss evoke out of what we believed to be a thing with one definite aspect, the hundred other things which it may equally well be, since each is related to a no less legitimate perspective. In short, just as at Balbec Albertine had often appeared different to me, so now [...], during this brief journey of my lips towards her cheek, it was ten Albertines that I saw; this one girl being like a many-headed goddess, the head I had seen last, when I tried to approach it, gave way to another. At least so long as I had not touched that head, I could still see it, and a faint perfume came to me from it. But alas—for in this matter of kissing our nostrils and eyes are as ill-placed as our lips are ill-made—suddenly my eyes ceased to see, then my nose, crushed by the collision, no longer perceived any odour, and, without thereby gaining any clearer idea of the taste of the rose of my desire, I learned, from these obnoxious signs, that at last I was in the act of kissing Albertine's cheek. (Proust [1981], vol. II, 660–1).<sup>5</sup>

In a way, the description of Albertine's fragmented face as a physiognomic narrative leading up to the first kiss represents an almost classical linguistic situation in modern European literature. Albertine's facial features portrayed in the text up to that point lose their reader-envisioned contours in dissipative structures of the literary imagination and metaphorical logic that render the face indescribable: in its present linguistic environment, spatial dimensions together with the principles of temporal, spatial, and causal order have become entirely fluid and thus neutralize all concrete features of a person. Albertine's face fragments into many faces like a "many-headed goddess;" the head that the narrator had last seen "gave way to another," which, after Albertine and the narrator's

faces collide, seems to disappear altogether as the narrator's nose, crushed by the collision, could no longer perceive any odour and thus gained no "clearer idea of the taste of the rose" of his desire.

What disappears in the course of this process of dissolution, Matt maintains, is a person's "identity as physical form and structure" (Matt [1983], 169) which, until that point, had guaranteed recognition and communication of the self based on specific psychologically interpreted image markers such as expressions, looks, characteristic features and so forth. These image markers constituted foundational concepts upon which the modern perception of the face was based, that is, the face as image and sign of identity, character, individuality, similarity, difference, aesthetic status, erotic disposition, and so on—all of which were read into the image of the face by the observer. This physiognomic discourse, introduced by della Porta and theorized by Lavater, controlled the social and artistic construction of the face and thus the primary identity of all the figures in literature and the arts for over 300 years, until a new medium, photography, literally overran and surpassed the traditional physiognomic forms of primary identities with new constructions of the human face. These traditional forms were exposed as fiction and replaced with a new fiction: the limitless discursive constructability of the human face and identity by means of fragmentation in the context of new evolving cognitive systems and discourses. If, however, these long held image markers of the primary identity construction dissipate in a process of fragmentation and with it the primary identity itself, the question arises, what replaces it? It is important to consider that primary identity, like the power discourse that created and socially controlled this form of visual recognition and representation, is not simply replaced, as Matt seems to believe, by a fragmented narrative space that defies coherent signification; even though fragmented, the shards of primary identity create secondary forms, abbreviated simulations of meaning that permeate the cultural space of twentieth-century media. Out of fragmentation, new faces and identities evolved and since the 1900s, dominated the European cultural landscape of Modernity. In the third part of the essay, I will try to clarify, pinpoint, and differentiate this unique situation.

In their most influential ontology *L'Anti-Oedipe* (Anti-Oedipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia), Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1994), while examining Proust's physiognomic narrative that leads to Albertine's first kiss, illustrate the process of object fragmentation, or in Proust's words, the process that evokes "out of what we believed to be a thing with one definite aspect, the hundred other things which it may equally well be" (Proust [1981], vol. II, 660). The authors compare this evocation of an object's "hundred other things" with a schizophrenic's mode of perception and contemplate in this respect that, "if schizophrenia is the universal [a universal method to transcend limits of cognition], the great artist is indeed the one who scales the schizophrenic wall and reaches the land of the unknown" (Deleuze and Guattari [1994], 69). Such is the case, they continue,

in an illustrative passage, the first kiss given Albertine. Albertine's face is at first a nebula, barely extracted from the collective of girls. Then her person disengages itself, through a series of views that are like distinct personalities, with Albertine's face jumping from one plane to another as the narrator's lips draw nearer her cheek. At last, within the magnified proximity, everything falls apart like a face drawn in sand, Albertine's face shatters into molecular partial objects, while those on the narrator's face rejoin the body without organs, eyes closed, nostrils pinched shut, mouth filled. (Deleuze and Guattari [1994], 69)

Deleuze and Guattari's analysis is highly intriguing because it contains, essentially, the construction blueprint for the face of modernity. In their book, the two authors argue for an ontology that describes the world as a process of flows and lines of flight, as a system that is always both collaps-



ing and being restructured. Consequently, cultural production in history can be described as a set of dynamic, overlapping social procedures of de- and reterritorialization along the lines of an aimlessly synthesising and dissipating discursive matrix. Since perception and understanding are based, in a Kantian sense, on physiological conditions, all conceptual building blocks of the world—that is, as an interactive system from nuclear physics to the event horizon in cosmology—are constructed under the aegis of biological and mechanical parameters of the body. This all encompassing cognitive space of physiological dependency is called the “body without organs” and perceived as a sphere upon which potential discourse patterns or possible multiplicities could conglomerate and dissolve according to historical conditions. However, in the capitalistic phase of history, the process of deterritorialization is accompanied by uninterrupted procedures of reterritorialization—hence, the schizophrenic structure of capitalism: the traditional beliefs in “grand narrative” (Jean-François Lyotard) or “primordial totality” (Deleuze, Guattari), power hierarchy, representation, individual identity, family, nation state, and so forth, are dismantled and reinstated at the same time. These contradictory dynamics have effected cultural fragmentation or, in the words of the authors, the “age of partial objects”:

We live today in the age of partial objects, bricks that have been shattered to bits, and leftovers. We no longer believe in the myth of the existence of fragments that, like pieces of an antique statue, are merely waiting for the last one to be turned up, so that they may all be glued back together to create a unity that is precisely the same as the original. We no longer believe in a primordial totality that once existed, or, in a final totality that awaits us at some future date. (Deleuze and Guattari [1994], 42)

The depiction of Albertine’s many faces and the fragmentation of hers and the narrator’s, upon touching her cheeks with his lips, into “molecular partial objects,” while those of the narrator rejoin the “body without organs” (i.e. they become potentialities of future new constructions of the face) define the parameters of composition and limitations of construction of the modern face in terms of a progression from its initial apparently unified state of being to its radical dissolution. Or, in concrete terms, from Albertine’s conventional face and seemingly stable identity in the collective of girls to the many aspects of her face and identity, “it was ten Albertines that I saw,” and, finally, to fragmenting into the partial objects of its composition combined with an ultimate loss of identity, “my nose [...] no longer perceived any odour.”

In the entire novel, the construction of Albertine’s face as a linguistic image adheres to the parameters of composition mentioned above. The narrator is unable to remember the complexity of her features; instead, he recalls only fleeting aspects of mood and expression in certain situations, her face reappearing from memory and imagination, a fluid image, fragile, dissolving, and resurfacing again. When the narrator asks Albertine if she would like to come with him to the Bois, at this “suggestion the smiling rosy face beneath Albertine’s flat toque, which came down very low, over her eyebrows, seemed to hesitate” (Proust [1981], vol. II, 401).<sup>6</sup> Later, she begins to cause in the narrator a longing for happiness, a sentiment that recalled to him “aspects of Albertine’s face more gentle, less gay, quite different from those that would have been evoked by physical desire” (Proust [1981], vol. II, 810).<sup>7</sup> One morning, when he was afraid she would tell him that she was not free that day because she had “a cold, preoccupied air,” he summons up the following image:

I would gaze at her, I would gaze at that rosy face of Albertine's, tantalising me with the enigma of her intentions, the unknown decision which was to create the happiness or misery of my afternoon. It was a whole state of soul, a whole future existence that had assumed before my eyes the allegorical and fateful form of a girl. (Proust [1981], vol. II, 1053).<sup>8</sup>

Seen in the perspective of the narrator's remembrance, Albertine's face is portrayed in a dynamic state due to an almost kaleidoscopic rearrangement of signifying facial elements and expressions. And along these narrative lines, her identity and social personality are transformed according to the contextual discursive situation as she turns into yet another "creation of the thoughts of other people" (Proust [1981], vol. I, 20), that is, into one of the many Albertines she is able to become. In other words, the concept of difference as a medium of contrast that produces identity dissolves along with the traditional notion of a primary identity. The individual subject reaches its vanishing point. I would like to clarify this observation in greater detail.

Regarding Albertine's face, two narrative procedures or webs traverse and unfold in the novel: fragmentation—during which her face "jumps from one plane of consistency to another, in order to finally come undone in a nebula of molecules" (Deleuze and Guattari [1994], 318)—and reconstruction. These two processes correspond to Deleuze and Guattari's conceptions of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, that is, the decoding and recoding of cultural productions, in our case, fragmentation and reconstruction of Albertine's face. In the course of these opposing narrative engagements, traditional forms of identity (upon which the humanist, unified, and rational subject was based) are dissolved and give way to the face of a nomadic subject that is always fragmented and reconstructed in a constant process of becoming and transformation. Therefore, faces of nomadic subjects, as Jean Baudrillard would have it (1994), represent images of images, that is, images of primary identities or "simulacra" of lost originals, of first-order images of forgotten individuals. Consequently in the realm of modern dynamics of fragmentation and reconstruction, individual faces, original identities or "private persons are an illusion, images of images or derivatives of derivatives" (Deleuze and Guattari [1994], 264) responding and adapting by means of fragmentation or reconstruction to various necessities that are posed by discourses in the context. However, considering the psychology of the reception of cultural products, fragmentation and reconstruction of the face as a linguistic image would not have surfaced if both procedures did not satisfy a deep-rooted desire. Referring to several important literary examples, I will attempt to describe the fascination with the two opposing narratives in the concluding part of this essay.

Originally, physiognomic features as the signifying medium of identity did pose a considerable problem, especially following the "alphabetisation" of the body in the Enlightenment (Koschorke [1999]). On the one hand, the construct of a primary individual identity could not be separated from a series of contextually restraining demands that were image-intrinsic (*noblesse oblige*); on the other hand, such demands and social expectations (for instance in connection with the face of celibacy, manliness, a virgin, a mother, and so forth) did repress desire and libidinal flows, which potentially cause emotional stress and tension and a longing for a less complex existential situation. The psychological implications of man's wish for a simplified existential status is central to Freud's work in connection with his concept of death drive or death wish. He describes the death wish as a form of aggression (motivated by repulsion and destruction) that is grounded in the law of entropy—in the tendency of all systems to eventually search their lowest level of energy or their most simplified form of existence (i.e. their greatest statistical state of disorder), which ultimately is death. From

this point of view, it is not surprising that traditional representations of the face in literature and the arts seemed to tend more and more towards styles that dissolved distinct psychological characterizations and features and gave way to less complex renditions with which the audience could more easily identify. The well-known marble statue “The Greek Slave” by Hiram Powers, a naked pubescent girl in chains with a face almost void of expression, is an example of such simplifications in nineteenth-century art. The history of literature and art contains numerous examples describing regression towards simplification and modern fragmentation, which focus only on aspects of the human condition (see Kanz [1993], Brilliant [1991], Wheeler [1942], Gamwell and Kogan [1981], Gibson [1978], Wolfe [1988]).

However, if constructed images of primary individual identity repress desire and libidinal flows, it can be argued that neutralizing the distinct psychological signifiers of such identities, or, a loss of identity or “facelessness” (as reflected in the process of regression regarding the portrayal of the human face as a linguistic image, from representation towards fragmented simplification), does in fact enhance desire and libidinal flows. Without difficulties, a number of even extreme examples come to mind, beginning with the works of de Sade in which none of the offenders or sexually abused victims have an identifiable face, such as *Juliette* (1968), or John Cleland’s *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (1748–49), the anonymous *Thérèse philosophe* (1748), Denis Diderot’s *Les bijoux indiscrets* (1748) (Indiscrete Jewels), up to Catherine Millet’s *La vie sexuelle de Catherine M.* (2001) (The Sexual Life of Catherine M.), a supposedly autobiographical rendering of her love life that also omits the identity description of her many sex partners. The connection between sexual degradation, uninhibitedness, and loss of identity is probably best described in the 1999 film version of *The Invisible Man, Hollow Man* (Paul Verhoeven) starring Kevin Bacon, when the protagonist refers to his invisible and thus identity-lacking state of being with the words: “You are amazed what you can do when you don’t see yourself in the mirror any more.”

The modern desire to disregard and transcend confinement, limitation, responsibility, and danger of primary or first-order forms of identity for a simple, secure, and less painful state of existence are caused, as Foucault explains, by our fascination with fascism, not only historical fascism, “but also the fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behaviour, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us” (Preface to Deleuze and Guattari [1994], xiii). And since the institutions that constitute and generate power along the lines of their ever present discourses are “faceless” and without an identity on a human scale (Franz Kafka made a career out of this observation), the urge to be assimilated by this power structure by means of fragmenting the self into second-order simulations, neutralizing all significations of the face, and demystifying the body remains a continuously alluring aspect of modern existence. Daniel Goldhagen (1996), for example, has written an extensive study regarding the fascination with power, in which he develops the thesis that Germans have not suffered oppression by fascism but actually welcomed and supported it.

Yet this tendency in modern culture towards fragmenting identity and the portrayal of the face does not represent a stable, linear literary narrative. The process of fragmenting very quickly leads creativity to a dead end if the fragmented cultural object is not reconstructed and re-territorialized as a functioning product. The portrait of the human face in modern European literature has reached this situation. In the case of Proust’s Albertine, it was possible to atomize her face only once in order to communicate the terms of its construction. Thereafter, Proust had to retreat, which he did, and

portrayed at least aspects of her face; that is, he re-territorialized it with identity features that the narrative demanded. Otherwise, after its fragmented dissolution, Albertine as a functional narrative figure would have been effectively erased and turned into a passive, subjugated object of the narrator's desire.

In general, facelessness in modern literature or the lack of a self image signals a fringe condition of human existence, or more precisely, anonymity, a lack of identity or even a schizophrenic state, abandonment of the self, and an unquestioning, fascistic surrender to the demands of power. The diary of the dancer and choreographer Vaslav Nijinsky is an interesting example. Written during 1918–19, at a time when Nijinsky was already mentally afflicted, the diary contains his ideas about religion, art, love, and life. Yet in the course of his obsessively egocentric use of the pronoun “I,” around which all aspects of the world seem to revolve, his identity shatters and dissolves into a multitude of schizoid fragments that make it impossible to form a mental image of the dancer: “I am the bull, a wounded bull. I am God in the bull. I am Apis. I am an Egyptian. I am an Indian. I am a Red Indian. I am a Negro. I am a Chinaman. I am a Japanese. I am a foreigner, a stranger. I am a sea bird. I am a land bird. I am the tree of Tolstoy” (Nijinsky [1968], 20). Nijinsky transcends the limits of identity fragmentation and thus enters an uncharted, non-recognizable schizophrenic space. These limits of identity fragmentation regarding the human face have been continuously tested by modern artists, such as Fernand Léger, Pablo Picasso, Joan Miró, Alberto Giacometti, Amedeo Modigliani, and many others. They were all aware of the fact that, if fragmentation transcends beyond a very fine line, the organic features of the face dissolve into abstract shards of form beyond any signifying capability, which was almost the case in Marcel Duchamp's famous 1912 painting “Nude Descending a Staircase.”

Consequently, in this context of culturally and, above all, economically induced aversions against forms of primary identity representation, it is almost a foundational poetological approach of modern literature to test the limits of fragmenting the face without destroying final vestiges of physiognomic signification for reasons mentioned above. The reader, in the light of successful modern novels that reflect this concept, is evidently attracted to a literary discourse that, with a ban on extensive images, is reduced to “rituals of the symbolic” (Kittler [1990], 248), as modern “[l]iterature [...] occupies, with creatures or noncreatures that can only be found in words, the margin left to it by the other media” (Kittler [1990], 250). It produces narrative figures that seemingly reflect existential conditions of the self in a continuous circular motion, pondering, speculating, endlessly questioning—figures that are exposed only to the rhetoric of paranoia and irony. As a result, after having established the limits of reduction, the general characteristics of the face as a linguistic image are only briefly touched upon in terms of a narrative fragment, an observation that grasps a few signifiers of a person comparable to a memory flashback, which exploits and communicates eccentricities and margins of the story.

In order to achieve this effect, a few sparse elements or rudiments of expression replace traditional features of the face. For example, the narrator in F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby* (1925) describes Tom Buchanan's characteristics with the words: “a rather hard mouth and a supercilious manner. Two shining, arrogant eyes had established dominance over his face and gave him the appearance of always leaning aggressively forward” (Fitzgerald [1991], 9). Somewhat later he introduces Miss Baker. “Her face was sad and lovely with bright things in it, bright eyes and a bright passionate mouth—but there was an excitement in her voice that men who had cared for her found

difficult to forget” (Fitzgerald [1991], 11). And the sketch of Mrs. Wilson: “Her face, above a spotted dress of dark blue *crêpe-de-chine*, contained no facet or gleam of beauty but there was an immediately perceptible vitality about her as if the nerves of her body were continually smouldering” (Fitzgerald [1991], 23).

The characteristics of the face are reduced to three isolated aspects, aggressiveness (Tom Buchanan), sadness and passion (Miss Baker), and vitality (Mrs. Wilson). They are communicated in terms of brief narratives, sparse image outlines reminiscent of momentary visual snap shots, unengaged, documenting, and fleeting. The tight linguistic economy of the images is almost comparable to the composition of cartoon characters as they portray a typology of social conditions along the lines of an effectively entertaining tale that is adverse to imagination and psychological depth or involvement. These portrayals are narrative glimpses composed for a moment of intimacy with the character that is not designed for a lasting effect. Considering economic demands of cultural expectations, these word sketches are to be consumed as entertainment and not imagined or reflected upon in preparation for the next image.

John Dos Passos and J. D. Salinger move even closer to the limits of fragmentation as they reduce the narrative of the face to an almost empty linguistic icon of identity and difference. As a result, the reader of Dos Passos’s *Manhattan Transfer* (1925) encounters numerous figures with only a few characteristics that do not add up to an imaginable face, such as “[t]he redhaired girl from the cloakroom,” the “moonfaced man” (Dos Passos [1953], 30), the “bottlenose” (32), the “longnosed Jewish boy” (42), and so forth. Even in cases when a few phrases or adjectives are added to the portrayal of a face, the description does not go beyond the absolute minimum. For instance, “[a] leanfaced young man with steel eyes and a thin highbridged nose sat in a swivel chair with his feet on his new mahogany-finish desk” (Dos Passos [1953], 49). Somewhat later, “Jimmy was blinking in the face of a tall cleanshaven man with gold eyeglasses” (88). Or Bud, when “[h]e was looking into the fire-blue eyes of a little yellow man who had a face like a toad, large mouth, protruding eyes and thick closecropped black hair” (Dos Passos [1953], 93), and so on. In the narrative space of Modernity, that is, a discursive situation in which writing, after having escaped its traditional representational function, re-writes itself in terms of a self-referential exposition, the portrayal of the face is not essential any more. In order to compose the linguistic image, a few scant markers suffice as in the case of William Holden, the narrator in Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951). Some examples should suffice: “She was a pretty nice girl, though” (Salinger [1951], 5); “She was around forty or forty-five, I guess, but she was very good-looking” (70); “I mean when she was talking and she got excited about something, her mouth sort of went in about fifty directions, her lips and all” (100); “I was surrounded by jerks. [...] At this other tiny table, right to my left, practically on *top* of me, there was this funny-looking guy and this funny-looking girl” (111). It is interesting to notice that the style of the narrator’s irreverent delivery overshadows all representational fragments of the written account, including the face. In Salinger’s story, the portrayal of the face neglects all physiognomic features. Interchangeable, unspecific, and without content, the images are close to the point of their own dissolution at the event horizon of imagination.

One of the most intriguing examples in literature that test the limits of fragmenting the human face and its identity can be found in the play *Die Lederköpfe* (Leatherheads), by the German dramatist Georg Kaiser (1928). In order to spy upon enemies, one of Basileus’s most devoted warriors, wishing to eradicate his former identity, disfigures his face in such a gruesome way that he has

to hide it under a leather cap. Pretending to change sides, he enters the enemy city and initiates its downfall. After his victory over the city and promotion to colonel, Basileus upon his earlier oath, intends to marry his daughter to the Leatherhead. But she accuses him of inhuman behaviour. By means of disfiguring his face, the daughter argues, along with his identity he has given up his humanity, and as such he has allowed himself to be corrupted and turned into a blind tool of destructive power. In the end the Leatherhead regrets his actions; however, since he cannot live on without a face, he permits Basileus to kill him and thus to stamp out his state of non-identity.

For reasons stated above, literature cannot function if the facial forms of its narrative characters are fragmented beyond recognition. Consequently, fragmentation as a narrative tool is most effective not when it is used to just disintegrate the linguistic image of the face into its varying signifying components, but when it re-integrates these components into new structures of meaning that were not available before. In other words, the narrative process of fragmentation and re-integration of the face takes place at the same time in a repeated and seemingly contradictory circular motion until the new structures of meaning, which fit perfectly into our age of mastermind image-makers, are satisfactory. Regarding the description of the face, the traditional production of identity and difference has collapsed. It has been replaced by a kaleidoscopic rearrangement of identity fragments out of which faces as linguistic images emerge and submerge in a continuous, infinite repetitive procedure without means of escape.

Thus, identity features of the modern face as a narrative image are only momentary configurations that are replaced with a different version of the same figure or of another. Often, they are brief and witty vignettes that serve the purpose of the moment, as for example in Henry Miller's *Sexus* (1949). "If Arthur Raymond had been a book," the narrator wonders regarding his noise-making ability, "I could have tossed him aside. But he was a river incarnate, and the bed through which he pulsed like a dynamo was but a few steps removed from the ledge in which we had carved a sheltering niche. Even in sleep the roar of his voice was present" (Miller [1959], 437). Or at the beginning of the novel, when the narrator meets Mara for the first time:

I was standing near the door when I spotted her crossing the car tracks under the elevated line; the sunlight filtered through the hideous structure in shafts of powdered gold. She had on a dotted Swiss dress which made her full figure seem even more opulent; the breeze blew lightly through her glossy black hair, teasing the heavy chalk-white face like spray dashing against a cliff. (Miller [1959], 36)

Even though Raymond and Mara have seemingly distinct characteristics, if one were to put all descriptive pieces of both of them together, two single integrated physiognomies would not emerge, but instead, comparable with Proust's *Albertine*, there would be a whole series of Raymonds and Maras with different fragmented aspects of identity. They come into sight as multiplicities of themselves and the identity fragments of their faces appear and disappear without a trace. From a historical point of view, the German poet Else Lasker-Schüler, in the context of her experiments with photography, was probably one of the first to recognize the artistic effects and expressive capabilities of the fragmented and reinvented or re-territorialized face as a linguistic image. For Deleuze and Guattari such a constructed face would represent a "partial object," a signifying linguistic icon of modern literary figures that have overcome traditional repressive forms of bourgeois identity to become "desiring nomads" or multiplicities in a constant, almost Heideggerian process of coming into being and transformation.

In this context, the process of fragmenting and reinventing the face, or of both collapsing the linguistic image of the face and restructuring it, of deterritorialization and continual reterritorialization, represents the schizophrenic structure of capitalism because both procedures take place at the same time. This theory of Deleuze and Guattari, however, if it is not understood as a mere metaphor for capitalism, is problematic: even in a clinical state of schizophrenia, identity transfer to different forms cannot take place at the same time but only consecutively. For example, Nijinsky in his mentally afflicted condition (see the quotation from his diary above) was not able to be a Negro and a Chinaman at the same time, but one after the other. Even if he had been both at the same time, he could not have expressed his state in language. In this perspective, the process of fragmenting and reinventing the modern face in literature must also be a consecutive process, even though this mechanism cannot be recognized in the text as such. One case in point, in “Wenn mein Herz gesund wär—Kinematographisches” (If Only My Heart Was Healthy—Cinematographic Reflections), Else Lasker-Schüler ([1998], vol. III, 267), with great irony, describes aviators: they look like birds; their noses are beaks; their heads are raised high up in the air; when she had dinner with one of them he attacked the meat like a hawk and the cutlet like a vulture. The reader cannot observe the process of fragmenting the physiognomy of a fictitious pilot. This process takes place in the author’s mind until the fragments are combined in such a way that they add up to a new structure of meaning, in the above case, the bird-like attitude and behaviour of aviators. A final physiognomic sketch from Miller’s *Sexus* is constructed the same way: “Costigan,” the narrator declares, “appealed to me in a strange way. He looked positively inert, a pimple-faced old sow with wiry bristles all over; he was so gentle, so tender, that if he had disguised himself as a woman you would never know that he was capable of shoving a guy against a wall and pummelling his brains out” (Miller [1959], 30). Neither the aviator nor Costigan represents the description of mental images of the authors. Above all, they are reinventions and transformations of possible physiognomies, of original identities, and a new way of seeing which results from the mental process of fragmenting visual and mental observations, reflections, and thoughts.

In conclusion, the cultural construction of the face of Modernity as a linguistic image is situated and kept in tension between two opposing forces. On the one side, we find the traditional procedures of describing the face as a literary portrait. On the other, we see the fragmentation of the traditional literary portrait into unrecognizable shards of meaning and signification. However, the process of constructing the modern literary face by means of fragmenting traditional images must avoid both sides because the first makes the production of new physiognomic meaning impossible as it can only repeat itself, and the second annihilates all meaning if the productive process of fragmentation transcends a certain limit. Avoiding both conditions that would, in the end, destroy the creative process, the modern literary face is seemingly trapped in between and left with only one escape, the continuous and incessant reinvention or transformation of itself into new images with new aspects of meaning. Seen from this angle, the cultural production of the modern face, at this point in time, represents a circular image making system of fragmentation, transformation, and generation. Images of faces come into being, they change, fade, disappear, and re-emerge to undergo the same motion again and again. In other words, the modern literary face can be described in terms of an image commodity, a product that has a restricted single function in a specific cultural situation before it is replaced by the next image-idea. As such, it continuously searches to reinvent itself, to change into an ever more desired article for the consumer of culture, overtly reflecting the demands and ideology of economy.

## Notes

1. “on distinguait mal son visage au nez busqué, aux yeux verts, sous un haut front entouré de cheveux blonds presque roux, coiffés à la Bressant” (Proust [1987], vol. I, 14).
2. “nous ne sommes pas un tout matériellement constitué, identique pour tout le monde [...] notre personnalité sociale est une création de la pensée des autres. Même l’acte si simple que nous appelons ‘voir une personne que nous connaissons’ est en partie un acte intellectuel. Nous remplissons l’apparence physique de l’être que nous voyons de toutes les notions que nous avons sur lui, et dans l’aspect total que nous nous représentons, ces notions ont certainement la plus grande part. Elles finissent par gonfler si parfaitement les joues, par suivre en une adhérence si exacte la ligne du nez, elles se mêlent si bien de nuancer la sonorité de la voix comme si celle-ci n’était qu’une transparente enveloppe, que chaque fois que nous voyons ce visage et que nous entendons cette voix, ce sont ces notions que nous retrouvons, que nous écoutons. Sans doute, dans le Swann qu’ils s’étaient constitué, mes parents avaient omis par ignorance de faire entrer une foule de particularités de sa vie mondaine qui étaient cause que d’autres personnes, quand elles étaient en sa présence, voyaient les élégances régner dans son visage et s’arrêter à son nez busqué comme à leur frontière naturelle; mais aussi ils avaient pu entasser dans ce visage désaffecté de son prestige, vacant et spacieux, au fond de ces yeux dépréciés, le vague et doux résidu — mi-mémoire, mi-oubli — des heures oisives passées ensemble après nos diners hebdomadaires, autour de la table de jeu ou au jardin, durant notre vie de bon voisinage campagnard” (Proust [1987], vol. I, 18–19).
3. “Les dernières applications de la photographie — qui couchant aux pieds d’une cathédrale toutes les maisons qui nous parurent si souvent, de près, Presque aussi hautes que les tours, font successivement manœuvrer comme un régiment, par files, en ordre dispersé, en masses serrées, les mêmes monuments, rapprochent l’une contre l’autre les deux colonnes de la Piazzetta tout à l’heure si distantes, éloignent la proche Salute et dans un fond pâle et dégradé réussissent à faire tenir un horizon immense sous l’arche d’un pont, dans l’embrasure d’une fenêtre, entre les feuilles d’un arbre situé au premier plan et d’un ton plus vigoureux, donnent successivement pour cadre à une même église les arcades de toutes les autres” (Proust [1987], vol. II, 660).
4. “D’abord au fur et à mesure que ma bouche commença à s’approcher des joues que mes regards lui avaient proposé d’embrasser, ceux-ci se déplaçant virent des joues nouvelles ; le cou, aperçu de plus près et comme à loupe, montra, dans ses gros grains, une robustesse qui modifia le caractère de la figure” (Proust [1987], vol. II, 660).
5. “Les dernières applications de la photographie [...] je ne vois que cela qui puisse, autant que le baiser, faire surgir de ce que nous croyions une chose à aspect défini, les cent autres choses qu’elle est tout aussi bien, puisque chacune est relative à une perspective non moins légitime. Bref, de même qu’à Balbec, Albertine m’avait souvent paru différente, maintenant [...], dans ce court trajet de mes lèvres vers sa joue, c’est dix Albertines que je vis ; cette seule jeune fille étant comme une déesse à plusieurs têtes, celle que j’avais vue en dernier, si je tentais de m’approcher d’elle, faisait place à une autre. Du moins tant que je ne l’avais pas touchée, cette tête, je la voyais, un léger parfum venait d’elle jusqu’à moi. Mais hélas ! — car pour le baiser, nos narines et nos yeux sont aussi mal placés que nos lèvres, mal faites — tout d’un coup, mes yeux cessèrent de voir, à son tour mon nez, s’écrasant, ne perçut plus aucune odeur, et sans connaître pour cela davantage le goût du rose désiré, j’appris, à ces détestables signes, qu’enfin j’étais en train d’embrasser la joue d’Albertine” (Proust [1987], vol. II, 660–1).
6. “À ma proposition, le visage souriant en rose d’Albertine, sous un toquet plat qui descendait très bas, jusqu’aux yeux, sembla hésiter” (Proust [1987], vol. II, 681).
7. “Ce sentiment me rappelait des aspects du visage d’Albertine, plus doux, moins gais, assez différents de ceux que m’eût évoqués le désir physique” (Proust [1987], vol. III, 179).
8. “Je la regardais, je regardais ce corps charmant, cette tête rose d’Albertine, dressant en face de moi l’énigme de ses intentions, la décision inconnue qui devait faire le bonheur ou le malheur de mon après-midi. C’était tout



un état d'âme, tout un avenir d'existence qui avait pris devant moi la forme allégorique et fatale d'une jeune fille" (Proust [1987], vol. III, 409).

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## Chapter 6

### Technology and Science

There is perhaps nothing extraordinary, in terms of themes and contents, about modernist interests in the great changes taking place in science and technology in the last quarter of the nineteenth and the early part of the twentieth century. This was also a relevant topic for realist writers who wanted to represent a changing world in their works. But in an aesthetic sphere that they also saw as radically changing, not least in its modes of representation and mediation, modernist writers were prone to register scientific and technological “progress” differently. “Making it new” did not necessarily mean the same in art and literature as it did in science and technology—but there are historically significant links between the two endeavors.

An important habit of thought that emerged in the modern world is the logic of double-entry bookkeeping, which requires that with every profitable entry (credit) a corresponding loss (debit) be shown—that the books must be balanced. **Stanley Corngold** argues that we can discover in modernist works a predictable resistance to the figure of bookkeeping. However, the functioning of this figure in early modern novels of Gide, Broch and especially Rilke’s *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* is surprisingly complex and shows the modernist style trying to contain the chaos of fragmentation according to the logic, however disturbing, of debit and credit, profit and loss.

Einstein and his theory of relativity are often seen as a synecdoche for the scientific discoveries that underlay the innovations of modern art, architecture and literature. **Linda Dalrymple Henderson** points out that there are serious flaws in this view. While interested physicists and others who followed the field closely may have known something of Einstein’s theories during the 1910s, the majority of laypersons had heard nothing of these developments until 1919. Looking beyond the brain of Einstein enables us to grasp modernism’s important debt to the succession of earlier scientific paradigms that stimulated the imaginations of artists and writers working near the turn of the twentieth century.

Much has been written about the impact of Freudian psychoanalysis on modernist literature, much less on the influence of its late nineteenth-century predecessors in the science of the mind. **Patricia Rae** considers this to be an unfortunate oversight because the “new psychology” emerging in the 1870s and 1880s had wide-ranging consequences for the way writers and artists conceived of themselves and their art. Of particular interest is the “empiricist” psychology of the times that had a significant impact on the way literary modernism viewed metaphysics.

The technological innovations introduced around 1900 combined with the philosophical fragmentation following World War I significantly shaped contemporary aesthetic developments.

**Julian Nelson** investigates how Thomas Mann's work, in particular, is a useful site for observing the interrelationships between the political and aesthetic dimensions of modernism. Like other modernist novels, Mann's *The Magic Mountain* is grounded on an epistemology of the fragment, but its illustration of the technologically mediated fragment and its relationship to ideology and subject formation offers valuable reflections on the way new technologies captivated the modernist imagination and increasingly shaped the way it perceived, negotiated and represented a changing world.

**Elena Lamberti's** article explores how the experimental works of modernist writers can be approached as heuristic tools that artists developed as they observed new scientific discoveries, new technologies, and new forms of communication. Symbolist and impressionist writers, imagists, futurists, James Joyce and Wyndham Lewis in particular, grasped some of the implications and psycho-sensorial dynamics associated with what later media theorists have defined as the passage from a *mechanic* to an *electric* age. An interdisciplinary approach that draws in part on Media Studies, therefore, completes, integrates and gives new insights to the more traditional methodologies applied to modernist studies.

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## Bookkeeping in the Modernist Novel

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As apparitional as sails that cross  
Some page of figures to be filed away;  
Hart Crane, "The Bridge" ([1986], 43)

"Art should have no more sex than mathematics," wrote Maxime Du Camp in 1863, meaning that art, like mathematics, must do without sex (Du Camp [1867], 30).<sup>1</sup> I should like to inflect this aperçu to mean that art must have no more sex than it must have mathematics and to point out that modernist writing—above all the modernist novel—has done as little without sex as it has done without mathematics. This is as it should be, surely, for Ulrich, the man without qualities, in Robert Musil's novel of the same name (begun in 1930). Throughout the "Parallel-Aktion" designing modernity, Ulrich is at work perfecting the idea of a General-Secretariat for Precision and Soul (Genauigkeit und Seele). Let "General Secretariat" be the code name for the modernist novel that is never too soulful or haughty not to enshrine the quantitative calculations it does on itself.

It is not unusual to be surprised by so computationally-inflected a passage as this from James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916):

[Stephen Dedalus] seemed to feel his soul in devotion pressing like fingers the keyboard of a great cash register and to see the amount of his purchase start forth immediately in heaven, not as a number but as a frail column of incense or as a slender flower. (Joyce [1993], 132)

A certain very crass precision is in play with soulfulness; the image speaks of a transformation of a number signifying cold cash into the gentle heat of incense or of a young flower. This mutation, which goes all one way, from the imagery of calculation to that of the sublime and the beautiful, could confirm the easy prejudice that in the world of the modernist novel, things go all this one way. But they do not, least of all in such a novel as Rainer Maria Rilke's *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* (The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge), which figures at the heart of this discussion. It is not as if the imagery of accounting, in its various modulations, were unsuited to convey key moments of the modernist art perspective.

The range of "accounting" metaphors I have begun with is admittedly wide. Higher mathematics à la Musil implies a different order of precision and soul from doing petty cash. In his earlier *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törless* (The Perplexities of the Pupil Törless) from 1906, which Musil wrote almost contemporaneously with Rilke's *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, you will not find cash register imagery on the mind of the exalted Törless: his calculations involve thinking through the square root of minus one. Advanced algebra is one thing; the amount of Stephen

Dedalus's purchase another—that is math in the demotic register. But in what follows, it is chiefly the lower registers of calculation that interest me, the arithmetic of bookkeeping. I mean to show that it is a discourse of totalization we should not despise or fail to note as conspicuous in works of modern fiction, philosophy, and criticism. That it should appear in an omnivorous modernist literature is accounted for by Hermann Broch, for one, in his "Historical Excursus" on the "Disintegration of Values" in *Die Schlafwandler* (The sleepwalkers) in 1931. Broch notes: "The two great rational ways of understanding [*Verständigungsmittel*] in modernity are the language of science in mathematics and the language of money in bookkeeping" (Broch [1994], 537–8).<sup>2</sup> I shall offer some prime instances of the latter.

Given the many striking images and arresting formulations in Walter Benjamin's essay "Goethes Wahlverwandschaften" (Goethe's Elective Affinities) from 1921, few readers would be inclined to tarry over the image and event lodged in the very first sentence, for its material content is merely implicit; one is eager to advance to the main truth of the sentence and to all the truths that follow. This revolutionary piece of critique begins: "The writings at hand on works of literature suggest that the minuteness of detail in such studies be reckoned more to the account of the interests of philology than of critique" (Benjamin [1996b], vol. I, 297).<sup>3</sup> The primacy of "critique," which seeks, after all, "the truth content of a work of art," is bound to be the dominant idea, for critique is as superior to philological commentary as its own intended product, flame, is superior to ash, the material substrate on which the commentator dwells. And yet, Benjamin adds, it is still with commentary, which addresses the material content of the work of art, that critique must begin.

Exactly this point might reactively sharpen our eye for the material substrate of that opening sentence; and here we suddenly become aware of a figure at work—not only the critic, not only the philologist and commentator, but the *Rechnungsführer*—the bookkeeper. For it is he who performs this beginning operation that concludes to the profit of critique. This reckoning requires the reader to enter into the proper ledger—that of philology—the cash-like proceeds, "the minuteness of detail," normally gained from study of the artwork. From this point on, however, beginning with Benjamin's essay, the many minute details extracted by the study of the artwork must be reckoned to another account, to that of critique.

This operation appears to be modeled on the logic of double-entry bookkeeping, which requires that with every profitable entry (credit) a corresponding loss (debit) be shown; the books must be balanced. And so, even if critique begins with philological commentary, to whose account the many minute details have traditionally been reckoned, something of this account must be debited, if the proceeds of this operation are ultimately to be reckoned to the account of critique. This point is neither explicitly made nor explicitly refuted by Benjamin but might be assumed to work on the strength of an assumed integrity of his bookkeeping image.

This accounting of accounting is neutral in the perspective of this narrator, but such is not always the case. It will come as no surprise to discover in other modernist works, along with this figure, a predictable resistance to it, as an imagery so "cold and severe," in Hölderlin's phrase, as to border on the reprehensibly inhuman. Yet such poetic images are necessary, continues Hölderlin, as a means of separating "man from his feeling world" when the intensity of inwardness threatens to overwhelm him (Hölderlin [1985], vol. XIII, 869). According to Erich Heller, Kafka subsequently deleted a number of such coldly calculating passages from the manuscript of *Das Schloß* (The Castle, 1926), as not in keeping with "the muted meaning of the book," for they are too explicit in

“indicting” K. (Heller [1974], 121). They would leave nothing, not even a suspicion, of the intensity of his inwardness, which seems damnably muted throughout. One such passage is contained in

the protocol about [... K.’s] life in the village which Momus has drawn up, and in which K. is accused of having made up to Frieda out of a ‘calculation of the lowest sort’: because he believed that in her he would win a mistress of Klamm’s and so possess ‘a pledge for which he can demand the highest price.’ On the margin of the protocol there was also ‘a childishly scrawled drawing, a man with a girl in his arms. The girl’s face was buried in the man’s chest, but the man, who was much the taller, was looking over the girl’s shoulders at a sheet of paper he had in his hands and on which he was joyfully inscribing some figures.’ (Heller [1974], 121–2)

It is plain that Heller considers such figuration of “figuring” as altogether jarring, not only in Kafka’s novel but, as in the inflected saying of Maxime Du Camp, in art as such. But the matter is more complicated in Kafka than Heller allows. Kafka is not Heideggerian in the way that Heller is; Kafka stands above such dogmatically polemical accounts of the metaphysics of calculation that run through Heidegger’s writing on technology. *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes* (The Origin of the Work of Art, 1935), for one, figures the work of art as a holding tension between “earth” and “world.” The term “earth” has a family resemblance to “nature”—the sensuous, material element; “world,” to “culture”—signifying practices—though this paraphrase does not mean to be exhaustive. The point of interest for us about “earth”—and hence, for the work of art, in which “earth” comes to light in its constitutive modality of secretiveness—is that it resists calculation and mensuration (Heidegger [1963a], 36).

Yet, even in this oeuvre, you will find exceptions to Heidegger’s comminatory view on calculation. His account of Nietzsche’s will to power ultimately rejects that category for failing to provide the right access to the question of Being; yet, the will to power is defined with care, even, or especially, as it involves a quantitative taking aim.

A note from 1887–88 states what Nietzsche means by value: “The standpoint of ‘value’ is the standpoint of conditions of preservation and enhancement for complex forms of relative life-duration within the flux of becoming” (Nietzsche [1968], 380). Heidegger continues:

The essence of value lies in its being a point-of-view. Value means that which is in view for a seeing that aims at something or that, as we say, reckons upon something and therewith must reckon with something else. Value stands in intimate relation to a so-much, to quantity and number. Hence values are related to a ‘numerical and mensural scale’ [...]. The question still remains: Upon what is the scale of increase and decrease, in its turn, grounded. (Heidegger [1977], 71)<sup>4</sup>

The thought is not remote from Kafka’s own, who declared an attachment to the quantitative mode as entirely “compatible” with higher concerns, values: “It is comforting to reflect that the disproportion of things in the world seems to be only arithmetical” (or: The disproportion in the world appears mercifully to be only quantitative) (Kafka [1954], 38).<sup>5</sup> For then that disproportion appears correctable, according to the (chimerical) logic of the balance sheet. Kafka’s relation to number, to calculation, is in fact polyvalent throughout his work.

K.’s figuring gesture, allegedly extirpated from *Das Schloß*, is drawn from one that Kafka could readily have seen—or, indeed, performed—in the “Hell of office life,” a Hell that continually penetrated the world of his fiction and from which only a fatal disease could separate him. One does not



have to look far in his work to find this gesture again. Kafka does not simply reject the mensurative imagery that Joseph K., for one, assigns to himself in saying that he had “always wanted to seize the world with twenty hands” (Kafka [1998], 228).<sup>6</sup> (To argue that the very language in which Joseph K. speaks to himself at the end is a laughably inexpugnable mark of his fallenness is possibly too severe.) Kafka’s plainest mythic expression of the faintly voluptuous Hell of official calculation, of sensuous alienation in a disenchanted world, might be “Poseidon,” named after the God who is seen seated at the bottom of the oceans “at his desk, going over the accounts” (Kafka [1971], 434).<sup>7</sup> He is unhappy, certainly, with his role as a quantifying administrator but equally unable to imagine anything else for himself. His attachment to his computations persists despite the fact that all this precision—he goes through his books twice, each time—has meant that his soul has never seen the seas themselves or “only fleetingly, during his hasty ascent to Olympus”: “He used to say that he was postponing this until the end of the world, for then there might come a quiet moment when, just before the end and having gone through the last account, he could still make a quick little tour” (Kafka [1971], 435).<sup>8</sup>

What is central is the tension between two notions of mastery of the whole: we could call them “sensate” and “arithmetical.” The first is conveyed by the imagery of a sight-seeing tour of the whole domain; the other by the final poring over the accounts—the first a “going around,” the second a “going over.” These notions do not tally. The first remains purely optative and ideal; the second pursues its end term by the neo-Kantian imperative of completing a series. The goal in the second instance is the method, but it gives no satisfaction.

The position that Poseidon occupies, as bookkeeper of the oceans, corresponds to the generalized function of bookkeeping that I am pursuing in the modernist novel: as the God Poseidon, he stands above his domain, the seas; but his power is exercised only through his role as administrator and accountant, as *part* of the apparatus. He is overseer of only his accountant’s ledger. To diminish (or in principle increase) the area of his competence would not be to make his accounting work any lighter (*nicht kleiner machen*) but only more or less petty (*kleinlicher*) (Kafka [1994], 130). It cannot totalize his domains. (An excellent discussion of this matter is found in Liska [1996]).

Such scenes of accounting run through Kafka’s diaries, which contain a notorious instance of double-entry bookkeeping as he struggles to decide for or against Felice, for or against marriage. Certainly, in another light, the method appalled him; that could be the reason for the crude entries in *Das Schloß* of which Heller speaks. But, on the other hand, it also appears to be unavoidable as, however deficient, it becomes a generally pervasive mode of modern totalization.

Once we have an eye open for this figure, it is difficult not to note its ubiquitousness. The business of bookkeeping, of doing accounts, could be held to be the soul of nineteenth-century bourgeois life and literature, everything that modernism subverted in the last decades of that century, especially in Germany, where a major novel of Gustav Freytag’s is entitled *Soll und Haben* (Debit and Credit, 1855). Yet this notion turns out to be more than an embellishment in a variety of major early modern works, including—besides Musil and, above all, Rilke—Gide’s *L’immoraliste* (The Immoralist, 1902), and Broch’s *The Sleepwalkers*. More than a trope for what must be destroyed, it has in each case a vital allegorical function, an operation that the mind is helpless *not* to perform in the matter of moral accounting and helpless not to rue in performing it.

In the second half of this essay I shall look more closely at the functioning of this figure in early modern novels of Gide and Broch and, most importantly, Rilke’s *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids*

*Brigge*. The career of Gide's hero Michel in *The Immoralist* suggests a passage from an archaic-sounding authenticity of insight and feeling to a high sunlit lucidity to a mad degradation that seeks the night. This pattern corresponds in form to the theory of history he narrates in the early days, before his breakthrough, as a professor of classical languages at the University of Paris. Each of these stages has its enabling scene: the first is Biskra, in Algeria, at the oasis; the second, at La Morinière in Normandy; the third Syracuse, in Sicily, at night, on the docks. But what is most striking for my purpose is the manner in which Michel formulates his project at the peak of his lucidity. During the weeks of amazement at the temperate richness of the Normandy lands, he lets himself go "in a dream of lands where every force should be so regulated, all expenditure so compensated, all exchanges so strict, that the slightest waste would be appreciable," whereupon he applies his "dream to life, imagining a code of ethics that should institute the scientific and perfect utilization of a man's self by a controlling intelligence" (Gide [1958], 61).<sup>9</sup> One could note that Dorothy Bussy's translated word "appreciable" corresponds only to Gide's word "sensible"—that is, "to what is noticeable." The translation is actually less apt than it might have seemed for formulating paradoxes of how *waste* could in fact "appreciate" in value: it does not in Michel's dream, but it does in Rilke's *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, via Malte's complicity with the "outcasts [*die Fortgeworfenen*] [...] who are not just beggars; no, [...] they are human *trash*" (Rilke [1983], 40, emphasis added).

Michel dreams that a system of aesthetic and erotic satisfaction could give rise to an ethics. Features of this dream will possess modern writers, especially those zones "where every force should be so regulated, all expenditure so compensated, all exchanges so strict, that the slightest waste would be appreciable" (Gide [1958], 61).<sup>9</sup> But one will wonder, always, how good the fit is, between an ethical code and scientific bookkeeping that aims to regulate sexual sensation.

And so does this work wonder. Here is the climax of Michel's system:

Look! I have here a number of white pebbles. I let them soak in the shade, then hold them in the hollow of my hand and wait until their soothing coolness is exhausted. Then I begin once more, changing the pebbles and putting back those that have lost their coolness to soak in the shade again. [...] Time passes and the evening comes on. (Gide [1958], 146)<sup>10</sup>

*The Immoralist* celebrates this connection of ideas and concludes with a travesty of reckoning. Reckoning persists, but the dream of perfect bookkeeping ends in a nightmare: white stones here, dark stones there. This is the anamorphic condensation of tourism, accounting, sexual sensation, and the very little that is left of an ethical code.

In Hermann Broch's 1929 novel *Esch oder die Anarchie* (Esch the Anarchist), the second volume of *The Sleepwalkers*, the image of ethical bookkeeping surfaces in both its topical and functional character. August Esch, the eponymous hero, is a bookkeeper who gets fired on registering that his boss has been cooking the books. A hero of conscience—though a lamed one—Esch is maddened by the deception but cannot manage to report the crime. In the course of his wanderings he visits a variety show, where an inarticulate woman, said to be Hungarian, allows knives to be thrown at her; her virtual martyrdom makes a lasting impression on him. Next, Esch visits a political rally, which leads to a trumped-up charge made against a friend of his, Martin, a meek Socialist agitator, who goes to jail for it. This injustice rankles in Esch; it vexes the "solid and legitimate bookkeeping of his soul" (*die solide und rechtliche Buchhaltung seiner Seele*) (Broch [1994], 199) and, again,

“the upright bookkeeping of his soul” (*die rechtschaffene Buchhaltung seiner Seele*) (Broch [1994], 266). Thereafter, Esch visits a Salvation Army rally, where he is struck by talk of “redemption” (*Erlösung*) (Broch [1994], 219). From this point on, the novel consists importantly of extended, agonized meditations on Esch’s part on how to square the world’s accounts, either by some form of self-inflicted martyrdom (conforming to “a logic of sacrifice” and thus including marriage) or by the punishment of the guilty (part of a more nearly rational settling of accounts). The tangled plot could lead one to conclude, along with Esch, that accounts have indeed been settled—Esch gets married—but the novel actually ends thus: “He realized that it was purely coincidental if the addition of the columns tallied” (Broch [1994], 380). This is indeed what the hero of Bernhard Schlink’s *Der Vorleser* (The Reader, 2000), will call “rationalizing it [...], making my desire an entry in a strange moral accounting” (Schlink [1998], 19).<sup>11</sup>

It is clear that this important research program is hardly accomplished with these mentions: our work has not been done by pointing up traces of higher math and lower math, pure and applied math, in various modernist novels. It is surely not a matter, here, of identifying a theme—counting—or a faculty—the quantitative imagination—but rather of determining the precise function of this “discourse” in each canonical case. So far, I have roughly speaking marked out several ways in which the figure of doing accounts is itself figured. In Benjamin, it is employed neutrally; in Heidegger, for the most part, and Heller, it is set down to provoke dismissal. In Gide, Rilke, Kafka, and Broch it is meant to convey and enact both legitimate and impotent impulses of the moral imagination.

What has *Esch the Anarchist* to do with any possible reading of Rilke’s great prose work *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*? Though Broch’s novel was written some twenty years later, it can articulate reflexively what one can see as Rilke’s concern with figuring, and then flying off from various pseudo-systems of exchange that strive to operate “without appreciable loss.” (Why I write pseudo-systems, orderings only suggestive of systems—rather than systems proper—is something I hope to make clear.) At one moment, indeed, Rilke literally employs the diction of bookkeeping, saying, in a grand set piece, that unlike the few facts genuinely at our disposal, our “conjectures” (*Vermutungen*) and “insights” (*Einsichten*) are only “subsequently” (*nachträglich*) added on to empirical experience: they are *mirabile dictu* “supplements,” supplied only afterwards, as something “belated, as payment in arrears.” Like entries in a ledger, they are registered after the factual experience of what they are about, they are there to settle accounts, “balance-sheets” (*Abschlüsse*), nothing more. “Right afterward,” Rilke continues, “a new page begins, with a completely different account, and no total carried forward” (Rilke [1983], 176),<sup>12</sup> meaning, presumably, that when the facts of the case (experience) are again encountered, they are encountered as if for the first time. Facts and insights do not tally; thought yields no appreciable profit.

What I am proposing now is that we see this diction of bookkeeping as organizing not only “the few facts” but whole pseudo-systems of fact as shown in the novel. Bookkeeping is the master trope comprehending entire orders of exchange. Various systems, which seem true until they are refuted, are themselves entered into the “ledger” of this book, in the hope that the profit of each might balance out the losses of each such order of exchange preceding it. The concept of bookkeeping, as the master-system, exceeds that of each particular pseudo-system or displayed instance of systematic rationality. In *Malte* these pseudo-systems are types of rhetorical, theological, economic, and sexual exchange, to wit: (1) a pseudo-system of chiasmic exchanges of the predicates of things, culminating in a set piece on Ibsen alluding to *The Wild Duck*, *Ghosts*, and *Brand*; (2) the theological

structure of belief illustrated in the tapestries at Cluny by the relations of virgin, unicorn, and mirror; (3) the pseudo-system of time-banking, experimented with by Nicolai Kuzmitsch; and, finally, (4) the exemplary figure for the logic of sacrifice—the empty jewel case—that follows the account of women who loved and were abandoned. Each of these particular orders contains elements and processes that figure in double-entry bookkeeping, but this is secondary to the fact that the essential bookkeeping of the novel is a registering and appraising of entire systems. It is this structure that best articulates the spatial form of this novel, “striated” by Rilke’s views on pseudo-systems of exchange; let us see what such an optic yields.

The effort to hold the pieces of this novel together in their disorder; to fit them into a structure of correspondences or exchanges; to intuit in these some manner of progress (addition) or heightening (multiplication)—this is the task laid on the reader apprenticed to Malte. This novel *is* Malte’s attempt, his encyclopedic attempt, to produce images of all possible economies, to do bookkeeping—to keep alive in his notebooks the idea of the Book, the symbolic system par excellence—at each stage, to register, under the pressure of consequential thought, the dissolution of any “total visualization” (*vollzählige Versichtbarung*) of a systematic whole (Rilke [1983], 240); and then to struggle to think on past its dissolution by introducing yet another order of exchange meaning to contain this moment of extinction as one of its moments: this is the entelechy informing Malte’s experience and also his style from the outset.

The longed-for idea of wholeness is projected in an early vignette. Like a painter Malte composes the scene of a day when everything is luminous:

Everything is simplified, brought onto a few correct, clear planes, like the face in a Manet portrait. And nothing is trivial or superfluous [...]: everything is in harmony, has value, everything takes part and forms a plenitude in which there is nothing lacking. (Rilke [1983], 18)<sup>13</sup>

Rilke’s word for plenitude, “Vollzähligkeit,” means a “numerical completeness,” which allows one promptly to contrast this scene with Rilke’s account of the book as a whole, in the famous letter to Gräfin Manon zu Solms-Laubach of 11 April 1910: “What *Malte* amounts to is in no wise a numerical completeness [*Vollzähligkeit*]” (Rilke [1974], 82).<sup>14</sup> Pictures of such longed-for wholeness rise up for a moment, for example: “In [those who are lovers] the mystery has become inviolate; they cry it out whole, like nightingales; it is no longer divided” (Rilke [1983], 235),<sup>15</sup> until the image of wholeness, additionally evolved, passes away.

This evocation of such wholeness is dramatically arresting in every way, especially as Malte begins from a zero-point, not even as a subject but as Rilke has it, a thoroughfare of sensations. The words that Malte applies in the second half of the novel (dense with references to world-historical personalities, to imposter kings and bereft lovers)—especially the words that Malte applies to the chaos of fourteenth-century Burgundy—stand threateningly over his project, continually: “All men attempted both the thing and its opposite. All men canceled themselves out; there was no such thing as action” (Rilke [1983], 229).<sup>16</sup> But this must not be the case.

When was it ever not the case? It was especially not so in Paris on 11 September, at the outset of the novel, which frames the fragmenting of sensation; the profusion of ties; of bodies with detachable faces, like gloves; of cripples and beggars, syncopes and eczemas, torn-open apartments, clanging streetcars, shouts on the stairs. Indeed, Malte drags himself off to La Salpêtrière for electrical shock-treatment, homeopathic cure of shock by shock, for a version of “that other interpretation”

(*die andere Auslegung*)—here, an electrical one—which he longs for and fears (Rilke [1983], 52). There will not be an easy gift of wholeness in experience.

But a countertendency is already at work toward purposeful exchange in the way this fragment-*edness* is figured. If pieces of things are flying about everywhere, then so are their placeholders, their names; in the rhetorical scene, all predicates of things, names included, are also flying about pell-mell, offering the poet a marvelous opportunity of recombination and exchange—and of self-defense.

Streets are then redolent with “iodoform, the grease of pommes frites, fear” too (Rilke [1983], 4).<sup>17</sup> Some Things in Malte’s Notebooks are “drowsy, absent-minded” (Rilke [1983], 11) and others “listless and negligent” (Rilke [1983], 183).<sup>18</sup> Malte sees a house peculiarly blind from cataracts (*eigentümlich starblind*) (Rilke [1983], 4). Steven Mitchell’s translation actually avoids the radicalness of Rilke’s metaphor; he translates this phrase as “a house that was peculiarly blind, as if from a cataract”; but there is no “as if” in the German: this house *has* cataracts. This play with the humanization/reification/hybridization of predicates becomes dizzying, it puts a torque on everything: “From the open windows, the air of the previous night crept out with a bad conscience” (Rilke [1983], 65)—this is “übernächtigte Luft,” air that has been up too late the night before.<sup>19</sup> “Rooms abandoned [Malte],” (“ließen ihn im Stich” better, “left him in the lurch”) “as soon as things went wrong” (Rilke [1983], 165). Malte’s proud, reclusive grandmother Brigge, who has missed out on a brilliant life, fights off the feeling of regret: “She had taken all this so deeply inside herself and had covered it with shells, many hard, brilliant, slightly metallic shells, and the layer that was for the moment on top always looked cool and new” (Rilke [1983], 121).<sup>20</sup>

Sometimes unexpected predicates pop up from beneath the shells and run wild, lecherously wild:

How well I now understand those strange pictures in which Things meant for limited and ordinary uses stretch out and stroke one another, lewd and curious, quivering in the random lechery of distraction. Those kettles that walk around steaming, those pistons that start to think, and the indolent funnel that squeezes into a hole for its pleasure. And already, tossed up by the jealous void, and among them, there are arms and legs, and faces that warmly vomit onto them, and windy buttocks that offer them satisfaction. (Rilke [1983], 184)<sup>21</sup>

This is the modernist version of the spousal verses that Wordsworth wanted to sing upon the marriage of mind and nature!

There is a source—indicated in the novel—to legitimate this crossing-over of predicates across inner and outer worlds, attractive as gesturing toward a world-design in which both would be as if hemispheres of a single cosmic bowl (this is Rilke’s figure for an antique vision of things as a whole), inspiring, too, Musil’s famous trope in his ceremonial speech on the occasion of Rilke’s death: “For the sensibility of this great poet everything is metaphor [*Gleichnis*]. Types of beings [*Wesensgattungen*] separated in ordinary thought seem to unite in a single sphere. The qualities of individuals [*Eigenschaften*] become the qualities of everything [*Aller-schaften*]” (Musil [1955], 893).<sup>22</sup> The main source of legitimacy in the novel for the procedure of chiasm is a description of the work of “that obstinate man” Ibsen, who,

because [he was] a revealer, a timelessly tragic poet, [...] had to transform this capillary action [of ‘life drawn back inside us’] all at once into the most convincing gestures, into the most available forms. So

[he] began that unprecedented act of violence in [his] work, which, more and more impatiently, desperately, sought equivalents in the visible world for what [he] had seen inside. (Rilke [1983], 83)<sup>23</sup>

The equivalencing occurs in literary language, as the so-called concrete qualities of things are exchanged for the abstract qualities of inwardness — and the reverse!

How are we to read the resulting constructions in principle: the street-smell of *Angst*, the kettles and pistons, all the Things vexed to lechery and distraction? These constructions are not random: they mean to reconnect the truths of hemispheres that have wandered apart. They are offered in this work with prideful dexterity and fluency like rhymes — like “Dasein-rhymes”; they force on the reader — and Malte — the awareness of a life’s work in language that needs to be done, or of something in language that still might be found, another order of treasure entirely; they point to the sphere that Benjamin at around the same time, in 1914, in an essay on Hölderlin, calls “the poetized” (*das Gedichtete*), the sphere of what has been poetically concentrated into a deep economy before or beyond empirical perception, figuring simultaneously as what in every case precedes the poem, the venture of naming the world anew, and what is effectuated by the poem: something, in Benjamin, Platonic, in the sense of pre-existing experience, and something Kantian in the sense of proposing the limit-ideal of an endless but purposeful task of systematizing an order of concepts (Benjamin [1996a], vol. I, 18).

And so the assumption of a metaphorical way, however frenzied or accelerated in its production of crossovers and exchanges (so that if *Angst* can be smelled [the inner is outer], rooms, too, can be “inside” you [the outer is the inner], sucking out of you any distinctive images of them you might have). This concrete-metaphorical way of seeing is one of the more stubborn strategies aiming at a totality that captivates Malte even when its failure has been forecast in the Ibsen piece. Malte’s description of Ibsen proceeds:

There was a rabbit there [of what velleity, I ask, would a rabbit be the equivalent?], an attic, a room where someone was pacing back and forth; there was a clatter of glass in a nearby bedroom, a fire outside the windows; there was the sun. There was a church, and a rock-strewn valley that was like a church. But this wasn’t enough: finally towers had to come in and whole mountain-ranges; and the avalanches that bury landscapes spilled onto a stage overwhelmed with what is tangible, for the sake of what cannot be grasped. Then you [Ibsen] could do no more. The two ends, which you had bent together until they touched, sprang apart; your demented strength escaped from the flexible wand, and your work was as if it had never existed. (Rilke [1983], 83)<sup>24</sup>

Now, such single-tier structures consisting of a field of equivalents and chiasmic metaphorical constructions may be, or may point toward, “wholes,” but, for a number of reasons, they are not yet systems, as Rilke himself teaches, for he has a highly developed instinct for higher-order systems. Consider, for example, his analysis of “noise,” “the sound made by any round tin object”! The passage reads:

Well, that is the whole story: some such tin object fell in the next room, rolled, lay motionless, and as this was going on, at certain intervals, someone stamped on the floor. Like all noises formed by repetition, this one too had its internal organization; it went through a whole gamut of inflections and was never exactly the same. But this was precisely what confirmed its regularity. It could be violent or gentle or melancholy; it could furiously rush to its conclusion, or glide along for what seemed like an eternity. And the final vibration was always a surprise. (Rilke [1983], 177)<sup>25</sup>

These factors speak for a system: the repetition of an action at regular intervals on the strength of its internal organization (*innerliche Organisation*)—an action never self-identical (*es war niemals genau dasselbe*), arising in variant forms (*Abwandlungen*), according to a legitimate regularity (*Gesetzmäßigkeit*). These are elements of a primer of generically modern systems-theory, leaving out, so far (as Luhmann's work developed), the involved presence of the cognizing observer. But Rilke has not failed to take this function into account, and so he adds:

And now both of them together [lid and can] form the concept 'can,' or more accurately, 'round can,' a simple, very familiar concept. I seem to remember them standing on the mantelpiece, these two parts that make up the can. Yes, they are even standing in front of the mirror, so that behind it a second can appears, an imaginary one that is indistinguishable from the first. A can which we consider absolutely worthless, but which a monkey, for example, would try to grab. In fact, there would even be two monkeys grabbing for it, since the monkey itself would be doubled as soon as it got to the edge of the mantelpiece. (Rilke [1983], 182)<sup>26</sup>

There is your cognizing observer in duplicate. But this is an atypically parodic dissolving away of the scientific presuppositions of the system.

This is as much of a demonstration of systems posited and then dissolved in *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* as I shall be able to offer within the word constraints of this essay. But I shall remind the reader of at least three other paradigmatic systems of correspondence and exchange proposed in the novel before they, too, are "written off" as insights or as only apparent profits before the enterprise of totalizing begins again. These are the theological system of the tapestries at Cluny; Kusmitsch's system of time-banking; and the sacrificial logic of the empty jewel case. The manner in which this final deconstruction works is exemplary because it returns to the rhetorical pseudo-system of the outset, as it explicitly refigures the failure of the chiasmic exchange of predicates.

In the figure of the jewel case it is the fate of a systematic exchange of stresses and relentings that is once again at stake. That stake is a profitable outcome. Doing art theory and doing accounts—aesthetics and bookkeeping—here concretely intersect: in the relation of mind and thing, which is to have the primacy, which is owed to which, which is to be credited and which debited? The chiasm tropes the movement by which entries are shunted back and forth across the bar of their division, like items entered into the debit column and then transferred with a change of sign into the credit column. This is at the same time the logic of the metaphor, which indebts the vehicle to the tenor. The jewel-case passage reads:

I still remember exactly how, one day long ago, at home, I found a jewel-case; it was two handbreadths large, fan-shaped, with a border of flowers stamped into the dark-green morocco. I opened it: it was empty. I can say this now after so many years. But at that time, when I had opened it, I saw only what its emptiness consisted of: velvet, a small mound of light-colored, no longer fresh velvet; and the jewel-groove which, empty and brighter by just a trace of melancholy, vanished into it. For a moment this was bearable. But to those who, as women who are loved, remain behind, it is perhaps always like this. (Rilke [1983], 236–7)<sup>27</sup>

This will not do (and will not have done) as poetry; and here the passage performs a superior deconstruction. It returns the negative picture of beloved women who remain behind to the system of reversals that we saw constructing the novel from the start. It identifies the aestheticizing descrip-

tion of the jewel-case groove as the obstacle to an objectless love; and in so doing, it destroys the rhetorical engine—the accounting engine—that has chiefly constructed the art-character of this novel: the dexterous exchange of qualities between the soul and things. This language of the groove is an obstacle to truthful speaking—flagrantly beautiful, chiastic in its logic, and altogether lewd, like one of those distracted, lecherous kettles or funnels that human beings have abused. But then the turn: “It was empty: I can say this now.” The path of the lover lies open: this is the clearest distillate of Malte’s knowledge—that there are no equivalents for longing.

Soon thereafter the novel concludes. None of Malte’s systems has worked, if the task of each was to produce a profit from the sum of its parts, from pieces of lived experience. Each system regulates its items, yet none of its accounts adds up. Each system figures as one entry in the moral accounting that drives the novel (the path of this modern *Bildung* is arithmetical). Yet each such project of relating particulars with a view to their totalization fails, and education consists in acknowledging this defeat. The sort of system that bookkeeping is meant to figure—Life—“unalterable [...], infinite and unsayable”—exceeds in its complexity the pseudo-system that bookkeeping is and whose single-tier structures are replicated in each of the different pseudo-systematic entries it comprises (Rilke [1983], 133).<sup>28</sup> Such structures—even if “double-entered” as themselves consisting of a list of compatible “entries” chiastically projecting equivalents under a reversed sign across the bar of the debit/credit division—may point toward systematic wholes but, as I have said, are themselves not systems. The distinction between one-tier arithmetical pseudo-systems and two-tier autonomous systems is one made eloquently by Nietzsche in conceiving of “the world” as a

monster of energy [Ungeheuer von Kraft], without beginning, without end; a firm, iron magnitude of force that does not grow bigger or smaller, that does not expend itself but only transforms itself; as a whole, of unalterable size, a household without expenses or losses, but likewise without increase or income. (Nietzsche [1968], 550)<sup>29</sup> (For a book-length discussion of this aphorism consult Pearson and Morgan [2000]).

And what, now, would victory look like? It is hard for Rilke, as it is hard for the modernist novel, and the modernist reader, to conceive. If ever we were to have a set of books that did indeed “add up” everything, the question would still remain of how such an addition could be complete without including the very activity of the bookkeeper—bookkeeping—among its entries. “This remainder, however, cannot be integrated, partly because the very act of bookkeeping—in this case the writing, and the text itself—remains” (Liska [1996], 1). We could offer an account of the shortcomings of each of the pseudo-systems in turn, as well as the master image that would record them. Yet as models of *bookkeeping*, it continues to remain haunting to recall that this anaphoric trope for the method of the whole—in *Malte Laurids Brigge*, as in other canonical modernist writings—is the literal figure of double-entry *bookkeeping*.

A final proviso as to its necessity: the discourse of bookkeeping is at once the index of a modernist style, as it colligates fragments or citations according to a logic of profit and loss. As a style it responds to the modernist’s sense of the world as of manifold types of sensation in tense, obscure relation with one another, assailed by a “meta-world of [...] decentered, multi-dimensionally, fluctuating energies [...] involving leaps, jerks, gaps, irregularities, and discontinuities” (Sheppard [1993], 14), the whole “threatening to run out of control” (Sheppard [1993], 18). If modernist aesthetics begins with the fragment, the jump, the broken line, which it valorizes, then



the re-appropriation of the metaphor of bookkeeping reads like a rearguard action to keep track of such disparate items before they fly off into chaos. One distinctive mode of containment is to enter them into the ledgers of memory according to the logic, however disturbing, of debit and credit, profit and loss.

## Notes

1. "L'art ne doit pas avoir plus de sexe que les mathématiques" (Du Camp [1867], 30).
2. "Die beiden großen rationalen Verständigungsmittel der Moderne [sind] die Sprache der Wissenschaft in der Mathematik und die Sprache des Geldes in der Buchhaltung" (Broch [1994], 537-38).
3. "Die vorliegende Literatur über Dichtungen legt es nahe, Ausführlichkeit in dergleichen Untersuchungen mehr auf Rechnung eines philologischen als eines kritischen Interesses zu setzen" (Benjamin [1972a], 125).
4. "Der Gesichtspunkt des 'Werts' ist der Gesichtspunkt von Erhaltungs-, Steigerungs-Bedingungen in Hinsicht auf komplexe Gebilde von relativer Dauer des Lebens innerhalb des Werdens. Das Wesen des Wertes beruht darin, Gesichtspunkt zu sein. Der Wert meint solches, was ins Auge gefaßt ist. Wert bedeutet den Augenpunkt für ein Sehen, das es auf etwas absieht, oder, wie wir sagen, auf etwas rechnet und dabei mit anderem rechnen muß. Wert steht im inneren Bezug zu einem Soviel, zu Quantum und Zahl. Werte sind daher (W.z.M.A. 710. a. d. J. 1888) auf eine 'Zahl- und Maß-Skala' bezogen. Die Frage bleibt noch, worauf sich die Skala der Steigerung und Minderung ihrerseits gründet" (Heidegger [1963b], 210).
5. "Das Mißverhältnis der Welt scheint tröstlicherweise nur ein zahlenmäßiges zu sein" (Kafka [1953], 43).
6. "Ich wollte immer mit zwanzig Händen in die Welt hineinfahren und überdies zu einem nicht zu billigenden Zweck" (Kafka [1990], 308).
7. "Poseidon saß an seinem Arbeitstisch und rechnete" (Kafka [1994], 130).
8. "So hatte er die Meere kaum gesehn, nur flüchtig beim eiligen Aufstieg zum Olypm, und niemals wirklich durchfahren. Er pflegte zu sagen, er warte damit bis zum Weltuntergang, dann werde sich wohl noch ein stiller Augenblick ergeben, wo er knapp vor dem Ende nach Durchsicht der letzten Rechnung noch schnell eine kleine Rundfahrt werde machen können" (Kafka [1994], 131).
9. "Et je me laissais rêver à telles terres où toutes forces fussent si bien réglées, toutes dépenses si compensées, tous échanges si stricts, que le moindre déchet devînt sensible; puis, appliquant mon rêve à la vie, je me construisais une éthique qui devenait une science de la parfaite utilisation de soi par une intelligente contrainte" (Gide [1957], 84).
10. "J'ai là, voyez, des cailloux blancs que je laisse tremper à l'ombre, puis que je tiens longtemps dans le creux de ma main, jusqu'à ce qu'en soit épuisée la calmante fraîcheur acquise. Alors je recommence, alternant les cailloux, remettant à tremper ceux dont la fraîcheur est tarie. Du temps s'y passe, et vient le soir" (Gide [1957], 186).
11. "So habe ich damals vernünftelt, aus meiner Begierde den Posten eines seltsamen moralischen Kalküls gemacht" (Schlink [1997], 21).
12. "Ich merkte, wie einfach und erleichternd sie [die Tatsachen] waren, den Vermutungen gegenüber. Als ob ich nicht gewußt hätte, daß alle unsere Einsichten nachträglich sind, Abschlüsse, nichts weiter. Gleich dahinter fängt eine neue Seite an mit etwas ganz anderem, ohne Übertrag" (Rilke [1966], 270-71).
13. "Alles ist vereinfacht, auf einige richtige helle plans gebracht wie das Gesicht in einem Manetschen Bildnis. Und nichts ist gering und überflüssig [...] : alles stimmt, gilt, nimmt teil und bildet eine Vollzähligkeit, in der nichts fehlt" (Rilke [1966], 122-23).
14. "was nun das Buch [Malte] ausmacht, ist durchaus nichts Vollzähliges" (Rilke [1974], 82).
15. "In [den Liebenden] ist das Geheimnis heil geworden, sie schreien es im Ganzen aus wie Nachtigallen, es hat keine Teile" (Rilke [1966], 324).

16. "Alle versuchten das Teil und das Gegenteil. Alle hoben sich auf, Handlung war keine" (Rilke [1966], 319).
17. "es roch nach [...] Jodoform, nach dem Fett von pommes frites, nach Angst" (Rilke [1966], 109).
18. "geistesabwesenden, verschlafenen Dinge" (Rilke [1966], 116); "sie werden unlustig und nachlässig" (Rilke [1966], 277).
19. "Aus den offenen Fenstern kroch mit schlechtem Gewissen die übernachtigte Luft" (Rilke [1966], 168).
20. "Sie hatte alles dies so weit in sich hineingenommen und hatte darüber Schalen angesetzt, viele, spröde, ein wenig metallisch glänzende Schalen, deren jeweilig oberste sich neu und kühl ausnahm" (Rilke [1966], 220).
21. "Wie begreif ich jetzt die wunderlichen Bilder, darinnen Dinge von beschränkten und regelmäßigen Gebrauchen sich ausspannen und sich lüstern und neugierig aneinander versuchen, zuckend in der ungefähren Unzucht der Zerstreuung. Diese Kessel, die kochend herumgehen, diese Kolben, die auf Gedanken kommen, und die müßigen Trichter, die sich in ein Loch drängen zu ihrem Vergnügen. Und da sind auch schon, vom eifersüchtigen Nichts heraufgeworfen, Gliedmaßen und Glieder unter ihnen und Gesichter, die warm in sie hineinvomieren, und blasende Gesäße, die ihnen den Gefallen tun" (Rilke [1966], 278).
22. "Man kann sagen: im Gefühl dieses großen Dichters ist alles Gleichnis, und — nichts mehr nur Gleichnis. Die vom gewöhnlichen Denken getrennten Sphäre der Wesensgattungen scheinen sich zu einer einigen Sphäre zu vereinen. [...] Die Eigenschaften werden zu Allerschaften" (Musil [1955], 893).
23. "So wie du warst, auf das Zeigen angelegt, ein zeitlos tragischer Dichter, mußt du diese Kapillare mit einem Schlag umsetzen in die überzeugendsten Gebärden, in die vorhandensten Dinge. Da gingst du an die beispiellose Gewaltat deines Werkes, das immer ungeduldiger, immer verzweifelter unter dem Sichtbaren nach den Äquivalenten suchte für das innen Geschehene" (Rilke [1966], 185).
24. "Da war ein Kaninchen, ein Bodenraum, ein Saal, in dem einer auf und nieder geht: da war ein Glasklirren im Nebenzimmer, ein Brand vor den Fenstern, da war die Sonne. Da war eine Kirche und ein Felsental, das einer Kirche glich. Aber das reichte nicht aus; schließlich mußten die Türme herein und die ganzen Gebrige; und die Lawinen, die die Landschaften begraben, verschütteten die mit Griefbarem überladene Bühne um des Unfaßlichen willen. Da konntst du nicht mehr. Die beiden Enden, die du zusammengebogen hattest, schnellten auseinander; deine Wahnsinnige Kraft entsprang aus dem elastischen Stab, und dein Werk war wie nicht" (Rilke [1966], 185).
25. "Nun also: das ist das Ganze; so ein blecherner Gegenstand fiel nebenan, rollte, blieb liegen, und dazwischen, in gewissen Abständen, stampfte es. Wie alle Geräusche, die sich wiederholt durchsetzen, hatte auch dieses sich innerlich organisiert; es wandelte sich ab, es war niemals genau dasselbe. Aber gerade das sprach für seine Gesetzmäßigkeit" (Rilke [1966], 272).
26. "Und nun bilden die beiden zusammen den Begriff Büchse, runde Büchse, genau ausgedrückt, einen einfachen, sehr bekannten Begriff. Mir ist, als entsänne ich mich, daß sie auf dem Kamin stehn, die beiden, die die Büchse ausmachen. Ja, sie stehn sogar vor dem Spiegel, so daß dahinter noch eine Büchse entsteht, eine täuschend ähnliche, imaginäre. Eine Büchse, auf die wir gar keinen Wert legen, nach der aber zum Beispiel ein Affe greifen würde. Richtig, es würden sogar zwei Affen danach greifen, denn auch der Affe wäre doppelt, sobald er auf dem Kaminrand ankäme" (Rilke [1966], 276).
27. "Ich weiß noch genau, einmal, vorzeiten, zuhaus, fand ich ein Schmucketui; es war zwei Hände groß, fächerförmig mit einem eingepreßten Blumenrand im dunkelgrünen Saffian. Ich schlug es auf; es war leer. Das kann ich nun sagen nach so langer Zeit. Aber damals, da ich es geöffnet hatte, sah ich nur, woraus diese Leere bestand: aus Samt, aus einem kleinen Hügel lichten, nicht mehr frischen Samtes; aus der Schmuckrille, die, um eine Spur Wehmut heller, leer, darin verlief. Einen Augenblick war das auszuhalten. Aber vor denen, die als Geliebte zurückbleiben, ist es vielleicht immer so" (Rilke [1966], 325).
28. "Das unabänderliche Leben [...] in seiner unendlichen Unsäglichkeit" (Rilke [1966], 232).
29. "ein Ungeheuer von Kraft, ohne Anfang, ohne Ende, eine feste, eherne Größe von Kraft, welche nicht

größer, nicht kleiner wird, die sich nicht verbraucht sondern nur verwandelt, als Ganzes unveränderlich groß, ein Haushalt ohne Ausgaben und Einbußen, aber ebenso ohne Zuwachs, ohne Einnahmen" (Nietzsche [1988], 610).

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## Modernism and Science

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Roland Barthes's *Mythologies* essay "The Brain of Einstein," written after Albert Einstein's death in 1955, points out the way in which the scientist's brain had come to function as a metonymical sign for his genius. In addition, the formula  $E=mc^2$  had become the cipher of Relativity Theory and, hence, the secrets of the universe (Barthes [1972], 68–70). By 1972, a similar myth-making was already appearing in writing on modernism, in which Einstein and Relativity would become a synecdoche for all of the science that underlay the innovations of modern art, architecture, and literature. Perhaps a bit of quantum physics had intervened here and there, but Einstein and Relativity, along with Freud in psychology, were the pillars on which modernism was built. New concepts of space and of time (fused as "space-time"), the equivalence of matter and energy, and, generally, a new relativism—this was said to be the science that had stimulated the growth of modernist expression.

There are serious flaws in this view, however. While interested physicists and others who followed the field closely may have known something of Einstein's theories during the 1910s, the majority of laypersons had heard nothing of these developments until 1919, when one of the theoretical predictions of Relativity Theory was confirmed during an eclipse of the sun. Only then did Einstein become a celebrity and his theories receive the popularization that would make them fodder for subsequent artists and writers. Unfortunately for scholars of modernism, the concentration on Einstein has kept them from exploring fully the science that actually dominated the public's worldview in the first two decades of the century and that served as the stimulus for much of the creative invention of early modernism. Indeed, the radical paradigm shift produced by the acceptance and popularization of Relativity Theory stands as one more factor (in addition to, for instance, World War I) that divided modernism into the two distinct phases that Michael Levenson has posited. To such assertions by Levenson as "modernism was individualist before it was anti-individualist," we could add that modernism was grounded in late classical ether physics before it responded to Einstein (Levenson [1984], 79; see also Clarke [1996], 4–5).

The phrase "late classical ether physics," however, hardly suggests the exhilarating effect of science on culture through a succession of scientific developments in this period, beginning with Heinrich Hertz's confirmation of the existence of electromagnetic waves in 1888 and, especially, Wilhelm Conrad Röntgen's discovery of the X-ray in 1895. Compared to the subsequent postwar era of Einstein and quantum physics, when a single hermetic equation and the brain of one scientist signaled a realm of erudite knowledge closed to the average person, science in the first two decades of the century was still readily accessible to the layperson. The key elements—even if invisible—could still be visualized, and popular science writing, including texts by major scientists

themselves, flourished in all manner of periodicals (for a broad sampling of this popular literature, see Henderson [1998]). Certain discoveries, such as the X-ray or the Hertzian wave, also supported new technologies that were transforming daily life. Rather than *space-time*, the words that abounded in science-related writing and modernist texts in this period are terms such as *invisible*, *energy*, *ether*, *vibration*, and *fourth dimension*. And in the science and technology or geometry from which these words derive (along with the philosophy of Henri Bergson), can be found a fundamental reorientation of ideas of space, time, energy, and matter as well as recognition of the relativity of knowledge and of perception, all predating public awareness of Einstein and Relativity.

The primary focus of this essay is the science of the era of early modernism—Symbolism through the end of World War I, since far less scholarly work has been done on this period. Nonetheless, the question of the engagement of modernists with Einsteinian Relativity and, to a lesser degree, with quantum physics (which never received the popular press of Relativity or atomic physics in general) is also central to any discussion of modernism and science and is thus addressed briefly below. Developments in physics were the central determinants of the radically changed sense of the external world in the first half of the century and are thus my main subject. Another essay could be written on modern artists' and writers' responses to biology and related fields, including evolutionary theory. For example, Larson (2005) makes a close study of the Symbolist Odilon Redon's response to microbiology and related fields, and Gamwell (2002) provides a more general overview of the impact of Darwinism, geology, and organic form (as well as other fields of science) on modern artists. Although the field of biology is not treated here, note should be made of the importance to modernism of progress in fields such as neurobiology—primarily the pioneering work on the structure of the brain by Santiago Ramón y Cajal, codified as the "neuron doctrine," or Gertrude Stein's own study of neuroanatomy at Johns Hopkins University (see Everdell [1997], 100–15; Otis [2000], Meyer [2001]). Along with the emergence of Freudian psychology (as well as the pre-Freudian study of the unconscious mind), the scientific study of brain function made clear that, just as physics was revealing a more complex conception of the external world, the perceiving self was also a far more complicated entity than previously considered (see, for example, Ellenberger [1970]). In fact, the discussion of physics here recovers the context for Freud himself, giving new resonance to statements such as his assertion in *Die Traumdeutung* (The Interpretation of Dreams) from 1900, that the unconscious, "the true psychological reality," "is just as imperfectly communicated to us by the data of consciousness as is the external world by the reports of our sense organs" (Freud [1938], 510).

### The Invisible Forms and Energies of Early Modernism

The invisible is a persistent theme in much writing of the late 1890s through World War I, whether in popular culture or in the most erudite literature and art. As Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia, a member of avant-garde circles in prewar Paris and wartime New York, recalled, "[i]t would seem [...] that in every field, a principal direction of the 20th century was the attempt to capture the 'nonperceptible'" (Buffet-Picabia [1951], 225). The existence of invisible phenomena that might be intuited by the sensitive artist or poet was already a staple of Symbolist theory, supported by the later nineteenth-century revival of idealist philosophies, a general openness to mysticism and occultism in the period, and the growing dissatisfaction with positivism's reliance on sense data alone. In 1895,

however, everything changed with Röntgen's discovery of the X-ray. An invisible world beyond human perception was no longer a matter of mystical or philosophical speculation, but was now established empirically by science.

Röntgen detected the mysterious new rays he termed *X-rays* in November 1895, in the course of his research on the stream of "cathode rays" that flowed from one end to the other of a Crookes tube, the electrified glass vacuum tube developed by the English chemist Sir William Crookes in the 1870s (for the science discussed in this section, see, for example, Keller [1983], or Henderson [1998]). Cathode rays produced fluorescent effects where they struck the glass wall of the tube or other objects within the tube, yet were unable to penetrate the glass wall itself. In 1895, there was still considerable debate about the nature of cathode rays, although it was subsequently confirmed that they were streams of negatively charged particles (the electrons that J. J. Thomson would identify in 1897). When Röntgen applied current to his tube and a barium platinocyanide screen lying across the laboratory began to fluoresce, he deduced that the cathode rays striking the tube wall were generating a new kind of radiation. Although it would be established experimentally only in 1912, a number of scientists, including Röntgen himself, ultimately came to believe that X-rays were electromagnetic waves like visible light, but vibrating at a much higher frequency. Röntgen's tests of the invisible rays' ability to expose a photographic plate with an object placed in front of it revealed the characteristic that would capture the public's imagination: the new rays passed through a variety of organic and inorganic materials of different depths and densities leaving a "shadow" on the plate.

Röntgen's publication of his findings at the end of December 1895 triggered the most immediate and widespread reaction to a scientific discovery before the mid-twentieth-century explosion of the first atomic bomb. The ability to see through clothing and flesh to the skeleton offered a startling new view of living beings. X-rays made solid matter transparent, revealing previously invisible forms and suggesting a new, more fluid relationship of those forms to the space around them. That lesson was not lost on Cubist and Futurist painters, who adopted a similar transparency and fluidity in their approach to form. "Who can still believe in the opacity of bodies?" the Italian Futurist painter Umberto Boccioni queried in his "Technical Manifesto of Futurist Painting" of April 1910. "Why should we forget in our creations the doubled power of our sight, capable of giving results analogous to those of the X-rays," he continued, making the first published reference to X-rays by any artist (Boccioni [1973], 28). For modern writers X-rays offered both a new motif, as in Hans Castorp's embrace of the "X-ray portrait" of Claudia Chauchat's chest in Thomas Mann's *Der Zauberberg* (The Magic Mountain) of 1924, and a model for vision that penetrates surfaces to reveal the invisible, as in August Strindberg's 1907 *Ghost Sonata* (Mann [1969], 218, 348). Strindberg, who was deeply involved with both occultism and science, believed his own experiments in photographing the invisible preempted Röntgen's discovery (Greenway [1991], 38–41). In H. G. Wells's inventive extension of contemporary science, Griffin, the anti-hero of *The Invisible Man*, uses "a sort of etheral vibration [...] no, not these Roentgen vibrations" to achieve the same index of refraction of the air (Wells [1897], 153).

The extrasensory reality revealed by X-rays pointed to an even more fundamental lesson of Röntgen's experiments, however: the inadequacy of human sense perception. Popular articles announcing the discovery bore titles such as "The World Beyond Our Senses" or "Professor Roentgen's Discovery and the Invisible World Around Us" and often included diagrams charting the much greater ranges of invisible radiations surrounding the narrow band of visible light perceptible to the



human eye. As identified fully in later years, the electromagnetic spectrum extends from gamma rays through X-rays, ultraviolet, visible light, infrared and microwaves to radio waves or the Hertzian waves supporting the then-new wireless telegraphy, with wavelengths ranging from 1 billionth of a meter for X-rays, 1 millionth of a meter for visible light, and one meter to a kilometer for radio waves.

In his *L'Inconnu* (The unknown) of 1900, the astronomer Camille Flammarion argued that X-rays were one more proof that “sensation and reality are two different things”:

The late discovery of the Röntgen rays, so inconceivable and so strange in its origins, ought to convince us how very small is the field of our usual observations [...] This is indeed a most eloquent example in favor of the axiom: it is unscientific to assert that realities are stopped by the limit of our knowledge and observation. (Flammarion [1901], 11, 14)

Confidence in the solidity and stability of matter was further challenged by Henri Becquerel's initial detection of radioactivity in 1896, Thomson's identification of the electron in 1897, and Pierre and Marie Curie's isolation of two new radioactive elements, polonium and radium, in 1898. It was the high-profile activity of the Curies, along with Ernest Rutherford's formulation of the theory of radioactive decay in 1902–03, that brought radioactivity to the attention of the general public. Now, in addition to X-rays, there were new, invisible alpha, beta, and gamma “rays” (actually alpha and beta particles, not rays) being emitted by radioactive materials. Moreover, in the process of producing the new emissions, radioactive substances were actually changing their chemical composition and releasing energy, suggesting an alchemy-like transformation. In fact, alchemy became a standard theme in popular discussions of radioactivity, abetted by the alchemy-oriented writings of chemist Frederic Soddy, Rutherford's collaborator, to whom Wells dedicated *The World Set Free: A Story of Mankind* in 1913. Wells was responding to the dominant theme in the literature on radioactivity: the prospect of an unlimited source of future energy that might counter the pessimistic nineteenth-century predictions of a coming thermodynamic “heat death” of the universe, an issue both he and Flammarion had engaged in earlier novels (see Schenkel [2001] and Clarke [2001]).

Radioactivity was one of the energies that inspired the new aesthetic Ezra Pound described in 1913: “We might come to believe that the thing that matters in art is a sort of energy, something more or less like electricity or radioactivity, a force transfusing, welding, and unifying” (Pound [1954a], 49). Similarly, on the model of the Curies's refining of a ton of pitchblende to produce a decigram of pure radium, Mina Loy wrote of Gertrude Stein in 1924: “Curie / of the laboratory / She crushed / the tonnage / of consciousness / congealed to phrases / to extract / a radium of the word” (Loy [1996], 94; see also Curie [1904], 463). Although radioactivity likewise focused the attention of modern artists on energy per se, its most immediate impact on visual artists was its demonstration that matter was literally dematerializing. Anyone could observe this effect directly, using a spinthariscopes, the tiny cylindrical instrument invented by Crookes, in which flashes of light on a zinc-sulphide screen within registered the impact of invisible alpha particles from a speck of radium. Since it was widely believed in this period that all matter might be radioactive, the scintillating, discrete brushstrokes of color filling the space of Cubist and Futurist paintings can be read as atoms of matter dematerializing into energy.

The primary spokesman for the notion of universal radioactivity and the dematerialization of *all* matter was Gustave Le Bon, French scientific popularizer, friend of Henri Poincaré, and author of

*Psychologie des foules* (Psychology of the crowd) from 1896. Based on his own experiments and the research of others, Le Bon argued that matter was only “a stable form of intra-atomic energy” in the gradual process of decaying back into the ether (Le Bon [1905], 9). Well before the public had ever heard of  $E=mc^2$ , readers encountered Le Bon’s equating of matter and energy in his best-selling books *L’Evolution de la matière* (The Evolution of Matter) in 1905, and *L’Evolution des forces* (The Evolution of Forces) in 1908. Le Bon was also a friend of the philosopher Henri Bergson, and his theories were often cited by contemporaries as providing scientific support for Bergson’s conception of reality as constant flux. In his 1896 *Matière et Mémoire* (Matter and Memory), for example, Bergson had argued that “all division of matter into independent bodies with absolutely determined outlines is an artificial division” (Bergson [1911], 259).

The fundamental reconception of matter produced by radioactivity was augmented by research on the structure of the atom and its relation to the incredibly minute, high-speed electrons Thomson had identified. Electrons, already identified as the component of cathode rays, were also proven to constitute the beta particles given off by radioactive substances. In 1911, Rutherford would confirm experimentally the basic planetary model of the atom, clarifying at the same time the small size of the nucleus in relation to its electron orbits and, hence, the relatively large amount of space within the atom itself. The widely publicized work of Rutherford and the Curies as well as Jean Perrin’s experimental confirmation of the existence of the atom in 1909, kept the invisible world of subatomic particles and the atom in the news through the prewar years.

Le Bon spoke of matter dissolving into the surrounding ether, but there was also widespread speculation in the nineteenth and early twentieth century that matter itself might be born of the mysterious ether, the matrix of late classical ether physics. Just as ideas of matter had changed radically, space in this period was never thought of as empty. Instead, it was filled with the “luminiferous ether,” an imponderable substance thought to suffuse all space and vibrate as the vehicle that could transmit light and the other newly identified invisible electromagnetic waves. Although the term *space* regularly implied *ether of space* in the early twentieth century, the ether is a major gap in scholars’ understanding of the scientific context of early modernism. Beyond the brief summary here, Donald Benson’s essay “Facts and Fictions in Scientific Discourse: The Case of the Ether” provides a superb analysis of this scientific hypothesis rooted in the commitment of nineteenth-century physicists to a model of continuity in nature. According to Benson, while among scientists the ether “was described and measured” and “widely taken for a fact,” it also “bore even more basic marks of a fiction: it was an imaginative construct, derived in significant part by metaphor and analogy, and taken for a fiction by some scientists (including certain of those who, paradoxically, also took it for a fact)” (Benson [1984], 837).

Historians of science and of culture in general often treat Einstein’s 1905 Special Theory of Relativity (if not the failure of the 1887 Michelson-Morley experiment to detect the “ether-drag” of the earth) as the death knell of the ether. However, the public heard only in 1919 of Einstein’s pronouncement that the ether had no mechanical properties and, hence, was of no use for measuring the earth’s relative motion through it; to do so was, in fact, to attempt to measure absolute motion, as I will further discuss in the final section of this article. Even with the triumph of Relativity Theory sans ether, the concept possessed such a powerful grip on the popular imagination that it lasted well beyond Einstein’s emergence as a culture hero, abetted by a number of champions such as the widely published Sir Oliver Lodge. Much later, Thomas Pynchon’s narrator in *Gravity’s Rainbow*,

speaking of an analogous “Aether” of time, captured something of the deep-seated appeal of the ether of space as a figure of connection: “But an Aether sea to bear us world-to-world might bring us back a continuity, show us a kinder universe, more easygoing” (Pynchon [1973], 847).

The concept of a world-filling “aether” can be traced back to Aristotle and also appears in the work of both Descartes and Newton. However, it was in the 1820s that Augustin Jean Fresnel first proposed the “luminiferous ether” as the necessary vehicle for the propagation of light in his new wave theory, and the idea was well accepted by the 1830s. By the late 1850s, James Clerk Maxwell and William Thomson (Lord Kelvin) had concluded that strains and motions in such a material ether were also the source of electromagnetic fields and, perhaps, the source of matter itself (see, for example, Harman [1982] and Hunt [2002]). Early conceptions of the invisible, impalpable ether ranged from a thin elastic jelly to a swirling fluid. Kelvin proposed in the 1860s that atoms might be whirling vortex rings in the ether, like smoke rings, providing Pound later with a model for the vortex in a Vorticism deeply indebted to electromagnetic theory and the theme of energy (Bell [1981], 163; Kayman [1986], 66–109).

The characteristics of the ether seemed curiously contradictory, since it required both rigidity to transmit waves and extreme permeability. According to William Shenstone, writing in a 1905 issue of *Cornhill Magazine*,

[w]e must conceive this bewildering substance as filling all space, permeating the inmost recesses of matter, solid, liquid, and gaseous (for in its absence how could these transmit light and other electromagnetic disturbances?), rigid, as I have said, as steel, and yet permitting material particles like grains of sand or the earth to flow through it. (Shenstone [1905], 205)

Robert Kennedy Duncan, in his popular book *The New Knowledge* (1905), emphasized the all-pervading nature of the ether—from interstellar space to “our own bodies”: “All lie not only encompassed in it but soaking in it as a sponge lies soaked in water. How much we ourselves are matter and how much ether is, in these days, a very moot question” (Duncan [1905], 5).

Developing further the view of the ether as the very source of matter, Lodge and others in the 1890s had propounded an “electric theory of matter,” grounded in the electron and its interaction with the ether, which was widely discussed in the early years of the century (Lodge [1904]). For the abstract art pioneer Wassily Kandinsky, writing in *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* (On the spiritual in art) in 1911, the “electron theory—i.e., the theory of moving electricity, which is supposed completely to replace matter” was a crucial blow to materialism, pointing toward a future era of greater spirituality (Kandinsky [1973], 40).<sup>1</sup> Boccioni likewise cited the “electric theory of matter” and, embracing ethereal continuity, attempted to dematerialize matter and give form to the ether in his paintings and sculptures, such as his 1913 *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* (Boccioni [1914], 105; Henderson [2002], 133–8). For modern artists and writers as well as the general public, the ether signified a realm of continuous cohesion and diffusion, materialization and dematerialization, coursed through by forces and vibrating waves. Lodge would have struck a responsive chord with many modernists in his 1909 book *The Ether of Space*, where he quoted Maxwell’s assertion that the universe is so “full of this wonderful medium [...] that no human power can remove it from the smallest portion of space, or produce the slightest flaw in its infinite continuity” (Lodge [1909], 105).

In 1908, the French poet Jules Romains celebrated the experience of immersion in a vibrating, energy-filled ether in *La Vie Unanime* (Unanimist life). The section of the poem titled “Dynamism,”

which also speaks of “rays that cannot be seen to vibrate,” begins with a telling epigram and continues:

*The present vibrates.*

At the top of the boulevard the human dusk

Crystallizes in an electric arc. A thin noise

Wiggles. The current/crowd, which struggles to pass through

And gets hooked on the hedges of molecules, bleeds.

The ripples of ether part, jumping up and down with excitement. (Romains [1913], 79)<sup>2</sup>

Ten years earlier, in 1898, Joseph Conrad had also responded to the ether and its intimate relation to matter, writing in a letter of X-rays and the idea of “*all matter* being only the thing of inconceivable tenuity through which the various vibrations of waves (electricity, heat, sound, and light etc.) are propagated, thus giving birth to our sensations—then emotions—then thought” (Conrad [1962], 143). Benson has, in fact, argued that the immaterial cosmos of such Conrad novels as *Lord Jim* (1900) may well be grounded in the new ether physics (see Benson [1991]). In the same year that Romains published *La Vie Unanime*, 1908, the scientist J. J. Thomson poetically summed up the era’s belief in the ether as the suprasensible source for phenomena in the visible world: “The invisible universe—the ether—is to a large extent the workshop of the material universe and [...] the phenomena of nature as we see them are fabrics woven in the looms of this unseen universe” (cited in Benson [1984], 837).

If a number of artists and writers responded to the ether-matter intersection, the most overt impact of the ether on modernist invention was by means of the vibrating Hertzian waves of wireless telegraphy. Guglielmo Marconi’s commercial development of wireless telegraphy in the later 1890s drew upon the work of scientists such as Lodge and the American émigré engineer Nikola Tesla with the “electrical radiations” whose existence Hertz had first confirmed in 1888. By means of these lower frequency electromagnetic waves, generated by a spark discharge in an oscillating primary circuit, Hertz had succeeded in creating a resonant oscillating current and resultant spark in a secondary circuit across his laboratory. This was the basic principle of wireless, spark telegraphy, based on the waves that would come to be known as radio waves when the transmission of voice later became possible. In the years before World War I, however, wireless telegraphy usually operated with the signals of the Morse code. It was these signals, broadcast from the Eiffel Tower in Paris, that united France and the rest of the world on a single time system in 1913 and that symbolized a newly cohesive, simultaneous modern world.

As Stephen Kern has established, wireless telegraphy fundamentally altered the layperson’s conceptions of time and distance in the early twentieth century (see Kern [1983]). In tandem with the new emphasis on private, psychological time in the philosophy of Bergson, the transformation of public time via the near-instant communication of wireless telegraphy stands as a reconception of time paralleling the reformulations of notions of space, matter, and energy already discussed and, likewise, preceding the popularization of Relativity Theory. The problem of the synchronization of clocks by means of both wired and wireless telegraphy had, in fact, been an important stimulus for Einstein’s own thinking about time (see Galison [2003]). The coming of the automobile and aviation introduced an analogous new experience of speed, dynamism, and simultaneity, celebrated

particularly by the Italian Futurists. Nonetheless, as Boccioni's statements noted earlier attest, the Futurists were attuned not only to new technologies but also to the science that lay behind them. Indeed, for all of the writers and artists attracted to wireless telegraphy, it was not an isolated technological development, but rather part of an electromagnetic worldview that recognized a variety of natural phenomena as rooted in vibrating waves differing only in their frequency.

Poets responded to wireless telegraphy both as a subject and as a new model for their literary craft. Futurism's founder F. T. Marinetti proclaimed in a 1912 manifesto the Futurists' invention of "wireless imagination" or the use of words without the connecting wires of syntax (Marinetti [1972], 89). Guillaume Apollinaire answered the Futurists' typographical experiments in his first visual poem, "Lettre-Océan," (Ocean Letter) published in June 1914. On each of its two pages, the Eiffel Tower is at the center, with words radiating outward like Hertzian waves from the Tower's *télégraphie sans fils* installation (Apollinaire [1914], 340–1). In wireless telegraphy Pound found an effective, new metaphor for poetic creation and communication. In April 1912, he defined the poet as "on the watch for new emotions, new vibrations sensible to faculties as yet ill understood" and subsequently translated his model to radio, describing poets and artists as the "antennae of the race" (Pound [1973], 331; Pound [1954b], 58).

Pound's fundamental interest in vibrations is paralleled in the art and theories of Marcel Duchamp and his older colleague the Czech painter František Kupka, as well as Kandinsky. Rejecting traditional artistic techniques, Duchamp used glass panels and a variety of laboratory-like materials to fabricate his masterwork *The Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)* between 1915 and 1923, which was based on notes he had begun to make in 1912. Duchamp's notes testify to his engagement with a wide range of scientific fields, including electromagnetism, in order to create the techno-scientific allegory of quest he referred to as his "painting of frequency" (Duchamp [1973], 25). Wireless telegraphy and wave-borne communication are central to the work, in which an ethereal, four-dimensional Bride above controls the activities of the desiring, three-dimensional, gravity-bound Bachelor Apparatus below by means of her "splendid vibrations" (Duchamp [1973], 42). Duchamp was keenly alert to the sexual overtones of much electrical language as well as to the possibilities for humor and punning offered in the new vocabularies of science and technology. In the latter pursuit he followed two critical literary mentors, the writers Alfred Jarry and Raymond Roussel, who likewise had found in contemporary ether physics and, particularly, electricity and electromagnetism, sources for their creative invention (see Henderson [1998], 47–57).

Although Kupka had originally conceived of his paintings as revelations of the invisible akin to an X-ray plate, by 1913 he had adopted the model of wireless telegraphy and the artist as an emitter of vibratory thought waves. He considered his totally abstract panels of 1912 onward to be "exteriorizations" of images from the artist's mind that could, in turn, generate similar vibrations in the mind of a viewer via waves of colored light. Kandinsky's goal of producing a sympathetic vibration or *Klang* in the soul of a viewer of one of his highly colored, amorphous canvases is somewhat better known. Beyond his engagement with musical sound vibrations and synaesthesia, Kandinsky drew support from the model of vibratory thought transfer based on wireless telegraphy (for Kupka and Kandinsky, see Henderson [2002]). However, like Pound's notion of the poet "on the watch for vibrations as yet ill understood," Kupka and Kandinsky had converted the wireless telegraphy model into one of human-to-human vibratory communication. Kupka, Kandinsky and Pound were

hardly alone in this period in their interest in thought transfer from brain to brain via ether vibrations. Grounded in contemporary science, these three individuals—as well as Boccioni and a variety of other modernists including Strindberg—were either actively involved with occultism or open to certain of its claims (see, among others, Los Angeles County Museum [1986] and Surette [1993]). In the later twentieth century we have lost sight of the fluid interpenetration of science and occultism in this period preoccupied with invisible realities. The mystical tradition, too, was not necessarily seen as antithetical to the world of science, which, as in the case of Kandinsky, seemed to provide strong evidence for anti-materialist transcendence.

James McFarlane's 1976 essay on "The Mind of Modernism" rightly pointed up the interest among modernists in the "debatable phenomena" being investigated by the Society for Psychical Research in this period (McFarlane [1976], 75). Although the issue of occultism has not been discussed until this point in this essay, it was implicit in what has gone before. Flammarion, Crookes, and Lodge, who have been cited here as voices of science were, in fact, all deeply interested in aspects of the occult and were associated with the Society for Psychical Research, as was the philosopher Bergson. When such a prominent astronomer, chemist, and physicist as these three, respectively, speculated publicly about unknown worlds not yet comprehended by science, it is little wonder that occultism and science could appear to be simply alternate routes for investigating the invisible unknown. Not surprisingly, just as advocates of alchemy seized upon radioactivity for support, similar connections were regularly made between X-rays and both spirit photographs and clairvoyance, electromagnetism and the practice of Magnetism or Mesmerism, and telegraphy and telepathy. Both the ether and the concept of vibration also had longstanding histories in mystical and occult traditions. For example, Madame Blavatsky discussed the ether extensively in her 1877 book *Isis Unveiled*, identifying it with the *anima mundi* or "world-soul" and a variety of other occult concepts as well as the latest science (Blavatsky [1877], vol. I, 129–30, 134).

Flammarion, Crookes, and Lodge were all interested in the implications of ether vibrations for the phenomenon of telepathy. In his 1897 presidential address before the Society for Psychical Research, Crookes provided a table of wave vibrations in the ether, frequently reproduced in this period, ranging from sound waves [not electromagnetic] through the very rapidly vibrating X-rays, with various steps of unknown vibrations in between and at each end (Crookes [1901], 200). In the penetrating X-ray Crookes believed he had found a possible model for telepathic "brain waves" and declared confidently in his 1898 presidential address before the British Association for the Advancement of Science, that "[e]ther vibrations have powers and attributes equal to any demand—even to the transmission of thought" (Crookes [1899], 31). For occultists the vibration model also suggested that sensitive individuals might expand their receptivity to include larger ranges of vibrations, offering the possibility of clairvoyance as well as telepathy: "If we had other cords to our lyre, ten, one hundred, or a thousand, the harmony of nature would be transmitted to us more complete than it is now, by making these cords all feel the influence of vibrations," Flammarion argued in *L'Inconnu* (Flammarion [1901], 12).

The best-known product of this period's confidence in the possibility of direct thought transfer is the 1901 book *Thought-Forms* by the Theosophists Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater. However, it is but one example in a much larger body of literature, including works such as *L'Ame humaine* (The Human Soul) of 1896, by the French photographer Hippolyte Baraduc, whom Besant and Leadbeater cite as their scientific support (Besant and Leadbeater [1905], 13–14). Like Baraduc, Colonel

Albert de Rochas embraced Baron von Reichenbach's practice of Magnetism based on "Odic" force and updated it with the latest developments in electromagnetism, reprinting scientific writings by Lodge and others in the extensive appendices to his books such as *L'Extériorisation de la sensibilité* (The Exteriorization of Sensibility) of 1895. Both Kupka and Kandinsky relied on such sources in theorizing the vibratory communicative powers of their paintings. And in literature, D. H. Lawrence embraced a similar "telepathic vitalism," grounded in the tradition of Magnetism and the contemporary ether, advising his friend Mabel Dodge Luhan to "put a new ripple in the ether" (Clarke [2001], 188, 190).

Just as the ether lent itself readily to occult applications, so, too, did a fourth dimension of space, the final concept that forms a part of the popular scientific worldview in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The idea that physical space might have four or more dimensions grew out of the  $n$ -dimensional geometries developed in the first half of the nineteenth century and first came to public attention in the 1870s (for this history, see Henderson [1983]). The thought-provoking notion that our three-dimensional world might be merely the section of a suprasensible, four-dimensional existence was first widely popularized in E. A. Abbott's *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions by a Square* (1884), a cautionary tale of a two-dimensional world's refusal to admit the possibility of higher dimensional space. Connected quickly to idealist philosophies rooted in Plato and Kant, the fourth dimension was discussed in terms ranging from the purely geometrical to a metaphoric association with infinity and the sublime (see Henderson [1986]). The international fascination with a possible fourth dimension of space from the 1890s into the early 1920s is registered in the immense amount of popular literature on the subject, including a 1909 essay contest sponsored by *Scientific American* that received entries from around the world (Manning [1910]). However, that popularity might never have occurred, had not the 1895 discovery of the X-ray established the inadequacy of human sense perception. After 1895 who could argue with any certainty that an invisible fourth dimension did not exist?

References to a fourth dimension appear in the writings of modern artists in almost every major movement between 1908 and 1930: Cubists, Duchamp, and Kupka in Paris, Italian Futurists, Russian Futurists as well as Suprematists and Constructivists, Dutch De Stijl artists, László Moholy-Nagy of the Bauhaus, Dadaists and Surrealists, and American artists in the Alfred Stieglitz and Walter Arensberg circles as well as with the designer Buckminster Fuller. For writers of science fiction, such a "paraspace" was a natural stimulus, and Wells utilized a spatial fourth dimension in a number of his tales. By contrast, Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895), with its focus on a temporal fourth dimension, was almost unique in this period in extending the eighteenth-century notion that time could be considered as a dimension. Although the fourth dimension was less prevalent in other genres of modern literature, writers such as Stein, Pound, D. H. Lawrence, James Joyce, Andrei Belyi, and Jorge Luis Borges also responded to the idea (see Henderson and Clarke [2006]). While the fourth dimension could serve as a marker of one's concern with mathematics and science, it was also closely tied to the mystical tradition and the theme of evolving consciousness, particularly as preached by the Russian mystic and mathematician Peter Demianovich Ouspensky, whose writings attracted a number of modern artists and writers. Like the ether, the spatial fourth dimension had such resonance in popular culture that it survived in various guises beyond the popularization of Relativity Theory, which had redefined the fourth dimension as time in a four-dimensional space-time continuum, as I will discuss below.

No advocate of the fourth dimension in its heyday could point to specific scientific evidence supporting the existence of a higher spatial dimension, apart from the possible implications of the right and left-handed symmetry of certain chemical molecules, known as isomerism. Nonetheless, authors frequently linked the fourth dimension to X-rays, noting the similar type of clairvoyant vision an additional dimension would provide, as well as to the ether. In the 1876 revised edition of *The Unseen Universe*, British scientists Balfour Stewart and P. G. Tait made one of the first published connections between the ether and the fourth dimension. The first edition of their book (1875), published anonymously, had already suggested that the ether might function as a kind of “bridge” into an unseen universe into which energy seemingly lost to entropy might be flowing and be stored for future use. In 1876, they cast the relationship of that invisible universe to the visible world in terms of dimensions: “we may suppose our (essentially three-dimensional) matter to be merely the skin or boundary of an Unseen whose matter has *four* dimensions” (Stewart and Tait [1876], 221). The English mathematician and hyperspace philosopher Charles Howard Hinton likewise suggested that the ether might be a three-dimensional “surface” of contact between two four-dimensional spaces and subsequently theorized that particles of ether in four-dimensional movement would produce the characteristics of an electrical current (see Hinton [1888], 56–60; and Hinton [1904], 17–18, 84).

The  $n$ -dimensional geometry from which the fourth dimension emerged was one of two “new” geometries developed in the nineteenth century that contributed to a growing recognition of the relativity of knowledge, a type of “relativity” widely discussed long before Einstein. The other geometry, non-Euclidean geometry, accomplished this revolution definitively by establishing that the axioms of Euclid, which for centuries had been considered examples of absolute truths, were instead simply one possible system among others (Kline [1962], 575–7). Just as the discovery of the X-ray demonstrated the inadequacy and, hence, relativity of sense perception, Crookes and Flammarion after him pointed to minute size and reduced dimensionality as other hindrances to absolute knowledge. Crookes’s 1897 presidential address to the Society for Psychical Research had been published in the *Revue Scientifique* under the title “De la relativité des connaissances humaines” (On the Relativity of Human Knowledge). In his speech Crookes had introduced his “table of vibrations” by demonstrating how the size of an observer, such as a “homunculus” on a cabbage leaf, would alter perceptions of events (Crookes [1901], 194–9). When Flammarion reproduced Crookes’s table in *L’Inconnu*, he specifically compared the unknown ranges of vibrations in the chart to a suprasensible four-dimensional space, declaring, “[w]e can no more conceive this excess of space [...] than a being only fitted to move about on a plane ( $n^2$ ) can conceive of cubic space ( $n^3$ ); but we are not authorized to declare that it does not exist [...] We know nothing *absolutely*. All our judgments are relative, and, therefore, partial and incomplete” (Flammarion [1901], 20).

In 1904 Madame Curie herself focused on the theme of invisible realities so prevalent in this period, concluding of her research on radioactivity that “once more we are forced to recognize how limited is our direct perception of the world that surrounds us” (Curie [1904], 461). In contrast to the tendency of much of the public today to ignore the complex physics of our surroundings, scientists and laypersons in this era were constantly alert to an invisible world of forms and energies, vibrating and pulsing and, perhaps, holding a completely other dimension of space. Henry Adams refers to this realm as a “supersensual world” and provides a litany of its contents in his chapters of *The Education of Henry Adams* on “The Dynamo and the Virgin” and “The Grammar of Science,” written in the wake of the Exposition Universelle of 1900. While for Adams, nearing the end of his



career, discoveries such as radioactivity signified “Multiplicity, Diversity, Complexity, Anarchy, and Chaos,” modern artists and writers found liberation and stimulation for creative activity in the fundamental changes that science had produced in conceptions of matter and energy, space and time (Adams [1918], 381, 455).

Richard Sheppard has used the term *meta-world* to characterize modernism’s sense of another reality impinging on the realm of everyday experience, and that phrase serves as an effective descriptor for Adams’s “supersensual world” and the science discussed herein (Sheppard [1993], 16). Yet, to be a useful element in critical writing on modernism, there must be at least two chronologically specific meta-worlds based on science as popularly known before and after 1919. Einstein and Heisenberg have no place in the earlier cosmos of ether physics and speculation on four-dimensional space; in fact, their later celebrity has clouded our understanding of the context for early modernism. Rather than the energy embodied abstractly in  $E=mc^2$ , invisible energies and forces were a fact of daily life in a world bathed in the ether. X-rays and wireless telegraphy offered entirely new ways of seeing and communicating, and other manifestations of energy could be captured in a variety of registering instruments like Crookes’s spinthariscopes. As Romaine declared, “The present vibrates” (Romaine [1913], 79). How could the languages of art and literature *not* change in the face of this newly intensified experience of the world?

### **Interlude: Duchamp, Pound, Joyce, and Modern Expression in the Style of the Scientist/Engineer**

In two interviews of 1915, Duchamp, praising the painter Georges Seurat, declared that “the twentieth century is to be still more abstract, more cold, more scientific” and asserted the need for “new values in art—values scientific and not sentimental” (Henderson [1998], 71). Seeking to “put painting once again at the service of the mind,” he had already become a student of science and technology in 1912 as he commenced planning and making notes for his *Large Glass* project, discussed above (Duchamp [1973], 125). Duchamp’s commitment to a “painting of precision, and beauty of indifference” led him to adopt a style of execution grounded in mechanical drawing and laboratory-like techniques—as well as chance—that directly countered the profound self-expression and sensitive touch advocated by his Bergsonian Cubist colleagues (Duchamp [1973], 30; on Bergsonian Cubism, see Antliff and Leighton [2001], 80–102). Duchamp considered his notes for the *Large Glass*, published in several collections during his lifetime, to be as important as the *Glass* itself, and his self-fashioning as engineer/artist is equally apparent in his verbal experimentation with the languages of geometry and science. By the 1920s, the model of the artist as precision engineer, inaugurated by Duchamp, would become increasingly prevalent among artists and architects, such as Moholy-Nagy and the Le Corbusier.

Beyond the interest in scientific *content* that Duchamp shared with Pound (as well as with the Joyce of *Ulysses*), the striking parallels between Duchamp’s approach and the aesthetics of both Pound and Joyce confirm that science was also a critical source for new ideas about modern *style* in both art and literature. “The touchstone of an art is its precision,” Pound declared (Pound [1954a], 48), closely paralleling Duchamp’s goal of a “painting of precision.” For both individuals the new art and poetry, like a scientific registering apparatus, needed to index the invisible energies in the

surrounding world—from Pound’s “design in the magnetized iron filings expos[ing] a confluence of energy” (Pound [1915], 277–8) to Duchamp’s “raising of dust” on the surface of the *Large Glass* for six months, evoking “electrical dust figures” (Henderson [1998], 118–19). And there was no place for Bergson’s deeply felt emotional expression in either the London Vortex of Pound nor in Wyndham Lewis or in Duchamp’s theories.

In its encyclopedic engagement with contemporary science and geometry, Duchamp’s *Glass* resonates both in terms of content and style with Joyce’s *Ulysses*, written in essentially the same time period, 1914–1922, and published in 1922. Joyce’s Ithaca chapter, his “mathematico-astro-nomico-physico-mechanico-geometrico-chemico sublimation of Bloom and Stephen,” is the center point for such comparisons (Joyce, cited in Theall [1997], 133). Joyce’s description of the chapter as a “mathematical catechism” written so that “the reader will know everything and know it in the baldest and coldest way” applies equally to Duchamp’s recasting of a sexual quest as the “Playful Physics,” chemistry, and dimensional disjunction of the *Glass* (Joyce, cited in Theall [1997], 133; Duchamp [1973], 49). Duchamp’s notes and Joyce’s chapter, both echoing the catalogs of Gustave Flaubert’s *Bouvard et Pécuchet* (1881), range through scientific topics such as chemistry, thermodynamics and changing states of matter, the ether, and geology (Joyce [1992], 669–70, 672–3, 704). And in their shared hope for self-improvement, both Bloom and Duchamp’s Bachelors possess a “sandow,” the elastic exerciser promoted by body builder Eugen Sandow, which in the *Glass* restores the Bachelors’ “Chariot” to its origin during its endless cycles of thrusting motion (Duchamp [1973], 57; Joyce [1992], 681, 709).

Although Joyce wrote the Ithaca chapter in 1921, there is no need to turn to Einstein and Relativity as a source, as scholars, assuming that scientifically-oriented content or style automatically points to Einstein’s impact, have tended to do. Joyce’s references to four-dimensional and non-Euclidean geometries in *Ulysses*, like Duchamp’s in the *Glass*, are certainly independent of Einstein (see, for instance, Theall [1997], 130–1). However, unlike Duchamp, whose grounding in early twentieth-century science before Einstein supported a lifetime of intellectual art making, Joyce went on to engage aspects of Relativity Theory and, in name at least, quantum physics, in his second monumental novel, *Finnegans Wake* (1939). In addition to his general interest in science, Joyce may also have been encouraged to address Relativity Theory through his friendship with the critic Carola Giedion-Welcker and her husband, the architectural critic and historian Sigfried Giedion (Theall [1997], 3–4). Giedion would become the single most important popularizer of the world of “space-time” in the arts, and his writings effectively established a cultural climate in the arts and literature that equated Einstein’s theories with modernism itself.

### **Post-World War I Modernism: The Question of Einstein and Space-Time/Quantum Physics in Art and Literature**

Einstein sometimes used the term *Invariantentheorie* or “theory of invariance” to “theory of relativity,” since establishing the invariance of the laws of nature was a central goal in positing the 1905 Special Theory of Relativity (Holton [1996], 8; see also Gardner [1976]). In order for nature’s laws to be invariant for all systems moving uniformly with respect to each other, however, certain former absolutes were “relativized:” no longer could any individual system be considered absolute, and in

the transition from one system to another, measurements of distance and time change and are likewise not absolute. Positing the speed of light,  $c$ , as a constant, Special Relativity also denied the traditional notion of absolute simultaneity and established that the mass of a moving electron is relative to its velocity, an idea Einstein generalized in 1907 in the immortal equation  $E=mc^2$ . Clearly, Special Relativity theory never meant that “everything is relative,” as its worst vulgarizations suggested.

In 1908, the mathematician Hermann Minkowski formulated the model of a four-dimensional “space-time continuum,” fusing three dimensions of space with a fourth temporal dimension, in order to synthesize the viewpoints of observers in different frames of reference after Einstein had made them relative. The space of an individual observer’s frame of reference at one instant would thus be a three-dimensional cross-section of the four-dimensional continuum, with time understood as a perpendicular to that frame, extending the length of the continuum. While the Special Theory had equated systems in uniform motion, Einstein extended the principle to include systems in accelerated motion in the General Theory of Relativity, published in 1916. Adopting Minkowski’s space-time continuum, Einstein also incorporated gravitation as irregular curvature in the metric of space-time in the vicinity of matter, using a type of non-Euclidean geometry developed in the mid-nineteenth century by the mathematician G. F. B. Riemann. Although the geometry of Minkowski’s continuum is also four-dimensional, the popularization of General Relativity largely eclipsed the earlier tradition of the spatial fourth dimension with the simple definition of time as the fourth dimension.

Space-time became a central theme in the writing on modern art and architecture primarily through Sigfried Giedion’s highly influential book *Space, Time and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition* (1941), which reached its fifth edition and sixteenth printing by 1967 (for this history, see Henderson [2005]). Giedion’s book sought to explain and legitimize the new architecture of the International Style by establishing it as a natural product of twentieth-century culture, in particular the innovations of Cubism and the scientific revolution of Einsteinian Relativity. The first sentence makes clear his motive: the book “is intended for those who are alarmed by the present state of our culture and anxious to find a way out of the apparent chaos of its contradictory tendencies” (Giedion [1941], v). Thirty years later, in her 1971 study *Space, Time and Structure in the Modern Novel*, Sharon Spencer drew on Giedion, Cubism, and Relativity Theory—as well as Joseph Frank’s 1945 “Spatial Form in Modern Literature” (itself free of direct Einstein allusions)—in order to overcome the intimidation of those who “instinctively recoil” from “‘difficult’ novels” (Spencer [1971], xiv).

Already in 1928 Carola Giedion-Welcker, sharing her husband’s interests, had taken a similar approach in an article on Joyce’s *Ulysses*. Noting the novel’s “relativistic attitude” and citing Russian Constructivist Naum Gabo’s 1920 “Realist Manifesto,” she suggested that “the reconstruction of the space-time problem is a phenomenon within modern sciences and art” (Giedion-Welcker [1970], 441–2). Clearly, avant-garde techniques in literature as well as architecture could be rationalized if tied to the most radical science or art of the twentieth century. Such vague usages of Relativity Theory (and, subsequently, quantum physics) as an interpretive critical tool have unfortunately obscured the history of modernism’s bona-fide interactions with science.

Giedion presented the new architecture, exemplified by Walter Gropius’s 1926 Bauhaus building at Dessau, Germany, as the logical extension of Cubist painting. His description of Cubism is laden with terms suggestive of aspects of Special Relativity (if poorly understood):

Cubism breaks with Renaissance perspective. It views objects relatively; that is, from several points of view, no one of which has exclusive authority. And in so dissecting objects it sees them simultaneously from all sides [...] Thus, to the three dimensions of the Renaissance [...] there is added a fourth one—time. (Giedion [1941], 357)

Suggesting a connection between the birth of Cubism and Einstein's articulation of the Special Theory of Relativity of 1905, Giedion established a Cubist/Einsteinian pedigree for the new "space-time" concept in modern architecture. He drew his key arguments from his analysis of Cubism as well as the new architecture's emphasis both on motion in time for viewing and on transparency to allow simultaneous viewing of inside and out. Giedion's themes—multiple perspectives or perspectivism, simultaneity, and some sort of space-time fusion—would occur repeatedly in subsequent discussions of Relativity Theory and art or literature.

In fact, as Einstein himself emphasized, Relativity Theory never called for multiple perspectives (Holton [1996], 7–8), and hence an artist's or writer's use of these techniques cannot be taken as a sign of awareness of Relativity Theory. Instead, for writers, in particular, sources such as Nietzsche's philosophical perspectivism and Jose Ortega y Gasset's emphasis on the non-universal character of individual points of view, which he subsequently connected to Einstein, provide alternative sources for the recognition that no single viewpoint can be taken as absolute (see Hales and Welshon [2000]; Ortega y Gasset [1961], 135–52). Artists and writers also often responded directly to the use of multiple viewpoints in Cubism, which was grounded in the example of Paul Cézanne's painting as well as non-artistic sources such as Henri Poincaré's advice in *La Science et l'hypothèse* (Science and Hypothesis) that the juxtaposition of multiple views taken of a four-dimensional object could convey an idea of that object's complexity (Poincaré [1902], 89–90; Henderson [1983], 84–5). Likewise in advance of any public knowledge of Relativity Theory, simultaneity was a prominent theme in Cubist and Futurist art theory as well as pre-World War I literary experiments (Bergman [1962]).

The irony of Giedion's argument is that by the 1920s in Germany, Russia, and Holland artists were well aware of Einstein and were indeed making new art and architecture in response to the new science. By 1924 Theo Van Doesburg had theorized a "space-time" architecture, which was a source for Giedion's subsequent ideas (Henderson [1983], 321–6; see also, Gamwell [2002], 224–36). Bauhaus educator Moholy-Nagy, who actually conferred with Einstein about writing a popular book for the Bauhaus series, was likewise developing new techniques in sculpture, photography, and design that could embody the new emphasis on time in the world of Relativity (Henderson [2005]). Moholy-Nagy subsequently emigrated to the United States in 1937 to head the New Bauhaus in Chicago and became with Giedion the other most influential advocate of space-time as the essence of modernism and modern life as a whole. His 1947 book *Vision in Motion*, with its pioneering layout, preached the relevance of modernism's "vision in motion" (or "simultaneity and space-time") for postwar society (Moholy [1947], 12). By the 1950s the book had come to stand as the primary codification of modernism across the arts and in literature, and its impact continued through its eighth printing in 1969. Given Moholy's friendship with Giedion and Giedion's connection to Joyce, it is not surprising that the sixty-page section on modern literature in *Vision in Motion* culminates with ten pages on Joyce and declares *Finnegans Wake* to be the fullest expression of "space-time thinking" in literature (Moholy-Nagy [1947], 346).

Space and time and their entanglement are indeed central to Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, written dur-

ing the years 1922–1939. Encouraged perhaps by Giedion, Joyce also focused on space and time specifically in response to Wyndham Lewis's biting critique of the time theories of Einstein and Bergson, and of Joyce himself in *Time and Western Man* (Lewis [1927], xiv–xix, 73–110, 136–43). Lewis's and Pound's disdain for Einstein represents a marked contrast to the situation in the arts, where Einstein was either a hero or was ignored, but never overtly attacked (see Albright [1997], 9–14). The battle lines were drawn, however, among members of the Anglo-American literary avant-garde, and the issue of time was central. Joyce satirizes Lewis in *Finnegans Wake* as Professor Jones, an “eminent spatialist” who critiques the “whoo-who and where's hair theories of Winestain [Einstein]” (Joyce [1959], 149). The twin sons of Joyce's protagonist H. C. Earwicker, Shem and Shaun, are proponents of time and space respectively, and their bickering points up the strains in the fusion of space-time meant to occur in Minkowski's four-dimensional continuum. Indeed, Joyce's line in the parable of The Mookse and the Gripes, “Is this space of hours too dimensional for you, temporeriser” (Joyce [1959], 154), might have been uttered by any of the believers in the fourth dimension of space in the 1920s and 1930s, whose geometric fourth dimension was being eclipsed by time.

Although a certain amount of solid historical work has been done on individual artists or writers, the larger history of Einstein or quantum physics and modern art and literature is still to be written. Alan J. Friedman and Carol C. Donley in *Einstein as Myth and Muse* have made a start in tackling the general question of the impact of Einstein and quantum theory on modern literature. As they readily admit, however, while characteristics associated with Relativity Theory or quantum physics may be present in an author's work, more evidence is needed to establish whether that author engaged science in a specific way. The crucial interface with Relativity or quantum physics, as with ether physics earlier, is popular literature—both periodical articles and books by scientists and others—that made the science accessible to the public. Holly Henry's *Virginia Woolf and the Discourse of Science: The Aesthetics of Astronomy* (2003), for example, effectively tracks the popularization of astronomy and Einstein's theories in England, including the works of Sir James Jeans, whose *The Mysterious Universe* (1930), was of central importance for Woolf. Recovering such histories of the diffusion of Relativity Theory and quantum physics in specific locales is a critical step toward understanding how artists or writers may have responded to science.

This is particularly true of quantum physics, which developed over several decades and never experienced the one-time publicity effect of Einstein's sudden rise to fame in 1919 (see Kragh [1999]). The radical developments in quantum mechanics of the 1920s grew out of Max Planck's introduction of the notion of quanta of energy in 1900, Einstein's subsequent 1905 explanation of the photoelectric effect as rooted in concentrated bundles of energy or photons within a light wave, and Niels Bohr's 1913 modification of Rutherford's model of the atom to include electrons jumping from one energy level or orbit to another—none of which attracted significant popular attention. A central question concerned the photon with its suggestion that light, understood as a wave phenomenon, might also behave as a particle. On the basis of experimental evidence, Bohr's 1927 Principle of Complementarity showed that light is both wave and particle and will act in one way or the other according to the type of experiment that is carried out. Louis de Broglie would also propose that, like light, matter itself could also behave either as particle or as wave, in the form of “matter waves.”

In 1927 Werner Heisenberg set forth the Uncertainty Principle at the heart of quantum mechanics, stating that it is impossible to measure accurately a particle's velocity and position at the same

time. Since measuring one aspect would interfere with any measurement of the other, one can assert only the statistical probability of a particular event occurring. Here was quantum physics' basic challenge to Newtonian mechanics, undermining the determinist causality that had previously been supported by the confidence that one could simultaneously know both position and velocity. At the same time, the effect of an observer upon an experiment's results was now irrefutable. The startling philosophical implications of quantum mechanics were those that would bring the new physics to public attention, if only gradually and in simplified form. Indeterminacy, probability, subject-object interdependence, the wave-particle duality, and the seeming discontinuity of quantum particles themselves (versus the former model of etherial continuity) became the key themes in popular discussion.

Yet, as with Relativity Theory, it is important to note that certain of these issues were also widely discussed in the pre-World War I period. Duchamp, for example, responded to the themes of probability and chance or uncertainty that were prevalent in literature on the kinetic theory of gases and extended further in the writings of Poincaré (Henderson [1998], 134–8, 64–5). Beyond Planck's and Einstein's investigation of photons, which remained embedded within scientific literature, popular sources regularly included references to early scientific debates about the wave or particle identity of cathode rays, X-rays, and radioactive discharges. These are the waves and particles that Daniel Albright addresses in his *Quantum Poetics: Yeats, Pound, Eliot, and the Science of Modernism*. There are also older, non-scientific traditions, such as rhetoric, from which a writer or artist might have derived ideas analogous to philosophical themes associated with quantum physics, as Dirk Vanderbeke has cautioned on the subject of quantum physics and *Finnegans Wake* (Vanderbeke [1992]).

Because of the danger of mistakenly connecting an idea such as probability or chance to quantum physics and because there has been far less popular literature on this subject than on Relativity Theory, tracking the popular diffusion of this information is all the more important. Gavin Parkinson's book *Surrealism, Art and Modern Science* provides a rare model for this type of research, and his results are relevant for scholars of artists or writers working in Paris in the 1930s. Analyzing the contents of the international science periodical *Scientia* as well as French philosophy journals such as the *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* and *Recherches Philosophiques*, Parkinson's study chronicles both the dispersion of information on quantum physics and Relativity Theory in this period and a developing epistemology of modern physics (Parkinson [2007], chap. 1). In addition to articles by quantum physicists themselves, especially de Broglie, these journals featured numerous texts by philosophers rethinking such issues as causality and determinism. Further, an increasing number of French intellectuals, some associated with Surrealism such as Gaston Bachelard and Roger Caillois, published articles that explored the implications of the new physics for psychology as well as philosophy.

This creative mix of physics and psychoanalysis also dominated the better-known engagement of Surrealism with Relativity Theory at the hands of founder André Breton and painter Salvador Dalí. Dalí created an unforgettable image for Relativity Theory in the limp watches of his 1931 *The Persistence of Memory*, which he characterized as "the extravagant and solitary Camembert of time and space" (Dalí [1935], 25). Recovering the interaction of popularized quantum physics with Relativity and with psychoanalysis in the Parisian milieu of Surrealism provides important new insights into this central movement of literary and artistic modernism. And the ferment produced by quan-

tum physics was soon felt in New York as well. The surrealist Wolfgang Paalen settled in Mexico in 1939, and during the 1940s his connections to the avant-garde in New York and his periodical *Dyn* introduced quantum physics to the art world there (Winter [2003], 143–51; Parkinson [2005], chap. 7). That effect was augmented in 1947 with the publication of Alexander Dorner's book *The Way Beyond 'Art,'* which celebrated the new "supraspatial" energies of quantum physics as the proper subject of the artist (Dorner [1947], 103). Dorner's book challenged the equation of modernism with Relativity Theory, creating another irony, since it was Dorner himself who had first made the Cubism-Relativity association in a 1930 lecture in Hamburg heard by Giedion.

Paris in the 1930s and New York by the later 1940s were locales in which the "meta-world" described by quantum physics was coming into being for an interested public, in the same way that the meta-world defined by Relativity Theory emerged in Germany in the early 1920s. Just as scholars of modernism need to observe the major fissure between the early modernist world of ether physics and the post-1919 shift to Relativity Theory, they must also be attuned to the availability of popular information on science in the particular context in which an artist or writer worked from the 1920s onward (see Henderson [2004]). Rather than the space-time *zeitgeist* preached by Giedion, which has affected so much writing on modernism, a healthy dose of skepticism and some serious cultural archeology are called for. Beyond the brain of Einstein, there is much to be discovered about modernism's debt to the succession of scientific paradigms that stimulated the imaginations of artists and writers. "Sifted science will do your arts good," Joyce declared in *Finnegans Wake* (Joyce [1959], 440), and Duchamp and many other modernists obviously agreed.

## Notes

1. "Die Theorie des Elektronen, d.h. der bewegten Elektrizität, die die Materie vollständig ersetzen soll" (Kandinsky [1973], 40).
2. "*Le présent vibre. / En haut du boulevard le crépuscule humain / Se cristallise en arc électrique. Un bruit mince / Frétille. Le courant, qui acharne à passer / Et s'accroche aux buissons des molécules, saigne. / Les frissons de l'éther partent en trépidant*" (Romains [1913], 79).

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## Modernism, Empirical Psychology and the Creative Imagination

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Much has been written about the impact of Freudian psychoanalysis on modernist literature, much less on the influence of its late nineteenth-century predecessors in the science of the mind. This is in some ways unfortunate, for the “new psychology” emerging in the 1870s and 1880s had wide-ranging consequences for the way writers and artists conceived of themselves and their art, some of which were at odds with Freudian assumptions. Judith Ryan, author of one of the only full-length studies of modernist literature and the earlier mental science, has identified three major divisions within it: “experimental,” “empirical,” and “empiricist,” and it is the last of these that concerns me here. Associated chiefly with Théodule Ribot, Henri Bergson, Ernst Mach and William James, the empiricist movement was preoccupied with three interrelated concerns: establishing a properly *scientific* study of mind, that would, *qua* science, eschew metaphysical questioning; bracketing speculation about the intervention in the life of consciousness of worlds and entities from “behind” or “beyond” the phenomenal veil; repudiating Cartesian dualism and the controversies to which it gives rise — questions about what is objective and what subjective, what real and what illusory, in mental experience. As Ryan’s *The Vanishing Subject* (1991) shows, the influence of the empiricist project on literature and visual art was wide-ranging: its principles were imitated, even parodied, in modernist painting, poetry, and fiction, and the debate it provoked about the unity of the self gave rise to much experimentation in the representation of character.

My concern in this paper is with just one strain within these myriad influences: the effect that psychological discourse had on modernist writers’ representations of the creative imagination, and especially of the moments of “inspiration” with which creative activity begins. I am interested in the way modernist writers, like the psychologists, “halt at the border of metaphysics” when describing such moments, evading the mystical claims for art made by their predecessors. Though they represent only a narrow slice of empirical psychology’s impact on literary modernism, these emerging re-descriptions of inspiration matter to our general understanding of modernism for at least two reasons. First, the stance a writer takes towards his own experiences of insight has a direct consequence for how he expresses them. The shift from a metaphysical to a scientific view of creative inspiration explains (and gives cohesiveness to) some of the foremost features of modernist literary form. Second, the rejection of metaphysics and dualism by many modernist writers precludes their adherence to some dogmatically skeptical positions commonly attributed to them, both by Freudian and poststructuralist criticism. Recognizing the impact of empirical psychology on their work helps us to discern shades of epistemological and ontological optimism in their work which these other accounts efface.

## The Empiricist Psychologists

This is not the place for a comprehensive account of late nineteenth-century empiricist psychology, but I shall attempt to suggest a context for its key contributions to literary modernism by looking briefly at the general specifications for describing consciousness set out by three of its major exponents: Ribot, Bergson, and (especially) James. I shall then narrow my focus to a few aspects of their work directly pertinent to the accounts of creative activity found in modernist manifestos.

France's leading publicist of empiricist psychology was Théodule Ribot. The new psychology, he announced in *La Psychologie anglaise contemporaine* (Contemporary English Psychology) in 1870, was to forego all efforts to establish the first causes of mental experience. Like the physical, biological, and chemical sciences before it, psychology was to recoil from the elusive realm of the noumenal, "this mysterious beyond that surrounds and presses in upon all knowledge" (Dugas [1924], 29, my translation),<sup>1</sup> and to focus instead on the accessible realm of the phenomenal. The most significant consequence of the separation of psychological inquiry from metaphysics, from the point of view of modernist aesthetics, was what I. A. Richards was later to describe as the "neutralization" of the language of mental description. The new discursive limits meant that mental events vital to the creation and reception of art could no longer be credited with mystical significance, explained, for example, as the manifestations of mysterious cosmic forces. In 1900, Ribot took some key steps towards demystifying aesthetics in the influential *Essai sur l'imagination créatrice* (Essay on the Creative Imagination), where he targeted some of the grander claims of French *Symbolisme*. In the prophetic view of the English translator of the *Essai*, Albert Baron, Ribot was a Prometheus figure, bringing the creative imagination down from its long-standing place in the heavens to its proper place on earth.

A key compatriot of Ribot's in the effort to bracket metaphysics from descriptions of mental experience was Henri Bergson. Though Bergson did not himself stay away from metaphysical issues—works like *Matière et mémoire* (Matter and Memory) from 1896 and *L'Évolution créatrice* (Creative Evolution) from 1907 make influential arguments about the fundamental principles governing human behavior and evolution—he founded these positions, as a matter of principle, on a detailed understanding of mental phenomena derived from the new psychology. Two closely related psychological concepts were especially important to his philosophical work, and also to modernist re-descriptions of creative experience: the notions of intuition ("l'intuition") and of "the fundamental self" ("le moi fondamentale"). Bergson wrote extensively about the experience of intuitive insight, privileging it over rational analysis, and his account of it is notable for distinguishing between the *sense* of mystical revelation it brings and the *claim* that this is the case. That is, he acknowledges the feelings of transcendence that accompany non-rational insights—the sense that they enable us to grasp essences—but offers an alternative way of accounting for them. The feeling of contacting something "absolute" or "perfect" or "infinite" in such experiences, he says, is simply the effect of the inadequacy of conceptual language ever fully to capture the insight; it is in no way evidence of penetration of the phenomenal veil. The "fundamental self" is a notion complementing this account of intuition, in being just the kind of complex entity that intuition is able to grasp. Unlike the self envisioned by nineteenth-century associationist psychology in the tradition of Hume, which depicted mental life as a series of *discrete* states, it is a flowing course of *interpenetrated* states, each of which contains a shade of the ones preceding it and a hint of the ones to fol-

low. This self is usually obscured behind a conceptual frame defining, dividing, and diminishing our thoughts and feelings. To contact it, in an intuitive experience, is to sense a continuous flux that no number of discursive statements would be sufficient to describe. To contact it is also to experience a sense of personal freedom. Introspective testimony about experiencing it later became the foundation for Bergson's most influential philosophical claims: that human behavior is at root unpredictable, not susceptible to mechanism or determinism, and that through all living things courses an undying life-force, the *élan vital*. But as initially conceived, the "fundamental self" functioned as a scientific alternative to the universal Mind or Spirit to whose intervention Idealist philosophers like Schopenhauer attribute the sense of transcendence.

The most influential North American proponent of empiricist psychology, and a close associate of Bergson's, was William James. James's *Principles of Psychology* (1890) and its one-volume successor, *Psychology: The Briefer Course* (1892), were some of the first comprehensive introductions to the principles, techniques, and early results of the new science of mind. In them, James made the prohibition against metaphysical claims very clear. "The mind all psychologists study," he says, "is the mind of distinct individuals inhabiting definite portions of a real space and of a real time. *With any other sort of mind*, absolute Intelligence, Mind unattached to a particular body, or Mind not subject to the course of time, [they have] *nothing to do*" (James [1950], vol. I, 183, my emphasis). James's greatest contribution to the new science of mind (and to literary modernism) was his description of the "stream of consciousness," a flowing self closely related to Bergson's "fundamental self." This self, James insisted, is "always changing" and "sensibly continuous" (James [1985], 19), a flux of interpenetrated states in which past thoughts and feelings inform present ones, shaping unpredictable growth. And like the "fundamental self," it facilitates descriptions of the more mysterious and incalculable dimensions of consciousness, descriptions that avoid succumbing to metaphysics. It "reinstat[e] *the vague* to its proper place in our mental life" (James [1985], 19–20), filling in the spaces between those "substantive moments" when we grasp concepts and images, restoring the inevitable feelings of anticipation and after-effect, of searching and qualification, of *connection* between moments of cognitive rest. It situates these ineffable feelings firmly in a "personal self," whose connections "with any other sort of mind," are not to be discussed. There are moments, James acknowledges, when we may feel invaded by another self, when unanticipated images and feelings suddenly spring to the forefront of our consciousness. But we can imagine these sudden insights springing out from the "fringe" of the continuous stream, where they have been eluding focused attention: "The mind," James says, creates the *impression* of separate selves by "the selection of some, and the suppression of the rest by the [...] inhibiting agency of attention" (James [1950], vol. I, 254), but we can imagine it as one great watery flow.

A later version of James's undivided "stream of consciousness" of great importance to literary modernism is found in *Essays on Radical Empiricism* (1912). The goal of this work, which links it directly back to the larger project of late nineteenth-century empiricism, is to define what constitutes *evidence for truth-claims* in a world where nothing can be known for certain. Here, empiricist psychology's prohibition against metaphysical judgments manifests itself as a repudiation of Cartesian dualism: a prohibition against separating mental experience into consciousness and the things it is "of." Simply, this means that the *whole* of an individual's experience of a thing or situation is what constitutes evidence—the kind of evidence that can undo a theory. He instructs anyone who would present personal experience as evidence to give a fulsome account of that experience: there

is to be no editing out, for example, of feelings perceived to be distorting or prejudicial or morally shameful—no exclusion of the “connections of things” or “experienced relations.” “To be radical,” James says, “an experience must neither admit into its constructions any element that is not directly experienced, nor exclude from them any element that is directly experienced” (James [1971], 25). As we shall see, a similar policy of full disclosure distinguishes certain major kinds of modernist writing, and is a vital factor in what makes them both aesthetically and politically revolutionary.

Within the empiricist psychologists’ efforts to “neutralize” the consciousness, there stand out certain descriptions of “inspired” states of mind that were to prove enormously influential for modernist writers. I mean by this descriptions of experiences, often cited as launching acts of expression, in which a writer or artist seems suddenly to gain insight into divine Truth: into essences, essential patterns, divinely ordained relations or equivalencies. What gets expunged or, more properly, bracketed in these descriptions are all the metaphysical concepts—the Spirits, Essences and Ideas—that aesthetic theorists in the Idealist tradition, such as the English Romantics and the French *Symbolistes*, had imported to explain such experiences.

A central concept in both Ribot’s “neutralized” account of the creative imagination, and, following his, in Bergson’s, is the notion of a “conception idéale” (Ribot [1896], 67; Bergson [1963], 946): a cluster of interpenetrated images, or ideas abstracted from images, that presents itself to the inventor’s mind at the beginning of the creative process and demands to be objectified. This mental construct presents itself without warning, like an unbidden apparition or a divine revelation. But both Ribot and Bergson shy away from claiming that the construct has “a supernatural origin,” asserting instead that it erupts after a period of preparation in the “fundamental self”—a self, again, whose connection with larger metaphysical orders they refuse to discuss. The significance of this notion for translating *Symboliste* aesthetics cannot be overestimated, for it fulfils the same function performed there by the nexus of synaesthetic relations, the transcendental “Idée” that Baudelaire, Mallarmé and others imagined embodied in the “Symbole.” Like that mystical entity, the construct is apprehended through intuition, and it spurs the mind on to an heuristic process of creation, culminating in a work of art of ineffable significance. Here, though, there is no universal *Geist* unrolling itself through the mind of the artist—only the unpredictable unfurling of the liquid self. Bergson did not restrict his account of the creative process to the experience of making, but had something to say, too, about the kind of product that would best express the infinitely complex insight grasped in the intuitive moment. He anticipated the strategy deployed by countless modernist writers in eschewing straightforward, discursive descriptions of thoughts and feelings, which he knew could only separate out what is interpenetrated, and recommended instead a spatial arrangement of images, whose relationship to one another is not immediately clear: “No image would ever replace the intuition of duration, but many diverse images borrowed from very different orders of things will be able to direct consciousness—through the convergence of their action—on the very point where a certain intuition can be seized” (Bergson [1946], 183, my translation).<sup>2</sup>

James suppressed his interests in aesthetics early in his adult life in favor of a career in psychology and, eventually, philosophy. He had a great deal to say, however, on revelatory moments in religious experience, which he implied were interchangeable with the moments of insight enjoyed by creative “geniuses.” In *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), he defines “mystical” moments as intuitive, ineffable, and utterly authoritative in the insights they bring:

[Mystical states] are states of insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect. They are illuminations, revelations, full of significance and importance, all inarticulate though they remain; and as a rule they carry with them a curious sense of authority for after-time. (James [1982], 380–1)

If he emphasizes the “convincingness” of such states, however, and the impression they give of bringing the mind into contact with something, a force or divinity from outside of itself, he takes various steps to avoid calling them the revelations of divine “Truth” they seem to be. He is careful, for example, to substitute the language of *feeling* for the language of *knowing*, writing at length about the “*sentiment*” of “rightness” or “rationality” or “reality” that may accompany them (James [1982], 55–6; James [1975]). He avoids characterizing the “gods” as genuinely divine by envisioning their immediate origin as a suppressed tributary of the flow of consciousness, or as a “threshold” neither inside nor outside the desiring self. Most significantly, from the point of view of poetics, he cautions against translating the insights gleaned in such “inspired” moments into dogma. The mystic would be wise to offer his wisdom to others in the form of “hypotheses,” provisional utterances that an audience can entertain and, if they wish, discard:

Mystical states indeed wield no authority due simply to their being mystical states. But the higher ones among them point in directions to which the religious sentiments even of non-mystical men incline. They tell us of the supremacy of the ideal, of vastness, of union, of safety and of rest. They offer us hypotheses, hypotheses which we may voluntarily ignore, but which as thinkers we cannot possibly upset. (James [1982], 428)

James translates his own agnostic attitude towards intense cognitive experiences, in other words, into an obligatory position for inspired “geniuses” wanting to share their insights with others. Like Bergson’s call to abandon discursive description for spatial arrangements of images, his endorsement of “hypothetical” modes of expression anticipated the experiments of many modernist writers seeking to express poetic knowledge conceived that way.

## Modernist Manifestos

The discursive changes introduced by empiricist psychology can be felt in many of the manifestos of literary modernism. One of the more important strains of thought facilitating its influence was what became known as the “new classicism.” Associated chiefly with T. S. Eliot and T. E. Hulme, the call for a repudiation of “romantic” and return to “classical” values in aesthetics was a reaction against what was perceived to be a hubristic view of human capacities, both ethical and cognitive, that had prevailed since the Renaissance. Among its chief targets were unabashedly mystical interpretations of art associated (rightly or wrongly) with German and English Romanticism and French *Symbolisme*. The infusion of aesthetics with “spilt religion,” as Hulme called it, the insistence on casting the creative experience in “the light that never was on land or sea” (Hulme [1994], 66) clashed with a sense that such confidence in the possibility of contact with the Eternal ought to have ended with the Fall of Man. The discourse of science, and especially psychology, provided Eliot and Hulme (and intellectual successors such as I. A. Richards) with a language for describing creative activity that avoided such hubris.



Eliot echoes the founding principles of psychology in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," when he speaks of his intention "to halt at the frontier of metaphysics or mysticism" (Eliot [1951], 21) while discussing art. But it was Hulme who pursued most intensely the project of divesting aesthetics of "metaphysical baggage" (Hulme [1994], 194), planning a book on the importance of the "new psychology" for this project, translating Bergson and advertising the merits of his re-description of Idealist aesthetics. Hulme is especially appreciative of the psychologists' distinction between the *feeling* of mystical intervention accompanying creative activity and the *fact* of such intervention: the Romantic and *Symboliste* position that art involves the revelation of the "infinite in the finite," he asserts, may "convey the kind of *excitement*" (Hulme [1994], 15) involved in art's creation and reception, but it is unacceptable as a description of the "*actual process*" the artist goes through (Hulme [1994], 193).

Though Hulme's full-length study of psychology and aesthetics was never realized (he left only notes, dying in a Belgian trench in 1916), two central concepts from Ribot, Bergson and James infiltrated his essays on the subject. The first was the concept of the indivisible "*moi fondamentale*," or "stream" of consciousness. He endorses the notion in the essays "The Philosophy of Intensive Manifolds" (1911) and "Bergson's Theory of Art" (1911–12). Hulme's term for the kind of reality which the "fundamental self" represents is "intensive manifold": "an absolute interpenetration—an complex thing which yet cannot be said to have parts because the parts cannot even be conceived as existing separately" (Hulme [1994], 173). For him, the useful thing about the vision of an interpenetrated self is that it enables us to see how the experience of something ineffable may *feel* like an experience of "the infinite" without necessarily actually entailing the penetration of the phenomenal "veil." Bergson's "fundamental self," in which "each state fades away into and interpenetrates the next state," resists description because ordinary language divides and atomizes it: the complexity grasped when we gain access to that self is therefore "infinite," but not in the sense of manifesting an "infinite" spirit, only in the sense that its parts cannot be separated out and itemized. Aesthetics would be done a great service, in Hulme's view, if it were to adopt this description of those moments of sudden, intuitive insight, with which the creative process often begins:

In essence, of course, [Bergson's] theory is exactly the same as Schopenhauer's. That is, they both want to convey over the same feeling about art. But Schopenhauer demands such a cumbrous machinery in order to get that feeling out. Art is a pure contemplation of the Idea in a moment of emancipation from the Will. To state a simple thing he has to invent two very extraordinary ones. In Bergson it is an actual contact with reality in a man who is emancipated from the ways of perception engendered by action, but the action is written with a small 'a,' not a large one. (Hulme [1994], 194)

Like Schopenhauer's mystic, that is, Bergson's poet eschews action-oriented analysis for intuition, but his reward is a fuller understanding of the enfolded feelings, percepts, and thoughts of his own consciousness—to say anything more would be to presume too much. Hulme saw similar potential for neutralizing the moment of revelation celebrated by Romantics and Symbolists in Ribot's and Bergson's notion of the "*conception idéale*." His notes and essays on the creative activity contain several references to an "inside image" or "visual signification" or "idea" appearing suddenly before the poet's consciousness and demanding objectification in language. Like the psychologists, he views this construct as a complex of images, clustered together by force of the perceived analogies between them. Like them, too, he uses it to describe aspects of the creative

experience that Idealists like Schopenhauer and *Symbolistes* like Baudelaire attributed to the mystical *Idée*, in the doctrine of “correspondances.” The analogous images, he says, “add something to each, and give a *sense of wonder*, a *sense of being united in another mystic world*” (Hulme [1994], 34). He envisions the “inside image,” finally, as launching an organic process in which it is concretized and modified: “The effort to express that idea in verse, the struggle with language, forces the idea as it were back on itself and brings out the original idea in a clearer shape” (Hulme [1994], 29). Hulme’s “new classical” account of creation (and Eliot’s, which also includes a version of the “conception idéale”) therefore matches the Romantic, Idealist one in every key aspect as a description of *experience*, the difference being the refusal to “spill religion” into the description by way of explanation. Appreciating the distinction enables us to respond to critics of the “new classicism,” who have regarded the presence of Romantic ideals in its program as a simple contradiction.

A similar desire to credit, yet neutralize, an artist’s revelatory moments informs Ezra Pound’s early writings on poetry, and is the force behind the entity he calls the “Image”—the psychological construct he envisions launching the creative process of the *Imagiste* poet. The poet’s creative experience, he writes, begins with the sudden appearance of this “Image,” whose attributes mark it descending from a higher, noumenal world. It is an object of intuition, the gift of a moment in which action, will, and intellect are suspended. The insights it brings seem ineffable: it “is the word beyond formulated language” (Pound [1980], 124). And its appearance, once again, like that of the Symbolist “Idea,” marks the beginning of an heuristic process: it resembles one of those equations of analytic geometry with which we are “able actually to *create*” and also a “VORTEX, from which, and through which, and into which, ideas are constantly rushing” (Pound [1970], 92). But the “Image” is in constitution and significance identical to Ribot’s and Bergson’s “conception idéale,” and to Hulme’s carefully bracketed “inside idea.” It is a product of associative activity, a “cluster” of percepts and ideas that has been “fused” in the mind by the energetic force of “emotion.” Above all, it is an entity whose first origin, mystical or otherwise, is outside the bounds of Pound’s interest:

An [I]mage, in our sense, is real because we know it directly. If it have an age-old traditional meaning this may serve as proof to the professional student of symbology that we have stood in the deathless light, or that we have walked in some arbour of his traditional paradiso, but that is not our affair. (Pound [1970], 86; my italics)

The discursive restraint Pound shows here is demonstrated in several other early texts describing mystical experience. In “Psychology and Troubadours,” for example, an essay contributed to a journal devoted to reconciling mysticism and science called *The Quest*, he characterizes the moments of apparently divine insight celebrated by the troubadours as “indisputable and very scientific fact[s]” of the creative experience (Pound [1912–13], 47). A poet, he concedes, is often struck by a “vision unsought,” a “vision gained without machination,” a moment when “the gods” seem, convincingly, to appear (Pound [1912–13], 50, 44, 47). Yet he scrupulously restricts his description to phenomenal fact: the subject under discussion is “delightful psychic *experience*” (Pound [1912–13], 50; my italics); the gods are “explications of *mood*” (Pound [1912–13], 44; my italics); the exalted moments occur when an individual “*feels* his immortality upon him” (Pound [1912–13], 47; my italics). The experience of a god, he says, is no different from the “taste of a lemon, or the fragrance of violets, or the aroma of dung-hills, or the feel of a stone or of tree-bark, or any other *direct perception*” (Pound [1973], 50).

The neutralization of the inspired “moment” has other manifestations in modernist accounts of creative activity. As Judith Ryan has observed, the protagonist of Robert Musil’s *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (The Man Without Qualities), who is himself a student of psychology, echoes discourse Musil encountered in Mach and James in conceiving of that moment as an experience of “daylight mysticism,” distinct from the dogmatically metaphysical “night-time” variety he associates with Romanticism (Ryan [1991], 14, 268–9, 220–3). Eliot assumes the persona of an empirical scientist when he likens the mind of the poet at the moment of creative inspiration to a receptacle for a chemical reaction (Eliot [1951], 18). One of the more fanciful means of re-describing inspiration is the figure of a liminal muse, pervading, for example, the poetry of Wallace Stevens and also appearing (as I shall demonstrate shortly) in the fiction of James Joyce. In the Platonic and neo-Platonic tradition, of course, the Muse is a marker of the poet’s visionary power: an emissary from God, a traveler from beyond the phenomenal “veil,” and a bearer of transcendental Truth. Stevens’s modernist muses, by contrast, typically hover in middle spaces half-way between territories representing self and non-self: they float at the level of the eye, between earth and sky, on the thresholds of doorways, along the borders of land and ocean. They correspond to the “limited divinities” described by James in *Varieties of Religious Experience*, having equal claim to being projections of the self as to being objective emissaries from a transcendental world. One of them, the “Sister of the Minotaur,” is described as “half-beast” and somewhat “more than human” (Stevens [1960], 52). Another, the odalisque in “So-and-so Reclining on her Couch,” “floats in the contention, the flux / Between the thing as idea and / The idea as thing” (Stevens [1954], 295). They are merely *effects*, facts of experience whose origins and identities are of no interest. The policy of treating these (usually) female “companions of the conscience” (Stevens [1989], 253) this way has elicited accusations of sexism, but the impression is somewhat mitigated by one important consequence of this effacing, which is to undermine the authority of poetic knowledge. The revelation the muses bring with them, as befits its dubious origin, is only the “uncertain light of single, certain truth” (Stevens [1954], 380).

### Modernist Form

The agnostic attitude modernist writers take towards moments of inspiration has direct consequences for the forms of modernist writing. We may trace the connection along lines suggested by William James himself, in a description of what he called the “reflex-action” model of consciousness. According to this model, our mental states are an inseparable part of a continuum beginning with impressions and culminating in actions:

Any mind, constructed on the triadic-reflex pattern, must first get its impression from the object which it confronts; then define what that object is, and decide what active measures its presence demands; and finally react. The stage of reaction depends on the stage of definition, and these, of course, on the nature of the impressing object. (James [1975], 98)

If the poet’s moment of apprehending some profoundly convincing insight corresponds to James’s “impression” of an “object,” his decision about the form in which to express that insight represents the “stage of reaction.” And that decision “*depends on the stage of definition*,” that is to

say, on the definition of the impression as a fact of experience about which no further judgment can be made. The challenge for modernist writers committed to neutralizing noetic experiences, according to this model, was to devise forms that would convey such experiences as facts, with all the *potential* of being true or false, divine or humanly projected, but without any *certainty* about either alternative. It is the challenge of presenting the “uncertain light of single, certain truth,” and several varieties of modernist form, on the surface very different from one another, seem well calculated to meet the challenge.

The set of techniques distinguishing “stream of consciousness” fiction—equally prevalent in modernist poetry—is one obvious example of the adjustment of form to the new description of mind. Though space prevents a comprehensive account of these techniques here, it is worth itemizing a few strategies that are especially interesting for their fidelity to the tenets for describing the fluid self specified by James. One of these is the practice of presenting the consciousness, not in the voice of its owner, but in that of an objective commentator, who makes neither judgment nor statement—a narrator who assumes, in effect, the position of empiricist psychologist, leaving it to philosophers to test their ultimate significance and truth. (We might think here of the dominant voice in Joyce’s *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, or of Woolf’s narrator in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Waves*.) Other, more obviously experimental, techniques seem aimed at capturing the qualities of continuity and change that are essential to the interpenetrated self. Gertrude Stein, for example, who had been James’s student at Harvard, was foremost among modernist writers in experimenting with the technique of repetition-with-variation. In works like *The Making of Americans* and “Patriarchal Poetry,” the repetition of words, phrases, and images captures continuity, while accompanying variations record change; every repetition-with-variation functions as a palimpsest, in which the past invades and informs the present moment. Other common “stream of consciousness” techniques seem directly aimed at representing the dissolution of boundaries between “substantive” and “transitive” states of consciousness. These include what has been called the “agglutination” of words, in which words, and representing “substantive” concepts, become conjoined, and “transsegmental adhesion,” in which the group of letters ending one word do double service as the beginning of the next. The latter technique, a form of overlapping, is especially effective in capturing the indivisibility of successive states of consciousness; “substantive” concepts become porous, or melt like wax into the mental states preceding and succeeding them. A similar technique, on a larger scale, splices the beginnings of sentences into the endings of their predecessors, disrupting the impression (and the reader’s experience) of closure on a thought. The notorious reluctance with which “stream of consciousness” writers use punctuation, especially periods, reflects the same sense of a mind never settling on a nest.

A final sub-category of “stream of consciousness” techniques includes a variety of practices aimed at effacing or rendering ambiguous the origins of states of mind. Writers adopting a psychologist’s stance towards consciousness, from Dorothy Richardson to Woolf to Stevens, will frequently prefix their descriptions of mental experience with the qualifier “as if.” It appears to the mind being described “as if” the world is this way, they tell us; questions about where that perception comes from are unimportant. In Stevens’s poetry, ellipses or cleverly ambiguous puns or unclear referents typically substitute for possible originators. Mental events “occur as they occur”; nothing else is to be said about them. Some of the most dramatic examples of this practice occur in descriptions of the kind of visionary moment of such great interest to Bergson and James, the moment that, in its

“convincingness” and accompanying sense of the “infinite,” presented the greatest test to the policy of resisting metaphysical claims. Stevens’s kaleidoscopic rendering of the synthetic and seemingly divine visions enjoyed from a sailboat in “Sea Surface Full of Clouds,” for example, confuses their origin in several ways: by inserting an ellipsis where we expect the agent progenitor of the visions to be named, or calling that agent an “esprit bâtarde,” or by situating the visions within the mingled blues of sea and sky, symbols for the consciousness and the external world. Joyce, who provided the term “epiphanies” for such moments, structures his account of the consciousness of the young Stephen Dedalus around them in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and is equally disciplined about resisting judgments and about effacing their origins. Perhaps the most striking example of this discipline in his work is his carefully balanced account in *Portrait* of Dedalus’s encounter with a haunting bird-girl on a beach, an encounter that inspires him to pursue his life as an artist. The bird-girl — another one of the “liminal muses” of modernism — may be a genuine visitor from beyond or a figment of Stephen’s imagination. She has all of the “otherness” of a Jamesian divinity, gazing at him and responding to his gaze, yet he has had plans to *create* such an imaginary figure in his imagination, and we hear repeatedly that he is “alone.” In the end we know only that Stephen *experiences her* as a reality, that she has a certain *effect* in his life; she is “uncertain as under sea,” an inhabitant of a liquid world “traversed by cloudy shapes and beings” (Joyce [1982], 173).

A closely related strain of modernist writing whose narrative style can be attributed to the influence of empirical psychology is what Marc Manganaro has recently labeled “modernist anthropology” (alternatively, in the formulation of Victor Turner and Edward Bruner, the “anthropology of experience.”) The founder of this movement, the Polish ethnographer Bronislaw Malinowski, wrote a graduate thesis on the work of Ernst Mach in which he endorsed the call for eschewing Cartesian dualism in records of consciousness, and went on to apply the principle to scientists’ records of their experiences of data collection. Scientists, that is, were to make “the observer and his position relative to the object of observation” (Thornton [1985], 9) an integral part of the data they present. This principle shaped the standards Malinowski later brought to his own records of anthropological fieldwork, including *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922). He considered it vital that the fieldworker *include* all the reactions he has to the scenes he witnesses, reactions shaped by the “customs, beliefs and prejudices” into which he has been acculturated, and vowed to be honest about these even when he knows they have hindered his best efforts to get “into real touch with the natives.” In other words, he advocates a kind of “radical empiricism” for the project of ethnography, a commitment to recording nothing that was not experienced and everything that was. The result was the introduction into anthropology of the device of the first person limited narrator, and, by virtue of his prejudices and inconsistencies, dramatic irony.

Malinowski’s radical empiricism coincided with a great admiration for the works of Joseph Conrad, which he took with him to the Trobriand Islands: he recognized in his compatriot a master of recording the mental experience of individuals in encounters with an alien other, and vowed to “be the Conrad” of his field. The dovetailing of a policy derived from empirical psychology and a desire to emulate one of the masters of modernist psychological fiction is hardly coincidental. And the coincidence of the two in Malinowski was only the beginning of a long history of interchange between ethnography and modernist fiction, in which the practice of detailing in full the contents of limited centers of consciousness, of exposing attendant prejudices and ironies, has been shared and mutually emulated. Ethnographic studies like George Orwell’s *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937) and

James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1939), for example, offered controversial exposés of the feelings of middle class ethnographers interacting with "foreign" cultures on the other side of the class divide. The British anthropological movement Mass Observation produced countless "day books" in which trained observers described their encounters with aspects of working-class culture, books James Buzard has likened in conception to Joyce's *Ulysses*. And the practice of offering the undivided experience of the ethnographer continues to this day in the work of Paul Rabinow and Vincent Crapanzano. This remote branch of psychological description suggests the progressive political potential of literary modernism's inheritance from empirical psychology. If the measure of writing's power to inspire social change is the education it provides into the material conditions of existence, these modernist narratives present the *interaction* of subjects with their worlds, experiences which, in the view of Adorno and other Marxist aestheticians, are a vital aspect of material conditions. The refusal to divide the contributions of subject and object, to distinguish feeling from fact, illusion from actuality, elevates modernist writing above the "false consciousness" of traditional literary realism.

Perhaps the most widespread and intriguing formal consequence of psychology's neutralization of experiences of knowing, though, is the modernist commitment to *parataxis*: the method of presenting materials side-by-side without commenting on their relation to one another. The connection between neutralization and parataxis is not immediately obvious, but the key to understanding it is the point emanating from James, discussed earlier, that the perfect expression of an agnostic view of cognition is *hypothesis*. Hypothetical propositions, after all, are posed with absolute neutrality as regards their truthfulness. They are provisional attempts to make sense of things that simultaneously invite readers to test them against experience and draw their own conclusions about their viability. Parataxis engenders such a process because it facilitates the perception of similarity-in-difference—a perception that simultaneously invites the start of a theory and the process of that theory's undoing. When a writer's insights are expressed through such a form, they appear as provisional assertions, suggestions offered along with the data that may be their doing.

One of the best sources of insight into this principle is the poetics of Ezra Pound, from its early formulation of the principles of *Imagisme* to its justifications for the kind of encyclopedic panorama found in *The Cantos*. Pound concurs with Hulme's view of poetry as something that "endeavours to arrest you, and to make you continuously see a physical thing, to prevent you gliding through an abstract process" (Hulme [1994], 70), devising numerous metaphors to represent the process wherein incipient abstractions meet the challenge of sense-perceptions. One of these is his comparison of the ideal poem to the Chinese ideogram, which he likens in turn, after Ernest Fenollosa, to a "blood-stained battle-flag" (Fenollosa [1936], 25). In this analogy, the "flag" corresponds to an abstract concept, a proxy for a set of similar particulars, the "blood" to the particulars that would be sacrificed to the concept, particulars that remain preserved in the ideogram's physical image. The concept, like the flag, is a pattern giving the conceiver confidence to charge forward into reality; the particulars are the impediments that complicate the plan. In the ideogram, and by extension, the ideal poem, an incipient concept's "etymology" is "constantly visible," and the act of reading is therefore an incessant flux of moving forward and second guessing. The model grafts easily onto the process of reading paratactic arrangements. Pound imagines the juxtaposed images in an *Imagiste* poem simultaneously inviting the perception of analogy—"The footsteps of the cat upon the snow: (*are like*) plum-blossoms" (Pound [1970], 89)—and a perception of where the line of similarity

stops. The reader contemplating the “two-image” poem, or indeed gleaning the patterns suggested by the array of textual fragments and historical details arrayed in *The Cantos*, is invited to entertain a provisional hypothesis about the design of the world, and then to “advance by discriminations, [to discern] that things hitherto deemed identical or similar are dissimilar,” or else “that things hitherto deemed dissimilar, mutually foreign, antagonistic, are similar and harmonic” (Pound [1973], 23). This potentially endless process of entertaining, undoing, and reconstructing insights turns the text itself into that “VORTEX, from which and through which and into which, ideas are constantly rushing” (Pound [1970], 92).

This hermeneutics holds true for many variations on parataxis in modernist literature. The “spatial form” of modernist fiction presents multiple takes on the same story elements, leaving it to the reader to discern consistencies and to assess the significance of discrepancies. As in Cubist paintings, to which this perspectival fiction is often compared, the array of possibilities may suggest an underlying essence, but accidental elements prevent the mind from “settling down and snoozing” on the percept. Some modernist poets and essayists pose a similar challenge when they juxtapose contradictory propositions on a subject, “contrary theses” that claim equal authority. The reader negotiates between them, sometimes gleaning a unifying principle in the midst of contradictions. If propositional *hypotaxis* is the form best suited to expressing dogma, propositional *parataxis* is the form appropriate for conveying the “uncertain light of single, certain truth.”

### Critical Implications

If the links I have proposed between modernist manifestos and forms are convincing, they present a challenge to a variety of critical accounts of modernism. Critics of modernist literature have not always been as scrupulous as the writers in eschewing metaphysical judgments and avoiding dualism, nor have they always caught the nuances in modernist texts that make it inappropriate to assign metaphysical and dualistic thinking to their authors. One fairly recent example of this phenomenon is the brand of criticism that aligns literary modernism with the radical skepticism of the intellectual ancestors of post-structuralism, Nietzsche and Freud. It often characterizes modernist literature as *categorically rejecting* the possibility of transcendental categories and revelatory symbols, as denying the very existence of God, let alone divine intervention in the creative experiences of artists. We may think here of some critics claiming to collapse the distinction between modernism and postmodernism, on the grounds that both embrace radical uncertainty. Or we may think of Richard Rorty’s influential account of a “pragmatist” modernism, which has modernist writing participating in the “de-divinization” of the world and being released by radical skepticism into a cavalier playfulness. We may think of the critics of Pound who have read his commitment to fragmentation and parataxis as a sign of his belief in the *impossibility* of transcendental patterns and connections. Or we may note the many Stevens critics who have represented him as dogmatically pessimistic on all epistemological and ontological questions: a poet unconcerned with history, because it was impossible to know; dismissive of God as a “necessary fiction”; an entertainer of “necessary angels” he knew to be *nothing more* than projections, purveyors of lies emanating from his own desires. Similar forms of extremism mark some post-structuralist readings of Joyce, Woolf, Musil and other modernist writers.

What these readings of literary modernism tend to forget is that in embracing uncertainty on metaphysical matters, modernist writers, like the empiricist psychologists who inspired them, rejected dogmatically *anti*-theistic positions along with theistic ones. As James puts it, in the passage following his call for translating “mystical” experiences into “hypotheses:” “The supernaturalism and optimism to which [mystical states] would persuade us *may* [...] be *after all* the truest of insights into the meaning of this life” (James [1982], 428). Or, speaking more directly about the apprehension of divinities and poetic muses:

Is our whole instinctive belief in higher presences, our persistent inner turning toward divine companionship, to count for nothing? Is it but the pathetic illusion of beings with incorrigibly social and imaginative minds? Such a negative conclusion would, I believe, be desperately hasty, a sort of pouring out of the child with the bath. (James [1971], 185)

Similar care to *preserve the possibility* of divine order, divine intervention, and the communication of absolute Truth in art, is to be found in all the writers I have considered, should we look for it. It may well be, as Pound put it, that modernist writers have “stood in the deathless light”; it may well be, Stevens speculates, that “the honey of heaven” will come. It may be that Stephen Dedalus answers God’s call when he becomes an artist, or that Ulrich’s “daytime mysticism” is ultimately of the “nighttime” variety. It might be that the “feelings of relation” felt in the stream of consciousness and tentatively communicated to the readers of paratactic arrangements reflect the actual order of things, and are not merely human constructions. The modernists simply knew, like the psychologists, that deciding such matters was “not [their] affair.”

## Notes

1. “ce mystérieux *au-delà* qui dans toute science l’entoure et la presse” (Dugas [1924], 29).
2. “Nulle image remplacerait l’intuition de la durée, mais beaucoup d’images diverses, empruntées à des ordres de choses très différents, pourront, par la convergence de leur action, diriger la conscience sur le point précis où il y a une certaine intuition à saisir” (Bergson [1946], 183).

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## Modernism and the Technologies of Insight

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The emergence of modernism as an influential model of representation within avant-garde circles in the 1920s and 1930s coincides with the appearance of Thomas Mann's novel *Der Zauberberg* (The Magic Mountain) in 1924, and the founding years of the Weimar Republic. Unlike many modernist texts extolling rupture with history, Mann's novel does not exhibit the same discursive paradox of a movement built on disdain for the past, but rather a shuffling of the fragments of a nascent modernity with the remnants of a persistent humanist identity premised on nineteenth-century Romantic ideals of self-formation, *Kultur*, and *Bildung*. Reading Mann's postwar novel in light of such a significant aesthetic resource as the fragment illuminates fissures through which the author's own conflicted relationship to modernity may be glimpsed. The novel may thus be viewed as symptomatic of deep anxieties about emerging democratic institutions in Germany during the Weimar Republic. Such a probing defines the topography of some of the most salient features of modernist aesthetics and their intersection with Mann's literary imaginings of technology as a pedagogical tool servicing reactionary politics and national hygiene.

The nexus of aesthetics and forms of representation coincides with the profound cultural crisis traced to the effects of World War I, and the cultural, political, and aesthetic dislocations peculiar to the years of the Weimar Republic. Framed by the two world wars, Weimar culture revolutionized political, cultural, and artistic life. Berlin, the capital of Weimar, was politically and socially fragmented, simultaneously a site for the republic's most ardent supporters and its most violent opposition. Indeed, political and socio-economic instability defined Weimar for the duration of its fifteen years, an epoch of intense political and cultural activity when political parties of all complexions intrigued and campaigned violently while artistic and intellectual developments flourished. Viewed as a makeshift solution by a nation increasingly alienated by the forces of modernity, however, Weimar democracy never achieved the popular support necessary for its survival. Much of middle-class Germany disdained modernity and the democratic institutions and artistic achievements of Weimar, which were perceived in large part as something imposed, a product of the hegemony of Anglo-French-American globalizations.

The ascendancy of high modernist aesthetics is clearly linked to the effects of the Great War, namely the breaking down of the conventions of nineteenth-century realism. The term modernism has since become more or less descriptive of the aesthetic, economic, and political features defining the early part of the twentieth century. In his important study of modernist aesthetics, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*, Marshall Berman maps the features of the years bracketing the turn of the century in terms of fragmentation and contradictions. To be modern, he argues, is to experience personal and social life as a "maelstrom", to find one's world and oneself in perpetual disintegration

and renewal, trouble and anguish, ambiguity and contradiction: “to be a part of a universe in which [...] all that is solid melts into air” (Berman [1988], 15). Marx’s aphorism is here rendered more prophetic than polemical. By the time the guns fell silent in November 1918, the Great War had destroyed much more than a generation: the philosophical fragmentation following such a watershed disaster mirrored the very real confusion felt in Europe in the face of radical social and historical upheaval. New social orders, defined by technology and new “rationalized” modes of production embraced the recent economic successes embodied by Fordism. But technological innovations heralded at the turn of the century were destroying humans with ruthless efficiency and fragmenting life to an unprecedented extent. Arguably, many anti-representational movements that followed emerged from the shattered landscapes and bodies of the First World War’s battlefields. In the trenches, fragmentation *was* realism. Anonymity and fragmentation thus define postwar Europe, a condition memorialized by the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

Modernists were understandably pessimistic about their contemporary situation and the fragmentation they witnessed found its sobering correlate in the war’s most immediate leftovers, the amputated bodies of veterans fitted with prosthetic limbs in many urban centers, memorably captured by the new objectivity of such artists as Otto Dix and Georg Grosz. Indeed, amputations and prosthetics were the most eloquent allegory for a nation coping with defeat after a bloody four-year war and the severing of a nearly fifty-year-old imperial identity. For many traumatized Germans, democracy was an unwieldy prosthetic. It is not surprising then that the opening decades of the twentieth century witnessed a series of radical aesthetic revolutions. The crisis in representation was the most obvious consequence of the war and its effects are most notable in the aesthetic realm, where the mappings of new material conditions require new aesthetic insights. It is in such a moment of postwar indeterminacy that modernist representation emerges, according to Fredric Jameson in “Modernism and Imperialism”:

and this is indeed in general the relationship of formal and cultural change to what we have called its social ‘determinants,’ which present a radically altered situation (new raw materials of a social, psychological, or physical type) to which a fresh and unprecedented aesthetic response is demanded. (Jameson [1990], 50)

Although often used as a vague historical index, modernism came in many flavors, whose diverse aesthetic and political agendas shared a common point of intersection: a preoccupation with the fragment. Ezra Pound’s terse injunction to “make it new” resounds amidst the discursive debris prevailing after such an aesthetic upheaval, but it is also symptomatic of an anxiety about how the fragments of past traditions influence new artistic directions. Foregrounding fragmentation as a new aesthetic resource for modernists is significant, especially in light of Germany’s postwar social and political upheaval. The strategies through which modernists chose to represent their fragmented world were complex and varied. In Germany, New Objectivity and Expressionism were but two aesthetic responses to the profound social and political fragmentation prevailing there in the postwar years. T. S. Eliot’s recycling of mythic fragments is yet another such strategy. “These fragments I have shored against my ruins” (Eliot [1971], 50), he writes in *The Waste Land* (1922), illustrating the contradictory nature of fragments: although circulating in an economy of remembrance, they serve as an index of degeneration. Paradoxically, fragments are simultaneously remembrance and amnesia, nostalgic and revolutionary, medicinal and poisonous. The fragment thus operates by

means of dialectical contrasts. Such a dialectic, according to Walter Benjamin, is the spark for allegory, arising from tensions surfacing in this aesthetic no man's land, "the point where transience and eternity most clearly adjoin" (Bolz [1996], 35). Hence Otto Dix's and Georg Grosz's allegorical responses to the war radiate from the amputated bodies of veterans, where allegory is birthed from spaces still resonating with lost presence.

As varied as the projects of other "high" modernists such as Proust and Joyce were, however, all express similar aesthetic concerns regarding fragmentation, simultaneously nostalgic and revolutionary. Proust's discursive trajectory builds on fragments from his past, but his *restauration* project has gastronomic and architectural referents, the former comprising the simplest of technologies (a cookie and a cup of tea), while Joyce recycles mythic fragments into the topography of a bustling metropolitan center circulating like an immense digestive system. Turn of the century technology, however, offered moderns a fascinating way of preserving and recycling fragments, and new forms of mass media systematically began to replace the palimpsest of human memory. Past events no longer lay in the irretrievably depths of memory, but were systematically transcribed instead to the surfaces of technologically reproducible archives. The gramophone, for example, allowed the past to achieve a type of acoustic presence. According to Friedrich Kittler, gramophones and recordings served as databases for memory fragments and a potent antidote against forgetfulness, but these uncanny sound effects of a dismembered past also reduced human experience to nostalgic sound bites, fragmented and commodified packages of memory and poetic substitutions for loss (Kittler [1999], 55).

Although emerging technologies succeeded in preserving singular moments from the past for repeated later consumption, they also underscored the fragmentary nature of modern life. As we see in Mann's novel, whether disembodied voices etched on records or ghostly X-ray images of body parts, these souvenirs represent fragments of unique moments in time and space, amputated and preserved for circulation and consumption. Torn from the fabric of tradition, memory is now replaced by prosthetics affording glimpses into a past that can never be fully recuperated. Hence a fascination with the mechanics of visibility also informed much of modernism and arguably provoked a wide range of aesthetic responses. Economic forces at the start of the century were quick to market and reinforce processes of "creative vision" within the aesthetic field itself. Artists therefore tried to mobilize their aesthetic capacities for political ends by fusing art into popular culture, thus confirming the project of a politicized modernism advocated by Bertolt Brecht. The outspoken Italian futurist Umberto Boccioni, for example, argued for a new aesthetics premised on such an X-ray vision. "Who can still believe in the opacity of bodies," he asks rhetorically, "without taking into account our perceptive powers which can give results analogous to those of X-rays?" (cited in Kevles [1997], 130). Critics such as Wilhelm Hausenstein drew similar analogies, arguing that expressionism's anti-representational insights function like X-rays with their indiscreet anatomical disclosures. Expressionism, he argues, is "the hyperbole of a psychologistic naturalism [...] that has simply transferred objects from being externally perceptible to being internally [...] and thereby paints colors, intestinal convolutions, nerves, and blood vessels" (cf. Kaes [1994], 481). The X-ray camera was a significant invention on many levels for moderns, illuminating hidden body parts as psychoanalysis did for unconscious impulses.

Modernist tropes exalted rupture, but as bodies and borders melted with X-rays and radio waves, technology ushered in an era when transformations in spatial and temporal discourse implied a break

with historical continuity, generating anxiety about technology's new role in defining modern life. This was especially the case in Germany, which eyed America's increasingly rationalized society suspiciously. "Germans," argues Mary Nolan, "initiated economic Americanism ambivalently and incompletely," because German society was deeply divided on debates of economic reform and the profound transformations effected by Fordism. While the greatest embodiments of that economic success, Henry Ford and his automobile factories, offered the appealing image of a revitalized economy and new social order, Germany anguished over the social and cultural costs of adopting this American variation of modernity. Such a conflict highlighted the contradictory ways in which Germans envisioned a more rationalized economic system and the impersonal forces of modernity reshaping every aspect of social life from work to family, gender relations, and commodity culture (Nolan [1994], 131–2).

Anxiety stemming from Fordism's rationalization of daily life found immediate expression in the new technology of cinematography. Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, for example, is a well-known film dating from the halcyon days of German expressionist cinema and thematizes the uneasy symbiosis of technology and the human. In a memorable scene the son of the mastermind discovers the repressed elements of Metropolis in a nightmarish, subterranean world where the workers, mechanized extensions of an enormous industrial apparatus, tend the machinery that keeps the city alive. There he witnesses a devastating industrial accident and imagines heavy machinery transforming itself into a giant monster devouring its sacrificial workers.

Another specific anxiety stemming from technological developments was the management of the sick and dying body in institutions, one of the many dislocations peculiar to the early part of the century. Mann's novel muses on the displacement of death to healthcare facilities where it can be sanitized and regulated by technological prosthetics and medical interrogation, which pried open the mysteries of the body in startling new ways. This vision is clearly a medicinal gaze, argues Michel Foucault in *Naissance de la clinique* (The Birth of the Clinic), which maps the body and classifies phenomena once below the threshold of the visible and expressible (Foucault [1994], 166). Technology, therefore, changed the way moderns viewed death, and the mediation of the new X-rays lifted the opaque veil of skin, permitting efficient mappings to emerge beneath the gaze. The eye could now sound depths of the body heretofore only possible with surgical intervention and postmortem inspections.

With the rise of international sanatoriums at the turn of the century, healthcare and the sanitation of death became culturally marketable. As a consequence, death became impersonal and increasingly mechanized in the clinic whose technological wonders captured the imagination of moderns. In Mann's novel these include such media as the X-ray, and the gramophone, technologies which appropriate death and render it more abstract and fragmented. Indeed, the technologically mediated fragment functions as a material practice shaping identity and in this sense, the mechanization of death in Mann's novel is instrumental in the "aesthetic education" of one of the clinic's patients, Hans Castorp, activating his complicity as a consuming spectator of death fragments, and then as a willing participant on the killing fields of World War I.

Thomas Mann refers to his work as a "novel of initiation," portraying exposure to death as a necessary precondition to overcome a decadent fetishizing of it. In this sense he praises the pedagogical value of death and, accordingly, prescribes doses of it as an antidote and an important route to health and knowledge, thus echoing his nineteenth-century precursors who regarded it as a vehicle

of evolution. The site of Mann's imaginative *Bildung* is a sanatorium in Switzerland, and his student is Hans Castorp, who both illustrates and problematizes Mann's notion of homeopathically cultivated health. Foregrounding death as a pedagogical tool makes sense in terms of the history behind Mann's novel, but turn-of-the-century scientific discourse, as expressed by the sanatorium, attempts to repress death through its regulation. Death operates in an economy of returns, however, and it ultimately reemerges with startling results. In this sense the technology of the clinic does not allow Hans to transcend his morbid fascination with it, rather, it permits him to experience death in ever more detached, fragmented, and ultimately aestheticized forms.

Displacing the site of death to the clinic and attempting to repress it, however, merely imbues it with aura. The violence of its denial only affirms its presence, and it is ultimately transfigured, returning with all the power and seduction of a taboo. The patient does not have to look very far for satisfying substitutions readily available in the clinic, and quickly displaces his fascination onto various technologies that I will refer to as "media of death." These substitutes satisfy a multiplicity of drives in Hans—his drive to death, and to aesthetic and erotic experiences. Each of these substitutes, consisting of the cinema, the X-ray machine, scientific textbooks, and the gramophone, represents a series of displacements in which each successive substitution is a more abstract and atomized experience of death. These technologies are capable of capturing any piece of empirically witnessed reality and transforming it into a commemoration or souvenir of a past, now dead event. Accordingly, such a technological reproduction, either optical or acoustic, is a death enactment in the sense that it isolates and appropriates a once living moment, and freezes it in time, thus emphasizing the "once-and-nevermore" condition of each of the infinite number of moments constituting organic life. In preserving a present moment, which is already a past, dead moment, a technological recording, for example, harvests and stores physical, now disembodied traits and emanations with "superhuman precision," thus providing an afterlife for the extinguished moment. Through such media, the spectator can experience death vicariously, while wresting pleasure out of the aesthetic mastery of the experience. In this sense the magic of technology lies in its potential, like the fragment, to provide the space in which opposites may come together, the point where transience and eternity most clearly adjoin: the death of the single moment and the persistence of the moment through technological preservation; the transitory nature of the fleeting moment and the opportunity to experience it repetitiously through the technological souvenir.

Despite Mann's ambivalence about the aesthetic potential of cinema, it nevertheless provides the patient with significant exposure to these new technologies of death while educating his gaze. Movie-watching activates Hans's voyeuristic impulses, an important prelude to his experiences with anatomy books and the X-ray machine, yet another type of cinematography. The movie flashes before his eyes, enabling him to simultaneously bask in the visual pleasure of disembodied images while reveling in a fantasy of secretly observing a private world. This anonymity provides the space in which he may take pleasure consuming technologically reproduced simulacra while remaining absent, enraptured by its glowing images from the safety of the audience.

While the cinema experience operates primarily on surfaces, the X-ray machine transcends the opaque, allowing Hans to see beyond the surface of the skin. The technology of the X-ray machine is instrumental in managing disease and death, but it also illuminates the fundamental vulnerability of the body, forcing patients to confront the inescapable fact of their own fragmentation and mortality in its very impersonality. Hans naturally fetishizes its medicinal clairvoyance and pos-

sible aesthetic configurations: a new movie camera peers into the interior spaces of the human body and pries objects from their shells. Technical violence thus becomes spiritual and liberating, illuminating the mystery of the internal components of the living body, now freed from the opacity of its skin.

Such radioactive photography, “the descendent both of the sketch pad and of the apparatus of scientific observation,” argues John Frow in *Time and Commodity Culture*, “unites in dramatic way disparate forms of knowledge—detached witnessing and aesthetic appreciation” (Frow [1997], 92–3). Indeed, the marvels of the X-ray machine provide pornographic images of bones and organs, appropriated, framed and presented for Hans’s voyeuristic pleasure. From this moment on Hans carries his “passport” with him, the photographic image of this momentous and most illuminating event. Circulating in an economy of fragments, the diapositive is a souvenir or relic, a *momento mori* and reminder of his transgressive preview of death, but it also functions as the narcissistic commemoration of his own “little death” when the object of his desire eventually presents her X-ray image to Hans, who regards it with a voyeur’s thrill of transgression. The probing and indifferent X-rays blend with Hans’s erotic desire and voyeuristic impulses, thus reinforcing the diapositive’s semantically charged circulation within an economy of pornography insofar as it provides the voyeur with an “intimate anonymity” for him to gaze with the aesthetic distance of a forensic specialist. Pleasure is therefore confused with the violence of the technical apparatus: violent discharges of radiation illuminate new configurations and symbolic exchanges, fusing technology, death, desire, eroticism, and fragmented body parts.

The final note of the protagonist’s education climaxes with his discovery of the gramophone. Ever attentive to the needs of its patients, the clinic procures the very finest technology for their distraction. This uncanny, technological wonder, the “Stradivarius of gramophones,” serves as an index to the large number of technological innovations and consumer goods made possible by industry at the turn of the century. Most importantly, for the first time, Hans may direct, like a conductor, this particular experience of death and life, determining the selection, sequence and frequency of pieces he wishes to hear. His need to play particular pieces repetitively reveals his desire to repeat this death enactment in order to gain control of it. His interaction with such a death substitution, however, resonates with undischarged tension, which later finds its resolution on the battlefield.

Above all, the aesthetic cleanliness of this technology seduces Hans, who expresses a keen appreciation for the freedom from earthbound physicality made possible by such a hygienic innovation. Hans experiences death vicariously while simultaneously wresting pleasure out the aesthetic mastery of such an experience. The singers’ voices, amputated and transplanted into the fine grooves of black discs, thrill Hans Castorp and he rejoices that he can now manipulate these harvested voices himself. Thus far, the patient has consumed technologically fragmented images of death from which he has been necessarily absent, enjoying the event from the safety of the audience. The gramophone, however, not only gives him the protective distance of the spectator, but also the power to direct this hygienic technology cleansed of bodily residue; he aims and controls the frequency and power of the vibrations of disembodied voices whenever and as often as he likes.

The most significant piece among Hans Castorp’s favorites is Schubert’s *Der Lindenbaum* (The Lime Tree), a song of German folk origin that carries him into battle at the end of the novel. It is the song of his German childhood in praise of an irrational and macabre longing for death. Arguably, the song triggers a sense of national identification and nostalgia for the *Volksgemeinschaft*, a dis-

course premised on the genetic nation. John Frow traces the genealogy of such *Heimweh*, pointing out that

[n]ostalgia has a particular history within the institution of Western medicine, originally defined in the seventeenth century in terms of a set of physical symptoms associated with acute homesickness. By the nineteenth century it had extended to describe a general condition of estrangement, as a state of ontological homelessness which became one of the period's key metaphors for the condition of modernity (and which is also one of the central conditions of tourism, where the *Heimat* functions simultaneously as the place of safety to which we return, and as that lost origin that is sought in the alien world.) (Frow [1997], 79–80)

From a pedagogical point of view, the patient or student is now ready to return home to put his training into practice.

When his education is complete, the curtain rises on the final literary moments of Hans Castorp as he runs across a World War I battlefield. The technological and symbolic fragmentation of the human body now finds its literal correlate in the dismembered human parts littering the scene. Hans is so habituated to the fragmentation of the body that he is at home with it: what was *unheimlich* is now *heimlich*. Dashing toward his own violent apotheosis across a field with a mysterious smile full of longing and expectation, humming Schubert's *Der Lindenbaum*, Hans is an actor in his own movie of death and this moment is sensationalized with all the power of a cinematographic masterpiece. His homecoming is projected onto the screen of his mind's eye, accompanied by an appropriately sentimental soundtrack. Now his "life is indistinguishable from the movies" (Adorno and Horkheimer [1997], 126). The clinic has cultured Hans's voyeuristic pleasure in experiencing technologically fragmented images of death. "Mankind," writes Benjamin, "which in Homer's time was an object of contemplation for the Olympian gods, now is one for itself. Its self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order" (Benjamin [1968], 242). Hans stages his own death as an aesthetic spectacle, a dramatic homecoming. With the sublime sounds of Schubert resonating on the killing fields that are the last movement of the novel, Hans, having exchanged his beloved cigar for the smoking rifle swinging at his side, tramples upon human leftovers with hobnailed boots, problematizing Mann's notion of homeopathically cultivated health. Equipped with a rationalized license to kill and government issued technology, Hans is no longer just a mere spectator — instead he is both the actor in and the director of the spectacle of death.

Ironical or not, Mann's *Kultur* and *Bildung*, the novel's ending bleakly suggests, find their ultimate justification on the battlefields of World War I. According to Mann, the protagonist goes to the clinic to take the cure, more for a decadent fascination with death than from any particular illness, but his cure ultimately becomes his poison, echoing Derrida's *pharmakon*. The author's attitude toward the displacement of death to the clinic and its technological management is therefore conflicted and the novel's contradictory conclusion only confirms this suggestion. The logic of Mann's homeopathic *Bildung* is visibly subverted by its own contradictory and contaminating effect, obviously clashing with Mann's conception of a spiritual *Bildung*, and this paradox reflects the author's deep anxieties about the convergence of commerce, death, technology, and the politics of self-formation in the therapeutic site of the clinic.



Although conspicuously lacking the shock of the new characterizing many modern works, Mann's *The Magic Mountain* is nevertheless grounded on an epistemology of the fragment, and its illustration of the technologically mediated fragment and its relationship to ideology and identity formation provides new and valuable reflections on the extent to which new technologies like the X-ray and gramophone captivated moderns and shaped the way they perceived and negotiated their changing world. While providing an imaginative illustration of healthcare management at the turn of the century, the novel links nineteenth-century ideals of *Bildung* and *Kultur* with technology, and in doing so offers a disturbing vision of how these forces play themselves out in the Great War, despite Mann's appeal to transcendent humanistic values. This contradiction is confirmed in Mann's claim that "art is the sphere wherein the conflict between the social and the ideal is resolved" (cited in Kaes [1994], 150). Mann's novel does not provide that resolution, however, further dramatizing middle-class anxieties underlying a deeply ambivalent relationship toward the forces of modernism shaping Germany during the Weimar period.

In the nineteen thirties Thomas Mann publicly expressed his support of Weimar democracy, but his political evolution was nevertheless rather shaky. Mann initially supported the war effort in 1914, and these strong nationalistic views surface again in 1918 with *Die Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* (Reflections of a Non-Political Man). This long political tract, which he later trivialized, expressed chauvinistic sentiments in a disturbingly civilized way. According to Francis Mulhern, however, *Kulturkritik* has often been linked to a tradition of covert nationalism. Mulhern argues that Mann's explicit ideal of the apolitical man refers to a man who is inspired by culture to reject with disgust mass democracy and political instrumentality (Mulhern [2000], 66). Indeed, Larry Jones argues that the outbreak of the war provided

an intellectually beleaguered Bildungsbürgertum with a much needed respite from its own ennui and gave it an opportunity to reaffirm its utility to the nation by defending German Kultur against the artificiality and superficiality of French Zivilisation. Thomas Mann's Reflections of a Non-Political Man was only the most celebrated example of the way in which Germany's cultured elite rallied to the cause of the German war effort. (Jones [1992], 79–80)

In this sense, Mann's *Kultur* and *Bildung* function as a discursive resistance to the corrupting influences of democratic culture. As Mann points out in his "Appell an die Vernunft" (*An Appeal to Reason*) in 1930, stern and civilizing concepts are sorely lacking in the popular culture springing up in postwar Germany:

The fantastic developments, the triumphs and catastrophes of our technical progress, our sensational sports records, the frantic overpayment and adoration bestowed upon 'stars,' the prize-fights with million-mark purses and hordes of spectators—all these make up the composite picture of the time, together with the decline and disappearance of stern and civilizing conceptions such as culture, mind, art, ideas. Like boys let out of school humanity seems to have run away from the humanitarian, idealistic nineteenth century, from whose morality our time represents a wild reaction. Everything is possible, everything permitted as a weapon against human decency. (Cited in Kaes [1994], 154)

While Mann's reactionary rhetoric may have points of overlap with subsequent fascist thinking in Germany, his definition of German identity appears to be embedded in his distinction between German *Kultur* and Western *Zivilisation*. Echoing a tradition grounded in nineteenth-century roman-

tic discourse, Mann asserts German *Kultur* to be a matter of spiritual *Bildung* or overcoming, an evolution toward reconciling the Faustian dialectic, clearly in opposition to what he views as the superficiality and dissimulation dominating the Anglo-French-American model. Mann's critique of internationalism thus anticipated contemporary fears and debates on globalization. Thomas Mann appeals to a spirit of resistance, arguing that the capitalist West, represented by an Anglo-French-American constellation, and its growing political and cultural hegemony, was spreading a single universal model of civilization throughout the globe, watering down national difference.

The desire to break away from the hegemony of Western cultural imperialism, codified politically as "bourgeois liberalism," was in part reflected contemporaneously in the aspirations of a national avant-garde, which was, of course, defined in large part by an aesthetic calling for radical forms of violence. Indeed, it is questionable whether the European avant-garde from the early part of the twentieth century was even conceivable without it. Italian Futurism and subsequent avant-garde movements such as Expressionism, Dada, and Surrealism, however, often translated this fascination with violence into radical experiments with literary forms, believing destructive gestures would displace their forerunners while clearing the discursive rubble for their own aesthetics in order to promote new ways of perceiving the world, all in the name of liberation and progress. Marinetti's well-known manifesto, for example, was intended as ammunition to arm futurists with "principles of an aesthetics of war" in their struggle for a new literature and art. He thus promulgates combat as inherently beautiful, a *Gesamtkunstwerk* synthesizing the destruction of industrialized war into a symphony of violence. Like the Futurists, Ernst Jünger's strategy for overcoming decadent bourgeois culture was through aesthetizing the experience of combat and military technology. Accordingly, both have their pedagogical virtues and can help shape the profile of the "neuer Mensch." War, Jünger argues, "is the forge in which the new world will be hammered into new borders and new communities. New forms want to be filled with blood, and power will be wielded with a hard fist. The war is a great school, and the new man will bear our stamp" (cited in Kaes [1994], 19).

While he cultivated an Olympian distance from the subversive strategies of the avant-garde (thus revealing a conflicted nature best represented in his early novellas), Mann's fascination with *Bildung* and the technological fragmentation of the body nevertheless reflects a defensive posture cultured in response to newly founded democratic institutions which he viewed as foreign imports. Although Mann confirmed himself to be a *Vernunftrepublikaner* with "An Appeal to Reason," a speech in which he argued his support of Weimar to be grounded on an allegiance to the cultural standards of the educated middle class, his rhetoric nevertheless makes a definite appeal to petit-bourgeois anti-modernism. Mann rhetorically distances himself from the virulent strain of romantic irrationalism inherent in nationalistic sentiments dominating the politics of Weimar, but he nevertheless valorizes the nationalism of the nineteenth century "with its bourgeois, strongly cosmopolitan, and humanitarian cast" (Kaes [1994], 153).

One could easily dismiss Mann's contradictions in view of the culture of his time, if Mann was not one of the most influential participants in the debates about the moral efficacy of culture that took place during Weimar. Read as a whole, Mann's fiction and critical views constitute a theory of Weimar culture as a decadent import or a foreign virus symptomatic of a sick nation. While the clinic would appear, at least superficially, as a site of resistance to, or escape from, the most alienating forces of modernity, it is a locus in which the forces in large part defining modernism are more clearly illuminated. Mann's strategy might be considered decadent, but his use of a thematic of ill-

ness parallels the reactionary rhetoric of the day, specifically the cultural pessimism diagnosed by writers as different as Oswald Spengler, Hermann Hesse, and Ernst Jünger, who perceive Weimar culture as a contagion or virus crippling the nation. Inspired by fears of foreign infection, many German intellectuals looked nostalgically to *Kultur* as a kind of *cordon sanitaire*.

Metaphors of infection were undoubtedly symptomatic of profound anxieties about the unprecedented technological compression of time and space, resulting in the permeability of bodies and borders in the early part of the twentieth century. Weimar cinema, too, was quick to serialize these anxieties and the growing appetite for violence in a steady stream of cinematographic masterpieces such as *Das Kabinett des Dr. Caligari*, *Nosferatu*, and *M*. Of course traces of Mann's interest in epidemiology find expression throughout his fiction, with *Tod in Venedig* (*Death in Venice*, 1912), and *Doktor Faustus* (*Doctor Faustus*, 1947) as examples, but the rhetoric of national hygiene has deep roots in German intellectual history. In his study on the convergence of medicine and aesthetics in contemporary German literature, Thomas Anz points out that Mann and others were merely building on a long and pre-existing tradition of representing the nation through metaphors of body and contagion (Anz [1989], 15). Yayha Elsashe corroborates and links Mann to such an intellectual current in *fin de siècle* Germany, arguing that Mann's fiction echoes cultural anxieties regarding hygiene and contagion most clearly articulated in the ideological affinity between epidemiology and foreign policy. Indeed, the practice of the *cordon sanitaire*, that conflation of geography, international law, and prevention of infection, reflects the intimate relationship of the human body as an object of political power to the modern concept of the nation (Elsashe [2000], 18).

Modernists in Germany were clearly concerned with the pathology of a nation they viewed as contaminated by Weimar culture. As argued, symptoms of Germany's postwar *maladie* were most clearly inscribed on the bodies of its traumatized veterans. In autobiographical writings, Klaus Mann diagnoses another symptom of the national contagion, the dance craze sweeping postwar Germany, and links it to the social and political convulsions afflicting a sick German body politic. Germany's *danse macabre*, Mann writes, is just another symptom of a society convulsing to the tempo of postwar trauma, echoed simultaneously by the tremors of shell shocked veterans begging on Berlin streets. "Millions of undernourished, corrupt, desperate, and voracious pleasure seeking men and women," Mann writes,

totter and stagger in a delirium of Jazz. Dancing has become a mania, an obsession and cult. The stock market is jumping, the senators shake [...] War cripples and profiteers, film stars and prostitutes, pensioned monarchs and teachers — everyone is convulsing, throwing up their limbs in a kind of ferocious frenzy. They are dancing the fox trot, shimmy, tango, the old waltzes and any number of trendy moves. They dance hunger and hysteria, fear and greed, panic and horror [...] every movement a dynamic explosion. (Cited in Lixl-Purcell [1990], 107)<sup>1</sup>

In this contribution I have dramatized the problematic intersections of Mann, Weimar culture, and the technological forces shaping it and contemporaneous aesthetic developments through the lens of Mann's novel. Like the contradictory nature of the modernist fragment, however, Mann's X-ray aesthetics are in turn vulnerable to their own uncanny revelations, exposing the anatomy of his troubled relationship with German identity and Weimar culture. A careful examination of Mann's narrative diapositive illuminates a strain of "reactionary modernism," confirming Mann's novel as a useful case study framing a larger discussion of modernist aesthetics and its relationship

to fragmentation and Weimar culture. Radiating out from this locus allows for more than a tracing of modernism's silhouette; it is a strategy which illuminates the internal, often contradictory dynamics of modernism as an aesthetic grounded upon fragments, a poetic of the prosthetic and a nostalgic response to a traumatic lack originating from the amputation of former traditions. Perhaps this prosthetic is symptomatic of a new mode of realism and a yearning to locate anachronistic humanistic ruins amidst fragments generated by new forces shaping the early part of the twentieth century.

## Notes

1. "Millionen von unternährten, korrumpierten, verzweifelt geilen, wütend vergnügungssüchtigen Männern und Frauen torkeln und taumeln dahin im Jazz-Delirium. Der Tanz wird zur Manie, sur *idée fixe*, zum Kult. Die Börse hüpf, die Minister wackeln. Kriegskrüppel und Kriegsgewinnler, Filmstars und Prostituierte, pensionierte Monarchen und pensionierte Studienräte—alles wirft die Glieder in grausiger Euphorie [...]. Man tanzt Hunger und Hysterie, Angst und Gier, Panik und Entsetzen...jede Geste eine dynamische Explosion" (cited in Lixl-Purcell [1990], 107).

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## From Linear to Acoustic Space

### New Media Environments and New Modernist Forms

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#### *THE NUMBER*

##### MIGHT IT EXIST

otherwise than hallucination of scattered spray

##### MIGHT IT BEGIN AND MIGHT IT END

welling up as denied and bounded on show

at last

in some outpouring rarely spread

##### MIGHT IT BE COUNTED

evidence of a tot of the sum however little one

##### MIGHT IT ILLUMINE

(Stéphane Mallarmé, “Un Coup de Dés”, 1897, [1982], 123)<sup>1</sup>

We are in the extreme promontory of the centuries....! Why should we look at our backs if we want to break the mysterious gates of the Impossible? Time and Space died yesterday. We are already living in the absolute, because we have already created the eternal speed of the omnipresent. (F. T. Marinetti, *Manifesto del Futurismo* ([1973c], 6)<sup>2</sup>

An ‘Image’ is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time. (Ezra Pound, “A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste” ([1954], 9)

O, Harp Eolian!

He took a reel of dental floss from his waistcoats pocket and, breaking off a piece, twanged it smartly between two and two of his resonant unwashed teeth.

– Bing bang, bang bang.

Mr. Bloom, seeing the coast clear, made for the inner door.

– Just a moment, Mr. Crawford, he said. I just want to phone about an ad.

He went in.

– What about that leader this evening? Professor MacHigh asked, coming to the editor and laying a firm hand on his shoulder.

– That’ll be all right, Myles Crawford said more calmly. Never you fret. Hello, Jack. That’s all right.

– Good day, Myles, J.J. O’Molloy said, letting the pages he held slip limply back on the file. Is that Canada swindle case on today?

The telephone whirled inside.

- Twenty eight...No, twenty...Double four...Yes.  
(James Joyce, *Ulysses* (Aeolus. The Newspaper) [1993], 123)

It is strange that the popular press as an art form has often attracted the enthusiastic attention of poets and aesthetes while rousing the gloomiest apprehensions in the academic mind. (Marshall McLuhan, *The Interior Landscape* [1969b], 5)

The works of the Modernist writers constitute a fundamental paradigm for the understanding of new psycho-dynamics triggered by new media and new technologies at the turn of the twentieth century. Also, these works act as an interesting bridge linking the new works of art to the new scientific discoveries; they experiment across disciplines and different forms of knowledge. As Carlo Pagetti noticed, the artistic form has always developed fundamental parallels with the contemporary dominant scientific models, so that it is possible to define a dominant metaphor epitomising the relation between science and art in the different ages: the clock in the eighteenth century, the living organism in the Romantic period and so forth. In the twentieth century, the prevailing image is borrowed from the new quantum theory and is artistically rendered in terms of “cosmic dance,” or “network of events,” or “energy field,” at once embracing both the observer and the observed objects, situations, and events (Pagetti [1991], 49–62). As N. Katharine Hayles has written in her seminal book *The Cosmic Web. Scientific Field Models and Literary Strategies in the Twentieth Century*, the distinguishing characteristics of the new narrative are “its fluid dynamic nature, the inclusion of the observer, the absence of detachable parts, and the mutuality of component interactions” (Hayles [1984], 15). The description of this new idea of “network of events” applies to Modernist experiments, which tend to reallocate perception from linear to acoustic modes through a shifting ‘vanishing point’: the act of writing and the act of reading are envisaged as cognitive moments reshaping the sensorial balance, moving from the old linear (exclusive) mode of perception to the new idea of acoustic (inclusive) space.

The attention to the heuristic potentialities of language is central in the works of the Modernist writers and is reflected by a constant and intense “search for a new form.” Language becomes the tool through which the literary canon is in turn built and deconstructed, also following the new and shifting media-induced perception of reality. The modernist aesthetic moment becomes a privileged moment in the passage leading from an old to a new *sensibility*, a passage which led the new writers to develop an inter-artistic (that is a multi-sensorial) aesthetics. The “vision” to which Modernist writers aspire, is complex and does not simply match the mere visual spectrum: it is linked to a total dimension (the above stated “cosmic dance” or “network of events”) which can transcend the representative conventions based on a sensorial abstraction due to what T. S. Eliot called dissociation of sensibility (Eliot [1955]) and which a famous media theorist, Marshall McLuhan, linked to Gutenberg’s fragmented man (McLuhan [1962]). Theirs is no longer an Euclidean vision, but instead an ‘inclusive’ one which can be attained through a new syntax conveying the new multi-sensorial modes of perception. This search for an epiphany also stands at the basis of what could be generally referred to as the modernist new epistemology: the operative project is rendered through formal experiments shared by authors who, well ahead of their time, were trying to give shape to the world in progress.

As a matter of fact, from the second half of the nineteenth century, new electric media started to redefine not only the world-environment, but also the way individuals related to it, having a

complex impact on their psycho-sensorial dynamics and attitudes (McLuhan [1964]). The world-phenomenon of the 'global village,' as theorised by critics in the second half of the twentieth century, begins with the organisation of the first electric forms of communication (second half of the nineteenth century) and ends with the new world-wide-web; the first electric medium triggered an irreversible change in terms of the individual's *sensibility* and *sensorium* that later media simply fastened and consolidated. The works of Modernist writers and artists stand in the middle between the first explorations in communication and the twentieth-century technological explosion; they can be approached as interesting probes to observe the impact of new media on society in its whole.

### Cross-readings of Media Studies and Modernist Studies: from Literal to Structural Exegesis

This essay brings together the study of literature and art in the Modernist period (1880–1930) and the study of new technologies of communications of the time (telegraph, telephone, radio, that is *electric media*, as well as The New Journalism or the Press, which is an objective correlative of electricity), which, together with new discoveries in the fields of social sciences, philosophy and physics, started to design new environmental models, new cultural contexts, as well as new forms of imagination (Marvin [1988]). This comparative reading enables to explore the opening hypothesis, that is that Modernist writers started to *perceive* and *render*, while deconstructing old literary canons, the effects induced by new forms (that is new technologies) of communication on their social and cultural context; they started to grasp some fundamental implications and psycho-sensorial dynamics associated with what later media theorists have defined as the passage from the *mechanic* to the *electric* age, or, to use an iconic expression coined by Marshall McLuhan, as the passage from the *age of the eye* (linear space) to the *age of the ear* (acoustic space) (McLuhan [1969b]). The malaise, the uneasiness that somehow emerge from Modernist writing inevitably follows the difficulty of both understanding and rendering a complex passage still in progress. As for the methodological approach, this essay treads in the wake of North American scholars who have crossed disciplinary borders and encouraged new forms of comparative studies, combining the study of literature and the arts with that of social or scientific disciplines. I am referring here, among many, to the recent works of scholars such as Donald Theall, Frank Zingrone and particularly Katherine Hayles. The intention is that of rethinking modernist avant-garde experiments and research as being both the expressions and agents of a more complex social, cultural and technological environment. Pioneer attempts in this direction have often been underestimated by Modernist critics, due to the fact that they came mainly from 'non-literary' or 'non-artistic' fields. I am thinking, for instance, of the works of Lewis Mumford and Sigfried Giedion in the late 1930s and 1940s, or of the investigations pursued in the 1950s and especially the early 1960s by scholars such as Edward T. Hall, R. Buckminster Fuller, Edmund Carpenter, and Marshall McLuhan himself; investigations that have been somehow neglected or at least not directly linked to Modernist studies until the mid-1980s.

This interdisciplinary approach with Media Studies somehow completes, integrates and gives new insights to more traditional methodologies applied to Modernist studies, as today critics are more and more aware of the complexity pervading even the more sound 'traditional interpretations' of literary and cultural phenomena. In this sense, Media Studies can contribute to working out the complex network of forces characterising the passage from the nineteenth to the twentieth cen-



ture, enabling us to investigate the entangled side-effects that new media had on new literary forms, both in terms of 'imaginative suggestions,' and of redefinitions of narrative heuristics and models. Needless to say, this kind of comparison can sometimes be not only difficult, but also misleading, due to a long-standing tradition of studies in both areas. Following Galileo's lesson, it is important constantly to define and clarify the use of a given terminology which can bear different implications in the two domains; a clarification which is necessary when transliterating terms from one field of study to another. This is, for instance, the case for the terms 'eye' and 'ear,' which are often employed both by media analysts and Modernist scholars to epitomise specific issues related to their own fields of research. In fact, these two terms, 'eye' and 'ear,' which media studies often use to identify symbolically two different forms of *sensibility* (respectively *linear*, that is visual and atomistic, and *acoustic*, that is syncretic and based on a 'field notion' of knowledge) are also often symbolically employed by literary critics in relation to a precise technique or art (that is to say: the eye to exemplify either painting or writing and, later on, Cinema; the ear to exemplify music). Therefore, modernist scholars could be puzzled by someone defining a cubist canvas as being 'acoustic' and not 'visual.' Both the perplexity and the inconsistency are easily overcome if the terms 'eye' and 'ear,' (and, similarly, the terms 'linear' and 'acoustic'), are no longer understood simply 'literally,' but also 'structurally,' as complex sensorial metaphors that media theorists use to point out a different 'form of sensibility.' The terms 'eye' and 'ear' are associated here with the psycho-dynamics of individuals' *sensorium*, and are turned into terms denoting a work of art according to the *perceptive modes* that they imply: in this sense, an Imagist poem or a cubist canvas are no longer mere 'visual' forms, but must be defined necessarily as 'acoustic' ones, as they aim at rendering the complexity of the newly conceived space-time perceptions, implying a multiplicity and simultaneity of points of view, sensorial synesthesia, inclusion of all readers/spectators as dynamic vanishing points.

As a consequence, to seriously combine media studies and modernist studies means necessarily to shift the critical exegesis from the *literal* to the *structural* level, that is to the formal configuration of avant-garde works, as it is the structure itself, the 'new form,' which is turned into a heuristic device *per se*; all the traditional elements pertaining to fictional and representative canons, in fact, are questioned not only by the new philosophical and scientific theories, but also by the new 'electric' conception of the world itself. Needless to say, already the literal level offers some interesting speculations concerning the impact that new electric technologies had upon individuals and society in those days. In this regard, there are some famous metaphors developed by Modernist artists to exemplify the making of a new reality and the necessity of questioning their role as poets and artists. Electric suggestions abound, for instance, in the various Futurist manifestos and writings: in *Uccidiamo il chiaro di luna* (Let's Kill the Moonlight), "three-hundred electric moons cancelled with their rays of shining chalk the ancient green queen of all loves" (Marinetti [1973a], 16, my translation);<sup>3</sup> in the *Manifesto Tecnico della letteratura futurista* (Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature), Marinetti wants to invent a "wireless imagination" (Marinetti [1973b], 83, my translation).<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Ezra Pound, who with F. S. Flint wrote a sort of 'manifesto' of Imagist poetry, defined artists as 'the antennae of the race' and literature as "news that stays news" (Pound [1991], 81; 29). Virginia Woolf has probably worked out the most compelling image to convey her new idea of life, of reality, built around an electric simile that points out the contrast between the evanescent *luminous halo*, that is reality as perceived at the beginning of the twentieth century, and the symmetrically arranged *gig lamps*, that is reality as perceived during Victorian age: "The mind receives a myriad

impressions [...] From all sides they come, an incessant shower of atoms. [...] Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end" (Woolf [1966], 106).

More examples revealing the way in which language adapted to the new world of electricity and led to the creation of new 'imaginative suggestions,' new metaphors or idiomatic expressions, are discussed by Caroline Marvin in her interesting volume *When Old Technologies Were New*, which offers also some humorous anecdotes revealing the inadequacy of traditional communicational and cognitive (and, as a consequence, artistic) patterns to cope with new media induced dynamics (Marvin [1988]). The most typical example of this inadequacy concerns people who use their body language to answer questions and comments addressed to them on the telephone, that is by nodding or shaking their heads while keeping silent, with the sole result of a faulty communication or, better, of a missed dialogue. Writers have often turned this inadequacy into a narrative expedient to epitomise the individual's malaise or crisis. Ford Madox Ford, among others, offers some interesting examples of the way in which new small sounds and noises, clicking, sobs, rustling, suspended words and lasting silences conveyed through the telephone can become dramatic and meaningful elements of the narrative plot; this new acoustically conceived mix, in fact, plays a fundamental role in a work such as *A Call: the Tale of Two Passions*, as well as in some pivotal scenes of *Parade's End* (Schutt [2002]). Yet, despite the interest of these 'literal' observations, it is the investigation of the structural level that mostly reveals the heuristic potentialities of avant-garde experiments in the light of new media: the will to 'make it new,' in fact, sums up a newly conceived epistemology and, therefore, a new world vision that new narrative and artistic forms embed.

This is what Marshall McLuhan (who was a Professor of English 'lent' to Media Studies) started to suggest in fundamental books, such as *The Interior Landscape* and *Through the Vanishing Point*. Both written in the second half of the twentieth century, these books cross-read the most experimental works of James Joyce, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, Wyndham Lewis and other artists in order to better understand the psycho-dynamic effects induced by new media. These two books suggest an interesting reading of Modernism, and point out the relevance of avant-garde movements in the perception and understanding of the time's new environmental dynamics. In particular, *The Interior Landscape* collects McLuhan's literary criticism and includes a fundamental section on 'The Nets of Analogy,' containing essays on Stéphane Mallarmé, James Joyce, Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, and John Dos Passos. The works of these authors, as the titles of the essays themselves reveal (for example: "Joyce, Mallarmé and the Press"; "John Dos Passos: Technique vs. Sensibility"; "Wyndham Lewis: His Theory of Art and Communication"), are read against the new media background of the time, and the critic analyses their 'new forms' in relation to the effects of the time's new electric media on human *sensorium* and habitat. Similarly, *Through the Vanishing Point* offers a cross-reading of painting and poetry in order to work out the time societal matrix; *space* is the paradigm used to develop the analysis:

The advantage of using two arts, both poetry and painting, simultaneously is that one permits a journey inwards, the other a journey outward to the appearance of things. The continuity of interface and dialogue between the sister arts should provide a rich means of training perception and sensibility. [...] The current rediscovery of territorial space points dramatically to the change of sensibility and space orientation of the population in the electronic age. Visual values have lost their power to obliterate the boundaries and forms of space proper to our other senses. [...] The great advantage of study-

ing space in the arts is that the arts offer an extraordinary range of sensory situations for the training of perception. (McLuhan & Parker [1969], 2; 3; 5)

As more recent studies seem to confirm, the modernist authors had already perceived a shift in sensibility (from visual to acoustic modes) and had tried to render it by retrieving an ancient form of oratory, at once oral and syncretic: "Write for the ear," wrote W. B. Yeats. "The words you will see are not the words you will hear," Joyce echoed inviting his audience to "read [him] with [their] ear." As a consequence, etymology, language and syntax became crucial tools in the hands of the new poets and proved the validity of Walter J. Ong's idea of a media-induced "secondary orality": "The electronic age is also an age of 'secondary orality,' the orality of telephones, radio and television, which depends on writing and print for its existence" (Ong [1982], 3). This "secondary orality" undoubtedly stands already at the basis of works such as *Finnegans Wake*.

Of particular interest for this discussion are the works of the Symbolist poets and the Impressionist writers (who broke linearity and favoured simultaneity), of the Imagists (whose idea of "image" is built upon the ideas of "complexity" and "resonant interval" as per modern physics), of the Futurists (whose focus on technology and speed induced them to rethink space geometry), of James Joyce (whose "verbo-voco-visual" form of writing is the perfect proto-type for the following hypertext heuristic), and of Wyndham Lewis (who tried to work out a new time-space theory in contrast with Bergson's time philosophy and who investigated the role of new media in the making of new forms of culture). Marshall McLuhan's theories on media are employed here as a sort of 'media-operative framework' to cross-read the artistic and literary experiments.

### **From Linear to Acoustic: New Media, New Modernist Forms, New Cultural Matrixes**

To better observe the acoustic structure of most Modernist masterpieces, it is useful to start from the new idea of 'vanishing point' which characterises many new Modernist forms, both in the visual arts and in narrative: the reader (or the viewer) is no longer conceived as a mere spectator of the artistic process, but instead as an active partner. The 'vanishing point' (of either a canvas or of a narrative) is no longer established according to linear principles (perspective in painting, chronological narration and omniscient narrator in the novel, or respect of traditional verse-form and rhetoric in poetry), but according to the apparently contrasting ideas of 'relativity' and 'inclusiveness.' The new epistemological earthquakes that were induced, in a very short span of time, by new philosophical theories, new scientific explorations and new technological developments, pointed out the inadequacy of previous cognitive and artistic paradigms: artists started to realise that reality could no longer be understood *in toto* and comprehensively, but that the individual's vision is necessarily partial, fragmentary, hence 'relative.' The acknowledged reason is that all individuals are, at once, not only *observers*, but also *agents* of the observed world: they are part of the events that they want to represent and, therefore, they cannot perceive themselves as entirely detached from a given situation. *Aloofness* becomes a new concept which no longer relates to the didactic element characterising traditional narrative discourses and reflecting an omniscient narrator; on the contrary, it epitomises a new idea of *impersonality* linked to the necessity of observing reality in the light of new epistemological categories. Henry James's technique of the 'limited point of view' in narrative,

is perhaps one of the crucial turning points, as it started to acknowledge this epistemological change in perception: in *Portrait of a Lady*, for instance, Isabel Archer's 'portrait' is not conveyed 'from the outside,' but from 'the inside' of the narrative, and the reader's knowledge progresses together with Isabel's; the perspective is no longer mastered and held secure by an omniscient narrator. Following James's 'explorations' in narrative, Ford Madox Ford emphasises, in his masterpiece *The Good Soldier*, the relativity of all points of view and the deep and complex involvement of all individuals in the situations they want to render on the written page: 'time shift,' 'progression d'effet,' 'juxtaposition of situations' are narrative techniques developed by Ford (and Joseph Conrad) to work out the new perception of the relation existing between the individual's inner and outer world (Ford [1924]). Ford's literary impressionism implies precise epistemological correspondences with other avant-garde 'explorations,' especially in painting: the ideas of 'simultaneity of impressions' or 'multiple points of view' conveyed through Ford's new techniques, in fact, also stand at the basis of Post-Impressionist, Futurist and Expressionist poetics (Fortunati [1984]).

This new idea of the vanishing point, built around the principles of 'relativity' and 'inclusiveness,' also mirrors a new understanding of the relation between those who observe and what is being observed as per modern physics: Einstein, Heisenberg and Plank worked out precisely the ideas of *relativity*, *resonant interval*, *simultaneity*, and *space-time*. In particular, *space-time* is presented as an all-inclusive dimension which characterises the new idea of 'field' in physics and which also pervades the new 'field-approach' to knowledge or, as Hayles suggests, a new 'field notion of culture' (Hayles [1984], 31–59). *Space-time* becomes here a concept broadly used to state space/time synesthesia, something which eludes all traditional centre/margin oppositions, and which constantly relates time, space, individuals, things, and situations, therefore creating complex 'field dynamics' which are difficult to grasp or to observe precisely because those who observe are themselves part of the 'field' or 'network' of situations that form the object of their study. As a consequence, their actions inevitably condition the act of observation itself. The very ideas of 'relativity' and 'inclusiveness,' both in physics and in the Arts, are built around this field approach to situations and to this new idea of *space-time*.

Similarly, the idea of 'space-time' relates to Bergson's 'Time Philosophy,' which conceives time as *durée*, that is as a syncretic continuum which brings together events, situations, objects and experiences belonging to different temporal moments, all of them 'felt' and 'perceived' by the individual's consciousness at the same time. The modernist technique of the 'stream-of-consciousness' draws upon both Bergson's philosophy and Freud's theories of the Unconscious, as do many Modernist experimental forms trying to combine inner and outer perceptions. The great Modernist voice against this dominance of Space-time and Time philosophy is certainly that of Wyndham Lewis, the Canadian born writer and artist, leader of the London of the Great Vortex (1910–1914), who developed a personal 'Space philosophy' to counter-attack the 'sensa world,' as well as the 'world of the Unconscious or automatic in the sense,' as per Bergson or Einstein: "Both Einstein and Bergson are river officials of the great river Flux, of its conservancy staff: they both, in different ways, administer it. [...] Physically these theories are the exact counterpart of the psychology of the Freudian" (Lewis [1993], 389). Lewis sees this new 'Time' or 'Flux' philosophy as the consequence of an unbalanced idea of 'perception,' based on the distorted 'isolation' of the 'Eye' upon all other senses, something which, in his analysis, mirrors the subjective disunity of the self in terms of sensorial patterns:

It is our contention here that it is because of the subjective disunity due to the separation, or separate treatment, of the senses, principally of sight and of touch, that the external disunity has been achieved. It is but another case of the morcellement of the one personality, in this case into a tactile-observer on the one hand and a visual observer on the other, giving different renderings of the same thing. (Lewis [1993], 393–4)

For Lewis, what he defines as ‘Bergsonism’ has led to privileging ‘intensity’ (that is ‘Time’) above ‘extension’ (that is ‘Space’), leading to a “world [which] is not a world of distinct objects. It is an interpenetrating world of direct sensation” (Lewis [1993], 409). Lewis’s ‘Space philosophy’ aims at recreating the lost sensorial balance, retrieving space as an empirical dimension:

So what we seek to stimulate, and what we give the critical outline of, is a philosophy that will be as much as a spatial-philosophy, as Bergson’s is a time-philosophy. [...] The interpretation of the ancient problems of space and time that consists in amalgamating them into space-time is no more real, but if anything less real, in our view, than Space and Time separately. The wedding of these two abstractions results, we believe [...] in the ascendancy of Time [...] over Space. (Lewis [1993], 417)

Hence the idea of the Vortex as opposed to that of ‘Flux:’ the firm and sound point which stands at the origin of the dynamic spirals preserves spatiality and, therefore, integrates extension and intensity.

Nevertheless, the new idea of *space-time*, as theorised and investigated by the time’s new physics, finds an objective correlative, a sort of ‘applied’ version, in the time’s ‘real world’ of technology, as it becomes a very useful concept to explain a psycho-sensorial phenomenon induced by new forms of communications (that is ‘electric media’), which, by their true nature, emphasise not only the idea of ‘speed,’ but also the idea of ‘simultaneity’ (and hence, those of ‘relativity’ and ‘inclusiveness’): instant communication, via electric or electromagnetic waves (Marconi’s fundamental wireless experiments are carried out between 1895 and 1901) enables people to ‘share’ and ‘live’ different realities and situations at the same time, in spite of spatial limits and traditional geographical distances. New communication technologies start to turn people into newly conceived ‘discarnate human beings’ (something that, in time, has led to the theorisation of ‘post-human beings’), that is into individuals who can overcome physical barriers and move freely and rapidly through the new technological ‘electric field’ of communication (something that, today, theorists define as ‘bitsphere’). As Boccioni wrote in 1910, “WE PROCLAIM [...] that movement and light destroy the materiality of the bodies” (Boccioni [1973], 26, my translation).<sup>5</sup> Therefore, already at the beginning of the last century, space is no longer perceived as a ‘container’ for either people or situations, but more and more as a newly conceived dimension that people and things form together in time. Space is not a ‘given’ entity, but it is configured each time in relation to the dynamics of perception developed by the constant interaction between individuals and things within an environment that renews constantly, because behavioural patterns are constantly reshaped also by new media and technology. “To contemporary man space is a cliché, an unexamined assumption; it is environmental, and modern man is therefore unaware of it,” wrote McLuhan and Parker in *Through the Vanishing Point* ([1969], 3). “Time and Space died yesterday,” wrote Marinetti, following his fascination for electricity, speed and new technology, “We live now in the absolute, because we have already created the eternal speed of the omnipresent” (Martinetti [1973c], 6, my translation).<sup>6</sup>

E. H. Gombrich has offered a fundamental study of this new dynamic approach to the idea of space: in *Art and Illusion* (1960), he works out precisely the ideas of *space* and *sensibility* through a comparative analysis of the various artistic manifestations. Similarly, in *Through the Vanishing Point*, Marshall McLuhan and Harley Parker emphasise the different perception of the space paradigm characterising various societal matrixes, that are in turn expressed by the time's artistic productions: the idea of space shared by tribal societies (acoustic space), preserved in the early Middle Ages, and rendered through primitive art (the graffiti) lacking visual perspective but emphasising simultaneity (think, for instance, of Cimabue's or Giotto's frescos), differs from the idea of space in the Renaissance period (visual space). In turn, the latter concept of space, characterised by the 'discovery' of visual perspective, by the development of new mechanical tools (the printing press, new optical instruments) and by new theories in physics (Newton's studies on the light, new Cartesian logic), differs from the idea of space shared by individuals living in the electric age. Nevertheless, the idea of space of the 'electric man' (new acoustic space induced by new electric media) retrieves some of the implications related to the idea of space as conceived by tribal men (themselves living in an acoustically conceived space), due to the sensorial effects induced by new electric wireless forms of communication (new sensorial synesthesia, inclusiveness, simultaneity). It is this new idea of acoustic space that avant-garde artists started to perceive and render, therefore mirroring, through their artistic research, the passage from literacy to post-literacy (Ong's 'secondary orality'). Emblematically, the painter Umberto Boccioni, one of the founders of the Italian Futurist movement and author of what could be defined as a true '*space-time sculpture*,' *Forme uniche della continuità nello spazio* (Unique Forms of Continuity in Space), defined himself and his fellow-artists as "the primitives" of a brand new "sensibility" (Boccioni, [1973], 26, my translation),<sup>7</sup> an assertion which, at once, introduces the idea of experimentalism as well as the subliminal consciousness of primeval (and inclusive) sensorial patterns, now related to new developing forms of technology. The Futurist case is certainly a very interesting one, as far as the development of this new 'space-time' perceptive dimension is concerned: on the one hand, they retrieve some 'sensorial ideas' which clearly also belong to tribal environments, and which recall the principles of 'simultaneity' and 'inclusiveness' as in the above stated media theories and analysis. In a Futurist canvas the vanishing point is no longer structured according to the traditional, linear canons: everything overlaps and is presented at the same time, following a time-space logic which somehow recalls that of primitive *graffiti* or medieval paintings. Similarly, Futurist poetry focuses on the ideas of *parole in libertà*, of *aeropoesia*, and renders new associations through either a renewed parataxis or a bald typographic juxtaposition which aims to convey the "dynamic sensation made eternal as such," another '*space-time*' concept (Boccioni [1973], 23, my translation).<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, Futurist artists celebrate modernity through the sublimation of new technology, with special reference to cars, trains, planes, as well as to all those media which emphasise the idea of 'speed' and space/time domination and control, such as electricity. Somehow this double attitude seems to confirm what was stated above by McLuhan and Parker, as well as by other media theorists and artists: at the turn of the last century, new technologies and new electric media reconfigured both time and space perception in terms of 'simultaneity' and 'space-time,' so that the new technological background helps to retrieve primeval inclusive sensorial modes (acoustic space being shared by tribal societies and 'electric' ones). Paradoxically, the new technological impulse is that which contributes to the retrieval of tribal psycho-dynamics of perception: electric forms

of communication recreate, *artificially*, a series of psycho-sensorial mechanisms based on a sensorial synesthesia and bypass a series of linear perceptive categories, which had characterised the making of modern Western complex society and which the arts had dutifully mirrored (McLuhan and Parker [1969], 35). A very interesting example of this cultural overlapping of primitivism and new technology is shown in Marinetti's futurist novel *Mafarka le futuriste* (1909): Mafarka is an African king who, himself, gives birth to Gazurmah, "an invisible and gigantic bird, that has great and flexible wings made to embrace the stars" (cited in De Maria [1973], xxix, my translation).<sup>9</sup> As Luciano de Maria has pointed out, Marinetti's 'African tale' combines primeval religion and mythology with a fascination for aeroplanes, and retrieves three of Nietzsche's leitmotifs, *will* (in Mafarka: "religion of the manifested Will and of daily Heroism;" see De Maria [1973], xxix, my translation),<sup>10</sup> *super-man* and *flight*, and Gazurmah becomes "*the good fruit* of Mafarka's will, and it is, at once, a superman who can take off and fly away from the *filthy* earth" (De Maria [1973], xxix, my translation).<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, the traditional idea of 'distance' (as according to the atomistic tradition) is the first sensorial paradigm to be overthrown by electric media and new technologies (from trains to cars, to aeroplanes), as it is inevitably replaced by those of simultaneity and inclusion; linear space evolves into acoustic space.

Acoustic space is [a space] that has no centre and no margin, unlike strictly visual space, which is an extension and intensification of the idea. Acoustic space is organic and integral, perceived through the simultaneous interplay of all senses; whereas rational or pictorial space is uniform, sequential, and continuous and creates a closed world with none of the rich resonance of the tribal echoland. (McLuhan [1969b], 59)

In literature, the French symbolist poets were among the first to understand the artistic potentialities offered by this new idea of simultaneity as conveyed by new media and new technologies. "Un coup de Dés" (A Throw of Dice) by Mallarmé is a poem which breaks linearity and translates the heuristic pervading modern Press into a new artistic architecture:

it was Mallarmé who formulated the lessons of the press as a guide for new impersonal poetry of suggestion and implication. He saw that the scale of modern reportage and of the mechanical multiplication of messages made personal rhetoric impossible. Now was the time for the artist to intervene in a new way and to manipulate the new media of communication by a precise and delicate adjustment of the relations of words, things, and events. His task had become not self-expression, but the release of the life in things. (McLuhan [1969b], 11)

"Un Coup de Dés" is to be read as a true 'space-time poem,' as the 'device' underpinning its structure aims to place 'thought' into 'space,' something that Paul Valéry has clearly conceptualised:

Mallarmé, after having had read to me his poem Coup de dés in a very precise way, in order to prepare a bigger surprise, made me consider the device. It seems to be to see the figure of a thought, placed in our space for the first time [...] To say the truth, having heard him speak, you could think of and give birth to some temporal forms. (Valéry, in Mallarmé [1951], 1582, my translation)<sup>12</sup>

Not surprisingly, Mallarmé and the French symbolist poets are often quoted by other modernist and artists as real pioneers in the understanding of the new time sensibility. As Ford Madox Ford himself wrote:

[they] aimed at broken rhythms and blurred images. They are of enormous importance because they led not only toward the non-representational works of Mr. Joyce, Miss Stein and the whole school of their imitators, but to what is non-representational, imagist and vibrating in the works of Mr. Pound and such other poets as Archibald MacLeish, Léonie Adams or the English poets Auden and Spender. (Ford [1947], 664)

They also contributed to the development of Ford's literary impressionism, which aims not to 'narrate' but to 'render' life, something which, inevitably, implies a newly conceived discontinuous form of narration embedding simultaneity: "for the whole of life is really like that; we are almost always in one place with our minds somewhere quite other" (Ford [1964], 41), and, coherently, the new literary and artistic forms cannot but convey this idea of simultaneity of impressions, experiences, feelings.

The idea of 'juxtaposition of situations' that Ford developed together with the idea of 'time shift,' anticipates the concept of *montage* which is a fundamental formal device developed and employed by most Modernist 'new forms,' from Cubism to literary impressionism, from Futurism to Imagism, not to mention the time experiments in a brand new 'electric' medium, Cinema (Seitz [1961]). Cinema is indeed the perfect example to introduce here another important concept which the cross-reading of media studies and modernist studies can help to clarify, that is the parallel development of avant-garde, experimental 'new forms,' on the one hand, and the establishment of new cultural models and societal matrixes on the other hand, a concept that I will retrieve later in this paper. As a matter of fact, Cinema is the perfect incarnation of the overlapping of so called 'high' and 'low' forms of art, as it is, at once, both a new form of mass communication and entertainment, and a very experimental form of art which, in turn, had a great impact on the works of many Modernist writers and artists. "Movies: The Reel World," is the title of the chapter dedicated to this new medium in McLuhan's *Understanding Media*, and a pun which immediately conveys the complex relation which exists between art and forms of mass communication.

Indeed, before movies, it is the Press itself that gives shape to the new idea of time and space 'montage,' and that embeds the time field notion of culture. Modern newspapers and magazines display a technique of juxtaposition which aims to convey the simultaneity of situations, events and thoughts which take place at the same time in various geographical locations; electric communications speed up the bringing together of all sorts of information. On the pages of a newspaper, in fact, different and heterogeneous events, news, and images overlap and are simultaneously brought together *hic et nunc*. The page of a newspaper naturally turns into a sort of cathartic space presenting the whole human experience through an estranging technique, bypassing all previously established aesthetic canons. News, advertisements, announcements and photographs form a mosaic of fragments that penetrate the true spirit of the time, now summed up and contained by the page frame. The new and complex idea of 'acoustic space' is rendered in the Press precisely through this 'montage' of various 'news items,' a fact which constitutes one of the most powerful consequences of long-distance communications, as assured by new electric media. What is important to notice here, is the evident correspondence between so called 'high' and 'low' forms of communication, that is art and mass communication, in terms of underpinning heuristic and cognitive process: a page of a newspaper, a cubist canvas or an imagist poem are all 'forms' built around the idea of 'montage' (or 'assemblage'), rendering the complex synesthesia which characterises acoustic space. In all cases, the overall effect conveys a dynamic network of forces which coexist and condition one another.



Emblematically, Ezra Pound defined literature “as news that stays news” (Pound [1991], 29).

What a newspaper, a cubist canvas and an imagist poem have in common is therefore the fragmentary, relative and inclusive way of perceiving reality, which must now be ‘re-assembled’ and ‘re-composed’ in new forms. This process can help to discover deeper and new realities, which transcend what is traditionally ‘visible’ and which the montage and the new associations brings to light precisely because of their paratactic and non-linear (non logical) juxtaposition. This is the type of ‘reading’ or ‘interpretation’ that we are asked, as a rule, to apply to Modernist art (the overlapping ‘enlightening fragments’ bring us to new epiphanies, we must work out the ‘figure,’ the glimpse of reality, hidden in the carpet, the complex environmental ground). In turn, Modernist writers did approach new technologies and new forms of communication with the same attitude. For instance, Joyce considered new forms of communication as both agents and expressions of a given community; he took them as heuristic models for the world in progress and, through their analysis, he perceived and theorised a new time *sensibility*: “The modern spirit is vivisection. Vivisection itself is the most modern process one can conceive [...] All modern political and religious criticism dispenses with presumptive states [...] It examines the entire community in action” (McLuhan [1969b], 17). ‘Vivisection’ is therefore the term he used to imply the simultaneous observation of coexisting phenomena which can be rendered only through new narrative structures and new experiments with language: the superficial, vivisectional cross-section of the popular press, combined with the artist’s sensibility and learning, can be worked out in order to elaborate new forms to be used as ‘antennas’ detecting the ongoing cultural processes. This is an additional reason which enables us to define works such as *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* as epoch-making works: in *Ulysses*, the character of Leopold Bloom and the city of Dublin metonymically stand for a universal community, which is more and more characterised and shaped by new mass media. Technically, the novel can be approached as an immense newspaper conceived acoustically, itself a grotesque and parodic amplification of the mock-heroic epic of an everyday man living an everyday life, and symbolically representing all men (McLuhan [1962], 94–5). In *Finnegans Wake*, the grotesque element pervades the peculiar linguistic construction which englobes different aesthetics belonging to both classic and popular traditions, and explores the new intriguing possibilities that new forms of mass communication had been offering to modern artist for almost half a century. As Joyce writes in *Finnegans Wake*: “The war is in words and the wood is the world.” Therefore, it is precisely through a disruption of traditional syntax and the hybridisation of language, form, and artistic codes that it is possible to render the evolving spirit of the time, no longer ‘linear’ (atomistic) but ‘acoustic’ (field-concept), and therefore awaken people to the ongoing cultural processes (Finnegan, the old tribal hero, should be, in fact, ‘awaken’). *Ulysses* and especially *Finnegans Wake* are works which require a different ‘reading approach’: words, sentences, puns, paradoxes and semantic gaps encourage the reader to overcome the flat and linear dimension of the printed page; they induce us to read the page also ‘in depth,’ as each word becomes a complex entity opening polysemous associations. McLuhan defined such a form of writing as a ‘verbo-voco-visual’ form, that is as a form which at once induces and requires a complex and multi-sensorial response, something that today we can describe as ‘electric or electronic,’ as bearing some correspondences with the heuristic of modern hypertexts. “Words are complex systems of metaphors and symbols that translate experience into our uttered or outered senses. They are a technology of explicitness. By means of translation of immediate sense experience into vocal symbols, the entire world can be retrieved at any instant” (McLuhan [1964], 64).

Similarly, Joyce's language can be approached as a complex 'interface' opening in depths 'windows' on the entire world. As for the perceptive response, the acoustic architecture of Joyce's printed page foresees the structure of today's hypertexts and 'extends' the 'intensity' of the written words, as they are re-discovered as polysemous containers through the retrieval of etymological correspondences, associations, and meanings: time and space are therefore compressed and preserved simultaneously, in spite of typographic linearity.

The analysis of Joyce's works reveals not only that the Irish writer had understood the potentialities offered by new forms of communication in terms of heuristic patterns and 'new artistic forms,' but also the fact that he had grasped some important 'side effects' characterising the development of new media, namely cultural, artistic and sociological effects. In particular, James Joyce perceived the important encounter between the so-called 'eye culture' (the Western world, visually perceived through mechanic means, and characterised by mechanic and atomistic logic applied to all fields) and the 'ear culture' (the Eastern world, characterised by holistic philosophies and orality), an encounter that he rendered in the famous pun: "In that european end meets Ind" (cited in McLuhan [1964], 263). Here, the word 'European' is emblematically turned into '*Ear*-ocean' to immediately convey that the new time culture, also in the Western world, is more and more linked to 'acoustic' patterns (and, therefore, individuals have to retrieve the old sensorial balance that had been lost in favour of a dominating *visual* or linear approach to knowledge, and must 'open' their 'ears' again) traditionally connected to the Eastern (Ind.) world; electric technologies form the ground through which the two realities meet (McLuhan [1964], 263). This is the media-induced encounter of two different sensorial modes, of two differently conceived anthropological constructs that are suddenly 'forced' to interact, to adjust one to the other. And it is not by chance that many Modernist writers developed an increasing interest in Eastern arts and writing techniques, as these latter do imply different sensorial (and cognitive) patterns, more in tune with the new electric (inclusive and acoustic) world. For instance, Ezra Pound, following Ernest Fenollosa's research, used the form of the Japanese haiku and Chinese written characters—as their juxtaposing technique enables a simultaneous rendering of both time and space—as a structural model for his *Cantos*. "My subject is poetry, not language, yet the roots of poetry are in language. In the study of a language so alien in forms to ours as is Chinese in its written character, it is necessary to inquire how those universal elements of forms which constitute poetics can derive appropriate nutriment" (Pound and Fenollosa [1953], 190). Chinese words and signs are presented by Pound as 'thought picture,' a concept which recalls Valéry's 'figure d'une pensée,' and which is rendered through 'images' which use parataxis to convey simultaneity: "an 'Image' is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time" (Pound [1954], 4). This idea of 'Image' perfectly mirrors Pound's analysis of Chinese words:

The fact is that almost every written Chinese word is properly just such an underlying word, and yet it is not abstract. It is not exclusive of parts of speech, but comprehensive; not something which is neither a noun, verb or adjective, but something which is all of them at once and at all times. (Pound and Fenollosa [1953], 199)

Similarly, Pound wrote in *ABC of Reading*: "Chinese ideogram does not try to be the picture of a sound, or to be a written sign recalling a sound, but it is still the picture of a thing; of a thing in a given position or relation, or of a combination, or quality germane to the several things that it pictures" (Pound [1991], 21).

Coherently, the syntactic gaps between poetry lines are to be perceived not as a sort of vacuum, but as harmonic intervals which resound with meaning and suggestions; an idea which implicitly recalls that of resonant interval, according to Heisenberg's and Einstein's studies.

Needless to say, the 'encounter' among heterogeneous civilisations is not necessarily painless, but bears 'side-effects' and can lead to cultural conflicts. Various media theorists in the twentieth century have thoroughly investigated the various technological implications characterising the 'global village' and conditioning its related cultural phenomena. Again, James Joyce 'the artist' had already evoked one of the most important 'side-effects' of the new media-induced environment, that is the inevitable societal clash induced by new technologies — a side-effect that he summed up in another very famous pun: "The west shall shake the East awake / While ye have the night for morn" (cited in McLuhan [1969b], 47). As a matter of fact, McLuhan himself quotes this aphorism in his famous book *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* as an example of a 'mimetic form' capable of immediately rendering the effects of the new media impact on world communications (McLuhan [1964], 236). Joyce is, in fact, one of McLuhan's 'masters,' a model to study, deconstruct and apply. McLuhan often presented his own media theories as 'applied Joyce,' therefore underlining the fact that, through his constantly experimental works, the Irish writer incorporated an understanding of his time and its societal matrix which can offer some interesting hints also to media theorists. McLuhan presents *Finnegans Wake* as the final achievement of Joyce's research, his most *acoustic* work, which 'translates' in a mimetic form the new idea of *space-time* and grasps, through puns and complex neologisms, evolving situations characterising the making of the electric age:

The title of *Finnegans Wake* is a set of multi-levelled puns of the reversal by which Western man enters his tribal, or Finn, cycle once more, following the track of the old Finn, but wide awake this time as we re-enter the tribal night. It is like our contemporary consciousness of the unconscious. (McLuhan, [1964], 47)

This statement leads back to what was stated above about the 'electrically-induced' idea of primitivism in Futurist writings and poetics. Therefore, the relation existing between new forms of communication (new electric media) and new modernist forms is inevitably associated with the investigation of the relevant cultural models which, in turn, mirror new societal matrixes; as previously anticipated, the 'field notion of culture' is, in fact, a very complex notion which points at a dynamic system in which 'low' and 'high' become overlapping and osmotic concepts, as the inclusive nature of the newly conceived acoustic space blurs traditional aesthetic and cultural boundaries. Again, Pound's 'ideogrammatic' method offers a good model to process this new cultural matrix. In fact, he conceives it as a peculiar form useful not only to encapsulate the new Imagist poetry, but also to convey the 'New Learning' of his time: it is built upon a carefully arranged juxtaposition of past and present cultural experiences, now rendered through the structural combination of learned models (the ancient aphorism and the Japanese traditional haiku) and new forms of mass communication (crossword puzzles, the press) (Lamberti [2002]).

Pound develops an iconic page which aims at rendering an acoustic effect as implied by new technologies of communication. He uses such a method not only in his celebrated *Cantos*, but also in less known works, such as *The ABC of Reading* and *Guide to Kulchur*. The latter, in particular, is conceived as a complex treatise, offered as a sort of threshold between old and new forms of 'knowledge,' as Pound designs it for a larger audience, something that, today, we would define as 'mass audience.' The volume looks like a sort of refined cultural *Baedeker* that brings togeth-

er, just like a modern newspaper (or a modern 'Reader's Digest'), various issues (from music to philosophy, to economics, to literature) and realities (Europe, China, America). Pound's idea of New Learning is an ambiguous concept here, which nevertheless has some clear correspondences with Francis Bacon's idea of learning as expressed in *The Advancement of Learning*. Here, in fact, Bacon opposes 'aphorisms' to 'method,' and states that the former is the only true tool to acquire a 'real' knowledge: "Aphorisms, representing a knowledge broken, do invite men to inquire farther; whereas Methods, carrying the show of a total, do secure man, as if they were at farthest" (Bacon [1950], 142). Therefore, Bacon opposes linear and logic writing to a discontinuous and syncretic one, as the latter encourages thought. Bacon's *Advancement of Learning* retrieves the ancient idea of *paideia*, something which his 'broken' knowledge translates into witty aphorisms whose meaning transcends, through the underpinning syncretism, time and space barriers and brings together knowledge in a form which requires a dynamic act of reading: it is this dynamic involvement of the reader which characterises a real learning process. This very idea is borrowed by Pound in *Guide to Kulchur*, but in the thirties, the idea of *paideia* had already been 'vivisected' by the time's societal matrix as per new media: the idea of knowledge was, in fact, more and more associated with a list of notions which took the form of the fragment, of a 'bit of information,' little 'figures' scattered on a heterogeneous ground. Inevitably, the semantic complexity and polysemy of aphoristic writing, which is to be found in some Modernist works, is flattened by the linearity of slogans and mottoes which are more and more spread through new media (ads are certainly the most emblematic example). As a consequence, Pound's 'New Learning' cannot but face (and mirror) this new cultural reality: 'culture' itself is more and more one of the many 'goods' that can be used to conquer new and larger audiences. The term 'Kulchur' that he uses to define the function of his 'Guide' reveals and underlines Pound's consciousness of the new societal matrix: here 'kulchur' opposes 'culture' and reveals, in a way which is at once parodic, ideological and also 'alarming,' new forms of knowledge, a bit coarse and kitsch, now working like homogenising agents.

"Annihilating Space, Time, and Difference. Experiments in Cultural Homogenization" is the title of the last chapter in Caroline Marvin's book dedicated to the impact of new electric media on culture and society in the late nineteenth century (Marvin [1988], 191). It is a title which immediately points out one of the most disrupting effects of new technological environments on individuals, society and culture. The idea of 'kulchur' as expressed by Pound, echoes Joyce's idea of a vivisection spirit connecting high and low forms of art and communication; all together, these are ways of denouncing the ongoing process of cultural homologation (mass commodities, including also 'education' and 'art') reversing old traditional forms of learning into new sets of corporate 'instructions' conveyed in no small part by new electric media. As Wyndham Lewis started to suggest already at the end of the 1920s (Lewis [1993]), individuals could get lost in the new electrical acoustic space of radios, newspapers and wireless communications; their individuality could be denied by a homogenising flow which annihilates all creative differences and generates 'hollow puppets.' In such a context, the experimental works of Modernist writers and artists, approached also through media studies, seem to acquire a double function: on the one hand, they help to work out the inner characteristics of the new dynamic environments, perceived as complex combinations of scientific, philosophic, cultural and artistic phenomena (from linear-atomistic views to the acoustic 'field notion of culture'); on the other end, they work like a 'warning signal' trying to resist, or at least to counter-balance, the numbing effects of mass homologation, as they require an active involvement of readers and audiences. In this sense, they offered a model to some later media studies investiga-

tions, as they suggested that it is possible to apply “the method of art analysis to the critical evaluation of society” (McLuhan [1967], vi).

## Notes

1. “LE NOMBRE/ EXISTÂT-IL / autrement qu’hallucination éparse d’agonie / COMMENÇÂT-IL ET CESSÂT-IL / sourdant que nié et clos quand apparu / enfin / par quelque profusion répandue en rareté / SE CHIFFRÂT-IL / évidence de la somme pour peu qu’une / ILLUMINÂT-IL” (Mallarmé [1951], 473).
2. Noi siamo sul promontorio estremo dei secoli!...Percfhè dovremmo guardarci alle spalle, se vogliamo sfondare le misteriose porte dell’Impossibile? Il Tempo e lo Spazio morirono ieri. Noi viviamo già nell’assoluto, poiché abbiamo già creata l’eterna velocità onnipresente (Marinetti [1973c], 6).
3. “trecento lune elettriche cancellarono coi loro raggi di gesso abbagliante l’antica regina verde degli amori” (Marinetti [1973a], 16).
4. “l’immaginazione senza fili” (Marinetti [1973b], 83).
5. “NOI PROCLAMIAMO [...] che il moto e la luce distruggono la materialità dei corpi” (Boccioni [1973], 26).
6. “Il Tempo e lo Spazio morirono ieri. Noi viviamo già nell’assoluto, perché abbiamo già creata l’eterna velocità dell’onnipresente” (Marinetti [1973c], 6).
7. “Noi siamo i primitivi di una sensibilità completamente trasformata” (Boccioni [1973], 26).
8. “Sensazione dinamica eternata come tale” (Boccioni [1973], 23).
9. “Uccello invisibile e gigantesco, che ha grandi ali flessibili fatte per abbracciare le stelle” (De Maria [1973], xxix).
10. “religione della Volontà estrinsecata e dell’Eroismo quotidiano” (De Maria [1973], xxix).
11. “*il bel frutto* della volontà di Mafarka, ed è nel contempo il superuomo, capace di staccarsi a volo dalla terra *immonda*” (De Maria [1973], xxix).
12. “Mallarmé, m’ayant lu le plus uniment du monde son *Coup de dés*, comme simple préparation à une plus grande surprise, me fit enfin considérer le dispositif. Il me sembla de voir la figure d’une pensée, pour la première fois placée dans notre espace [...] Ici, véritablement, l’étendue parlait, songeait, enfantait des formes temporelles” (Mallarmé [1951], 1582).

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## Chapter 7

### Literature and the Other Arts

One of the chief characteristics of modernist literature is an often far-reaching distrust of mimetic methods. The disruption of traditional verisimilitude may open up new possibilities of visual and musical representation, which may be more readily understood if one considers the connections between modernist writing and the other arts, including the theatre, architecture, music and painting as well as the art form which came into being simultaneously with the burgeoning of literary modernism, namely film. And as Baudelaire had predicted as early as the 1860s, such interart attention cannot overlook spheres that both defy and challenge art: fashion, street life, the glamour and misery of modern urban life. This, however was often overlooked in the criticism that first displayed a deep interest in modernist writing (especially modernist poetry).

The relatively limited attention paid to the importance of radical visual experiences within modernism can largely be explained by the social, cultural and political preferment of orderly art and the critical tendency to overlook non-verbal languages. In response to the historically marginalized position of the artistic avant-garde in academic discussions of modernism and the lack of a detailed coverage and contextualization of the interplay between the arts, **Giovanni Cianci** offers a historical overview of an imbalance in the relationship between the visual arts and modernist criticism. He points out that despite the recent recognition of the impact of the visual arts on literary modernism, the issue remains largely unexplored. Cianci argues that the interchanges between literature and the visual arts in Europe were especially intricate and intense in the pre-war period and tries to locate where and how the visual was put aside in favour of the written.

Although both literary and architectural modernism greatly influenced the conceptual and material topographies of the modern world, a thorough analysis of their interrelationship is still missing. **David Spurr** reveals the close link between the two areas by tracing the interrelationships between the conceptualization of dwelling in both literary modernism (Marcel Proust, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Samuel Beckett and others) and architectural modernism. In spite of the nearly total absence of a direct reception of modern architects like Wright or Le Corbusier in modernist works of literature, David Spurr argues that there are strikingly analogous principles underlying the concept of dwelling in the two disciplines and discourses: the primacy of formal and thematic characteristics such as transparency, the subversion of the dichotomy interior/exterior, and a disillusionment with nineteenth-century aesthetics.

**Jakob Lothe** explores the link between modernist literature and film in terms of modernizing effects characterized by a dynamic, complex and continually changing aesthetic form. Referring to



Boris Eikenbaum's notion of the intellectual activity demanded from the spectator of films, Lothe traces a connection between the new, unaccustomed responses required by viewers of (especially early) films and readers of modernist literature and art. Lothe is concerned with the beginnings and innovative narrative techniques in works by two modernist authors (Hamsun, Kafka) and their respective film adaptations (Carlsen, Welles). Lothe shows how these adaptations try to conserve the uniqueness of the original texts and apply within the specificity of their medium equally experimental narrative techniques exploring the limits and possibilities of perspective.

In their comparative analysis of Pierre Loti's literary work and the paintings of Vincent Van Gogh, **Bridget Elliott** and **Anthony Purdy** foreground the intrusion of the decorative arts into French modernist aesthetics. They show how, far from signifying a reactionary return to pre-modern forms, ornament and décor served as an escape route from the harshness of modern social and political life. Elliott and Purdy demonstrate that the oriental and Japanese settings displayed in the decorative arts were not so much ornaments as inspirations for profound transformations of the conventional Western perspective and for subversions of its assumptions about the relationship between subject and background. This change manifests itself in the importance of the surface and repetitive structure of the patterns that replace the traditional privileging of depth in modern artistic discourse since the Renaissance. Finally, Elliott and Purdy show that the decorative in modernism is not only conceived of as an innovation of aesthetic modes, but that, in its search for communal life forms, it also has an ethical dimension.

**Brad Bucknell** approaches one of the central topics in modernist art, the subversion of language as a transparent communicative medium, by highlighting the decisive influence of music on French, Anglo-American and German modernist literature. After tracing the continuities and discontinuities between traditional and modernist notions of music and its connection with the sublime, Bucknell analyzes modern poetry and novels, showing how certain writers make use of musical devices in order to question language as an adequate means of representation. Bucknell illustrates his argument with the opera libretto *The Mother of Us All* by Gertrude Stein and shows that the influence of music on modern literature does not necessarily entail a retreat from social and political contexts as is often assumed.

**Graham Ley** argues that it is unacceptable to confine theatrical modernism merely to an aspect of the history of drama because theatre is no longer perceived as the enactment of written dramas, but a complex activity to which the term "performance" must be applied. Ley points to the frailty of critical and theoretical attention to theatrical modernism and calls for a more robust and holistic account that does not depend exclusively on analogies with literary or artistic modernism, but that includes a theory of performance and of modernism in dramaturgy and theatrical practice.

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## The New Critical Demotion of the Visual in Modernism

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Over the past thirty years there has been no lack of research into the relationship between modernism and the visual arts. The pioneering work on the subject dates back to the 1970s and much progress has been made since. A number of specialized studies have focused on individual authors or on restricted groups. Even taken together, however, the list of these authors is by no means exhaustive. Moreover, to date there is still no general overview of the issue, nor even one limited to early Anglo-American modernism on the London scene. As late as in 1994 one scholar still complained that historians of modernism continued to give preferential treatment to its literary dimension, neglecting the visual one (Butler [1994], xv). There was no shift of emphasis with the recent publication of a work of such historical sweep as the *Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, which dedicated the whole of Volume VII to *Modernism and The New Criticism* (Litz, Menand, Rayney [2000]). Readers of this new account will search in vain for adequate discussion, in the form of detailed coverage and historical contextualization, of the numerous exchanges between the arts—yet these were typical precisely of modernism, in particular its experimental phase in the years just before World War I.

On the contrary, while coverage of the kind is completely absent from the volume on the twentieth century (the essay on “Ezra Pound” by Walton Litz and Lawrence Rainey is the sole contribution to place due emphasis on the impact of Futurism on the formation of Imagism and Vorticism), there is an excellent, illuminating chapter in Volume V on the nineteenth century (Romanticism), a well-documented and informative account of the relationship between literature and the other arts, in particular on the “interchanges and encroachments” between the various artistic disciplines (Linderberger [2000]). Were relations between the sister arts in the twentieth century uninteresting, or did they produce no episodes of significance? Are there only negligible links between the great transformation of forms that occurred in literary modernism and the formal revolution of avant-garde in painting? Or if the reverse is the case—given that the dialogue between literature and the plastic and visual arts has never been so varied and intense as in that exciting period—then how can this, one of the least insular and most fascinating aspects of Anglo-American modernism, be neglected? It is my view that such neglect derives neither from a *parti pris* nor from a chance lack of information, but rather results from a number of causes which underlie the whole course and outcome of Anglo-American modernism.

I intend to focus my attention on the prewar phase only, which to my mind was the most intense and influential throughout Europe, not excepting Britain. By way of a preamble, I would schematically identify five basic reasons for the lack of attention which the phenomenon has received: first,

the short life-span of the most radical experimentation (Vorticism, which took place entirely in the two years from 1914 to 1915), a decisive experience but one which was immediately overwhelmed by the outbreak of the First World War and subsequently forgotten until the 1960s-70s; second, the utterly different climate between the wars, no longer iconoclastic but orientated instead towards a *rappel à l'ordre* which did not call for and promote radical experiments, as before the War, but tended to overshadow the *destruens* strategy of the *avant-guerre*; third, the rise of a critical methodology genetically addressed to exploring only the linguistic dimension of texts (the 'close reading' of the Cambridge School and later of American New Criticism); fourth, the organicist assumptions of I. A. Richards's aesthetics, incompatible with the radicalism and rupture of prewar production; fifth, the thesis that literature (poetry) alone formed the critical conscience of civilization, with the consequent marginalization of non-verbal languages.

I will discuss these five points in turn before turning to any additional causes there may be.

### The Short-Lived Experimentation of the Prewar Years and the Radical Vorticist Phase

The years of the twentieth century in which interchanges between literature and the visual arts were most intense, all over Europe, were those between 1910 and 1914. Although now generally well-known, it is important to underline in this article the most significant moments in the relationship between literature and the other arts in early modernism, which in Britain, as elsewhere, went through a period of radical, unprecedented experimentation. My aim in this article is an analysis of critical paradigms and not a full survey of the context, so I will not go into details about the events and the achievements of the prewar years. But I must briefly mention them, because they have been almost completely left out in accounts of modernist innovations, above all by the apologists and canon makers of modernism (dealt with in point 3). And their omissions, as we shall see, go a long way to account for the prevalent critical attitude.

John Middleton Murry returned to London from Paris (where he had lived from 1910–1911) and together with Katherine Mansfield and Michael Sadleir founded *Rhythm* (from 1911 to 1913, when it became *The Blue Review*), the first modernist magazine which, as if in continuation of the role played at the turn of the century by *The Yellow Book*, brought together literature and the visual arts. The writings of Katherine Mansfield, Ford Madox Ford and D. H. Lawrence were published alongside commentaries and illustrations of works by the Fauvists, Cubists (Picasso) and other experimental artists (as the sculptor Gaudier-Brzeska). Other pivotal events in early modernism followed in rapid succession. One was the celebrated Post-Impressionism Exhibition at the Grafton Galleries in London (1910–1911) organized by Roger Fry, who thus introduced the experiments of continental painters in Britain with a huge *succès de scandale*. Its importance was epoch-making, as remarked by Virginia Woolf's famous sentence "On or about 1910 human nature changed" in her essay *Mr Bennet and Mrs Brown* (1924). The Futurists also had an enormous impact in Britain, with exhibitions in 1912, 1913 and 1914, together with their manifestos on painting and literature, soon translated into English and widely published both in catalogues and the national press (Gioè [1987], 172–88). They quickly monopolized the British scene and became a protest model for those local artists who were eager, in Pound's words, to "Make It New!" In reaction there arose an independent radical movement combining elements of both Cubism and Futurism—Vorticism—led by the

painter and writer Wyndham Lewis with the help of an exceptional “impresario” in the person of Ezra Pound, determined to move on from ascetic Imagism to the militant avant-garde by following and encouraging the new movement in the plastic and visual arts. The official Vorticist review *BLAST*, *The Review of the Great English Vortex* (No.1, 1914, No.2, 1915) followed the innovations of Futurism in its graphic design and also provided a platform for the most daring interaction between literature and painting. In the first issue, Wyndham Lewis published a play whose dramatic technique was inspired by abstract experimentation in painting (*Enemy of the Stars*, 1914). It was also in *BLAST* (which as well as literary manifestos and essays published works by painters and sculptors, reproduced in monochrome illustrations) that the first poems by T. S. Eliot, *Preludes* and *Rhapsody on a Windy Night*, appeared in Britain. T. S. Eliot was by no means that poet immune to other arts which so many of the studies dedicated to him would have us believe. True, he did not sign manifestos, but we know from his letters that he was in touch with a variety of artists, not just Wyndham Lewis but also painters, sculptors and art critics of the Bloomsbury set, such as Roger Fry and Clive Bell. Eliot also went to see art exhibitions, where he was particularly taken with the innovative work of the sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brzeska—“one of the most interesting of the radicals”—while among the Vorticists he preferred the abstract Edward Wadsworth—“a man whose work I like exceedingly” (Eliot [1988], 94). As is confirmed by a significant statement he made in 1917, Eliot was not unaware that, where the realistic model lost its sway (as in so much of modernist practice), there was room for influence from the visual dimension: “In general, we may say that the less ‘realistic’ literature is, the more visual it must be” (Eliot [1917], 103).

Lewis’s writings were highly symptomatic of the radical innovations taking place, as for instance in his novel *Tarr* (published in 1918, but written before the war), in which he attempts the greatest possible simplification of syntax, in an attempt to emulate the model of the “abstractist innovator” in painting (Lewis [1963], 552–3). This program—felt the more keenly by Lewis who, as a painter, had already tackled the crisis of representation in his canvases—was to involve literature in formal experimentation, for “nothing was being written just then that seemed within a million leagues of the stark radicalism of the *visuals*” (Lewis [1963], 552–3). At that time Lewis saw literature as being “too bookish and not keeping pace with the visual revolution” (Lewis [1950], 129).

Ezra Pound, who aspired to do in Britain what Apollinaire was doing in Paris with the *nouveaux peintres*, recalled that in 1911, when attempting to evoke the sensations experienced in a Paris Metro station, it was not words that came to his aid—for try as he might he could not think of the right ones—but a sudden equation of colors, “little splotches of color” to use his own words; for him that moment was “the beginning of a language in color” (Zinnes [1980], 203). He was referring specifically to a well-known composition of 1913, “In a Station of the Metro.”

Virginia Woolf, too, recalled in her monograph on her friend Roger Fry (1940) the phase of intense fascination with painting: “Literature was suffering from a plethora of old clothes. Cézanne and Picasso had shown the way; writers should fling representation to the winds and follow suit” (Woolf [1991], 172).

The catastrophe of the Great War overwhelmed all these movements and experiments. Its direct victims included leading figures in British modernism: T. E. Hulme and Henri Gaudier-Brzeska. Creativity suffered terribly. *BLAST* ceased publication abruptly in 1915 after its second issue. As Wyndham Lewis himself put it, “the ‘fog of war’ came down” on the London scene, then at the very peak of its radical innovations (Lewis [1967], 46).

### The Postwar Avant-Garde: The *Rappel À L'ordre*. Tradition and Reconstruction

As Marjorie Perloff maintains, “the war marked a watershed in artistic production from which we have never recovered, putting an end to first-phase modernism with its utopian, radical, largely optimistic momentum” (Perloff [1992], 172). Throughout Europe, indeed, in every sector there was a strong reaction against the violent and extremist practice of the *avant-guerre*. This return to tradition was first noticeable in 1915, grew stronger in 1916 and 1917, and became the general pattern in the period 1918–1922 and beyond. It involved all the arts, from painting through literature to music, and Britain was certainly no exception to the new cultural drift (see Cowling and Mundy [1990]; Silver [1989]; Aa.Vv [1992]).

It is true that in Britain the rupture with tradition had never been as radical as on the continent. Even in Britain, however, there was much radicalization of experimentation in the prewar years, as we have noted. It is thus no coincidence that on the British scene, too, we find the typical characteristics of the *rappel à l'ordre* in the years following the war: the return to figurative representation in painters such as Wyndham Lewis, David Bomberg and Edward Wadsworth, to mention only the most significant names (see Cork [1976–7], who, though he simplistically deplores this phenomenon, offers extensive documentation). Nor should we forget the emphasis on “Reconstruction” (clearly and polemically opposed to the “Destruction” of prewar euphoria) in the declarations of narrative poetics and later in the postwar novels of Ford Madox Ford, beginning with the “Tietjens Tetralogy” (including *Some Do Not* from 1924).

So far as Pound and Eliot are concerned, there is Pound’s well-known recollection that “[a]t a particular date in a particular room, two authors [...] decided that the dilutation [sic] of *vers libre*, Amygism, Lee Masterism, general floppiness had gone too far and that some counter-current must be set-going [...] Remedy prescribed *Emaux et Camées*. (or the Bay State Hymn Book). Rhyme and regular strophes” (Pound [1932], 590). It should also be remembered that it was at the instigation of Pound, who had introduced him to Gautier, that Eliot turned to the severe formal discipline of the “quatrain poems,” inspired by the French poet’s classicism, in his work written between 1917 and 1919.

As to Eliot himself in the postwar period, it is hardly necessary to recall the central role played by tradition in his famous essay *Tradition and the Individual Talent* (1919), but one also notes the emphasis on the need for “order” and “form” when in his 1923 review of *Ulysses* he had recourse to the formula of the “mythic method” to explain Joyce’s extraordinary innovation: “simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history” (Eliot [1923], 483).

As has been amply documented by Stan Smith, 1923 was already a year in which Eliot was no longer willing to admit the need to activate violent stimuli that he had advocated in 1917 in his *Reflections on Vers Libre* “when in a sluggish society tradition is lapsing into superstition [...] the violent stimulus of novelty is required” (cited in Smith [1994], 35)—or disposed to repeat aggressive statements, such as: “What we want is to disturb and alarm the public” (Eliot [1918], 69). The emphasis now fell (as in the essay *The Function of Criticism*) on expressions such as: “allegiance,” “devotion,” “common inheritance” and “common cause” (cited in Smith [1994], 22–41).

The second edition of Lewis’s *Tarr* (1928) and *Enemy of Stars* (1932)—significantly—abolished the formal radical experiments of the prewar years. In parallel with the return of figuration in his painting, no short stories or novels of his (if we except parts of *The Apes of God*, 1930) from *The Revenge*

for Love (1937) onwards, resume the daring formal innovations of 1914, when Lewis applied the techniques of abstract painting to a written text.

It is true that *rappel à l'ordre* was not a simple return to traditional naturalistic conventions, as if nothing had happened before. Postwar return to order was in fact a different stage in the development of modernism. But even Pound's innovative *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* (1920) was now looking down on an "age" — the antebellum era — "that demanded an image of its accelerated grimace" instead of "an Attic grace" (Pound [1964], 173) consonant with the classicism that came to the fore after the war. Prewar modernism constituted the basis on which postwar modernists were soon to capitalize. In some respects postwar modernism was a consolidation of the prewar major formal transformations, when "what had once seemed to be rarified and outrageous experiments now took on a different character; they now looked like necessary means for grasping the fevered and accelerated spirit of the postwar world" (Bradbury [1989], 19–20).

On the whole, the postwar years were remote from the paroxysms of 1913–1915, when the revolutionary schemes of the various arts were strongly influenced by the violent, anarchical tendencies of prewar culture. The militant, explosive demands which had resonated from the titles of avant-garde reviews or manifestos published all over Europe in the tenor of battle cries (from the German Expressionist *Der Sturm* and *Die Aktion* through the Russian Cubo-Futurist *A Slap in the Face of the Public* to the English Vorticist *BLAST*) now gave way to the new keynote words of Tradition and Reconstruction. In the aftermath of war, shocked by its chaos and horror, culture had an urgent need to regain a sense of certainty, felt the requirement for orientation and stability, a safe anchorage such as only reflection and communion with the past seemed able to assure. The writings of T. E. Hulme, originally so closely tied to the prewar *Sturm und Drang* phase, were collected and published in 1924 (*Speculations*, edited posthumously by Herbert Read). Thus a much broader public received his prewar notes for a hoped-for "classical revival," but in a historical context that was far more disposed to accentuate its classical and canonical potential. Deprived of its connection with and support from the now forgotten radical experimentation in prewar painting and sculpture, which Hulme had so strenuously defended, his call for a "classical revival" was stripped of its "subversive" and militant intent. In the prewar years, influenced by Nietzsche, Hulme had equated the "classical" with the "dynamic," in other words with the subversive, and not at all with the static, pacified and normative notion of the late Victorian era.

I have given a brief summary of the postwar climate and its stabilizing inclinations after the transgressive euphoria of the *avant-guerre* because, at least in part, it helps to bear in mind this orientation of restoration and *finis avanguardiae* (introduced by T. S. Eliot himself after 1922, the conservative, orthodox Eliot). Another reason is that it helps to characterize those who accompanied and at the same time domesticated modernist experimentation: the critics who in the 1920s and 30s supported, mediated, explained and diffused the production of the avant-garde, laying the foundations for its subsequent canonization in the 1950s and 60s.

### The Primacy of Close Verbal Analysis in the Apologists and Canon Makers of Modernism

An orientation towards a *rappel à l'ordre* is not in itself sufficient to explain either the way in which prewar modernism was domesticated by literary critics, or the marginalization of the visual arts.

The most important explanation is that in order to justify, promote and canonize the literary output of modernism, there arose in the 1920s a school of literary criticism which was utterly indifferent to the arts. As is well-known, this new line of critical thought went by the name of the Cambridge School. Its founder I. A. Richards, a philosopher by academic training, had a background in experimental psychology, semantics and aesthetics. Richards, the originator of the analytical criticism which soon established itself throughout the English-speaking world, was one of the most authoritative apologists for modernist production in the 1920s and 30s. He was supported by his own literary sensibility—and creativity: he himself later published poetry. In the second edition of his *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1926), Richards added an important appendix on the poetry of T. S. Eliot, centered on *The Waste Land*. Even as early as in 1919, however, he had introduced his Cambridge pupils to the works of T. S. Eliot, Conrad, Hopkins and Yeats (Bradbrook [1973], 61–72).

Now, if we bear in mind the great attention and extensive commentaries dedicated to the visual arts in the *avant-guerre*, the extraordinary innovations these went through, the writings and poetics of the prewar modernists (manifestos, critical programs, essays, and so forth), we cannot but note a significant change, when we come to read the criticism of Richards and his followers. The striking thing is that, in attempting to shed light on the new experimental products of modernism, absolutely no reference is made to the plastic and visual arts, which not only had been so central to the writings of Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis, but which had also been relevant to all the other modernist authors mentioned above, as also to D. H. Lawrence and James Joyce—to restrict ourselves to the chief writers only. Indeed, we may ask whatever happened to that “oneness of purpose” between the arts which a witness of the modernist experience as important as Ford Madox Ford had referred to: “in the just-before-the war days, the Fine, the Plastic and the Literary Arts touched hands with an unusual intimacy and what is called oneness of purpose” (cited in Rose [1968], 82).

In order to find confirmation of how, contrary to the impression given by Richards and his School, the experience of the other arts was present in literary practice and thinking, it suffices to read not only T. E. Hulme’s numerous writings and statements on the arts, but also a text such as Pound’s *Gaudier-Brzeska: A Memoir*, both for its collage technique derived from Futurism (Perloff [1982]), and for the way it attests to the whole climate of mutual stimulation between literature and the arts. In commemorating the genius of the sculptor, Pound refers to the search during the prewar years for a “common ground of the arts,” while maintaining the specifics of each single artistic language (Pound [1970], 119–20). In his “Lecture on Modern Poetry” (1914), T. E. Hulme had already observed how “[t]his new verse resembles sculpture rather than music; it appeals to the eye rather than to the ear (Hulme [1955], 84). It was Pound, too, who noted the intersection of other branches of the arts in a different (Imagist) kind of poetry, “where painting and sculpture seems as if it were ‘just coming over into speech’” (cited in Zinnes [1980], 200).

It is well known that close reading originated as a technique of literary examination; it was applied exclusively to verbal language. Non-verbal languages were excluded. The close reading method was a protest against positivist, philological scholarship, biographical criticism, historical reconstruction, etcetera, and it concentrated exclusively on close verbal analysis of the text, on the bare “words on the page,” on that which it considered to be the “resourcefulness of words,” while it dismissed as irrelevant, extrinsic or secondary any consideration of the context, in opposition to any method that reduced literature to cultural history. Such critical analysis, since it chose to leave out the historical context, inevitably ignored many factors which had helped to shape the literary

experience of modernism, including the close ties which had bound together literature and art. As I argued elsewhere, close reading analysis, which responded to texts as self-referential linguistic objects “certainly illuminated modernism’s concern with language-as-medium, but at the same time it failed to register a fundamental shift from music to painting as a model for a new avant-garde language” (Cianci and Nicholls [2001], xiii).

### Art Themes Shaping Ezra Pound’s and Wyndham Lewis’s Criticism

One consequence of this general lack of attention paid to the dialogue between literature and the arts was that the impact of the vigorous debate on forms on the very language of criticism used by the modernists was ignored, despite the intensity of the debate in both the visual arts and literature, at the time of the major exhibitions on post-impressionist painting. Art terms do indeed feature prominently in the modernists’ critical prose.

We may leave aside the most salient instance, that of Wyndham Lewis, which is not surprising inasmuch as he was a militant critic and painter in close contact with the range of contemporary production in all the arts. Let us merely recall here his reference to the “wave of formal enthusiasm that immediately preceded the war”: “In the arts that movement [Vorticism] brought imagination back once more, banishing the naturalist dogmas that had obtained for fifty or sixty years. Impressionism was driven out and the great idea of structure and formal significance was restored” (Lewis [1927], 152).

Pound’s writings and critical language, too, however (and not only in the years 1910–1930), are rich in expressions which can only be explained by reference to the arts, to manifestos, to art criticism, to the numerous unprecedented debates stimulated by the anti-organic tendencies of non-representational works. Pound often refers to “craft,” “technique” and to the aesthetics of “form,” all stimulated by the revolutions in painting that were linked to the names of Cézanne, Picasso and in general the innovative artists of post-Impressionist painting and the new sculpture (Brancusi, Epstein, Gaudier-Brzeska, and others). How significant it is that Virginia Woolf, Wyndham Lewis and D. H. Lawrence — among so many other novelists and poets on the Continent — took part in the great debate on the revolution of forms carried out by Cézanne: another confirmation of the great attraction exerted by experimental painting on literature (Cianci, Franzini, Negri [2001]).

We may list some instances of such expressions here: “planes in relations,” “arrangements of forms,” “pure form,” “primary form,” “mass,” “shapes,” “plastic substance,” “formed words,” “arrangement of lines and colors” (which comes directly from Whistler), “renewal of the sense of construction,” “to revive the sense of form,” and so on (Zinnes [1980]).

Another aspect which still awaits detailed study is the relationship between the plastic-visual arts and the work of another modernist writer, Ford Madox Ford, whose writings “On Impressionism” (and his experimental novel *The Good Soldier*) make constant reference, explicitly or implicitly, to avant-garde movements and the technique of revolutionary painting. To give one further instance only, it is worth noting that T. S. Eliot (generally considered to have kept his distance from the debate on the arts), in his essay *Tradition and the Individual Talent*, should italicize the adjective “significant” — “*significant* emotion” (Eliot [1999], 22) — a qualifier which dates back to the well-known formula “significant form” invented in 1912 by Clive Bell (and subsequently reiterated



in *Art* in 1914). This formula was emblematic of the renewal of the language of art criticism undertaken to tackle the formal innovations of Post-impressionist painting, and one which had considerable success.

The distinction frequently made in the period—in Ford Madox Ford, in Pound, and others—between “representation” and “presentation” (poetry “presents,” rather than “represents,” meaning that it does not describe by mimesis) is also close to the language of art, for example in the debate on abstract art which claimed to be non-realistic, “representing” nothing but rather “presenting” autonomously as “self-enclosed,” pure form.

The whole of this critical language related to “form” is absent from the criticism of I. A. Richards and his followers. The characteristic notes of poetical language which they typically laid stress on (“ambiguity,” “irony,” “complexity” and—in American New Criticism—Allen Tate’s “tension,” Cleanth Brook’s “paradox,” and so on) refer not so much to the texts in themselves, as René Wellek has rightly pointed out, but to the reader’s response to them; they refer not to poetics but to impulses, in other words to psychology, to the subjective realm of impulses and attitudes, in accordance with the very nature of the *Principles*, which was an attempt to apply to literature the methods of experimental psychology (Wellek [1986], 151).

### **The Organicist Assumptions of I. A. Richards’s Aesthetics. Literature as Therapy. The Domestication of Modernism**

Creativity in the prewar years was typified by radical experimentation, feverish research, protest and conflict, which often nurtured an extraordinary wealth of new forms of expression. There was an awareness that the yoke of tired, stifling conventions could at last be thrown off (hence the excitement and euphoric tone of so many innovations), but also (in T. S. Eliot in particular) a consciousness of a profound crisis, accompanied by lucid despair. The radical novelty of the linguistic dislocations, deliberate disconnectedness, formal and psychological disjunctions, and so on, which abound in the texts of early modernism, is intrinsically linked to this climate. The formal violence of the visual arts (and especially of painting, the guiding discipline of the renewal, with its dynamism, geometricization and fragmentation) was not without a spirit of protest and revolt, the spirit of “a man at war” that Pound noticed, for example, in Lewis’s watercolors for *Timon of Athens* (Zinnes [1980], 188). In the same period T. S. Eliot, too, noticed a spirit in a literary work that was not dissimilar. Reviewing Lewis’s novel *Tarr*, published in 1918 but written before the war, Eliot underscored its dramatic dimension (Dostoevsky), energy akin to primitivism (“In the work of Mr Lewis we recognize the thought of the modern and the energy of the cave-man”) and the author’s determination to contest the traditional, tranquilizing values of humor, elevating it to a protective tool against “stupidity” (Eliot [1918], 106).

Such excitement, such openness, the libertarian spirit and sense of dramatic, lacerating shock typical of this heroic, de-stabilizing phase of the avant-garde, were incompatible with the theoretical basis of Richards’s *The Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924), which also later underlay American New Criticism.

The mention of names such as Cézanne, Picasso and Epstein in the chapter on painting and sculpture in Richards’s book, the inaugural work of analytical criticism, reveals his knowledge of mod-

ernist developments in the field (in the preface he also paraphrases Le Corbusier's "A book is a machine to think with"). But his analysis is always psychological and almost never formal, insofar as his emphasis is constantly, as has been observed above, on the viewer's (or reader's) response to individual works, not on their intrinsic qualities (form, volume, mass, and so forth). The missionary tone of his apology for poetry and art may recall the inspired approach of Matthew Arnold or John Ruskin—Richards's biographer writes: "There are moments of moral compassion, urgency of tone, and prophecy in Richards's social and educational criticism that resembles the pages of [Ruskin's] *Unto this Last*" (Russo [1989], 22). Yet Richards actually makes but cursory mention of Ruskin, the most important art critic in the history of British culture, and even then (as in *Practical Criticism*, 1929) only to find fault with his "external standard" in criticism or his theory of the "pathetic fallacy," or else to recall his criticism of fanatical mountaineering (Richards [1976], 235).

What most requires our attention is Richards's aesthetics of equilibrium, the organicist assumptions of his theory, with their conciliatory, pacifying intent. Was such an approach capable of accounting for the daring and revolutionary spirit of modernist experimentation and its language of rapture, especially in its early phase?

In Richards's *Principles*, poetry falls into line with Coleridge's notion of it as a fusion of opposing forces, as organic unity, a unified structure. For the founder of the Cambridge School, the function of poetry is to conciliate attitudes and impulses into a "systematized complex response" (Richards [1963], 183). In this way even opposing impulses eventually find a "conciliation," an "equilibrium of opposed opposites"—in other words, an inner coherence and stability, a pacification. For Richards, the poet is gifted with a "superior power of ordering the experience" and in the poet those influences which are "conflicting, independent and mutually distractive [...] combine into a stable poise" (Richards [1963], 243).

Richards's theories do not allow for poetry in which conflict and drama remain unresolved; he was still conditioned by an optimistic world view, derived in part from the scientific confidence of the late nineteenth century to which he was heir. In his aesthetics there thus prevailed, to use the terms of Nietzsche's polarity, the "all-ordering," Apollonian impulse, rather than the Dionysiac one.

Applied to postwar production, his approach was thus well-prepared to furnish an interpretation which could eventually resolve the disarticulate, fragmentary *The Waste Land* into coherent, tranquilizing unity. Thanks to these organicist assumptions the shock and alienation in Eliot's poem, its transgressive statement of despair, were tranquilized, smoothed out and shorn of their dimension of rupture and denunciation.

In his intelligent and up-to-date assessment, Richards takes to task those readers who, disappointed by the complexity and obscurity of the text, accused the author of *The Waste Land* of formal anarchy. He himself attributes an emotional rather than a logical structure to the poem: the technique of *The Waste Land* is like "music of ideas." Music of ideas, indeed, but still harmonic, since Richards goes on to restate his view that the "effects" of all the "ideas" agitated by the text must at the last "combine into a coherent whole of feeling and attitude" (Richards [1963], 293). It is no coincidence that for Richards "[t]he poem, in fact, is radically naturalistic; only its compression makes it appear otherwise" (Richards [1963], 292).

Because of his theory of literature as an "equilibrium of opposed impulses," Richards's approach was simply incapable of reading—to use a line by William Empson—"a style" as a "a despair."

Such an approach was destined on the contrary to encourage interpretations which sought to smooth over or even to hide the lacerations of Eliot's verse, its disturbing force, its despair. And indeed one of the exponents of New Criticism in the USA, Cleanth Brooks, duly fell into line with Richards's aesthetics when he insisted, in one of his most important works (*The Well Wrought Urn*, 1947), on the substantial unity and integrity to which all of the poem's component parts are finally brought back, by what he describes as "the balancing and harmonizing connotations, attitudes and meanings" (Brooks [1947], 178). For Brooks, "the work of art" is "a pattern of resolutions, and balances and harmonizations" (Brooks [1947], 186). With regard to *The Waste Land*, Brooks underlines the character of "coherence," the "unified whole" of Eliot's poem, its fundamental ability to confer order on the "chaotic experience" (Brooks [1939], 167) from which its substance was drawn, and in so doing ignores the original negation, the contrasts, the abyss, the extremisms, in short the apocalyptic dimension of the work.

At this point we might conjecture that Richards's notion of the enjoyment of art as a wholesome, pacifying experience was so successful and influential because, in conjunction with other factors, the change in direction after the Great War was marked by a shift away from destructuring, nihilistic and apocalyptic positions towards a general search for roots and compositional harmonies, after the extremism and exasperation of the *avant-guerre*. Religion, defeated by science, was replaced in its functions by literature as a discipline for compensatory and therapeutic ends. In Richards's sermonizing, poetry — in the vein of Matthew Arnold — "is capable of saving us," as he remarks in *Science and Poetry* ([1926], 95). He called upon it to fend off the chaos and disorder of the modern world, to fill the void left by the collapse of values.

### **The Primacy of Literature as Culture and Critical Consciousness of Civilization. The Marginalization of Non-Verbal Language**

Regarding another founder of the modern canon, F. R. Leavis, militant critic and pedagogue, influential exponent of the Cambridge School, a brief mention will suffice for a thinker who shared several of Richards's basic tenets, although he dropped the whole physio-psychological basis of his aesthetics. Among the basic principles which he did share with Richards was the idea that culture coincides with language and that literature has primacy, not only among the arts but in the whole range of experience. Leavis added his own particular emphasis on the ethical and pedagogical value of literary education: "The essential discipline of an English School is the literary-critical [...] and it is irreplaceable. It trains, in a way no other discipline can, intelligence and sensibility together" (Leavis [1948], 34).

Leavis makes no reference to modernist arts. In his assessment of D. H. Lawrence, whom he considers to be the greatest writer of the twentieth century, there is not a word about the interest in the visual arts that Lawrence cultivated throughout his life; he makes no mention of the impact of Futurism, so crucial to the development of the writer's narrative poetics at the time he was writing *The Sisters* (later to become *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*), nor does he deal with the long, important essay that Lawrence wrote on Cézanne (*Introduction to These Paintings*, 1929). Like Richards before him (whose influence can be clearly perceived in his early writings), given that

the historical juxtaposition had traditionally opposed science and poetry, Leavis, as a sworn enemy of industrial civilization (science), fought on behalf of literature (poetry), in which he felt that, more than in the other arts, the authentic, immemorial values of tradition had taken root. These values, which for Leavis coincide with those of organic, pre-industrial society, can only be recovered through a close reading of verbal texts. Only the literature of one's own language and country can re-establish the continuity of tradition, so violently upset by the present cultural decline. And only a militant, discriminating and — once again — literary minority will be able to access that tradition and “resisting the bent of civilization in our time” (Leavis [1948], 16), fighting its social and cultural disintegration, will be able to hand down its example.

In Leavis's view, proper literary training would reactivate the fertile contact between the reader, at present uneducated, and the stunning richness of the “great tradition,” its “fullness of life,” in which a poem like *The Waste Land* was by no means an interruption, but rather an example of continuity.

As is witnessed by Leavis's militant socio-pedagogical pamphlets — from *Culture and Environment* (1933) to *Education and the University* (1943) — he took as model the *Kultur* of pre-industrial *Little England*. Indeed he rightly described himself as “the scion of a line of Little Englanders” (Leavis [1972], 132). This is what lies behind his rejection of and open hostility towards science and the culture of the great metropolis — and it was of course in the great cities, in the culture-capitals of Europe, that the major instances of modernist experimentation took place. It also helps to explain the narrow-mindedness of his Anglocentric criticism, innately incompatible with the frankly open, transnational horizons of modernism, let alone the modernist internationalism of the visual arts.

### Forgetting the Rapture of the *Avant-Guerre*: Modernism as Symbolism

In the 1930s an original contribution to the interpretation of modernism was made by a non-academic American critic, Edmund Wilson. In his pioneering volume *Axel's Castle* (1931) we find a far more open-minded and cosmopolitan perspective than the one adopted by Leavis. Wilson had a background in comparative studies at Princeton University. He viewed the modernist phenomenon as a dialogue between English-speaking writers (Yeats, Eliot, Joyce, Gertrude Stein) and French ones (Rimbaud, Valéry, Proust), but without Leavis's nostalgia for the “immemorial ways of life, of life rooted in the soil” (Leavis [1963], 78). Even in Wilson's study, however, there is no reference to the pre- and postwar revolutions in the visual arts. The emphasis is on the symbolist experience, on what the critic defines as “not merely a degeneration or an elaboration of Romanticism, but rather a counterpart to it, a second flood of the same tide” (Wilson [1962], 9), a tide which swept forward, like a long nineteenth century, to reach the third decade of the following century. For Wilson, although the authors he dealt with represented “the culmination of a self-conscious and very important literary movement” (Wilson [1962], 9), there was no break between symbolism and modernism, but substantial continuity. This was the same view adopted many years later by Frank Kermode in his well-known study *Romantic Image* (1957), which argues that, with the mediation of T. E. Hulme, Imagism and Vorticism did no more than rewrite and update to the twentieth century a poetics of “image” whose matrix was Romantic and Decadent.

### **“Spatial Form” and the Impact of the Visual Arts Reconsidered**

A turning point in modernist studies, with a first, decisive recognition of the significance of the visual arts in avant-garde literature, came about with the influential essay “Spatial Form in Modern Literature” (1945) by Joseph Frank, who later expanded his views in *The Widening Gyre* (1963). Frank’s well-known hypothesis was that in modernist literature, both in poetry (Pound, Eliot) and the novel (Proust, Joyce, Djuna Barnes), there was a radically “new” form—“spatial form”—made up of synchronic juxtapositions in place of temporal development. This innovation swept aside all the traditional postulates of narrative sequence and depth, typical of the “story” and of logical succession. “Spatial form” referred to a structure without discourse or time, close to the super-historical simultaneity of myth.

In Frank’s essay the link with the visual arts was principally theoretical. During the period, knowledge of the avant-garde movements was very limited, even among art historians; it was only in the 1960s and 70s that serious research on archive material got under way with the publication of important documents related to the artistic creativity of modernism (memoirs, correspondence, manifestos, poetics, and so on). Frank rightly drew attention to the topicality in prewar Britain of Worringer’s *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* (Abstraction and Empathy), reformulated in English by Hulme in *Speculations*. The primacy of the arts in justifying a new literary style thus came back into the debate on a “new” classicist orientation, but Frank did not connect “spatial form” to the practice of visual arts by the modernists, or even to their familiarity and knowledge of the artists and their movements. Nonetheless, his notion of the “complete congruity of aesthetic form in modern art with the form of modern literature” (Frank [1991], 61) was enormously important and laid the foundations for future inquiry into relations between literature and the other arts in modernism.

The most questionable legacy of Frank’s views was his hypothesis of “spatial form” in Worringer’s sense of “abstraction,” namely a style which expressed terror and flight from the contingency, disorder and flux of the world towards the absolute consoling immobility of transcendence. But can the whole experience of modernism be ascribed to timelessness and tragic anguish? Might not the crisis, of which “spatial form” was an indication, be just as much the expression of an exciting experience of emancipation, destruction of old forms, symptomatic of a Utopian creative phase? One need only refer to the practice of “simultaneity” (in some ways a precondition for the existence of “spatial form”) in the prewar artistic and literary avant-garde movements. Above all, we must surely recognize that “spatial form,” instead of referring to the timeless world of myth, could also receive stimuli from or be in tune with the dynamic and technological temporality of the great metropolises (Paris, London, and others), as occurred with the Futurists and Vorticists. We should not forget that it was above all in an urban context (and with the machine civilization that inhabits it) that the modernist rebellion ripened and exploded. Such experiments as “simultaneity,” multiple perspectives, and so on, so far from looking to the timeless places of myth, had their most significant points of reference in the secularized areas of the big city, the prime cause of the crisis of spatial-temporal categories (see Bergman [1962]; Kern [1983]).

Hugh Kenner is one of the most penetrating historians of modernism and in many respects his work on the subject was ground-breaking. One need only think of his seminal volume, *The Pound Era* (1971), to understand his contribution to the study of modernism in Britain. In this account

the avant-garde art movements were finally recognized as playing a vital role in spurring literature to radical renewal. While in previous accounts, even only a few years before (such as the influential anthology *The Modern Tradition: Backgrounds of Modern Literature* by Richard Ellmann and Charles Feidelson, 1965), modernism and symbolism were almost synonymous (Perloff [1992], 167) and Paris was recorded as the well-nigh exclusive setting for the modernist experience, for the first time Kenner's work highlighted in detail the London scene and a historical phase centered on a new radicalism that contested or profoundly updated *fin de siècle* aesthetics. He documented the rise of Imagism and the Vorticist movement in a broad, absorbing pattern in which there is constant dialogue between literature and the plastic-visual arts—the emphasis is on cubism. Although Kenner kept within the often polemical and distorting perspective of T. S. Eliot, Pound or Lewis, making their tenets entirely his own, he nonetheless deserves credit for having brought back into focus some of the essential processes in reconstructing the context of the avant-garde, in particular the radical innovation of the modernist aesthetic.

When discussing the interchanges between literary and artistic avant-garde movements, there is clearly little need to verify the kind of documentation offered by those critics who were more or less fiercely hostile towards modernism. After the Second World War, in the 1950s and 60s, it was natural that the reactionary and non-liberal ideology of the modernists (in particular Pound, Eliot and Lewis) should repel many critics with liberal and democratic views. In Britain, the hostility of the Movement (Donald Davie, Philip Larkin, Robert Conquest, and others) is a case in point; in Italy the Futurist movement was boycotted until the 1960s by the critics for much the same reasons. We should also remember the stance of those critics who, over and beyond their ideological and political reservations, held that modernism was a phenomenon largely imposed on the British scene by outsiders, who had forced local literature into a “detour” away from its main Tradition (Hough [1960]). Equally, it is unsurprising that the intense experimentation of the first decades of the twentieth century should have been ignored by those critics—Harold Bloom and his followers provide a notorious example—who denied provocatively that the modernist phenomenon had ever existed: “Modernism in literature has not passed; rather, it has been exposed as never having been there” (Bloom [1975], 28).

In order to give an idea of the ignorance or at best only vague awareness of prewar modernist movements, we may note here how even such a scrupulous and well-informed critic as Richard Ellmann, anything but suspicious of experimental horizons, referred only in a marginal note in his now classic, monumental biography of James Joyce to the possibility that the author of *Ulysses* had come into contact with Futurism, moreover dating the event wrongly to 1908, a year before the movement was born (an error which survived into the second, revised edition from 1989).

### Radical Visuals/Radical Modernism

Fortunately, the picture has since changed thanks to a series of in-depth studies, although these have often continued to fall obediently into line with the coordinates set out by their subjects, taking at face value their every pronouncement. These studies, as was observed at the outset, have by no means completely answered the need to provide exhaustive documentation, still less to bear in mind, in the full impact of its historical relevance, the international context of modernism, a factor

which is increasingly hard to ignore. Remaining within the ambit of prewar London, the following studies deserve mention: William C. Wees, *Vorticism and the English Avant-Garde* (1972), Timothy Materer, *Vortex: Pound, Eliot, and Lewis* (1979), *Futurismo/Vorticismo* (Aa.Vv. [1979]) and Giovanni Cianci, *Wyndham Lewis. Letteratura/Pittura* ([1982], and for related articles [1983] and [1984]). For their treatment of the art scene these, like other subsequent studies, owe much to the documentary research carried out by—unsurprisingly—an art historian, Richard Cork, in *Vorticism and Abstract Art in the First Machine Age* (1976–77). Other later works enhanced our detailed knowledge of the cultural complexity and richness of the period, such as *Poetry, Painting and Ideas, 1885–1914* (Robinson [1985]) or Reed Way Dasenbrock's *The Literary Vorticism of Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis: Towards the Condition of Painting* (1985). On verbo-visual experimentation in the period 1912–1914, the outstanding account is by Marjorie Perloff, *The Futurist Moment: Avant-Garde, Avant-Guerre and the Language of Rupture* (1986). It covers mainly the continental avant-garde, Futurism, Cubism, German Expressionism. Pound is the only “London” author to be discussed. In a brilliant overview of radical prewar innovation, Perloff identifies a context of influence in which to place Vorticism itself, illustrating the pervasive presence of the technique of “collage and its cognates (montage, assemblage, construction)” (Perloff [1986], 46).

Erik Svarny's ‘*The MEN of 1914*’—*T.S.Eliot and Early Modernism* (1988) offers accurate and persuasive scholarship and records in particular the proximity of Eliot's stylistic solutions in his satiric, quatrain poems to the non-empathetic techniques, the “external style,” both literary and visual, of Wyndham Lewis. Christopher Butler's call for historians of literary modernism to give due space to the visuals has already been mentioned. His book also has the merit of pointing out not only the central role played by the French axis in early modernism on the London scene, but also the far from secondary part played by Futurism and Expressionism, both literary and visual. Lastly, two works deserve to be noted for the renewed attention they give to the influence of the plastic and visual arts on modernist writing: D.R. Schwarz, *Reconfiguring Modernism: Explorations in the Relationship between Modern Art and Modern Literature* (1997) and the exhaustive monograph by Paul Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis: Painter and Writer* (2000). Based on thorough and extensive research, the volume systematically traces the dialogue between Lewis's literary and artistic output. Edwards, who has studied and written about Lewis for many years, may be said to have produced the standard work on Vorticism and its leader.

For reasons of space, the impact of visual arts on literature has only been discussed here with regard to its most radical and disruptive phase, that of *avant-guerre* early modernism. Nonetheless, any historical account would be incomplete if it ignored the constant presence in written modernist production of visual codes (or at all events of the influence exerted by the plastic and visual arts) in the postwar period, too. This is a field of research which has not yet been investigated as it deserves. As has recently been demonstrated by interdisciplinary studies by various authors, a further much neglected phenomenon is that of the postwar resurgence of Ruskin (often cited by the modernist radicals themselves, Lewis, Pound and Eliot)—a name which had been exorcised in the prewar years. Ruskin became a vital point of reference in the period, significantly at a time when, as has been seen, there was a perceived and general *rappel à l'ordre* throughout Europe, and when the art which came to the fore in this climate of “rebuilding” was not so much painting as architecture—the discipline which more than any other expresses the social need for cohesion and collective memory felt after the disintegration of war (Cianci and Nicholls [2001]; Cerutti [2000]).

In conclusion we may recall that one of the most typical phenomena of the modernist experience was the crisis of the *logos* and the discursive model, and the consequent primacy of the image or, to use the term employed by Jean-François Lyotard, of the figural (Lyotard [1971]). Any account of literary modernism which fails to cover this crisis of the *logos* or the textual with its reductive divisions, also fails to identify the underlying reasons for the radical renewal of forms which characterized this fascinating cultural period. For example, the kind of literary criticism which ignores the incidence of the visual in a writer like Virginia Woolf (not even a line is devoted to her interest in the arts in the profile of “Virginia Woolf” in Litz, Menand and Rainey [2000]) — a writer notoriously involved with modernist arts not only in her critical practice but in her fiction, too, right from her early experimental sketch *The Mark on the Wall*, 1917 — could perhaps be appropriately countered with the novelist’s own reflections in one of her frequent encounters with painting:

The novelist is always saying to himself how can I bring the sun on to my page? How can I show the night and the moon rising? And he must often think that to describe a scene is the worst way to show it [...] All great writers are great colourists, just as they are musicians into the bargain; they always contrive to make their scene glow and darken and change to the eye [...] The best critics, Dryden, Lamb, Hazlitt, were acutely aware of the mixture of elements, and wrote of literature with music and painting in their minds. Nowadays, we are all so specialized that critics keep their brain fixed to the print, which counts for the starved condition of criticism in our time, and the attenuated and partial manner in which it deals with its subject. (Woolf [1967], 241–2).

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## An End to Dwelling

### Reflections on Modern Literature and Architecture

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Why is it that literary modernism is so rarely studied in conjunction with architectural modernism, when both of these movements have done so much to define the material and intellectual landscape in which we live? Perhaps it is because modern architecture, in its extreme rationality, its pure functionalism, and its brutal break with the past is thought to constitute one of the concrete, objective conditions of modernity that modernist literature implicitly criticises. Certainly the functionalist and rationalist elements of twentieth-century architecture would seem to be diametrically opposed in spirit to the value that twentieth-century literature places on subjective, non-rational experience.

However, a more thorough examination of the question suggests that these are merely superficial differences, and that a more meaningful relation between modernist architecture and literature may in fact be found if we are willing to consider the various grounds on which a comparison between these two art forms is made possible. I shall mention here just three of these grounds. The first is *formal*: architectural and literary works have often been shown to share similar formal principles, as in the standards in classical art of symmetry, proportion, and so on. We shall see that certain other principles of form are common to literature and architecture in the modernist era. The second ground is *representational*: from the stories of Daedalus's labyrinth to Italo Calvino's *Le città invisibili* (Invisible Cities) from 1973, literary works have always been a rich source of architectural description, commentary, and imagination. Although modernist literary works have little to say about contemporary architecture, their representations of traditional architecture bear a certain relation to the critique of tradition embodied in the new architecture of their own age. Finally, there is the *symbolic* dimension, in which both literary and architectural works may be said to express what Theodor Adorno calls the "collective undercurrent" (Adorno [1991], vol. I, 45) of a given historical condition. In a similar vein, the architectural historian Sigfried Giedion discerns a "hidden unity" or "secret synthesis" in modern civilisation which, despite the conflicting tendencies of the age, nonetheless provides a common ground for architecture and the other arts (Giedion [1990], 11). It is this undercurrent or secret synthesis that makes modern literature more than the expression of a merely private subjectivity, and that makes modern architecture more than the mere objectification of a capitalist economy.

In a field as large and complex as this, I must lay full claim to the essayist's privilege of exploring the subject from many sides without the pretence of encompassing it wholly. The grounds of comparison between literature and architecture necessarily change from one set of works to the next,

and even to speak of modernist “movements” is to downplay the important differences between the artists in each genre: in architecture, between Adolf Loos’s austerity, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe’s elegance, Frank Lloyd Wright’s organicism, and Le Corbusier’s machine aesthetic; in literature, Proust’s obsessive reminiscence, Joyce’s relentless parody, Woolf’s lyrical impressionism, and Beckett’s bleak humour. Yet without denying these differences, it is still possible to trace broad lines of movement that connect the various works within an art form, and that even form intersections between the two art forms as they develop simultaneously. I shall argue that the concept of *dwelling* points to one of these intersections, but first I wish to establish a historical setting.

Much of the common ground between architectural and literary modernisms lies in their respective relations to the perceived conditions of modernity—big-scale industrialism, the erosion of imperial power, social fragmentation, the commodification and mechanisation of everyday experience. Walter Benjamin claims in 1936 that since the Great War “experience has fallen in value”: the traditional human relations that make storytelling meaningful have been subverted and contradicted by unprecedented and incommensurable developments in civilisation itself. As the title character in Robert Musil’s *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (The man without qualities) from 1930–45, expresses it: “There’s no longer a whole man confronting a whole world, only a human something moving about in a general culture” (Musil [1995], 234).<sup>1</sup>

As forms of art, literature and architecture share a profoundly ambiguous and yet productive response to these conditions. In an essay entitled “Erfahrung und Armut” (Experience and Poverty) written in 1933, the year that Hitler became Chancellor of Germany, Benjamin points out that writers like Bertolt Brecht and architects like Adolf Loos are equally motivated by “a total absence of illusion about the age and at the same time an unlimited commitment to it” (Benjamin [1999], Vol. II, 733).<sup>2</sup> Their disillusionment is not just with political events, but with the poverty of experience itself, and with the attempts to mask this poverty by the bourgeois aesthetic values of the nineteenth century—attempts represented, for example, by the Jugendstil and Biedermeier styles in design, by the Deuxième Empire and Gothic Revival in architecture, by Victorian sentimentality and the chic aesthetic of the interiors that are described in Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891). Against these styles, the commitment of artists like Brecht and Loos lies in a vision of the age that faces unflinchingly the poverty of experience, but not at all in the manner of the late nineteenth century realistic novel. Rather, they seek a new aesthetic relation to the world based on an unprecedented existential condition. This is the common ground of the modernist movements in literature and architecture.

In architecture, disillusionment with nineteenth century aesthetics is to be found in Loos’s attacks on ornament and kitsch in “Ornament und Verbrechen” (Ornament and Crime) from 1913, and in Le Corbusier’s call, in *Vers une architecture* (Towards an Architecture) from 1920, for order, geometry, and purity of form: “spirit of order, unity of intention” (Le Corbusier [1991], 75).<sup>3</sup> In literature, we find similar impulses in Ezra Pound’s insistence on the clarity and economy of the poetic image. Just as Loos rejects ornament and kitsch in architecture, Pound rejects sentiment, abstraction, and rhetoric in poetry. Another point of intersection between the two arts is to be found in Le Corbusier’s idea of *plan libre*, according to which the design of a building evolves outward according to a “primary rhythm” belonging to its inner function: “the plan proceeds from inside out: the exterior is the result of an interior” (Le Corbusier [1991], 75).<sup>4</sup> Further developing this idea, Mies van der Rohe defends it against the charge that *plan libre* means absolute freedom: “That is a misun-

derstanding. *Plan libre* demands as much discipline and understanding on the part of the architect as the conventional plan" (cited in Norberg-Schultz [1977], 366). Compare Mies van der Rohe's description of *plan libre* to T. S. Eliot's 1917 essay on *vers libre*: free verse does not mean escape from meter, but mastery of irregular meter; it does not mean liberation from rhyme, but liberation of rhyme from conventional forms (Eliot [1975], 31–6). We might say that in *vers libre* as in *plan libre*, form follows function. These are not, however, mere questions of style: in each case, we see the reinvention of artistic form based on the conditions of human existence as it is actually lived.

If we see modernist architecture as an expression of contemporary human existence, we begin to understand why one of its great projects is the demystification of "dwelling," that idealised conception of space that promises rootedness, permanence, and a womblike removal from the experience of modernity. It is important to distinguish "dwelling" from words of similar meaning such as "living" or "inhabiting." From at least the time of the Renaissance, the "dwelling" has had sacred overtones in English, as in the King James version of the opening line of Psalm 90: "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations." The associations of dwelling with sacredness and eternity last well into the nineteenth century. Thus Ruskin in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849) writes: "Our God is a household god as well as a heavenly one; He has an altar in every man's dwelling" (Ruskin [1989], 184). As so often happens in English, however, the modern meaning of a word conceals a tortuous history, in this case one that actually contradicts what the word has come to mean. "To dwell" comes from the Old English *dwellan* meaning to go astray, to be misled, to be hindered. This etymological ambiguity is to my purpose, for what I wish to demonstrate is that for modern architects and writers alike, the traditionally idealised concept of dwelling is a false promise, one that modern art forms reject in order to strive for a more authentic definition of human existence in its spatial dimension.

The concept of dwelling became a literary and philosophical preoccupation precisely at the moment when it was no longer possible as a way of life. The concept itself is most lyrically evoked in Heidegger's essay of 1951, "Bauen Wohnen Denken" (Building Dwelling Thinking), where the German verb *wohnen* is given a meaning very close to the English "dwelling." As his ideal symbol of *wohnen*, Heidegger presents us with the picture of a farmhouse in the Black Forest which has been the dwelling of peasants for 200 years. Rooted in the earth, open to the sky, and furnished with the work of patient craftsmen, the house represents the ideal of human dwelling in complete harmony with its surroundings. Heidegger originally gave this lecture in Darmstadt, a city quite literally in ruins after the war. For him, the Black Forest house stands as a counter symbol to the modern condition of spiritual homelessness. Yet he concludes with a consolatory thought: "as soon as man gives thought to his homelessness, it is a misery no longer" (Heidegger [1971], 161). Like his contemporaries in literature and architecture, Heidegger calls for an authentic reflection on being in the space as well as in the time of modernity.

Heidegger's reflections on dwelling find an echo in Jacques Derrida's 1998 homage to Maurice Blanchot, entitled *Demeure* (Dwell; Dwelling). In this essay, Derrida points out that literature has no essence or ideality of its own. The radical historicity of literature—the fact that its identity is always only provisional and granted only by external circumstances which are themselves subject to change—means that literature has no safe "dwelling place", "it doesn't occupy a place of dwelling if 'dwelling' designates at the very least the essential stability of a place; it dwells only *there where* and *if* in another sense: it remains in debt [*à demeure*], having been put on notice [*mise en*

*demeure*]" (Derrida [1998], 29).<sup>5</sup> Literature has no place of its own. Wherever it resides, it is always being asked to deliver or to move on. Similarly, dwelling is always both conceived of and experienced in manner that is historically contingent. Dwelling, in other words, does not dwell in the stable essence of its on ontological place; we may say of dwelling what Blanchot says of the truth, that it is nomadic.

At this point I wish to explore the question of dwelling as it arises in some representative literary texts from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. I wish to demonstrate that the literary reflection on dwelling passes through from a nineteenth-century nostalgia for dwelling in the traditional sense to the liberation from this nostalgia by various narrative and rhetorical means, including a new consciousness of urban space. This process passes finally to a renewed confrontation with the absence of dwelling, where modern writing strives to relieve the misery of homelessness by giving thought to it. This general movement in literature coincides historically with architecture's movement from nineteenth-century historicism through the various phases of architectural modernism. This is a necessarily brief survey, but one which I hope will lay the groundwork for a more extended study, while also offering a new reading of several canonical literary texts.

The kind of dwelling that Heidegger recalls nostalgically is very close in spirit to the architectural visions of Victorian writers like Walter Pater and John Ruskin. For Ruskin one of the fundamental principles or "lamps" of architecture is what he calls the "lamp of memory." This is architecture's memorial function; it preserves the historical past in the great Gothic cathedrals of Europe, but also in those domestic dwellings that are a memorial to the ancestral past of their inhabitants: "If men lived like men indeed, their houses would be temples [...] in which it would make us holy to be permitted to live" (Ruskin [1989], 185). At his first view of a "Swiss cottage," or old-style farmhouse on the road between Basel and Schaffhausen, he finds it to be "tangible testimony" to

the joy of peasant life, continuous, motionless there in the shadow of its ancestral turf — unassailed and unassailing, in the blessedness of righteous poverty, of religious peace. (Ruskin [1991], 28)

Dwelling takes place here in a deeply privileged space and time, far removed from the crowded tenements of industrial England.

As Ruskin's views on architecture are well enough known, let us turn to his contemporary Charles Dickens, a writer somewhat better acquainted with the crowded tenements of London, but seldom read as an architectural writer. Dickens's novel *Bleak House* (1852–53) is intensely architectural in its preoccupations. Its great panorama of Victorian society is presented as a triangular relation among three scenes of the built environment. First, there is the urban legal district of Temple Bar and Lincoln's Inn, of courts of law whose institutional corruption is reflected in the smouldering tenements nearby. At the centre of this district is the Court of Chancery, "which has its decaying houses and its blighted lands in every shire" (Dickens [1998], 13). Second, there is the sinister country house, Chesney Wold in Lincolnshire, emblematic of a sterile aristocracy and rivalled in ghostliness only by Edgar Allan Poe's House of Usher. Finally, there is Bleak House itself, a dream-like refuge from these other scenes of England's ruin. It is described as follows by Esther Summer-son, the novel's young heroine:

It was one of those delightfully irregular houses where you go up and down steps out of one room into another, and where you come upon more rooms when you think you have seen all there are, and where

there is a bountiful provision of little halls and passages, and where you find still older cottage-rooms in unexpected places, with lattice-windows and green-growth pressing through them. (Dickens [1998], 78)

This is all one sentence, whose loosely periodic structure imitates the rambling passage through this pleasing labyrinth of a house. The furnishings of Bleak House are similarly eccentric—a profusion of mangles, three-cornered tables, Hindu chairs, china closets, scent-bottles, paper flowers, pin-cushions, needlework, velvet, brocade—in short, all of the Victorian bric-a-brac that makes this domestic space into a richly upholstered projection of its inhabitants' fantasy life. Bleak House is the middle-class counterpart to another of Dickens's architectural wonders, the little fisherman's house in *David Copperfield* (1849–50), made out of an old boat. This eccentric dwelling is presented as the perfect realisation of David's childhood fantasy: "If it had been Alladin's palace, roc's egg and all, I suppose I could not have been more charmed with the romantic idea of living in it" (Dickens [1999], 28).

If in *Bleak House* Esther is the honorary "mistress" of her guardian's house, its resident spirit is Harold Skimpole, Dickens's parody of the poet and essayist Leigh Hunt. The aging Skimpole is the eternal child, a figure of pure enjoyment, coveting nothing, and asking only that others know the joy of generosity by providing him with all the little luxuries of country-house life. The gentle irony with which Dickens treats this *genius loci* of Bleak House is one sign, I believe, of Dickens's ambivalence regarding the fantasy of the house itself. Dickens's social vision is keen enough to realise on some level the unreality of Bleak House. Others have discussed the unreal nature of Bleak House in terms of Dickens's vision of social reality, but here I would like to consider it in the light of architectural theory. In its labyrinthine eccentricity and its profusion of exotic furnishings, Bleak House serves as a kind of architectural extension and affirmation of a Victorian fantasy.

However, the symbolic function of Bleak House as a privileged space is undercut at the end of the novel, when John Jarndyce, the benevolent master of the house, builds a perfect dwelling for Esther, his ward, and her new husband, Woodcourt. This new house is in fact a second Bleak House, an uncanny double of the house which up to now has been distinguished by its uniqueness. Reproduced in this manner, the ideal dwelling is in fact commodified, offered in an unacknowledged exchange for Esther's continued attachment to her guardian after she has chosen to marry a man of her own age rather than Jarndyce himself. The easy reproducibility of the house also tends to undermine its status as an ideal dwelling: unique, authentic, and rooted in a special place. The second Bleak House calls into question the myth of dwelling represented in the original Bleak House by submitting it to the logic of seriality, by permitting the thought that this "original" is in fact based on some earlier model, thereby opening up a process of potentially infinite reduplication, which in turn suggests that the ideal of dwelling is something imagined, constructed, and contingent, rather than being an organic, ineluctable bond between human beings and the earth.

I find it significant that among the more than forty illustrations to this novel produced by Hablot Browne under Dickens's supervision, not one gives us a proper view of Bleak House itself. The frontispiece of the first book edition depicts the brooding gothic manor of Chesney Wold, not bright Bleak House with its three-peaked roof. It is as if to represent Bleak House in graphic, visual form would be to destroy its immaterial, phantasmatic status. Of course, both Bleak House and Chesney Wold are products of Dickens's novelistic imagination. But Bleak House is inscribed within



the narrative framework itself with a certain dreamlike status, rendering it doubly imaginary. We are thus faced with the following paradox: by producing an exaggerated idealisation of the figure of dwelling, Dickens tends to subvert the bourgeois Victorian aesthetic that he appears to celebrate. To register the fantasy of ideal dwelling as such is implicitly to relegate it to the realm of the purely imaginary, just as Ruskin's own vision of dwelling—the Swiss cottage—can be realised only within the framework of a sacred space far removed from the realities of nineteenth-century England.

The qualities of private fantasy embodied in *Bleak House* are precisely those that come under attack by the modernist movement. In *Das Passagen-Werk* (The Arcades Project), Benjamin's massive series of reflections on material culture in the nineteenth century, he argues that the nineteenth-century private interior is the culmination of a process of alienation brought about by the industrial revolution. The theory is that the private individual is alienated from the dehumanising conditions of the workplace, and so he creates a domestic space apart from and opposed to this workplace, where he can freely indulge in the fantasies of his own subjectivity. Hence the emphasis on ornament, on knick-knacks, and on materials like plush, designed to capture and preserve the trace of the dweller:

The nineteenth century, like no other century, was addicted to dwelling. It conceived the residence as a receptacle for the person, and it encased him with all his appurtenances so deeply in the dwelling's interior that one might be reminded of the inside of a compass case, where the instrument with all its accessories lies embedded in deep, usually violet folds of velvet [...] The twentieth century, with its porosity and transparency, its tendency toward the well-lit and airy, has put an end to dwelling in the old sense (Benjamin [1999a], 220–1).<sup>6</sup>

Benjamin's larger point is that the nineteenth-century womblike interior, far from satisfying the individual's desire for an authentic subjectivity, merely increased his sense of alienation from the real conditions of his existence. Again such a response is recorded in Musil, whose protagonist wearily contemplates the interior of the little rococo château that he has had renovated at great expense: "All these circular lines, intersecting lines, straight lines, curves and wreaths of which a domestic interior is composed and that had piled up around him were neither nature nor inner necessity but bristled, to the last detail, with baroque overabundance" (Musil [1995], 134).<sup>7</sup>

The initial project of modernist architecture, then, was to break open this inner space, to clean up its lines, to clear it of clutter, to let in light and air. This process had already begun, in fact, in the London of Dickens's day. When Dickens was writing *Bleak House* in the early 1850s, the most popular public attraction in England was the Crystal Palace in Hyde Park, built in 1851 to house the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry. Designed by Joseph Paxton, the Crystal Palace was basically an immense greenhouse made of 300,000 panes of glass supported by a skeletal framework of thin iron beams. Although iron and glass roofs had appeared in the Paris arcades as early as 1822, the Crystal Palace promised much greater possibilities for these materials, and was immediately recognised as a completely new kind of architecture.

With the twentieth century, then, modernist architecture seeks to create a new interaction between interior and exterior. Its principles are those of open space, transparency, freedom of movement, the dissolution of mass, the disappearance of historicising masks and symbols, the breakdown of hierarchical and domineering spatial effects. Frank Lloyd Wright's buildings open out into the land-

scape in a subtle and organic way which consciously avoids the domination of surrounding space that we see, for example, in the Palace of Versailles or Castle Howard in North Yorkshire. Many of these principles are given technical definition in Le Corbusier's "Cinq points d'une architecture nouvelle," (Five aspects of a new architecture) from 1926: (1) structural weight is to be borne by pillars instead of walls, (2) flat roofs maximize interior space and preserve green space as gardens, (3) the plan of each level is independent of the others, and (4) windows extend horizontally across the façade, which (5) remains free of the weight-bearing structure (Le Corbusier [1991], 120–1). In his writings on urban planning, Le Corbusier also introduced the notion of "trafic différencié" (differentiated traffic), according to which the built environment is designed for varying speeds and rhythms of life (Norberg-Schultz [1977], 362).

Le Corbusier made it clear that his project went beyond a merely technical program. It represented a new way of life, a revolution in consciousness:

Out of mere words, we make things whose meaning and form are arbitrarily fixed and immobilised—a glossary of themes appealing to the most permanent ideas, which we then petrify into immovable attitudes: roof, village, belltower, house, etc.; stone, rock and earth; hands. (Le Corbusier [1946], 18)<sup>8</sup>

We need no clearer statement of the intended continuity between architecture and language, and of the symbolic economy in which certain materials signify a profoundly conservative ideology, which Le Corbusier calls "le culte du souvenir" (the cult of memory) (Le Corbusier [1946], 18). If the building materials of stone, wood, and earth (or brick) carry the symbolic charge of hearth and fatherland, then an entirely new set of values is implied in the new materials of steel, glass, and reinforced concrete. Gideon called these materials the "subconscious" of modern architecture; they allowed for a new conception of architectural space, one no longer concerned with representational façades and monumental volumes. Rather, the traditional mass of the house was dispersed into a more loosely connected design of rectangular planes. This redesign brought into play an unprecedented degree of interpenetration between the interior and exterior space, as well as between the varying levels of a building (Giedion [1990], 30). The consequence in symbolic terms was to diminish every traditionally hierarchical order governing the use of space and materials. Architecture then transcends notions of *patrie* or *Heimat* in order to become international; it embraces open space; it decenters axial order, moving the dweller away from the hearth and putting him at the window, where his or her gaze is naturally directed outward.

Now, if we look at modernist literature in the light of these ideas, it is true that we do not see any particular interest in the kinds of houses being built by Wright and Le Corbusier. However, we do see what I believe to be a more fundamental correspondence of certain principles as both formal and thematic features of literary modernism: transparency, the interpenetration of interior and exterior, the rejection of historicising symbols, the breakdown of the hierarchies that traditionally order human experience and, by extension, the structure of works of art. An important dimension of literary modernism is the *mise en cause* of the nineteenth-century notion of privileged space—whether this notion is applied literally to architecture and landscape, or figuratively to the nature of the subject. In one work after another, from Proust to Beckett, the subject is opened up and exposed to the elements of modernity. What is revealed in this process, however, is not the inner Xanadu of Romantic poetry, but rather a space essentially continuous with the outside, itself composed of the elements of a symbolic universe which exists independently of any subject. The inner space of the subject

turns out to be a constituent part of the symbolic universe to which the subject is just that — subject and not sovereign. The point is not merely to expose the modern subject as an automaton jostled this way and that by forces beyond his control, like Poe's "The Man of the Crowd." Rather, it is ultimately to come to terms with this condition, to work through it towards a more authentic relation to existence. In this respect, literary modernism is like psychoanalysis — there is no question of a cure, but at least we can learn to live with our symptoms.

It is in this light that I would like to consider certain scenes in Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* (Remembrance of Things Past) from 1913–27, a work whose excavation of modern subjectivity is carried out through a richly architectural system of figuration. If the "cathedral" nature of Proust's work has become a critical commonplace, the proper sense of this metaphor has not always been understood. Theodor Adorno points out that in Proust's work the relation of the whole to its parts is not that of an overall architectonic plan to its realisation in concrete detail; rather, Proust revolted against "the brutal untruth of a subsuming form forced on from above" (Adorno [1991], 174).<sup>9</sup> Proust has a predilection for the Gothic precisely because, unlike classical architecture, it cannot be apprehended in its unity; too much of it is hidden away in an irregular and asymmetrical profusion of elements. Proust thus puts his faith in the *non confundar*, the uncombined, in his unreserved surrender to things in their natural coherence (*Zusammenhang von Natur*). On the one hand, this quality as a formal principle would seem diametrically opposed to Le Corbusier's calls for "spirit of order, unity of intention." On the other hand, the natural coherence of Proust's work is perfectly in keeping with the architectural principle of a "primary rhythm" and a "plan libre" that takes form from the inside out, and that breaks down the conventional divisions between inside and outside. The effect of such a procedure is to destabilise the traditional notion of dwelling, in fact to redefine dwelling in a modern sense, as a continual process of displacement.

From the very first page of his work, Proust creates a multiple analogy of the book, the self, and architecture. The narrator tells how as a child falling asleep at night, his reflections on the book he had been reading would take a peculiar turn: "it seemed to me that I myself was the immediate subject of my book: a church, a quartet, the rivalry between François I and Charles V" (Proust [1989], vol. I, 3).<sup>10</sup> The idea of the self as a church introduces the notion of the narrator's rich inner life as a space to be entered and explored in all the complexity of its structure. From this point on, he will return frequently to the *topos* of architecture in his analysis of human subjectivity.

In Proust, the structures of desire are rendered in terms of architectural space: on the level of narrative, interior spaces provide a refuge for the expression of forbidden desires, while on a figural level they allegorise both the hidden nature of such desires and the manner in which they are brought to light through a process of penetration and exposure. I am referring here to the numerous scenes of voyeurism in Proust's novel. For example, in the opening volume, the young narrator finds himself outside the country house of the deceased musician Vinteuil. Through a lighted window, he watches Vinteuil's daughter making love to her female companion in front of her father's portrait, an image which the two young women take pleasure in abusing as part of a sadistic ritual (Proust [1989], vol. I, 175–8). In a later volume, *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, the narrator watches from a window of his parents' house as, in the courtyard, Baron de Charlus engages in elaborate flirtation with the waistcoat maker Jupien. Then, when the two men go into Jupien's shop, the narrator moves to an adjacent room in order to hear the violent sounds of their sexual encounter (Proust [1989], vol II, 626–32). Again, in the final volume, the narrator finds himself on the upper floor of an obscure hotel

where, hearing muffled cries from an isolated room, he peers into the room from a hidden opening. What he sees inside is a lurid scene of sadomasochism, in which Charlus is being flogged by chains and whips (Proust [1989], vol. III, 843–6).

Each of these scenes depends for its effect on the arrangement and above all the interpenetration of architectural spaces: in each case, an act of transgression is made possible by an interior space thought to be concealed, but which is in fact open to view from an adjoining space, the space of the voyeur. It is true that scenes like this are not new in literature. They are well-known to readers of eighteenth-century fiction; they belong to the repertoire of the licentious novels of de Sade and Laclos; they occur in lighter form as the various “bed-trick” scenes in Fielding. But Proust’s voyeurism goes beyond these precedents in that it does not rely wholly on the notion of vice, with its secret witness and stealthy gaze. These belong to a conventional voyeurism that depends for its gratification on maintaining the distinction between inside and outside, concealed and revealed, and so preserving the *frisson* of scandal. Proust’s voyeuristic scenes, however, are rendered in such a way as to undermine these distinctions by analysis, by working through the dynamics of transgression. And so in each instance the narrator arrives at an understanding that allows him to see sexual transgression as something more than mere vice. In Mlle Vinteuil’s profanation of her father’s portrait, he sees an essentially respectful daughter, because the pleasure of sacrilege can belong only to those who hold sacred the things they profane: virtue, the memory of the dead, daughterly duty. In Charlus’s seduction of Jupien, what at first appears grotesque is rendered intelligible and even natural by the narrator’s sudden realisation that Charlus is in essence “a woman,” meaning one of the race of men whose temperament and desires are feminine. Finally, in the scene of sadomasochism, Charlus’s vice comes to be interpreted as having a certain virtue; the country boys whom Charlus hires to whip him bear a striking resemblance to his estranged lover Morel. By thus preserving the figure of Morel in these sad rituals, Charlus remains in his own way faithful to the memory of that young man.

More generally, the figurative dimension of Proust’s use of architecture can be seen as a modern extension of the classical *ars memoria*, in which a complex object of knowledge could be safely stored in the memory by assigning its parts to the respective rooms of an imaginary house. In Proust, however, this model undergoes a twofold transformation: first, its organisation is based not on the assignment of discrete categories to a correspondingly divided series of inner spaces, but rather on the mutual permeability of such spaces and categories. Second, the memory to be reconstructed is not an object of merely intellectual knowledge, but rather a profoundly disturbing experience—in effect a primal scene—the elements of which the narrator must recombine and reinterpret as a form of insight into the workings of human nature. In doing so, he acquires a deeper knowledge as well as an altered sense of what it means to be at home in the enigmatic world that he inhabits. The effect is both cathartic and salutary in ways not unrelated to the liberating effects intended by the masters of modern architecture.

If architecture figures in Proust as a metaphor of inner desire, it figures in Joyce as the concrete embodiment of modernity itself. *Ulysses* is a work that gets its characters out of the house and into the street, where they are confronted not with dwelling in its domestic sense, but with their existence in urban space, the very scene of modernity. Le Corbusier’s notion of an architectural space designed for differentiated speeds and rhythms echoes a remark made by Walter Gropius on his design for the Bauhaus School in Dessau, in 1926: “The imposition of axial symmetry gives way

to a vital equilibrium of free and asymmetrical groupings” (cited in Norberg-Schultz [1977], 370). This is not a bad way to understand Joyce’s Dublin, as well as the structure of *Ulysses*. Joyce shows us a single day in which his characters wander through the space of the city at their respective speeds and rhythms, their paths intersecting occasionally and as if by chance. This plan allows for a break with conventional narrative development, while it also tends to diminish social distinctions and class differences. In the street, persons of all classes stand at the same level, equally subject to the gaze of the other. At the same time, the space of the city becomes continuous with that of consciousness itself, effacing the distinction between subject and object. Here is a passage from chapter 8, which Joyce designated informally as the “architectural” chapter:

Trams passed one another, ingoing, outgoing, clanging [...] squads of police marching out, back: trams in, out. Those two loonies mooching about. Dignam carted off [...] cityful passing away, other cityful coming, passing away too: other coming on, passing on. Houses, lines of houses, streets, miles of pavements, piledup bricks, stones. (Joyce [1993], 134–5)

Almost imperceptibly, these lines shift from an anonymous, objective point of view to Leopold Bloom’s own stream of consciousness, thus performing on a textual level the interpenetration of inside and outside, of the subjective and objective universes. At the same time the shifting, associative flow of consciousness in Joyce is shown to be a function of the ceaseless movement of the city, whose traffic comes and goes, whose structures rise and fall like the formations of thought itself.

Joyce’s profound loyalty to the scene of modernity as one of ceaseless reconstruction leads him to a merciless parody of the traditional myth of dwelling, exposing it as something that can be realised only in a banal and commodified form. The penultimate chapter of *Ulysses* reveals Bloom’s “ultimate ambition” to be the ownership of

a thatched bungalowshaped 2 storey dwellinghouse of southerly aspect, surmounted by vane and lightning conductor, connected with the earth, with porch covered by parasitic plants (ivy or Virginia creeper), halldoor, olive green, with smart carriage finish and neat doorbrasses, stucco front with gilt tracery at eaves and gable, rising, if possible, upon a gentle eminence with agreeable prospect from balcony with stone pillar parapet over unoccupied and unoccupiable interjacent pastures and standing in 5 or 6 acres of its own ground. (Joyce [1993], 585)

Bloom’s dream house, with its imaginary address of “Bloom Cottage. Saint Leopold’s. Flowerville,” is the twentieth-century estate agent’s update of Bleak House, or of Ruskin’s Swiss cottage. In Joyce’s deconstruction of the myth of dwelling, its true nature in the twentieth century turns out to consist not in the righteous joys of peasant life, but in the frantic pursuit of middle-class leisure activities: snapshot photography, gardening, tennis, do-it-yourself carpentry, the reading of “unexpurgated exotic erotic masterpieces,” and the “discussion in tepid security of unsolved historical and criminal problems” (Joyce [1993], 587). The roots of dwelling are exposed as being not in the earth but in the accumulation and circulation of capital; hence this passage is followed by a long paragraph, written entirely in contractual language, stipulating the terms of a mortgage loan from the “Industrious Foreign Acclimated Nationalised Friendly Stateaided Building Society” (Joyce [1993], 589). The point is that Joyce’s parody of dwelling ends by affirming another, more vital relation to architectural space, that is represented by the city itself as the scene of encounter with the reality of experience.

Joyce's representation of urban space in terms of multiplicity, seriality, and circulation finds a counterpart in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), published three years after *Ulysses*, and based on a similar structuring principle: the movements of a series of characters through the space of a city (in this case London) on a single day in the middle of June. In contrast to Joyce, however, Woolf is more precisely concerned with the dialectic between domestic space and the urban landscape, especially as this dialectic implies the freedom of feminine consciousness. In Woolf, the recurring motif of this relation between inner and outer space, as well as of conscious freedom, is the figure of the window.

One can hardly overestimate the importance of the window and of glass in the discourse and practice of modern architecture. Already in his 1909 essay *Brücke und Tür* (Bridge and Door), Georg Simmel finds in the very nature of the window as human artefact an object whose symbolic significance goes beyond its practical value. The window is ordinarily made for looking out, not in. Like the door, it marks the transition from a spatially limited interior to an unlimited exterior, and so in an existential sense symbolises the place of the uniquely human, poised on the border between finitude and the infinite. In a more concrete sense, the modern innovation of non load-bearing façades meant that they could be entirely transparent, thus solving in a quite natural way the problem of interior illumination that had existed since the beginning of human history. Among the early modernist visionaries of architectural transparency was Bruno Taut, who designed a *Glashaus* for the 1914 exhibition of the German Werkbund. This in turn inspired Paul Scheerbart's novel *Glasmarchitektur* (1914), where glass construction symbolises the society of the future. Scheerbart argues that a higher culture can only come about through architectural transformation, which for him means the introduction of glass, "which admits the light of sun and moon and stars not only through a few windows, but through as many walls as possible, walls made of glass" (cited in Krufft [1994], 372). Later, the great master of the medium proved to be Mies van der Rohe. His buildings in the form of glass boxes and towers embody an almost spiritual approach to construction, in which the material of glass unites surface and light, the material and the immaterial (Frampton [1987], 44).

The architecture of *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) is of course the dull stone masonry of Westminster, with its eighteenth- and nineteenth-century houses. Woolf has no interest in modern architecture as such, and the utopian manifestos of modern architecture in particular should not be confused with the aims of modernist writers like Joyce and Woolf. However, Woolf shares with her architectural contemporaries a passion for the dematerialisation of solid boundaries and for the interpenetration of interior and exterior space. The impulse of the novel's opening passage is that of, precisely, an opening out and a dissolution of the barriers to desire. Clarissa stands at the open window of her house and reflects that for that evening's party, "the doors would be taken off their hinges." This architectural image opens simultaneously onto the exterior space of the city ("what a morning — fresh as if issued to children on a beach") and the interior space of her memory, for the scene recalls to her how, as a girl, "she had burst open the French windows at Bourton into the open air" (Woolf [1992a], 3). The door between memory and actuality, inner and outer spaces, is taken off its hinges. Both the remembered gesture and the present one, however, stand in contrast to the tomb-like hall of the house, "cool as a vault" (Woolf [1992a], 37), or the confined space of the attic room where she sleeps alone on a narrow bed: "There was an emptiness about the heart of life; an attic room" (Woolf [1992a], 39). As Clarissa ventures forth into the city to buy flowers, she embodies the freedom of movement enjoyed by middle-class women in the modern city. The nearly ecstatic

pleasure that she derives from the sensations of urban space serves to compensate for the sterility of her domestic life.

If the window stands for this opening out of feminine desire, it also serves to affirm the “odd affinities” (Woolf [1992a], 200) that unite Clarissa on a profound and mysterious level to the people and things around her. Near the end of the novel, she stands at the window once again, alone for a moment during her party. It is dark now, and she has just learned of the suicide of a stranger whom we know as Septimus Warren Smith. The young man has thrown himself out of a window in an act that Clarissa imagines as one of defiance, of “an attempt to communicate” (Woolf [1992a], 241–2). Across the street, in the room opposite, she is surprised by the sight of an old woman staring straight at her. The old woman is going to bed; at last she puts out the light. Clarissa, now contemplating the darkness that passes over the house opposite, thinks of the young man who has killed himself by throwing himself out of a window; she feels “glad that he had done it, thrown it away while they went on living” (Woolf [1992a], 244). The scene is rich in the way it uses architectural space to stage Clarissa’s confrontation with the conditions of her own existence. She stands in a room apart from her guests, but her gaze is directed outward, towards a female figure opposite who returns her gaze, as if in a mirror image. It is a remarkable moment, in which the gaze of the other appears as Clarissa’s own gaze directed back at her: however, the old woman’s gaze is neither completely Clarissa’s own nor that of the other. The point is that the window scene creates a moment in which the difference between self and other is suspended, thereby effacing this boundary in a kind of revelation that also effaces the boundary between life and death. In the sudden darkness of the other house, Clarissa sees her own death. But death here is not the confinement of the tomb; rather it is the final suspension of difference, the breakdown of barriers. The thought of death unites her with both strangers, the young man and the old woman: “There was an embrace in death.” I find it significant that this vision is seized through the enframing device of the window, by a feminine gaze directed outward and away from the patriarchal order of the domestic interior—the house of Mrs Richard Dalloway, hostess to the Prime Minister. The gaze that passes through one interior, across open space, and into the inner space of the other, represents Woolf’s ideal of a unifying feminine consciousness.

The figure of a woman standing at the window is symbolic of a certain feminine stance in Woolf. Here we are reminded that the traditional ideal of dwelling is inseparable from a certain idea of the feminine—the *femme au foyer*, herself a bodily extension of the warmth of the hearth, yet one which is confined to the walls of the dwelling. Woolf’s novels consciously subvert the notion of dwelling that includes the *femme au foyer*, while seeking a sense of permanence that does not depend on the enclosure of domestic space. Her characters represent the attempt, however fleeting and tentative, to be at home in the world. The opening section of *To the Lighthouse* (1927) is called “The Window.” It is here that Mrs Ramsey, wife and mother, has the occasion to reflect on the world of social difference: “The real differences, she thought, standing by the drawing room window” (Woolf [1992c], 14). These are differences of rich and poor, high and low, “things she saw with her own eyes, weekly, daily, here or in London, when she visited this widow, or that struggling wife” (Woolf [1992c], 15). Woolf’s emphasis here is on the feminine consciousness of the feminisation of poverty, one that can be acquired only by a gaze directed outward from the purely domestic sphere. Mrs Ramsey, however, is not merely an observer of social reality. She also bears witness to a sense

of the permanence of being, a sense confirmed by the light reflected in the window: "something, she meant, is immune from change, and shines out (she glanced at the window with its ripple of reflected lights) in the force of the flowing, the fleeting, the spectral" (Woolf [1992c], 142).

As an opening onto exterior space, Woolf's window joins the domestic sphere to the social; as a reflecting surface, it serves as the place of fusion between the material and the immaterial dimensions of Woolf's world. Finally, it is through an uncurtained window that the narrator of *A Room of One's Own* (1929) surveys the London streets (Woolf [1992b], 124). In order to write, Woolf says, a woman needs money and a room of her own. But the point is worth making that this celebrated essay is not about feminine self-enclosure. Rather, it is about creating a position from which the world at a given historical moment can be observed and rendered by a feminine consciousness. And so she looks out her window to see what London is doing on the morning of 26 October 1928. Woolf makes it clear, however, that the glass is transparent both ways: as she observes the world, she also exposes herself to its view. The window has no curtain. The woman wears no veil. She looks at London face to face.

At this point I wish to return to Benjamin's essay on "Experience and Poverty" in order to lay the groundwork for discussing a rather different response to the conditions of modernity from that which we find in Joyce and Woolf. In that essay, Benjamin speaks of modern civilisation as composed of people "who have grown tired of the endless complications of everyday living [...] to whom the purpose of existence seems to have been reduced to the most distant vanishing point in an endless horizon" (Benjamin [1999b], vol. II, 735).<sup>11</sup> An important artistic response to this state of things has been that of the *tabula rasa*, the ruthless clearing away or emptying out of all forms of value in order that the creative spirit can begin again. This art of "insight and renunciation" is found equally in architecture and literature. Rather than idealising the material of glass in the manner of Scheerbart, Benjamin finds it to be something cold and sober, "a hard, smooth material to which nothing can be fixed" (Benjamin [1999b], vol. II, 733).<sup>12</sup> Scheerbart with his glass and the Bauhaus school with its steel consciously create rooms in which the human being leaves little or no trace.

This idea has been taken up more recently by the Italian theorist Massimo Cacciari, who sees the history of twentieth-century architecture as the concrete embodiment of the spirit of nihilism. Architectural nihilism, in Cacciari's terms, is an even more radical renunciation of the myth of dwelling than my examples have shown up to this point. It annihilates the spirit of place in favor of an abstract geometrical conception of space; it destroys all that is "collected"; its movement is one of "universal displacement" and of "radical uprooting." Cacciari finds this architectural movement to be essentially necessary, given the historical conditions which it expresses. He admires, for example, the absolutely anti-ornamental effect of Loos's 1911 Michaelerplatz building in Vienna, with its bare, stripped-down façade (Cacciari [1993], 161). This building, with its simple windows and bare whitewashed walls, was regarded by Loos's contemporaries as "nihilistic" (Heynen [1999], 91), just as they called Loos's Café Museum (1899) "Café Nihilismus" (Cacciari [1993], 111). Cacciari also admires the glass towers of Mies, for their absolute transparency that no longer violates the interior, but that "appears henceforth as the meaning of the thing that it has helped to destroy" (Cacciari [1993], 190). Quoting Rilke's Seventh Elegy, Cacciari renounces the possibility of being consoled for the loss of dwelling and of place, finding instead, in the empty space left by the destruction of these things, "das atmende Klarsein," or breathing clarity (Cacciari [1993], 174).



The literary counterpart to the architecture of nihilism is the austere, lucid work of writers of the second generation of modernists, like Jean Rhys and Samuel Beckett. Their deliberate flatness of style, their renunciation of lyricism and “fine writing,” is the equivalent of Loos’s relentless anti-ornamentation. In this particular respect they show the influence of Eliot more than of Woolf or Joyce. The deadpan voice is the authentic expression of a world emptied of dwelling, and bereft of place. Eliot’s 1920 poem “Gerontion” revives the metaphor of the house as an inner space of memory, but here, unlike what happens in Proust’s work, memory no longer bears fruit; it has the lifelessness of “reconsidered passion.” Only vanity now guides the mind through the house of memory, with its “cunning passages, contrived corridors, / And issues,” and the only remaining “Tenants of the house” are “Thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season” (Eliot [1964], 31–3). In the voice and the architectural setting of this poem, Eliot has set the stage for the later work of Beckett.

Before examining one of Beckett’s plays in this light, I would remark that the theatre is the perfect hinge-medium between literature and architecture. That is, in the theatre, a dramatic text is performed in an architectural space specifically adapted to this text, in the form of stage set, backdrop, lighting, and so on. When the scene represented is the Battle of Agincourt, the actual theatrical space may be nothing more than a limitation to be overcome. But in the case of an interior scene, what is represented is pretty much what is in fact there: an architectural space represents itself. Consider the opening stage directions of Beckett’s *Endgame* (1958):

Bare interior.  
 Grey light.  
 Left and right back, high up, two small windows, curtains drawn.  
 Front right, a door. Hanging near door, its face to wall, a picture.  
 Front left, touching each other, covered with an old sheet,  
 two ashbins.  
 Centre, in an armchair, on castors, covered with an old sheet,  
*Hamm*. (Beckett [1958], 11)

One could hardly conceive of a better expression of architectural nihilism. The bare interior is the literal staging of the architectural *tabula rasa* that resists all traces of human dwelling, while doing away with every “collected” object to which an aura still clings: the picture, for example, is turned to the wall. In the course of the play, Hamm will throw away his toy dog, the last object to which any of his affection still attaches. The gesture is reminiscent of a scene in Rhys’s *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), where Anna Morgan, the down-and-out woman of the streets, smashes a picture of a little dog entitled “Loyal Heart” (Rhys [1969], 137). These little dogs are the last survivors of the kitsch objects that once abounded in the Victorian interior.

In *Endgame*, whatever qualities of shelter or domesticity are suggested by the very notion of an interior are here negated, not only by this bareness, but also by the absence of difference between interior and exterior. Hamm, who is blind, directs Clov to look out of the windows, which can only be reached by means of a stepladder. The windows are placed above eye level because they serve no purpose, there being nothing on which to open out. Modern architecture’s destruction of the barrier between inside and outside here is given a new, if entirely negative meaning. Thus at the window stage right, Clov reports, “Zero [...] all is [...] corpsed” (Beckett [1958], 25). At the other window,

there is a featureless sea. There is literally nothing to see in the sense that what Clov sees is the landscape of nothingness, which as such is indistinguishable from the bare interior.

The sense of displacement and uprooting defined by Cacciari is likewise enacted on Beckett's stage. It has, for example, no traces left of place—of an identifiable landscape or setting, with its own location and history: all of this has been abstracted from what is now just space. The sense of displacement, which here means the annihilation of place, is enacted in the constant if pointless movement about the stage, and by Hamm's obsessive attempts to occupy the exact centre of the room. The notion of rootedness meanwhile is parodied in the figures of Nell and Nagg, literally rooted in their ashbins. To portray rootedness as consignment to the dust heap is implicitly to assert a profound sense of uprootedness. Finally, the overall structure of the play is one of a systematic evacuation: it begins with a bare space that is emptied out even more completely, with the extinguishing of Nagg and Nell, the discarding of various props, the hesitant departure of Clov, the veiling and the silence of Hamm, who is finally frozen in a brief tableau.

How are we to understand this negativity in terms of the problematic of dwelling that Beckett and his architectural contemporaries have inherited from the nineteenth century? An answer to this question is suggested by Slavoj Žižek in his recent essay, *The Fragile Absolute* (2000), where the negativity of empty space constitutes, paradoxically, a fundamental component of the structure of sublimation. His version of this structure consists of two elements: a sacred space, cleared out and exempted from the circuit of everyday economy, and a positive object which, by filling this space, is elevated to the dignity of the sublime. In Lacanian terminology, these two elements are designated respectively as the Void and the Thing. In traditional, pre-modern art, the problem was to find an object sufficiently beautiful to occupy this sacred space, thereby fulfilling the conditions of the Sublime. In Ruskin, for example, the "righteous poverty" of Swiss peasant life took place in a similarly sacred space of dwelling.

Today, however, we can no longer count on the existence of any sacred space, either in the concrete physical sense or in the structure of our symbolic universe. If the problem for traditional art was to fill in the Void, the problem for modern art is one of creating the Void to begin with, this clearing in the midst of a world hostile to anything sacred. The space of modern art, according to this logic, can only be occupied by the most minimal, leftover object: the remainder, the piece of trash. A more sublime object is not available, and in any case would not be possible without an adequate space of the sacred; only an object utterly devoid of the sublime can "sustain the void of an empty place," whose purity depends on its being distinguished from the elements that fill it out (Žižek [2000], 26–7).

Here I think we have a key to understanding the trash that occupies Beckett's theatrical space: the characters in ashbins, the soiled handkerchief, the sawdust, the fleas, the urine, the stink, the dialogue of asides and throwaway lines. The point is to create a space emptied of all value. This is the necessary condition for the sacred in a world where no actual object or discourse can fulfil that role. As we have seen, modern architecture, too, has cultivated empty space as well as open space. What might be seen as the fulfilment of nihilism, however, should rather be seen as an essential move in the dialectic of the Sublime.

*Clov:* Do you believe in the life to come?

*Hamm:* Mine was always that. (Beckett [1958], 35)

Hamm replies to the question of faith with a wry confession of failed expectations in his own life, on which the curtain is about to close. His reply expresses a hopelessness to which the emptiness of the stage set, and the austerity of the play as a whole, are perfectly adapted. But it would be an error to interpret Beckett's art of negation in a purely nihilistic sense. It is more properly seen as a work of ascesis, in the tradition of the *via negativa* that goes back at least as far as St. John of the Cross. However, the difference between sixteenth-century and modern forms of ascesis is that the latter have an essentially social character. As Adorno argues in "Versuch, das Endspiel zu verstehen" (Trying to understand *Endgame*; Adorno [1991], vol. I, 241–75), modern forms of ascesis, whether literary or architectural, are related more to the spirit of the age than to the Holy Spirit. Such works constitute a form of resistance to the oppressive character of modern social reality. In the very purity of their negation, they therefore carry an element of promise, the promise implied in the courage of an unswerving commitment to the age combined with a total absence of illusion about it. It is in this negative way that modern art finally refers, however distantly, to the promise of that other, as yet uncreated world, the life to come that always was.

## Notes

1. "Es steht nicht mehr ein ganzer Mensch einer ganzen Welt gegenüber, sondern ein menschliches Etwas bewegt sich in einer allgemeinen Nährflüssigkeit" (Musil [1978], vol. I, 217).
2. "Gänzliche Illusionslosigkeit über das Zeitalter und dennoch ein rückhaltloses Bekenntnis zu ihm" (Benjamin [1991], 216).
3. "Esprit d'ordre, unité d'intention" (Le Corbusier [1991], 75).
4. "Le plan procède du dedans au dehors: l'extérieur est le résultat d'un intérieur" (Le Corbusier [1991], 75).
5. "Elle ne se maintient pas à demeure si du moins 'demeure' désigne la stabilité essentielle d'un lieu; elle demeure seulement *là où et si* 'être à demeure' dans quelque 'mise en demeure' signifie autre chose" (Derrida [1998], 29).
6. "Das neunzehnte Jahrhundert war wie kein anderes wohnsüchtig. Es begriff die Wohnung als Futteral des Menschen und bettete ihm mit all seinem Zubehör so tief in sie ein, dass man ans Innere eines Zirkelkastens denken könnte, wo das Instrument mit allen Ersatzteilen in tiefe, meistens violette Sammethöhlen gebettet, daliegt... Das zwanzigste Jahrhundert machte mit seiner Porosität, Transparenz, seinem Freilicht- und Freiluftwesen dem Wohnen im alten Sinne ein Ende" (Benjamin [1982], vol. I, 29).
7. "All diese Olinien, Kreuzlinien, Geraden, Schwünge und Geflechte, aus denen sich eine Wohnungseinrichtung zusammensetzt und die sich um ihn angehäuften hatten, waren weder Natur noch innere Notwendigkeit, sondern starrten bis ins Einzelne von barocker Überüppigkeit" (Musil [1978], vol. I, 128).
8. "De mots, on fait des choses à sens et forme arbitrairement fixés et immobilisés, un glossaire de thèmes en appelant aux notions les plus permanentes mais que l'on fige en des attitudes immuables: toit, village, clocher, maison, etc.; pierre, bois et terre; mains, cœur et âme; patrie, foyer" (Le Corbusier [1946], 18).
9. "gegen das gewalttätig Unwahre einer subsumierenden, von oben her aufgestülpten Form hat Proust revoltiert" (Adorno [1974], vol. XI, 203).
10. "il me semblait que j'étais moi-même ce dont parlait l'ouvrage : une église, un quatuor, la rivalité de François 1<sup>er</sup> et de Charles Quint" (Proust [1987], vol. I, 3).
11. "Leuten die an den endlosen Komplikationen des Alltags müde geworden sind und denen der Zweck des Lebens nur als fernster Fluchtpunkt in einer unendlichen Perspektive von Mittlen auftaucht" (Benjamin [1991], vol. II, 218).

12. "Glas ist nicht unsomst ein so hartes und glattes Material, an dem sich nichts festsetzt" (Benjamin [1991], vol. II, 217).

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## Narrative Beginnings

### Modernist Literature and the Medium of Film

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In their introduction to *Literary Modernism*, Alex Davis and Lee M. Jenkins note that “recent theoretical debate has served to enhance our understanding of the plural bases of modernism, and yet the construction of modernism as an international, urban and yet placeless, phenomenon remains, for the most part, a critical given” (Davis and Jenkins [2000], 3). There is a sense in which the kind of paradox suggested here also applies to variants of modernism found in both literature and film. For although it is commonly agreed that these media are vastly different, critics still tend to regard the linkage between Modernist literature and film as stronger than that between other types of literature and film. The notion of such a linkage may be justified: if a key characteristic of Modernist literature is radical narrative experimentation, film—which arose as an artistic medium almost exactly at the time that literary Modernism began—rapidly developed a range of innovative and experimental techniques which, as in literature, are inseparable from the complex thematics these techniques shape and transmit.

A related reason for our tendency to interlink Modernist literature and film is suggested by the relative imprecision of “modernist,” a term often used synonymously with the word “modern.” In literary criticism “modern” can, confusingly, refer to both Modernist and postmodernist literature. In the cinema, the modern is commonly associated with two distinct phases, the 1920s and 1960s. And yet, as John Orr notes in *Cinema and Modernity*, the modern “has never been replaced” (Orr [1993], 2). Orr goes on to make an important point:

This is the paradox which confronts us in looking at film over the last fifty years. The reasons are complex. We can begin to understand them only if we view modern artworks, including narrative pictures, as processes which come into being in a Nietzschean sense by coming back into being, which move forward by echoing the past. Modern artworks are never exclusively ‘modern’ but also a multitude of other things. Their varied properties elude the abstract résumé of their honorific title, so that the word ‘modern’ never subsumes them. (Orr [1993], 3; see also Orr and Nicholson [1992], 1–9)

Orr reminds us of the self-transforming nature of the modern—its vitality and inherent dynamism, its resistance to oversimplified categorization. Although his primary concern is with film rather than literature, Orr would appear to concur with Michael Levenson’s suggestion that it “will prove better to be minimalist in our definitions of that conventionally flaccid term *Modernist* and

maximalist in our account of the diverse *modernizing* works and movements” (Levenson [2001], “Introduction”, 3; see also Childs [2000], 13).

Orr and Levenson are right to highlight the dynamism and continual change so characteristic of the movement commonly referred to as Modernist/Modernism. Seen in the context of this essay, the locution “modernizing works and movements” has the additional advantage of being more unproblematically applicable to modern literature and film alike. Taking my cue from these points made by Orr (about film) and Levenson (about literature), I want to discuss four literary and filmic texts that are modernizing in this sense. I will focus on narrative and on adaptation, discussing the beginnings of two novels—and two adaptations of them—which represent different stages of literary Modernism: Knut Hamsun’s *Sult* (Hunger) from 1890 and Franz Kafka’s *Der Prozess* (The Trial) from 1914–15 (see Lothe [2002a] and [2002b]). Proceeding from the text-oriented discussion, the concluding part of the essay is more generalised and theoretical.

Because, as indicated above, critics tend to use the concepts of modern and Modernism somewhat interchangeably, film is often seen not only as a relatively recent but also as a Modernist medium. For all its affinities with Modernism, however, film is a medium that seems easily (some would say “naturally”) driven into realist-mimetic mediation. One could even argue that since the way film creates meaning differs radically from the way verbal literature creates meaning, the critical potential of interrelating Modernist literature and the medium of film is limited. For the Russian formalist Boris Eikhenbaum, the transformation of literature into cinema “is neither staging nor illustration, but rather translation into film language.” “The cinema audience,” Eikhenbaum goes on to argue,

is placed in completely new conditions of perception, which are to an extent opposite to those of the reading process. Whereas the reader moves from the printed word to visualisation of the subject, the viewer moves in the opposite direction: he moves from the subject, from comparison of the moving frames to their comprehension, to naming them, in short, to the construction of internal speech. The success of film is partly connected to this new and heretofore undeveloped kind of intellectual exercise. (Eikhenbaum [1973], 123)

It is interesting to note that since he wrote his classic essay in 1926, Eikhenbaum’s knowledge of Modernist literature—especially as represented by the challenging narrative experimentation of authors such as Joyce, Woolf, and Faulkner—was limited. When, for example, Faulkner in the first section of *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) makes the mentally retarded Benjy a first-person narrator, “he cannot render accurately in words the thought-processes of someone for whom words have no symbolic meaning, and what he really gives us in this section is a series of physical impressions recorded directly, without the intervention of an ordering and interpreting intelligence” (Millgate [1961], 27). I am not arguing that this kind of Modernist literature prompts an “intellectual exercise” as radically new as that required by the medium of film. But I am suggesting that Modernist literature and film are both art forms that break new ground and therefore ask their audiences to respond in a new, unaccustomed way to gain an adequate understanding of the works facing them. This point applies, albeit in unequal measure, both to films produced during the Modernist period and to later film adaptations of literary works written during that same period. Both films and adaptations can be modernizing art forms; moreover, as Dudley Andrew pointed out in a seminal essay first published in 1984, every representational film can be regarded as an adaptation. Of the three main variants of adaptation identified by Andrew, I consider the two films discussed in this essay

as examples of *intersecting*, which means “a refraction of the original [film] in which the uniqueness of the original text is preserved to such an extent that it is intentionally left unassimilated in the adaptation” (Andrew [1992], 422; see also Naremore [2000]).

Turning now to the opening of *Hunger*, I first note that the novel’s highly subjective first-person narrative mode—a facet of *Hunger* that, in combination with other noticeable traits, serves to distinguish it as a significant early Modernist novel—would appear to make it less susceptible to faithful adaptation. As several critics have observed, one consequence of this narrative form is that while the main character is divided, ambivalent, unsure of his identity and subject to irrational impulses, it becomes more difficult for us as readers to distance ourselves from him—even though we might wish to do so. As film has no equivalent to verbal first-person narrative, the challenge of filming Hamsun’s novel is considerable. To see how Henning Carlsen responds to this challenge, we first need to briefly consider the opening of Hamsun’s *Hunger*:

It was in those days when I wandered about hungry in Kristiania, that strange city which no one leaves before it has made an impression on him....

Lying awake in my attic room, I hear a clock strike six downstairs. It was fairly light already and people were beginning to walk up and down the stairs. Over by the door, where my room was papered with old issues of *Morgenbladet*, I could see, very clearly, a notice from the Director of Lighthouses, and just left of it a fat, swelling ad for freshly baked bread by Fabian Olsen, Baker. (Hamsun [1998], 7)

Presenting itself as a first-person narrative, this fictional discourse is communicated by an anonymous “I”—a narrator who wants to narrate something he has experienced and who will thus become, we suspect, both narrator and main character. We do not yet know, and are in fact never told, the narrator-character’s name. Yet we sense, right at the beginning, an existential motivation on the part of the narrator. This motivation to narrate becomes all the more striking as a result of the abrupt transition from the first to the second paragraph. It is as though Hamsun is groping for an alternative to the realist paradigm of fictional representation. Significantly written in the present tense, the second sentence takes the reader straight into the narrator’s registering consciousness, yet it is difficult to ascertain whether, or to what extent, it provides an example of *in medias res*. Edward W. Said has observed of the technique of *in medias res* that it is “a convention that burdens the beginning with the pretence that it is not one” (Said [1975], 43). Modernist authors do not just subscribe to this convention but also start problematising it: by beginning in the middle, the authors of *Hunger*, *The Trial* and *To the Lighthouse* all reveal how difficult it is to begin, and how coincidental any beginning in one sense is. What is striking about Hamsun’s problematising use of *in medias res* in *Hunger* is the combination of narrative immediacy and focus on the protagonist’s consciousness. The author employs an original narrative technique to highlight a particular thematic issue: where does the protagonist’s consciousness begin, what are its main constituent aspects, and how can it be recorded in fictional prose? Hamsun is a pioneer of the stream-of-consciousness technique later perfected by Modernist writers such as Joyce and Woolf. As James McFarlane has noted (McFarlane [1960]; see also McFarlane [1956], 563–94), we are drawn into the character’s situation as experienced at the time of awakening. In Martin Humpál’s succinct phrase, “the narrative of *Hunger* presents the workings of a character’s consciousness as if in its *present manifestation*: the protagonist moves constantly before the reader as an ever-changing identity” (Humpál [1998], 58; see also Kittang [1985], 295–308).

There is a sense in which the second sentence of *Hunger* speaks of assaults on, and distrust of,



understandings of reality as presented in realist fiction. And yet, as Paul Copley writes of Modernist narrative, “implicit in each such assault is the presentation of an *enhanced* view of the world” (Copley [2001], 150). One significant aspect of such a view is the rendering, in fiction, of the individual’s perception of the world at the time of the experience, without the kind of ordering and editing activity typically performed by the narrator in a realist novel. How does film respond to Modernist literature’s presentation of such an “enhanced view”? More specifically, how does Henning Carlsen, as director of the adaptation of *Hunger*, react to the challenge of transferring the literary qualities of the novel’s beginning to film? I would like to venture three interrelated comments on the opening of Carlsen’s *Sult* (*Hunger*, 1966). Implicit in my argument is the view of this adaptation, and of Welles’s *The Trial*, as modernizing films.

My first observation concerns the location of the film’s opening shot. Film is unique among art forms in its ability to display space. A camera shot in film is as rich in connotations as a sentence, perhaps a paragraph. Thus, a film made up of only one shot, like the Lumière brothers’ *L’Arrivé d’un train en gare de la Ciotat* (The arrival of a train in Ciotat station, 1895), can be surprisingly complex, constituting, as André Gaudreault has argued, a narrative in its own right (Gaudreault [1994], 70). Moreover, as Christian Metz has shown, the opening shot tends to rapidly blend with successive shots, thus constituting original and complicated tropes that work on the viewer through their kinetic energy (Metz [1974]). The director’s choice of his or her first shot is crucially important, and possibly even more so in an adaptation than in a film not based on a literary text. Seen against this theoretical background, it is interesting that Carlsen, having selected Hausmannsbroen in Oslo in the mid-1960s as the location of the film’s opening shot, keeps the camera in a stable position (with no tilting or panning movements) for 45 seconds. In a study of Carlsen’s adaptation, Lars Thomas Braaten argues that the camera’s first position resembles the narrative perspective of the novel’s opening sentence. Tacitly adopting the camera’s opening perspective, as viewers we associate ourselves with the film’s narrating “I.” Located at an unspecified point in time after the diegetic action, this narrative agent is also distanced spatially from that of the character involved. It is as though the film’s narrating I says: “This is how I stood on that bridge” (Braaten [1997], 34).

Second, while the first camera position is relatively detached and neutral, it provides a combined foil for, and contrast to, the following introduction of “subjective camera:” this dual movement forms a filmic equivalent to the transition from the first to the second paragraph in *Hunger*. Once the film’s credits have been projected over the silver screen, the camera starts moving closer to the person on the bridge. Gradually we realise the film’s narrating I is inviting us to adopt the perspective of the narrated I. This is what Braaten means by conceptually subjective camera positionings, the thematic effects of which contribute significantly to Carlsen’s achievement as the director of *Hunger*. One such effect noticeable at the film’s beginning is that although the camera’s perspectival changes are related to the protagonist’s activities, there is no one-to-one relationship between these two types of change; this kind of disruption serves to filmically illustrate the protagonist’s unstable and unpredictable state of mind.

This observation is related to a key point made by Siegfried Kracauer in *Theory of Film*. “In passing through the continuum of physical existence,” writes Kracauer, “the film maker may choose different routes” (Kracauer [1997], 64). For example, “films may cover vast expanses of physical reality,” or they may “caress one single object long enough to make us imagine its unlimited aspects” (Kracauer [1997], 64; 66). This latter route is not often followed by filmmakers, but

Carlsen attempts to do so. And yet, as Kracauer's slightly ironic use of the verb "caress" indicates, Carlsen's camera is not, and cannot be, just "subjective" (in the sense of being consistently associated with, and limited to, the narrator-character's perspective). There are also various forms of distance involved, and these modulations of spatial and attitudinal distance accommodate aspects of voyeurism as well as elements of irony. Although the difference between the media of literature and film complicates a direct comparison, the limitations in Carlsen's use of subjective camera remind us that the presence of the narrating I is more apparent in the film than in Hamsun's novel. This is what I mean by the film's "dual movement," which becomes all the more striking because of the way it deviates from the corresponding segment (the second paragraph) of the novel's discourse.

My final comment highlights the beginning of Carlsen's *Hunger* compared to that of Roman Polanski's adaptation of Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, a novel published one year before *Hunger*. In the opening of Polanski's film, the camera is situated in front of a landscape that has remained virtually unchanged for centuries, and of which man, though small and vulnerable, is an integral part. Contrasting with this kind of harmonious, though threatened, relationship between man and nature, Carlsen's filmic presentation of the urban landscape of Kristiania strikes a note of dissonance and tension. The introduction of the protagonist provides an illustrative example: as the camera zooms in on the man on the bridge, he suddenly turns round and faces the camera (and the viewer) as if discovering an enemy. Relating this comment to the point made above about the opening's dual movement, I would suggest that the protagonist's act of turning round forms a filmic equivalent to his act of awakening in the novel. If in the second sentence of *Hunger* Hamsun employs literary language to present new dimensions of human consciousness, Carlsen exploits the possibilities of the film camera in order to make his film achieve, within and through its own register, a comparable effect. "I ask that a film discover something for me," commented Luis Buñuel (Doniol-Valcroze and Bazin [1955], 185). At the beginning of *Hunger*, Carlsen asks the film camera at his disposal to "discover something" that can display, through film form, essential qualities of the unnamed protagonist as characterised in Hamsun's novel. Even though this camera function is not particularly subjective since it presupposes considerable distance from the protagonist, it accentuates his sense of alienation and existential vacuity in an urban space perceived as curiously attractive yet frighteningly hostile.

It has frequently been argued that Modernism took the form of a reaction against the bourgeois idea of modernity. Yet as Astradur Eysteinnsson has observed, "in order for us to begin finding the edges of Modernism, we have to relate the above issues [thematic, ethical, sociological, psychological, philosophical and ideological] to modes of presentation, to language and formal mediation, winding our way back to the question of 'Modernist form'" (Eysteinnsson [1990], 38; see also Eysteinnsson [2000], 3–17). As an important early Modernist novel, *Hunger* responds to the combination of factors underlying the advance of Modernism by exploring new ways of fictional representation. In *Hunger*, as in Kafka's *The Trial*, one significant aspect of this ambitious project is the rethinking, and problematising, of the kind of narrative beginning typical of the realist novel. As film directors, both Carlsen and Orson Welles respond, in their respective adaptations, to this Modernist feature of the two novels. However, as the forms of problematising vary in *Hunger* and *The Trial*, it comes as no surprise that there is also a difference between the filmic presentations of the beginnings of the two adaptations. There is a striking discrepancy between reading *The Trial* in the order presented in the German critical edition and reading it according to its *Entstehung* (this is the

order in which the different parts were written). If, as is often the case, we read the novel by moving from the first to the last chapter, the “Fragmente” (fragments) constitute a new kind of beginning since they are appended to the main text. However, in the “Apparatband” (volume containing editorial notes) which accompanies the critical edition, Malcolm Pasley notes that Kafka wrote “Verhaftung” (arrest) and “Ende” (ending) first, probably both in August 1914 (Pasley [1990], 111). But the order of the remaining parts, divided by Pasley into “Kapitel” (chapters) and “Fragmente” is far more uncertain, and the novel’s fragments are perhaps not to be read after the chapters. There is a sense in which the uncertainties of the chapters’ order and the reader’s impression of loosely related scenes in the middle of *The Trial* serve to make the novel’s beginning and ending more definite. And yet the complication or suspension of causal relationship not only influences the reader’s understanding of the novel’s middle but also infiltrates our reading of its beginning and ending. In the process of reading, this effect proves to be an addition to, and thus a strengthening of, the complications of narrative beginning that can be observed on the novel’s first page.

“Jemand musste Josef K. verleumdet haben, denn ohne dass er etwas Böses getan hätte, wurde er eines Morgens verhaftet” (Kafka [1990], 7). Keeping the opening of Welles’s adaptation in mind, I will make three comments on this famous first sentence of *Der Prozess*. First, as a number of critics have noted, “hätte” is a key word in this sentence. The subjunctive form implies that although K. was not aware of having done anything wrong, perhaps he still might have. The subjunctive form is lost in many translations of *Der Prozess*, for example in Douglas Scott and Chris Walker’s: “Someone must have been spreading lies about Josef K. for without having done anything wrong he was arrested one morning” (Kafka [1988], 17). This is unfortunate, because the subjunctive form makes the literary text ambiguous in a way that creates suspense. This kind of ambiguity—in evidence later in the text, too—is linked to K. as the main character. Significant structurally as well as thematically, it is crucially important for the communication of K.’s thoughts, self-awareness, and situation in life.

This first comment blends into my second, which focuses on the narrator. Although “hätte” is related to what K. might have done and thus offers a partial explanation of his arrest, in the novel’s narrative discourse it is the third-person narrator, not K., who uses this subjunctive form. The third-person narrative perspective is closely associated with that of the main character, yet the narrator can also distance himself from K. Even though the two perspectives are inter-linked, they do not coalesce. The third-person narrator that Kafka employs is not an omniscient narrator in the traditional, realist sense. Although he informs us that K. was arrested, the subjunctive form “hätte” suggests that it remains open whether this was with good reason or on thin evidence—perhaps the narrator does not know the reason at all.

Highlighting the passive verbal construction “wurde verhaftet,” a third observation is to draw attention to the manner in which “verhaftet” (the last word of the novel’s opening sentence) serves to extend the possible meanings of, as well as the uncertainty associated with, “hätte.” Since, in a presumably civilized society (the word “Rechtsstaat” is used on page 11), one is not arrested unless one has done or is suspected of having done something wrong, and since any arrest prompts the question of who ordered it, a third agent is added to those of main character and narrator. This agent, a kind of court, remains enigmatic throughout. Yet its distance from the accused is curiously counteracted by its all-pervasive presence in the narrative discourse. One indication of the court’s insistent presence is that when the word “verhaftet” occurs in the novel’s first sentence, it is already

a repetition — both of the chapter title “Verhaftung” and, less directly yet perhaps more importantly, of the novel’s title.

Thus, when the narrative discourse of *The Trial* begins, the trial has already started. The stage of the trial we are introduced to is not the first one — not the (possible) crime but the (strange kind of) arrest. The novel’s real beginning, like our sense of beginning in general, approximates the unknown. So does, I would argue, the beginning of “Vor dem Gesetz” (Before the Law), that strange parable which Kafka first published separately in the Jewish weekly *Selbstwehr* (Self-defence) on 7 September 1915 and then incorporated into “Im Dom” (In the Cathedral), the penultimate chapter of *The Trial*.

The beginning of “Vor dem Gesetz” has characteristic features that are interestingly related to, and curiously repeat, those noted in my brief discussion of “Verhaftung”: beginning *in medias res*, “Vor dem Gesetz” signals that the narrative recording of its textual beginning is essentially incomplete. Although we are informed that the man from the country comes to the door-keeper and begs for admission to the Law, his reasons for wanting to be admitted are not given. If we ask, as we are inclined to do, whether the man has perhaps done something that makes admission to the Law particularly desirable or necessary for him, our attention is drawn to a blank or ellipsis located before the beginning of the actual narrative. This kind of blank is a parallel to our limited knowledge about the beginning of K.’s trial. Moreover, although “Vor dem Gesetz” first appeared as an independent story, the highly effective manner in which it is integrated into the overall narrative of *The Trial* further strengthens the link between the predicament of the man from the country and that of K. By introducing the story, the priest, who as it were arrests K. by authoritatively asking him to wait as he is about to leave the cathedral, establishes a new narrative level in *The Trial*, the hypodiegetic narrative that the parable forms. Although the priest, who communicates the parable as a first-person narrator, is the main link between the two levels, the fact that K. immediately starts interpreting it effectively integrates the short narrative into the larger one. Beginning and ending are interrelated; once the priest’s narration of the parable ends, K.’s reading of it begins.

The short story about the man who begs admission to the Law is located right at the centre of *The Trial*: “Vor dem Gesetz” contains *Der Prozess* in embryo. Orson Welles understood this, as his adaptation of Kafka’s novel shows. When Welles came to make *The Trial*, he was already a legend in the cinema, although many had thought his best had come and gone with *Citizen Kane*, the film he directed as early as 1941. *The Trial* was produced in 1961, after Welles had spent a frustrating time directing and starring in a version of Cervantes’s *Don Quixote* which, like the adaptation of Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* that he worked on before creating *Citizen Kane*, remained unfinished. The film’s locations were varied, ranging from Yugoslavia (where Welles created the huge, open-plan office using 850 identical desks, typewriters and operators) to Rome, Milan, and the abandoned Gare D’Orsay in Paris. *The Trial* is Welles’s last editorial triumph, and is now increasingly regarded as one of the director’s major films.

Even though the strengths of this film are many, its beginning is particularly interesting. Welles takes the story “Vor dem Gesetz” from the novel’s penultimate chapter, condenses it, and places it right at the beginning of the film. Thus, what can be considered as a second beginning in Kafka’s novel becomes the “first” beginning in Welles’s adaptation. And yet, since we have seen that the first sentence of *Der Prozess* not only presents a narrative beginning but also problematises it, Welles’s filmic response is intelligently conceived and effectively executed. By placing “Vor dem Gesetz”

right at the beginning of the film, Welles not only changes the short text's order in relation to the larger one, but also makes the parable both a prologue to the film's plot and an illustration of it. This impression is reinforced when, later on in the adaptation, the parable is presented for a second time, and Welles closes the film with a visual reference to it.

Welles's most original device is to present the parable as a succession of images which look like stylised drawings. Asked about these illustrations, Welles explained that

all those pictures were made by the shadows of pins. Thousands of pins. These two deliriously lunatic, highly civilized, elegant, and charming old Russians—a man and his wife [Alexandre Alexieff and Clarie Parker]—sit and on huge boards they place pins. And the shadow of the pin is what makes the chiaroscuro on the picture [...] I think the pictures are very beautiful. (Welles and Bogdanovich [1998], 273)

As a radically condensed visual presentation of the parable's most important stages, the pictures made by Alexieff and Parker change as the voice of a narrator communicates the content to the viewer. This narrator's identity is revealed at the very end: "This film was based on a novel by Franz Kafka [...] I played the advocate and wrote and directed this film. My name is Orson Welles." Suggestively illustrating the parable of the man from the country, the pictures also show Welles's respect for, and insight into, the parable as a genre. By placing the parable first, Welles removes it from the context of the chapter "In the cathedral." Thus the parable appears as an illustration of the subsequent action as it evolves through the plot, but it is crucial that Welles does not attempt to explain the action. Welles answers the question of whether Kafka's parabolic text can be filmed by experimentally encapsulating a literary art form in his own. It is as though out of respect for the parable as a genre, and for Kafka as author, he does not wish to go further than illustrating "Vor dem Gesetz" with some simple pictures. Yet since the incorporation of these pictures into the film's beginning is structurally and thematically productive, Welles succeeds through his insight into what film *cannot* achieve in extending the limits to what a film *can* represent. One reason why, according to many viewers, the pictures do not damagingly distort the mental process of visualisation already experienced by the viewer who has read Kafka's novel, is suggested by their simple, in one sense monumental, form. A related reason can be sought in the way that Welles's accentuation of the image in his version of the parable highlights film's combined space-time dimension. As Dudley Andrew puts it, "[t]he image is the trace left by an object gone before us in time. More than representing that object, it expresses its absence" (Andrew [1995], 182). For me, one essential aspect of this rich comment is the way in which Andrew highlights the viewer's unsettling (though it happens repeatedly) realisation that for all their resemblance to present-day reality, film images are associated not with us but rather with the film's actors. Thus, film continually reminds us that the world, and human life in this world, do not depend on our own participation to exist.

If "Vor dem Gesetz" constitutes a second beginning in Kafka's novel, Welles's adaptation begins as it were for a second time with the introduction of K. and the presentation of his arrest. The last word spoken by Welles as commentator, "nightmare," establishes a point of transition from the brief story to the larger one that follows. "Nightmare" is one aspect of the film's large register of sound. Closing the voice-over that has accompanied, and explained, the filmic display of the parable, "nightmare" auditively furthers the transition from the presentation of the parable as a prologue to the film's second beginning. The camera focuses on a man, K., lying in bed, awakening to what is

to be a nightmare. “You are under arrest,” he is informed by the two strangers who suddenly appear in his bedroom. This second opening is the beginning of the plot in Welles’s *The Trial*. And yet our understanding of this event is coloured by our response to, and understanding of, the preceding narrative—the parable we have just been watching. We suspect, for instance, that the trial following the arrest is likely to take time, since the essential activity performed by the man from the country consists of waiting.

As far as Modernist literature and the medium of film are concerned, two aspects of this second beginning are notable. First, the positioning of the camera is essential: as it is placed close to K. and near the room’s floor, the two unknown men appear tall and frightening. The combination of a low camera angle and the proximity of the camera positioning and K.’s position ask the viewer to adopt K.’s perspective, and as we do so we sense that the unknown men are the more powerful of the two parties. This first impression reminds us of the parable, in which, as we have just seen, the man from the country is presented as small and vulnerable compared to the guard. And yet it is important that the perspective of the camera and that of K. do not wholly or unproblematically coalesce. There is a significant difference between positioning the camera close to K.’s perspective and identifying it with his perspective. It is as though Welles, in his presentation of the second beginning of *The Trial*, makes his camera adopt a position close to, or filmically imitating, the position of the novel’s third-person narrator. Significantly, this is an ambiguous position since the narrator in *Der Prozess* can both move close to the main character (for instance by using free indirect discourse) and distance himself from K.

Second, even though it is uncertain whether Welles read the original version of *Der Prozess*, the beginning of the film *The Trial* responds to the productive ambiguity of the novel’s opening sentence. To adopt three phrases from William Empson’s *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, this sentence (and particularly the word “hätte”) is a “piece of language” which indicates “psychological complexity” and, at least on a second reading, signals a “logical disorder” (Empson [1973], 19; 69). It is typical of Kafka’s novel, and of much Modernist literature, that this meaning assumes the form of questions rather than answers: is there something about K. we do not know, something he may not even be aware of himself? If he has done something wrong, what is it? Such questions prompt larger ones: do we commit acts, perhaps even acts of violence, of which we are unaware? Ought we to be punished for such acts if found guilty of having committed them? But how can we be punished if these acts cannot be identified? The uncertainties and questions associated with Kafka’s literary language in “Verhaftung” are in Welles’s filmic language prompted, first, by the use of the parable as prologue and, second, through K.’s reaction to his arrest. Right from the start, Anthony Perkins presents K. as nervous and impatient, aggressively protesting his innocence. Even though this behaviour does not, of course, imply guilt on his part, it makes us wonder whether he may have something to hide. Acting the part of Miss Bürstner, Jeanne Moreau condenses this wonder into a comment addressed to Anthony Perkins as K.: “You must have done something.” Is there something in K.’s behaviour, his restlessness and eagerness to defend himself, that make people suspicious of him? An anonymous review published in *Newsweek* in February 1963 comments thus on Perkins’s presentation of K.: “Anthony Perkins is K., the man who is accused of nothing in particular and therefore of everything in the world” (cited in Beja [1995], 31). This is also an essential quality of Kafka’s text. The beginning of Welles’s adaptation marks a new phase in K.’s life—a potentially decisive phase in which he must make an ardent attempt to justify his existence in the world. If the reader’s sense of K.’s

hesitant, new beginning is strong, the viewer's impression of Anthony Perkins as a man hesitantly awakening to a new, challenging existence is also forceful (see also Neumann [1992], 121–42; Nicholls [1995], 275–8).

Although he works with a medium distinguished by identifiable beginnings that demand progression of action, Welles dwells on and thus highlights the beginning of *The Trial*. The film's two openings not only present a beginning but also reflect on the problem of beginnings. In his fine study *Reading Narrative*, J. Hillis Miller notes that "any beginning in narrative cunningly covers a gap, an absence at the origin" (Miller [1998], 58). In the very different media of literature and film, both *Der Prozess* and *The Trial* not only cover but also reveal traces of this gap—thus drawing our attention to a beginning we can neither conceive of nor yet do without.

One characteristic feature of the translation of literature to film language is, as Roger Odin puts it, that

filmic images, which disappear as soon as they appear, are fundamentally changeable, transitory, evanescent; they have to be seized as they rush past, on the spur of the moment, and with no hope of ever retrieving them; they follow one another relentlessly, allowing us no rest, no chance to take control, making it impossible for us to check and verify them (at least under normal projection conditions). (Odin [2000], 55)

Yet although film language is very different from literary language, the most important components of a narrative—time, space, and causality—are central concepts in film theory as well (Lothe [2000], 3–8). Narrative terms such as plot, repetition, events, characters, and characterization are also important in film—even though, as both Eikhenbaum and Odin indicate and my discussion of the films by Carlsen and Welles has shown, the *form* of presentation and the ways in which these concepts are actualised vary greatly in these two art forms.

This last point is related to the question of whether all films are Modernist. Is perhaps cinema itself, as Michael Wood asks, "an accelerated image of modernity, like the railway or the telephone[?]" (Wood [2001], 217). Clearly, there are Modernist films, both within and outside the period we associate with Modernism; yet Wood is right to state that "the largest fact about the cinema over the hundred years since its birth is its comfortable embrace of ancient conventions of realism and narrative coherence" (Wood [2001], 217). Seen in this light, it makes sense to identify, as John Orr does in *Cinema and Modernity*, two distinctly Modernist phases: a silent cinema of directors such as Murnau, Dreyer, Lang, Buñuel, and Eisenstein in the 1920s and 1930s, and a sound cinema of directors like Godard, Pasolini, and Antonioni which crystallises in the 1960s (Orr [1993], 2). The films by Carlsen and Welles discussed here belong in this last phase. Made in the 1960s, they are aligned, in their modernising experimentation with film form, with the work of Godard, Antonioni, Fellini, and Bertolucci: "here invisible narration is punctured by the visible presence of the camera as an intruding force and by a new form of subjectivity which substitutes for representation the deranged vision of the neurotic subject" (Orr [2000], 8). Both Carlsen's *Hunger* and Welles's *The Trial* present neurotic subjects, and both make, generally and in the films' openings particularly, effective use of the camera as "an intruding force."

The issue of narrative beginnings (both the critical concept of beginning and the problems it purports to illuminate) brings together and actualises problems associated with theories of Modernism, narrative, and film. One of the best accounts of this issue is given by Edward W. Said, who in his

wide-ranging study *Beginnings* notes that the problem of beginnings is one that can confront the writer and the reader on both the practical and the theoretical level:

If I have begun to write, for example, and a line has started its way across the page, is that all that has taken place? Clearly not. For in the act of asking a question about the meaning of a beginning, I seem to have discerned vague outlines of significance where very little had been suspected. (Said [1975], 29)

Said refers to Claude Lévi-Strauss, who in *The Savage Mind* suggests that the mind's logic is such that "the principle underlying a classification can never be postulated in advance. It can only be discovered *a posteriori*" (Lévi-Strauss [1966], 58). Although Said agrees that to identify a point as a starting-point is to classify it in hindsight, he nonetheless argues—rightly, I think—that the study of beginnings is not necessarily a critically useless exercise.

One reason why beginnings appear arbitrary and peculiarly ungraspable is suggested by the way that language operates. As Said, paraphrasing Ferdinand de Saussure, puts it: "Language is both the medium of study and—since beginning has a meaning primarily in and regarding language—its object" (Said [1975], 36). The beginning of a text is *there*, observable on the page, and yet it is not there, since the first linguistic sign and the first linguistic utterance are preceded by something located before or beyond the text. For Saussure, the process of delimitation involved here establishes a "viewpoint," an orienting perspective. As we have seen, in Modernist literature this kind of perspective is not just narrative but also, as often becomes clear on a second reading of the text under consideration, epistemological and interpretative. It is one of the challenges of film to adequately respond to this kind of literary exploration of the possibilities, and limitations, of perspective.

A number of the filmic devices that Carlsen and Welles employ in order to establish, modulate, and problematise perspective can be subsumed under the concept of "narrator," which is a critically helpful term in literary and film studies alike. In considering the more general uses of the term narrator, it is natural to turn again to the word "hätte" in the first sentence of *Der Prozess*. This verb form is employed by Kafka's third-person narrator, whose narrative discourse fills most of the text (since the use of dialogue is restricted). In film generally as in film adaptations, however, this kind of reporting narrative discourse, produced by a first-person or a third-person narrator, is conspicuously absent. This has led some film theorists to reject the concept of narrator in film. Film, argues David Bordwell in an influential study, has narration but no narrator (Bordwell [1985], 28–31). Bordwell's theory is remarkably comprehensive and broadly persuasive. Yet my own position is closer to that of Seymour Chatman, who finds it difficult to imagine that a film is narrated (or organized) without being narrated (or sent), and who in *Coming to Terms* presents a diagram which illustrates "the multiplicity of the cinematic narrator" (Chatman [1990], 134–5; see also Lothe [2000], 31). As this diagram shows, the film narrator is complex and fragmented, but this characteristic feature does not in itself make the concept of film narrator redundant or useless. Actually, a number of the points made above about the films by Carlsen and Welles could not have been formulated without my critical use of the concept of narrator. I hasten to add, however, that in discussions of films the term "narrator" is often implied rather than openly stated. The reason for this is probably suggested by critics' awareness of the term's complexity.

I will briefly support this more general point by specifying the variants of literary narrator that Hamsun and Kafka employ. The beginning of Hamsun's novel is, we recall, distinguished by the abrupt transition from the first-person narrator's backward-looking stance in the first paragraph to



the narrative immediacy created by the use of the present tense in the second. This narrative beginning illustrates a theoretical point that J. Hillis Miller makes in his book *On Literature*. “Even first-person narrations,” writes Miller, “are double. The ‘I’ as narrator speaks of a past ‘I’ whose experiences are narrated in the past tense” (Miller [2002], 32). Although all narration is double, however, the doubleness of narration is highlighted in Modernism, partly as a result of the Modernists’ rejection of narrative omniscience and their problematising of narrative authority. Not only is the knowledge we have of Hamsun’s first-person narrator limited, but that of Kafka’s third-person narrator is restricted too. In dissimilar yet related ways, Carlsen and Welles make innovative uses of the camera in order to filmically present this doubleness, along with the uncertainty and pervasive feeling of tension that accompany it in Modernist literature. While Carlsen produces this effect by making his camera focus on the protagonist in one exceptionally long shot, Welles achieves a comparable effect by positioning, after having shown us his version of the parable, the camera close to the awakening K.

My concluding comment concerns the film camera. It can be seen as a metaphor for the modern—and for Modernism. The camera eye is mechanical, it has its own way of seeing the world, and there is something refreshingly de-anthromorphising about it which contrasts with the way human beings see. The camera can, for instance, focus on details not noticed by the human eye. More obviously and effectively than any other film device, the camera would appear both to create and illustrate the kind of fragmentation often seen as typically Modernist. Yet we must not forget that the camera is after all steered—by a photographer, and behind him or her a director. If the camera is a mechanical instrument, it is also a device which enables the filmmaker to make a series of decisions, ranging from the trivial to the significant and existential. The photographer and director decide where and how to place the camera in relation to the filmed object, and this kind of relation serves to establish perspective as well as distance. A director like Alfred Hitchcock skilfully employs this capacity of the film camera. In films such as *Rear Window* (1954) and *Vertigo* (1958) the camera repeatedly orients and reorients the viewer’s perspective in a manner that effectively creates suspense. Yet the manner in which Hitchcock creates suspense is different from, and more easily identifiable than, the kind of suspense often generated in Modernist film. Whereas Hitchcock’s camera is usually directed at a potentially dangerous object (or an object associated with identifiable danger), in the films by Carlsen and Welles the camera, zooming in on and positioned near yet somewhat distanced from the main character, presents the world itself—and human existence in it—as bewildering and potentially dangerous. In Carlsen’s *Hunger* as in Welles’s *The Trial*, the city is a site of alienation, and so, by implication, is the world. The presentation of this quintessentially Modernist experience is inextricably linked to the way the camera establishes, modulates, and problematises human perspective, involvement, and distance.

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## (Re-)Dressing French Modernism

### Décor, Costume, and the Decorative in an Interarts Perspective

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*The only urgent thing is the décor.*  
(Pierre Loti)

In his influential essay, “Out of the Past: Fashion / Orientalism / the Body,” Peter Wollen invokes “what fashion historians call the Great Masculine Renunciation, the abandonment of sartorial display in men’s clothing around the beginning of the nineteenth century” and argues that the shift in fashion had important consequences for Adolf Loos’s seminal and programmatic version of modernism: “In effect, Loos’s career was devoted to generalizing the Great Masculine Renunciation by driving ornament not only out of clothing but out of all the applied arts, architecture and, by extension, painting itself. [...] The project of modernism was linked inextricably in his mind with that of dress reform” (Wollen [1993], 14–15). The focus on dress allows Wollen to revisit with fresh eyes the cultural events of the years immediately preceding the First World War, a crucial moment in the early history of modernism marked by a dramatic if, in some respects, shortlived resurgence of Orientalism.

Sergei Diaghilev’s *Schéhérazade* had taken Paris by storm in 1910, with Léon Bakst’s exaggerated Oriental sets and costumes serving as the perfect decadent décor for the blurring of gender lines suggested by Ida Rubinstein’s Zobeida and Nijinsky’s Golden Slave. In June 1911, the spectacular launch of fashion designer Paul Poiret’s “Oriental” look took the form of a Thousand and Second Night party at which the costumes were but one element of an elaborate *mise-en-scène* involving a sultan (Poiret himself), slaves, and caged women in a visual extravaganza of sexual role playing. At the same time, and despite his mixed feelings about the excesses of the Russian Ballet in general and of Bakst’s *Schéhérazade* in particular, Henri Matisse was assimilating the lessons of Oriental art, attending exhibitions in Paris in 1906 and, more importantly, in Munich in 1910, where he was struck both by the use of an ornamental, arabesque line in drawing and by forms of spatial organization and decorative pattern achieved through the use of flat areas of bright colour. In Wollen’s words, “the Russian Ballet launched the new Orientalism, Poiret popularized it, Matisse channelled it into painting and fine art” (Wollen [1993], 3). Three great colourists, and three essentially decorative artists, Bakst, Poiret and Matisse each created “a scenography of the Orient that enabled him to redefine the image of the body, especially, but not exclusively, the female body” (Wollen [1993], 13). It was this scenography and this aesthetic, immensely popular in the pivotal years just

before the First World War, that would be strategically sidelined and disavowed by Loos's functional, rational version of modernism which would situate its myth of origin in its own (re-)interpretation of Picasso and the cubists. Kenneth Silver has documented the turn away from avant-garde iconoclasm in wartime and post-war France and the reaffirmation of the national virtues of classical reason and order as an antidote to "German" irrationalism and decadence. Poirer and Diaghilev, in particular, were singled out as targets by those eager to denounce the decadent excesses of "German Orientalism" (Silver [1989], 167–85).

Wollen's modernism is a strictly twentieth-century affair, but if we are to take seriously his alternative account which situates Bakst, Poirer and Matisse as "the last Orientalists (in art) and the first modernists," breaking with "the official art by which they were formed, but without embracing functionalism or rejecting the body and the decorative" (Wollen [1993], 17–18), then it is tempting to trace the genealogy back to the late nineteenth century, not to Orientalist painters like Gérôme, but to a loose network of post-impressionist artists whose work was influenced in one way or another by a common literary source, the novels and travel writings of Pierre Loti. That the influence is still alive in the period discussed by Wollen is illustrated by a passage he quotes from Matisse, commenting on an experience of *déjà vu*, *déjà lu*:

I found the landscapes of Morocco just as they had been described in the paintings of Delacroix and in Pierre Loti's novels. One morning in Tangiers I was riding in a meadow; the flowers came up to the horse's muzzle. I wondered where I had already had a similar experience--it was reading one of Pierre Loti's descriptions in his book *Au Maroc*. (Wollen [1993], 12–13)

In this essay we look first at how Loti's aesthetic of sensory experience is grounded in a resistance to both Weberian modernity and the Great Masculine Renunciation, a resistance that finds expression in an unashamed celebration of the decorative and the body (both male and female). From Loti we turn to one of his more deeply engaged readers and try to account for Vincent Van Gogh's passionate attachment to a novel that seems at first sight to run counter to some of the painter's own enthusiasms. In the process, we attempt to reassess the importance of the decorative in the emergent project of modernism by shifting the ground on which it is usually defined, even by sympathetic twentieth-century commentators like Wollen.

Pierre Loti, whose real name was Julien Viaud (1850–1923), is an unlikely starting point for a discussion of French modernism. Except for the odd passing reference, he is absent from almost all manuals of literary history. When he is taken up by literary historians, he is assigned a minor role as a naval officer and sometime circus acrobat of ambivalent sexual orientation who travelled the world and made a reputation, by chance as it were, as a prolific writer of best-selling exotic novels of scant literary merit. His election to the French Academy in 1891 is usually described as the more or less incidental outcome of an anyone-but-Zola campaign. With Loti's highly dubious gender and racial politics, his penchant for dressing up and wearing make-up (even when in uniform), and his apparently reactionary nostalgia for a pre-modern world on the verge of extinction, it is not hard to see why the literary establishment has, for the most part, tended to view him as either an amusing curiosity or a bit of an embarrassment, to be confined to a parenthesis or a footnote in the ordered procession of schools and movements, punctuated by flashes of genius, which is traditional literary history. And yet, like Poirer's fashions and Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes* in the period 1910–1914, Loti's "decorative" novels were not only immensely popular at the turn of the

century—with *Le mariage de Loti* (Loti's Marriage), first published in 1880, running to a 75th edition by 1905—but were also, in the case of *Madame Chrysanthème*, the inspiration for operas by Messager (1893) and Puccini (*Madama Butterfly*, 1904). More important for us is the fact that Loti could count, among his more avid readers, both Paul Gauguin and Van Gogh. Since space constraints make it impossible for us to deal adequately with both, and since Gauguin's Tahitian adventure owes such an obvious debt to *Le mariage de Loti*, our reading will foreground the more discreet relationship between Loti's Japanese novel of 1887–88 and Van Gogh's turn to Japan and *Japonisme* in the paintings produced in the years leading up to his death in 1890. But first a word about Loti's own Orientalism as it appears in his first novel, *Aziyadé*, published in 1879.

*Aziyadé* is the author's Turkish novel and, in typical Loti fashion, tells the autobiographical story of his sojourn in Salonica and Istanbul, where he sets up house in a temporary "marriage" with the eponymous heroine. The "going native," however, has much less to do with his love for *Aziyadé* than with the twin drives to dress up and to decorate. While the compulsion to decorate is a constant with Loti, it finds special satisfaction here as he gives free rein to his unabashed Orientalism, his lifelong Turcophilia. The novel abounds in elaborately (and self-consciously) constructed interiors, Orientalist décors carefully staged by Loti the set designer, assisted by his mistress and his manservant, Achmet. His models are the French Orientalist painters whose vision mediates everything he sees: "It was all so colourful and so strange, that it was more like the fantastic composition of some hallucinating Orientalist than the real world" (Loti [1991a], 76). Even his ship's cabin resembles a Weberian iron cage transformed by the decorator's art: "I had furnished that vault, that never saw the light of day, in an original fashion: on the iron walls, a thick red silk with strange flowers; earthenware, regilded antique pieces, weapons, shining against that dark background" (Loti [1991a], 57).

As for the need to dress up, that too is theatrically self-conscious to the point of self-parody, as becomes evident in a scene which sees Loti, in full naval uniform, enter by the front door of a curious house in the backstreets of Salonica only to leave soon after, by the back door, dressed as a Turk or Albanian. Inside, the transformation is described in explicitly theatrical terms, the tone bordering on camp:

Start of the melodrama. —Scene one: A dark old apartment. Fairly poor looking, but lots of Oriental colour. Hookahs and weapons scattered about the floor.

Your friend Loti centre stage with three old Jewish women bustling around him without uttering a word. [...] They have his officer's uniform off in no time and set to the task of dressing him as a Turk, kneeling down to start with the golden gaiters and the garters. Loti retains the sombre and preoccupied air befitting the hero of a lyrical drama. (Loti [1991a], 39)

Before leaving the dressing-room to step onstage, Loti pauses to admire himself in the mirror: "Loti is pleased with the effect, and smiles sadly at this costume which could be the death of him" (Loti [1991a], 39–40). This is a key moment. It is quintessential Loti and lays bare the double gesture that underpins his Orientalism: in throwing off the dress of Western modernity, in renouncing the Great Masculine Renunciation, Loti is playing, is having tremendous fun; but, at the same time, he is deadly, if melodramatically, serious insofar as this particular piece of dress-up could quite easily get him killed. In Georges Bataille's terms, as he passes through the liminal space of the house, he crosses over into a sacred (Oriental) world of play by transgressing the prohibitions constitutive

of the profane (Western) world of work; his transvestism is a form of *sacrifice*, quite literally a making sacred, a temporary putting to death of his Western self—a narcissistic gesture, to be sure, but one not without risk. Framed thus in the mirror, Loti is not so much disguised as transfigured, transformed, in Roland Barthes's words, into a describable object rather than an introspectible subject, a part of the picture that, for Loti, was Turkey. Similarly, in *Le Désert* (The desert), when he dresses as an Arabian sheik, he is the first to acknowledge that his clothes are not really necessary for purposes of disguise but are undoubtedly more decorative (Loti [1991a], 348). The function of costume, the point of dressing up, is to dissolve the subject through the pictorial integration of the body:

Thus a minor author, old-fashioned and clearly unconcerned with theory (though a contemporary of Mallarmé, of Proust), brings to light the trickiest of writing's logics: for the desire to be 'a part of the picture' is to write only to the extent that one is written: abolition of passive and active, of sayer and said, of subject and utterance, the very site of modern writing's search for itself. (Barthes [1972], 181)

It is this pictorial dissolution of the subject that finds its ultimate expression in Loti's Japanese novel, *Madame Chrysanthème*. Not because the pictorial integration is there perfectly realized but because, on the contrary, it is entirely frustrated and the 'exotic' novel becomes a text about the failure of representation, the impossibility of "describing the object," of achieving the pictorial integration of the body in the tableau, the costume in the décor. Undoubtedly the most racist of Loti's novels, *Madame Chrysanthème* follows the formula of Loti going native, this time in Nagasaki, and contracting a "marriage" with a young local girl. Here, however, the marriage is a mercantile, loveless transaction that reflects Loti's almost total lack of sympathy with Japan, its culture, and its people. At the root of the problem is Loti's reiterated frustration at his inability to "penetrate the hidden *underside* of things that might be full of mystery" (Loti [1990], 147, emphasis mine), his failure to get beyond the stereotypical inscrutability of the Japanese, "the mystery of their expression, cold and vague, that seems to betoken absurd and surprising inner thoughts, a world of ideas absolutely closed to us" (Loti [1990], 186). Even when she is evidently transported by her own music, Chrysanthème remains remote, inaccessible to the watching Loti: "her eyes are set on some inner object, inscrutably Japanese" (Loti [1990], 204). Reduced to the role of impotent spectator, constantly rebuffed by impenetrable, indecipherable surfaces, Loti does not even attempt to integrate himself pictorially in the décor; in fact, *Madame Chrysanthème* is his only exotic novel in which he does not dress up, does not adopt the local costume. This is perhaps in part because the décor itself is remarkably restrained, the bare partition walls of the houses and temples a far cry from the crowded Orientalist interiors of Constantinople. If the décor is a blank surface, with everything decorative kept hidden from view in drawers and secret alcoves, the integration of one's own body with an (absent) picture loses its meaning.

In the absence of a strong pictorial element, one might expect narrative to come to the fore, with an increased investment in plot and character development. In fact, narrative is the first casualty of the Japanese setting:

It's true, an entire imbroglio appears to loom on my monotonous horizon; the plot of an entire novel seems set to unfold in the middle of this little world of mousmés and cicadas [...] There would even be the making of a great fratricidal drama if we were in any other country than this; but we are in Japan and, given the influence of a milieu that attenuates, shrinks and makes everything funny, nothing at all will come of it. (Loti [1990], 165)

Paradoxically, it is still the décor and the decorative that dominate, though transposed from the visually figurative to other broader registers of sense impression: “My memoirs... that comprise nothing but absurd details; meticulous notations of colours, forms, scents, noises” (Loti [1990], 164); and:

[i]n the absence of a storyline and tragic events, I would at least like to be able to capture the sweet scent of the surrounding gardens, a little of the gentle warmth of this sun, of the shade of these pretty trees. In the absence of love, convey something of the restful tranquillity of these outskirts of the city. Capture, too, the sounds of Chrysanthème’s guitar. (Loti [1990], 104)

In effect, the décor, along with Loti’s attempts to render its effects on his state of mind, becomes the novel’s only real subject, as Loti acknowledges in the dedication to the duchesse de Richelieu: “Although the most important rôle may appear to fall to Madame Chrysanthème, there is no doubt that the three main characters are *Me*, *Japan* and the *Effect* the country had on me” (Loti [1990], 43).

This theme is carried through to Loti’s final and most explicit confrontation with the irrepresentability of Japan for a Western artist. Shortly before leaving Nagasaki, he sits down to draw the house he has shared with Chrysanthème and delights his Japanese audience with the *realism* of his sketch, attributable in his own mind to his use of perspective and to the fact that he “renders what he sees.” But if his audience is satisfied, Loti is not:

I put everything exactly where it belonged, but the whole has something ordinary, mediocre, French about it that simply won’t do. The feeling is not rendered, and I wonder if I might not have done better by deforming the perspective in the Japanese fashion and exaggerating the lines of things, which are already strange, to the point of impossibility. And then this dwelling has lost its appearance of frailty and its dry violin tones. The pencil lines representing the woodwork don’t convey the precise detail of its craftsmanship, nor its extreme age, nor its spotlessness, nor the cicadas’ vibrato that it seems to have stored over hundreds of summers in its dried out fibres. [...] No, all that cannot be drawn, cannot be expressed, remains untranslatable and elusive. (Loti [1990], 213–14)

Once again it is the décor that is central, but in Japan, for Loti, the décor is destined to remain invisible or at least beyond the representational means of Western art. Faced with a reality that stubbornly refuses to reveal its secrets to the Western gaze, the techniques of artistic realism—chiaroscuro modeling, spatial illusionism—lose any claim to universality as their conventional nature is thrown into stark relief.

One can speculate that Loti’s encounter with the limitations of post-Renaissance perspectival conventions struck a chord with Van Gogh who read *Madame Chrysanthème* with considerable enthusiasm in June 1888, some four months after moving south to Arles from Paris. In letters to his brother Theo and fellow painters such as Emile Bernard, Van Gogh repeatedly raises the subject of Loti’s novel, asking insistently if they have read it yet. As his correspondence attests, Van Gogh took various Japanese motifs from Loti, such as the young Arlesean girl depicted as *La Mousmé* (1888) and the *Self-Portrait* (1888) he gave to Paul Gauguin with the explanation that it was supposed to look like a Japanese bonze (Van Gogh [1959], vol. III, 64). Scholars have also stressed how the experience of reading *Madame Chrysanthème* fuelled Van Gogh’s longstanding passion for Japanese art and culture, strengthening his ambition both to exploit artistically the Arles area and its



inhabitants as colourful local subjects and to see them as part of a primitivist utopia, a Japan transposed to the South of France (Druik and Zegers [2001], 126; Kodera [1984], 189–208). However, it seems curious that Van Gogh should be deeply fascinated by a book that expresses little sympathy for the Japanese culture he loved and that ultimately abandons the attempt to represent it adequately. As we will argue, there were other, more important things that Van Gogh discovered in *Madame Chrysanthème*.

While at first blush the colonizing impetus of Loti's novel seems to shed light on Van Gogh's relationship to the provincial South, it is worth noting that the colonial dynamic operated quite differently for writer and painter. As a French naval officer, Loti was a fully paid-up member of a colonial modernity he detested; he travelled to exotic locations where he attempted to shed his Western identity and "go native," while Van Gogh remained perpetually estranged, a lonely outsider in a region of France that he tried to render as an exotic elsewhere. For Loti the décor is a given, a *déjà vu*, that makes possible the sacrificial transfiguration of the self in the mode of spectacle; for Van Gogh the self is sacrificed, the flesh mortified, in the production and transfiguration of the décor. (The difficulties that the painter experienced in capturing the landscape—spending hours in the burning sun, being bitten by insects and using pegs to anchor his easel so he could paint in the howling winds of the mistral—have become part of art-historical legend.) Unlike Loti, Van Gogh was not seduced by fashion, fancy dress and photo opportunities. In fact, his crude, rather shabby appearance disconcerted many of his fellow painters who considered him eccentric. As an adult he refused to be photographed and in his self-portraits he often highlighted the more distressing aspects of his appearance (Nemeczek [1995], 10). As a socially isolated figure who sold little work and survived only because he received a small allowance from his younger brother, Van Gogh lived in the margins of modernity and would scarcely have felt the need to renounce the Great Masculine Renunciation. In this respect, Van Gogh had very different reasons for wanting to integrate himself corporeally into a pictorial aesthetic, reasons that had more to do with overcoming his alienation and finding somewhere to belong, as we shall argue in relation to one of his self-portraits and a landscape.

It is worth noting that Van Gogh wanted not only to insert himself into his pictures, but to situate those pictures within a larger *Japoniste* framework of his own making. To understand how these things work, we must begin with his exploration of decorative practices. As Wojtech Jirat-Wasiutyński and Travers Newton note in their fine study of Gauguin, the term *decorative* played a central part in nineteenth-century French art criticism where it was traditionally used "to devalue certain art practices by placing them in the category of the so-called decorative arts. It was also strongly susceptible to gendered use, the decorative being largely equated with the feminine" (Jirat-Wasiutyński and Newton [2000], 195). While monumental decoration in the form of frescoes and murals was acceptable as fine art within the academic system, the description of easel painting as decorative represented a clear challenge to its completeness and seriousness as fine art, a way of relegating it without appeal to an inferior order, as was the case with Claude Monet's paintings shown at the first Impressionist exhibition in 1874:

Critics characterized the paintings as decorative because, from the point of view of an academic aesthetic, they lacked finish and depth. They were organized by color and surface rather than the drawing and chiaroscuro needed to create the focussed space and narrative of traditional painting. While this disqualified them from being tableaux in the traditional sense, they could be appreciated as décors.

Eugène Fromentin said as much by referring to such new high-key and sketchy paintings as ‘like Japanese wallpaper.’ The decorative qualities of brushwork and paint surface and the primacy of tonal and color harmonies over form signaled an art of sensory immediacy, of impressions. (Jirat-Wasiutyński and Newton [2000], 195)

Rejecting the dominant academic tradition of classicism and naturalism with its reliance on chiaroscuro modeling and spatial illusionism, the vanguard Impressionists of the 1870s and early 1880s deliberately cultivated techniques that emphasized surface and pattern over illusions of depth, thereby installing the decorative as a positive term at the centre of a new aesthetic, a “shared contemporary vision based on individual perception” (Jirat-Wasiutyński and Newton [2000], 195). The challenge for the vanguard artists of the 1880s, such as Gauguin, was to invent a new kind of *tableau*, a monumental art that would incorporate the new decorative visual language and silence the critics.

Klaus Berger provides a perceptive account of Van Gogh’s own exploration of the decorative when he explains that what is Japanese about the artist’s second portrait of *Père Tanguy* (1887), with its iconic frontal figure seated in front of a series of Japanese prints, is not the prints themselves but rather “the two-fold picture plane, with its components unconnected and juxtaposed without transitions, and the tension and intensity that all this creates” (Berger [1992], 134). This image, with its spatial and representational disconnections, not only foreshadows later developments in Van Gogh’s oeuvre but also resonates with the aesthetic of unmotivated digression that Loti ascribes to all things Japanese:

But interruption is totally characteristic of this country’s taste; it enters into everything — conversation, music, even painting; a landscape artist, for example, when he’s finished a painting of mountains and rocks, won’t think twice about tracing, slap in the middle of the sky, a circle or a diamond shape, some manner of frame, in which he will put anything so long as it’s incoherent and unexpected: a monk playing with a fan, or a woman drinking a cup of tea. Nothing is more Japanese than this habit of pointless digression. (Loti [1990], 89)

Again, Japan’s apparent resistance to narrative coherence and to the kind of unity born of single-point perspective disconcerts Loti, leaving him frustrated before such seemingly meaningless fragmentation.

What is lived by the novelist as a source of endless frustration translates for the painter into an experience of aesthetic liberation. This can be explained in part by the fact that Van Gogh seeks integration, not through projection and transfiguration of the self, but through an act of painting that is his way of recording, of taking possession of a new and largely unwelcoming reality. The experience of arriving in Arles, of speaking a different dialect and not knowing the local people and customs, makes him especially attentive to the unfamiliar patterns of domestic, everyday life. As art historian Meyer Schapiro stresses:

when he comes as a foreigner to Arles, a strange town, he paints everything — day and night scenes, people, children, a whole family, houses, cafés, streets, his own room, and the surrounding country — as if to enter completely into this new milieu [...]. He needs objectivity, the most humble and obvious kind [...] the unproblematic things he sees about him, the flowers and roads and fields, his shoes, his chair and hat and pipe, the utensils on his table, are his personal objects, which come forward and address him. (Schapiro [1980], 32)

In other words, Van Gogh is busy putting himself metonymically, through his objects, into a new picture in order to find a place in a community with which he is still trying to come to terms. The experience is often frustrating, as his comment to Theo in a letter from mid-July of 1888 indicates: "When I came here I hoped it would be possible to make some connection with art lovers here; but up to the present I haven't made the least progress in people's affection. [...] Often whole days pass without my speaking to anyone, except to ask for dinner or coffee. And it has been like that from the beginning" (Van Gogh [1959], vol. II, 609). And yet it was this distance that sharpened his powers of observation when it came to noting the minutiae of daily life which he started to dissect from a variety of new angles.

As Berger stresses, Van Gogh's unravelling of Western perspective is predicated upon two main avenues of inquiry: the first consists of using colour spatially to delineate structure and distance by patterns of repetition, while the second involves creating a graphic style stressing the "autonomous rhythm of the contoured outlines" (Berger [1992], 138). Berger discusses Van Gogh's *Steps to the Bridge at Trinquetaille* (1888) as an example of the former. In this painting Van Gogh selects the unusual vantage point of looking up the stairs to the bridge looming overhead. The pattern of the steep stairs with their alternating blue steps and green risers is extended to the green structure of the bridge which is rhythmically dissected by angular blue wires and supporting joists. The repetition of pattern and colour disorients the viewer by making the bridge seem unattainable. Berger sees the bridge as a kind of impossible "stairway to heaven," an expression of Van Gogh's oppressive vision of life (Berger [1992], 137). But in terms of the argument we have been making, the picture might also be read as an intense desire on the part of the painter to enter his picture and disappear into the décor. As the faceless figures ascend the stairs, they are swallowed up by the architecture, the colours of their clothes fusing with those of their surroundings. Further along, crossing the bridge, they completely disintegrate into blotches of paint.

A more extreme version of this corporeal integration can be seen in the later self-portrait painted at Saint-Rémy in 1889. Here figure and ground are rendered in the same pale blue and green textured strokes. Again Meyer Schapiro provides some telling insights:

The flowing, pulsating forms of the background, schemata of sustained excitement, are not just ornament, although related to the undulant forms of the decorative art of the 1890s; they are unconfined by a fixed rhythm or pattern and are a means of intensity, rather, an overflow of the artist's feelings to his surroundings. [...] Yet the same rhythms occur in the figure and even in the head, which are painted in similar close-packed, coiling, and wavy lines. As we shift our attention from the man to his surroundings and back again, the analogies are multiplied; the nodal points, or centres, in the background ornament begin to resemble more the eyes and ear and buttons of the figure. (Schapiro [1980], 118)

By this point in Van Gogh's career, the patterning of colours and lines has become fully integrated.

According to Berger, Van Gogh probably used Suzuki Harunobu's *Girl Painting a Flower Arrangement* (ca. 1768), which he had encountered in the July 1888 issue of Siegfried Bing's *Le Japon Artistique* (The artistic Japan), as a starting point for his different versions of *L'Arlésienne* (The Woman from Arles) (Berger [1992], 138). In this portrait, Van Gogh deliberately echoes the angular patterns of the two sleeves, hairline, head-dress and chair frame, which has the effect of making the woman's determination and resilience seem more physically tangible. Such devices infused his quiet scenes of everyday life with a powerful emotional charge that was much admired

by modernist critics, such as Roger Fry and Clive Bell. Among their Bloomsbury contemporaries were Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell who particularly liked the repetition of simple outlined forms in the works of Van Gogh, Gauguin and Matisse that they saw in the first and second Post-Impressionist exhibitions organized by Fry in London in 1910 and 1912. The fact that Van Gogh's work figured so prominently in these key exhibitions secured him a foundational position in the version of the modernist canon that was emerging in England at that time. It is worth stressing that the Bloomsbury Group took up the decorative qualities of Van Gogh's painting in similar experiments of their own, not only in painting and drawing but also in the textiles and furnishings they produced for the Omega Workshops.

The aim of Van Gogh's *Japoniste* decorative strategies—the repetition of both colour and form—was to make the viewer feel part of the décor by experiencing it rather than simply looking at it, something Loti had felt unable to do visually with his sketch of the Japanese house but which he evidently achieved through his prose, as is amply attested by readers such as Van Gogh, Gauguin and Matisse. As Vincent stressed to Theo, seeing things with “an eye more Japanese” enabled one to feel colour differently (Van Gogh [1959], vol. II, 590). Writing to Gauguin, he describes the “absolute restfulness” he is trying to achieve through the use of diverse colours in the well-known painting of his bedroom in the yellow house in Arles executed in 1888 (Van Gogh [1959], vol. III, 527), while in a letter to his sister, Wil, he explains his painting of *Memory of the Garden at Etten* (1888), asking if she can understand “that one may make a poem only by arranging colours, in the same way that one can say comforting things in music” (Van Gogh [1959], vol. III, 448). He goes on to observe: “In a similar manner the bizarre lines, purposely selected and multiplied, meandering all through the picture, may fail to give the garden a vulgar resemblance, but may present it to our minds as seen in a dream.” He adds that the blotches of citron yellow in the dahlias suggest their mother's personality to him, just as the contrasts between the pattern of an orange and green check shawl and the plain rich colours of a dark green cypress and red parasol remind him of her functioning as some kind of representative figure, “like those in Dickens's novels” (Van Gogh [1959], vol. III, 448).

Using decoration to achieve a newly expressive aesthetic within individual paintings was not enough for Van Gogh, who also wanted to insert his pictures into a larger decorative framework that would transform the viewer's world. If the florid wallpaper with pink dahlias in *La Berceuse* (The Lullabye) (1888) provides the first decorative frame for the figure of the cradle-rocker, Van Gogh clearly had another one in mind when he sent the following instructions to Theo: “If you arrange them [the paintings] as follows, so that the *Berceuse* hangs in the middle and the paintings of sunflowers to right and left, you will have a kind of triptych... then they will work much more strongly through the proximity of the yellows... Give resonance to one canvas through the one that hangs beside it” (cited in Berger [1992], 140; see also Van Gogh [1959], vol. III, 129). This notion of complementary or “matching” paintings evolves into a full-blown *mise-en-scène* when he asks Theo to view two of his landscape drawings from a Japanese perspective that owes a great deal to his reading of Loti:

Have you read Mme Chrysanthème? It gave me the impression that the real Japanese have nothing on their walls, that description of the cloister or pagoda where there was nothing (the drawings and curiosities all being hidden in the drawers). That is how you must look at Japanese art, in a very bright room, quite bare, and open to the country. (Van Gogh [1959], vol. II, 610)

He urges Theo to look at the drawings (of French landscapes) outside or in a café, where their Japanese qualities will become evident.

This idea of a work of art being seen to its best advantage in a place outside the gallery system provides an interesting antidote to what Walter Benjamin describes as art's loss of aura in the exhibitionary context of museum culture (Benjamin [1968]). Moreover, foregrounding the relationship between a painting and its context of viewing introduces notions of décor and place that will be systematically marginalized by modernist ideologues such as Loos. It also has the effect of narrowing the gap between painting and the decorative arts in which place plays such a central role, as Nancy Troy points out when she cites from Henry Havard's authoritative four-volume dictionary of furnishing and decoration, published between 1887 and 1890. Havard defines "decoration" as an "ensemble of ornamentation that decorates a room, a townhouse, a house, an edifice" and *décoratif* as an object that "ornaments the place it occupies" such as "ornamental sculpture, wallpaper, ceramics, glassware, woodwork—in a word, all the industrial arts, which have as their particular aim the interior or exterior ornamentation of a dwelling" (cited in Troy [1991], 1). As Jirat-Wasiutyński and Newton have argued, it was not uncommon for vanguard artists of the 1880s to exploit the decorative aesthetic of Impressionism in an attempt to achieve a newly monumental painting comparable to fresco. Gauguin's ambition to "produce modern *tableaux* in the form of monumental decorations" can be seen in the powerful new style of *Vision of the Sermon* (1888):

The color and design of the image were made for the setting of the church in Pont-Aven; it was decorative functionally, as well as aesthetically, since it was meant to embellish an architectural interior. [...] The style of the figures and landscape, outlined and divided into colored compartments, was meant to harmonize with the simple artistic decor of a provincial church. *Vision of the Sermon* resembles Japanese prints and stained glass, old murals and medieval panel painting, all interpreted as decorative and primitive arts in late nineteenth-century Europe. (Jirat-Wasiutyński and Newton [2000], 200–1)

While Van Gogh's paintings of the same period are less monumental, they are similarly context-oriented, emphasizing function in the community and use-value over the exhibition-value of museum culture.

Loti's novels, with their fond evocation of exotic interiors, provide ample illustration of the link between decoration and dwelling. Loti was a compulsive decorator, driven to transform his domestic surroundings into theatrical backdrops for his tireless self-fashioning. This practice found its most spectacular realization in his own family home in Rochefort, transformed over the years into a veritable museum comprising, amongst others, Turkish, Chinese, Arab and medieval rooms, and even a mosque and a Japanese pagoda, all furnished with the spoils of Loti's expeditions. At the end of *Madame Chrysanthème* we see Loti leaving Nagasaki with eighteen packing cases of souvenirs and *objets d'art*, most of which must have found their way into the pagoda constructed in 1886 on the ground floor of the house in Rochefort. Unlike many of the other rooms, the pagoda was not inaugurated with an extravagant costume party, a practice that seems to have started with a Louis XI dinner in 1888, followed by a series of theme parties stretching through the 1890s and well into the twentieth century (Bault [1988], 38). One wonders if Paul Poiret found inspiration for his Thousand and Second Night party in one of Loti's Turkish soirées. The house at Rochefort is now a municipal museum but, unlike similar collections such as those of Émile Guimet and Adolphe d'Ennery,

Loti's objects make no scientific claims to represent the world's cultures. Loti *lived* in his house and his objects, though present in extraordinary concentrations, were furnishings rather than exhibits, unencumbered by the museum trappings of labels, classifications and catalogues. He felt no need to order the world, to render it scientifically intelligible; all his efforts went instead to reenchanting the world through decoration. In this respect, his house has more of the curiosity cabinet than the museum about it. As Marie-Pascale Bault remarks, rather than a true collector Loti was a *metteur en scène*, in his home as in his works (Bault [1988], 44).

Much of the impetus for Van Gogh's astonishing outpouring of paintings during the autumn of 1888 came from his desire to decorate the yellow house in Arles that he was renting. Although he couldn't afford to furnish the house and had to keep living and eating in nearby cafés for several months until Theo sent him 300 francs from a family legacy in September, he continued to dream of turning the house into a travelling artists' residence which he envisioned functioning as a studio of the south. Gauguin, of course, was to be his first visitor in October and Van Gogh set to work furnishing the house, installing gas and painting fifteen large canvases to show Gauguin what he had accomplished. The first fifteen paintings, including various arrangements of sunflowers, were finished by mid-October, and a further fifteen canvases were planned to complete the decorative cycle (Van Gogh [1959], 82; Nemecek [1995], 87–94). It is perhaps significant that this was one of the few times in his career as a painter that Van Gogh was able to imagine some sort of practical use for his pictures. Unable to sell work that few of his contemporaries appreciated, he needed to find other means of validation and alternative venues for displaying his work. Highly critical of the Paris network of dealers and galleries which had ignored him, he sought consolation in making art available to his fellow painters by displaying it in his own house.

The idea of the decorative that emerges from our reading of Loti and Van Gogh is not inconsistent with “that decorative unity of design” that Roger Fry will see in the work of Matisse, in contrast to the “purely abstract language of form” he attributes to the other stream of modernist art represented by Picasso (Fry [1981], 167–8). Whether we are looking at Loti as a largely unacknowledged catalyst of modernism or at Van Gogh as one of its major precursors, the continuities between their work and that of Poiret, Bakst and Matisse some twenty years later are at least as striking as the discontinuities. However, we have been at pains to stress that, in the case of both Loti and Van Gogh, the principle of “decorative unity” extends beyond the boundaries of the work of art or literature to encompass an attitude toward life. The late nineteenth-century crisis of representation is, for both writer and painter, inseparable from the more general malaise of modernity, a profound disenchantment with a world rapidly being drained of colour and variety. In both cases, though in very different ways, the aesthetic project is socially utopian, a search for community, however limited, and an unalienated place, whether exotic or domestic. In both cases, the decorative impulse is toward integration (of the self in the work and the work in the world) rather than differentiation, toward belonging rather than setting oneself, or one's art, apart. The decorative is neither a distraction nor a supplement, neither trivial nor incidental; it is the shape, the look, the feel that holds the picture together when the old codes of representation fail or lose their meaning; it is the flow of life and colour in and through the painting or the text, and beyond to the world that houses them and that they, in turn, transform. And this — the fashioning of a habitable world — was, for Van Gogh as for Loti, a matter of some urgency.

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## The Mother of Us All

### Modernism, Literature and Music

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“‘I can’t get out—I can’t get out,’ said the starling.” The words inflame the sentimental traveller/narrator of Laurence Sterne’s *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* (1768). This cry for freedom haunts the narrator who in fact cannot free the little bird. We note the transcription of sound here in this moment of sentimental recognition: “I vow I never had my affections more tenderly awakened [...] Mechanical as the notes were, yet so true in tune to nature were they chanted, that in one moment they overthrew all my systematic reasonings” (Sterne [1983], 96). This moment, so rich in complex words, such as “nature,” and “reasonings,” and so resonant with a moment beyond reason itself, where the song of the bird is immediately translated into language, may be a kind of sentimental precursor to one of those “cathectic” romantic moments of which the musical/literary theorist Lawrence Kramer speaks: “Cathexis is the process, described by psychoanalysis, by which a subject invests a portion of its psychic energy in an object and thereby makes the object meaningful for itself” (Kramer [1984], 19). According to Kramer, cathexis is part of a rhythm, one in which “[t]he insistent subjective thrust of the cathectic rhythm achieves expression through a decrease in discursive lucidity—the classic analytic combination of concealment and disclosure that mediates an unconscious idea” (Kramer [1984], 21). Kramer claims, in fact, that there is a change in the conception of the subject in or about 1800, a change which involves “the recognition (or constitution) of the ego as one of the activities of a transcendent subject; [as well as] the discovery of consciousness as an independent entity, a dynamic force set over against both the objects and the subjects of which it becomes conscious” (Kramer [1984], 18). (Note that the Sterne’s paratactic narrative appears about thirty years before this.) This change in the sense of the subject seems to coincide with a change in the way of speaking about the possibilities of musical and linguistic expression. The “consciousness model rested largely on the expressive theories of art and the valorization of organic processes that were culturally ascendent around 1800” (Kramer [1984], 18). Carl Dahlhaus has made a similar observation with regard to the rise of absolute music at about the same time: “In a sudden reversal of esthetic judgement, [...] ‘indeterminacy’ of content was no longer judged a deficiency but rather a hallmark of the ‘sublime’ style, and distancing from the simple ‘language of the heart’ was perceived as an intimation of the ‘infinite’ rather than as a flight into empty abstraction” (Dahlhaus [1989], 54).<sup>1</sup>

Kramer maintains that the consciousness model is infinitely reinventable, and, I would add, it is far more influential than we might like to admit now. Such a model has had tremendous impact upon the music and literature of the last two hundred years, and remains pervasive today, perhaps



nowhere more than in the realm of the popular music interview or review. It has not been without its problems and complexities too, as I will suggest later in this article. Whether or not such a model of consciousness as Kramer describes is the key to romantic expression, there is indeed a change at the end of the eighteenth century in the way of speaking about consciousness and about the music and literature that apparently spring from it. This desire for a kind of extra-social sense of self, and of operations of the mind or “spirit” that flee from any orderly, rational cage into the realm of expression remained the sometimes liberating, sometimes confusing, motivation for musical-literary relations well into the modernist period.

However, I detect another struggle here. In part it has to do with the desire that lurks beneath the speech of the bird, or, indeed, the intentional dimension of cathexis as described above. What certainty is there that this language of the inside can be heard by others? And what certainty is there that one has in fact removed oneself from the social, from time and history, through this realm of expressive transcendence (the bird might sing or speak only to you, after all)? My sense is that especially for the moderns, versions of these questions will not let go, or will not easily resolve themselves aesthetically. My task here is to elaborate a little on this uncertain romantic inheritance of the moderns and then move on to a discussion of Virgil Thomson and Gertrude Stein’s last opera, *The Mother of Us All* (1946), in the hope of demonstrating the tensions of such an inheritance.

The musical and literary worlds sometimes rely on each other for expression of an aesthetic resistance to industrial-technological modernity through a possible aesthetic transcendence. Dahlhaus, for instance, points out how often composers or music theorists call upon “poetry” as an aesthetic ideal (Dahlhaus [1982], 56), and of course, on the literary side of things, there is Pater’s famous dictum that “[a]ll art constantly aspires to the condition of music” (emphasis in original, Pater [1986], 86). Both sorts of statement seek an ultimate metaphor from the other art in order to express a kind of anti-rationalism that poetry and music had in various ways tried to adopt since the time of romanticism. Such a romantic inheritance is part of an attempt to realize or form the subject outside of or beyond the social or historical. This may be a reaction to modernity itself, and dovetails with notions of humanistic individualism, or even, for instance, with the kinds of frontier, self-sufficiency myths that become so prominent in America, even while industrial modernity becomes increasingly pervasive.

However, at the turn of the eighteenth century, and for most of the nineteenth, music is more usually figured as the paradigmatic art. The rhetoric surrounding especially instrumental music at the beginning of the nineteenth century, as seen in the writings of someone like E. T. A. Hoffmann, suggests the transcendent nature of music as romantically conceived. Indeed, in Hoffmann’s version of Beethoven’s instrumental music, the infinite is connected with the sublime:

Thus Beethoven’s instrumental music opens up to us also the realm of the monstrous and the immeasurable [...]. Beethoven’s music sets in motion the lever of fear, of awe, of horror, of suffering, and wakens just that infinite longing which is the essence of romanticism. (Hoffmann [1950], 777)<sup>2</sup>

There is a kind of paradox here which Hoffmann’s adjectival assessment of the symphony in C minor tends to elide. Somehow the listener is to get to “that wondrous spirit realm where grief and joy embrace him in the form of sound” (Hoffmann [1950], 778).<sup>3</sup> In other words, we are to get to the apparently immaterial precisely through the senses, or through that which gives us access to the material world. Hoffmann’s contention resonates, of course, with Schopenhauer’s notion that music

is the most transcendent of the arts because it gives us a direct access to the Will itself, the ground of reality (Schopenhauer [1981], 312). The Will is the reality which precedes the manifestation of any particular object of perception. For those who believe in music's power, there is no need for language, or even an analogy with language—in fact, it seems better if there is no analogy with language. The notion of absolute music, or music without language or programs to guide the listener, is the dominant idealization of art music in the first half of the nineteenth century, and one which, as I have already noted, depends upon a rather interesting reversal of aesthetic regard. Precisely what can guarantee that we are in the “spirit realm” and not a state of self-delusion is not completely clear. It certainly was not clear to Hegel, for instance, who feared the potential for instrumental music to stray into merely subjective indulgence (Hegel [1975], vol. 2, 955). Kant too had worried about the transitory nature of music, and the fact that it seemed to communicate by sensation alone (Kant [1951], 172).

This tension between music as powerful but lexically indeterminate, and therefore either able to transport us to the sublime, or merely to tickle us with an illusion of the sublime, is one that persists, but that takes on different kinds of figurations and possibilities as the nineteenth century moves on. Eduard Hanslick in his *On the Musically Beautiful* (1854) would try to recover musical meaning in strictly musical terms. With his notion of musical meaning as “tonally moving forms” (Hanslick [1986], 29) Hanslick attempts to move the Hegelian concept of the *content* of art to the level of form itself, with form conceived of as “spirit, [or] essential form, form created from the inside out” (Dahlhaus [1989], 111).<sup>4</sup> Hanslick is in part reacting to the expressivist aesthetics of Wagner, and his notion of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or the “total artwork” which will include language, movement, and music in a kind of complete expressive form. Wagner's notion of complete expressivity has profound implications for writers and musicians all over Europe, but especially for symbolists such as Baudelaire and Mallarmé. Perhaps the most significant exploration of the notion of the total artwork is performed by Mallarmé, since it is precisely the idea of totality that Mallarmé aims at, and with a decidedly de-totalizing edge. Mallarmé seems to want to appropriate the notion of totality for poetry. Wagner thought it necessary that music and language condition each other so that the correct balance between music's emotional power and language's appeal to reason (and these are always associated with the “appropriate” gender) could be struck. We see this in his notion of *Stabreim*, or the coordination between the vowel and consonant sounds of words and their emotional associations and the harmonic movement of the music (see Wagner [1988], 210–11). However, in “Crise de Vers” (Crisis in Poetry, 1886–1892–1896), Mallarmé would suggest that language itself is fallen, that there is no language whose sounds can guarantee its meanings (Mallarmé [1956a], 38). Elsewhere, in “La Musique et les Lettres” (Music and Literature, 1894), he joins the notions of music and language precisely at the level of their obscurity, in an apparent attempt to regain for poetic language the mystery appropriate to its more spiritual aims (Mallarmé [1956b], 47). The notion of totality is thus reworked to the degree that expressivity is “total” precisely in so far as it cannot be controlled. It is as if Mallarmé attempts to reconcile a Hegelian suspicion of music with a revised version of poetry (in Hegel's view the foremost of the arts) as music by transforming uncertainty and potential subjective indulgence into a kind of supreme spiritual act: poetry becomes music, or can become most like music, when it is untranslatable into other terms. Whether or not he is successful is another matter; clearly, in works like “Un Coup de Dés” (A Throw of Dice), with the distribution of language around the page, the musical model seems to be to “spatialize” or disrupt the

linear flow of language in an effort to take on not just the sonority of music with which poetry has so often been associated (through the sounds of words, rhyme, rhythmic variation, and so forth) but to dislodge language itself from its supposed “rational” basis. Syntax and syntagmatic continuity are broken in the name of some less “logical,” and apparently more mysterious set of textual effects.

Mallarmé seems to stage a truly modernist sense of supplementarity, by which I mean that he appears to realise that totality in any art is likely to be an illusion, and it is especially an illusion when considering some kind of artifice which will take on and try to encapsulate an age, a genre, a method of art, and so on. Thus, Mallarmé’s notion of the Book as a Spiritual Instrument is that of an artifice which purports to some future, some potential formal self-presence, but one that is both made possible by the very materiality of the Book itself, yet is never guaranteed by it. While such totalizing impulses may not be lost by the modernists, it seems to me that the notion of “music” is often called upon by later writers with a sense that the total, either rationally captured by language, or irrationally alluded to by virtue of some kind of association of language with music, is not without very great problems. Music may be conjured to solve these problems, but there is rarely a security of meaning, or of totality, which comes along with it, however music or “musical” language are conceived.

At its most rudimentary level, music consists of the organization of sound in time. As Stravinsky points out, music is a “chronologic art,” and it “presupposes before all else a certain organization of time, a *chronomony*” (Stravinsky [1942], 28).<sup>5</sup> Of course, literature has been defined in very much the same way, most explicitly, in Lessing’s *Laocoön* (1766). However, in much modern literature which claims to be “musically” inspired (or which has such claims made for it), the formal properties of the work often try to break the line of the sentence or the poetic line, and attempt to develop a more or less non-linear structure for the piece. In this imitation of music’s “*chronomony*” it is striking just how often the sense of the linearity of time is itself disrupted. Interestingly, even moderns who might not have agreed at all with a symbolist aesthetic (figures such as Pound, for instance) end up adopting some kind of Mallarméan version of “the Book” as a collection of motifs which are “inborn” and in which, as Mallarmé says, “[e]verything will be hesitation, disposition of parts, their alternations and relationships — all this contributing to the rhythmic totality, which is the very silence of the poem, in its blank spaces, as that silence is translated by each structural element in its own way” (Mallarmé [1956a], 41).<sup>6</sup> Thus, one way often used to describe the “musical” literature of the modernist period is to say that it is “fugal” or “contrapuntal,” terms often applied to Pound’s *Cantos*, for example, or to *Ulysses*, though not unproblematically.

Such disruptions of linearity can often be linked to the modernist interest in subjectivity and its own associative and non-logical proclivities. One can point to (and I emphasize here that I can *only* point to a variety of texts and can lay no claim to a thorough examination of their purported “musical” structuration or thematic complexity) many instances where modernist texts attempt to overcome external senses of time and association through the adoption and variation of a supposedly musical *chronomony*. Such texts might include Proust’s *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu* (Remembrance of Things Past), especially the “little phrase” from the Vinteuil sonata which so pervades Swann’s associations with Odette. Here the focus on the changing nature of Swann’s perceptions of his lover and of his own feelings are associated with this phrase and enacted through the linguistic representation of his memory. A similar kind of associative use of the relationship between memory and music appears in Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922), especially in the “Sirens” chapter, where well-known

songs are sometimes satirically, and sometimes not, poised against Bloom's reminiscences, as well as his anticipation of what is to come as his wife awaits her lover across town. Here, music is shown to block affect almost as much as it expresses it. The chapter is notorious for its apparent "fugal" structure, but it is very hard to determine just where this fugue might be, or how it might exist. Joyce himself played up the contrapuntal analogy, at least in part as a justification for his formal experimentation in the chapter. However, Joyce's use of music, especially opera and popular song, is pervasive throughout his work, as recent studies have once again shown (see Bauerle [1993], and Hodgart and Bauerle [1997]).

Novelistic attempts to incorporate music, either thematically, structurally, or both, are numerous in the modernist period. Following *Ulysses*, though perhaps less successfully, is Huxley's *Point Counter Point* (1928), with the fictional novelist Philip Quarles's meditations upon the "musicalization of fiction" (Huxley [1955], 297). The text points to a simultaneity of narrated events (rather in the manner of Joyce's *Ulysses*), and to the effect (and *lack* of effect) of listening on its characters. Music is central too to the fiction of E. M. Forster, in such works as *Howards End* (1910) and *A Passage to India* (1924). In the latter, music often seems to indicate the cultural barriers, and possibilities, that the text explores generally.

The mention of music might seem like an aesthetic response to modern alienation, but it is not a kind of dreamy creamy re-institution of an updated romantic subject. As often as not, it is an attempt to come to terms with social and historical conditions in as far as these can be formally comprehended. Perhaps Marshall Brown makes the case best in his discussion of the connections between modernist musical and literary forms. Brown says that formally both music and literature in the nineteenth century can be characterized broadly by "oppositions between tension and relaxation, complication and resolution, colorful dissonance and restored harmony" (Brown [1993], 80). Brown takes a well-known formalist path here in suggesting that "[a]t the end of the nineteenth century these polarized forms became formulaic" (Brown [1993], 81), and hence lost their effectiveness. Meaning moves away from large-scale organizing oppositions, and, in music at least, "dissonance is no longer marked with respect to consonance. The dominant, similarly, is no longer marked with respect to the tonic, so that though polytonal music continues to use triads, movement away from a given triad loses its significance" (Brown [1993], 87). This loss of binary significance is actually part of a whole change in relationships which come about in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Even before Schoenberg's development of the twelve-tone system, then, in the advanced chromatic and atonal period around the turn of the century, and even for composers who would remain more attached to tonality and its capacity for large-scale organization, there is a weakening of musical "language." As Charles Rosen points out, the changes in music which are taking place by the early twentieth century have to do with a loss of the "acceptance of very large units at certain strategic points—in general, the ends of sections or cadences" (Rosen [1975], 20–1). Thus, "[t]he renunciation of the symmetrical use of the blocks of elements in working out musical proportions placed the weight on the smallest units, single intervals, short motifs" (Rosen [1975], 21). The weakening of tonal large-scale construction can be seen, for instance, in the increasing chromaticism of Strauss's *Salome* (1905) (based on Wilde's play), and *Electra* (1908), in Debussy's extensive use of whole-tone scales, in Scriabin's "mystic chord," and of course in Schoenberg's early expressionist atonal pieces, and ultimately in his serial work. If similar oppositions are also breaking down in literature (a weakening of plot in relationship to linguistic performance,

for instance, or an emphasis on “action” which is not external to the characters) the question then becomes what, in the newly devised methods of both music and literature, can remain or become meaningful or “expressive”? (See Morgan [1990] for more on these and other composers).

Perhaps the whole issue of formal experimentation in music and literature of the period and the variety of attempts to defamiliarize and rejuvenate form lay bare the problem of expression itself: what is to assure the modernist composer or writer that any new formal surface will be appropriate for an intersubjective connection with the listener or reader? Indeed, what formal revision can guarantee that there is a shared sense of the subject or of the possibilities for knowing that subject and *its* ways of knowing or valuing? Modernism in music and literature at this point comes right up against the problem of expression, and it does so not only, or merely, in aesthetic terms, but in terms which lead directly to an examination of the place and possibilities of art in contemporary history. The moderns’ focus on time and subjectivity is not merely a collective retreat from new historical formations but an attempt to see through or past notions of technological “progress” and the “rational” bonds of capital. Indeed, the turn toward the subject (since the end of the eighteenth century, so thoroughly music’s domain) and temporality can be seen in many cases as the attempt to come to terms with the excesses of contemporary historical narrative and its ostensibly inevitable sense of progress. In literature, for instance, music forms a central part of Pound’s aesthetics that, as the century progresses, become increasingly concerned with the formal intervention of art and language in the chaos of the contemporary. We may not be fond of Pound’s political and aesthetic views, but they nevertheless clearly define the modernist project as part of a larger cultural and historical intervention.

Pound’s sense of the importance of music for literature and his attempts to link the formal practices of art generally to the processes of society and history are life-long obsessions. His musical-literary theorizations begin as early as the collection of essays called *I gather the limbs of Osiris*, 1911–12, and form an important dimension of his thinking during the imagist and vorticist phases of his career and beyond. His *Antheil and the Treatise on Harmony* (1927) has as much, or more, to do with Pound’s own version of harmony as he himself practiced it in his opera of 1923, *Le Testament de François Villon*, than it does with composer George Antheil. Pound wrote the music for *Le Testament*, translated the libretto from Villon, and designed the “book” of the opera. The *Antheil* piece and the opera demonstrate and echo Pound’s notion of the ideogram as a kind of resonant image. Pound contends that “A SOUND OF ANY PITCH, OR ANY COMBINATION OF SUCH SOUNDS, MAY BE FOLLOWED BY A SOUND OF ANY OTHER PITCH, OR ANY COMBINATION OF SUCH PITCHES, providing the time interval between them is properly gauged” (emphasis in original, Pound [1927], 10). In other words, harmony is no longer to be guided by rules for the simultaneous occurrence of pitches, rules which are based upon tonal relationships established by position within a scale, but rather by temporality as such. In the later theory of the Great Bass, put forth in the *Guide to Kulchur* (1934), Pound goes on to link pitch frequency and time as tempo: proper playing requires the proper sense of the coordination of sound frequency and tempo (Pound [1970], 233). In fact, he goes further than this. In an earlier chapter of the book, Pound assembles a disparate group of references as part of what he calls an “ideogram” on “right reason”: “*These disjunct paragraphs belong together; Gaudier, Great Bass, Leibniz, Erigena, are part of one ideogram, they are not merely separate subjects*” (emphasis in original, Pound [1970], 75). The breadth of related elements in this ideogram is part of Pound’s growing belief in the inter-

relationship among the realms of philosophy (East and West), politics, art, economics, and so on. If he also includes elsewhere increasingly disturbing elements such as anti-Semitism we can still not miss the point which concerns me here: for Pound, art in general is an integral part of contemporary life, and if this is not recognized, then no part of the social and aesthetic matrix can be properly understood. Pound will not accept separations between social and aesthetic realms, and this applies as much to his music theory and practice as it does to his poetic endeavors (see Bucknell [2001], 51–120).

Pound is certainly a unique case; however, the point is that he is not alone in recognizing the inter-connections between the social-historical and aesthetic realms. A similar concern can be seen in Virginia Woolf's last novel, *Between the Acts* (1941), where Miss LaTrobe's pageant replays the history of England in popular and often satirically used patriotic song, scene and mime. The pageant ends with a kind of explosion of history into the present, as the pageant's players reflect the audience back to itself using anything that will create a reflection: "hand glasses, tin cans, scraps of scullery glass, harness room glass, and heavily embossed silver mirrors" (Woolf [1978], 134). The players move about as a "jagged" tune plays — "Fox-trot was it? Jazz?" (Woolf [1978], 133) — as the cows join the tune, and periodically, airplanes in formation fly overhead (the book is set in the rural England of 1939). History, local and imperial, micro and macro, is replayed, brought home, as it were, even as the music and the actors dislocate the present and the past on the very eve of World War II.

The complex use of music to suggest both community and dispersion is, however, perhaps nowhere as effectively used as in African American literature, especially in the early part of the twentieth century. It is virtually impossible, for instance, to find a novel by the major figures of the Harlem Renaissance which does not allude to jazz, or blues, or both, especially when setting some dimension of the urban African American life. Earlier in the century, there was W. E. B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), which is part polemic, part sociological analysis, and certainly part cultural and racial "uplift" (among many other things). All the chapters begin with a musical citation from the "sorrow songs," or Negro spirituals and with a quotation usually from the poetry of the white tradition. The contrast and complementarity staged here is part of Du Bois's attempt not just to point out the doubleness of black experience (as both insider and outsider to American life), but also to display a black tradition which is equal in riches to anything created by the tradition that would exclude black voices. By 1925, Langston Hughes had published *The Weary Blues* and began his life-long attempt to reclaim and incorporate black vernacular traditions of speech and music into his work. The title poem is itself an exemplary demonstration of Hughes's ability to capture vernacular speech rhythms and blues versification in an amazingly subtle transcription of sound and changing points of view. We listen as the focus changes from the narrator to that of the blues singer, at the same time as rhythmic patterns from earlier in the poem cross back and forth with later patterns, and the focalization changes from that of the speaker to that of the blues singer (see Chinitz [1996], and Patterson [2000]). Blues, early jazz, Caribbean, and even African music are structurally and thematically important in almost all the African American fiction of the early twentieth century. These would include such novels as Jessie Redmon Fauset's *There is Confusion* (1924), Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem* (1928), and Zora Neale Hurston's *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934), among a great many others. The use of music in these and many other African American texts is usually complex, and often goes far beyond the mere inclusion of jazz or blues as a kind of decorative setting

for the urban black experience. Often, a whole other tradition and sense of cultural priorities enter these texts through the music, a different set of forms and possibilities which do not go unnoticed outside the African American community. Virgil Thomson produces his first operatic collaboration with Gertrude Stein, *Four Saints in three Acts*, in 1934, using a fashionable all-black cast; and T. S. Eliot used not only allusions to Wagner (in 1922, in *The Waste Land*) and (apparently) the structure of late-Beethoven quartets (in 1942, in *The Four Quartets*), but also included James Weldon and Rosamond Johnson's *Under the Bamboo Tree* in his unfinished *Sweeney Agonistes* (1924).

Finally, and perhaps most tellingly, Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus* (1947) remains one of the most complex and important novels to include a musical basis. It brings together not only contemporary musical developments (fictional composer, Adrian Leverkühn, invents Schoenberg's twelve-tone system of music composition) and philosophical debates about music (Adorno is a well-known contributor to the theory and sense of music described in the book), but casts these within the context of contemporary history, since the narrator/writer joins the biography of his friend, the radical composer Leverkühn, with the degeneracy of German, and indeed, Western modernity. Few novels link detailed discussion of musical composition and expression so directly with the problems of evil, and with world history on a personal, cultural, and social scale. The young Leverkühn's penchant for parody — "'Why must I think that almost all, no, all the methods and conventions of art today *are good for parody only?*'" (emphasis in original, Mann [1971], 134)<sup>7</sup> — is itself a statement on both aesthetic exhaustion and the stultification of modernity. Schoenberg, however, was no parodist, even though he might share with Leverkühn a desire for a style of "strict composition" which might reconcile the old and the new (Mann [1971], 190–1). We are left to wonder if Leverkühn's achievement of precisely this strict style is too much — since it seems he may literally have sold his soul to the Devil to do this (or else his apparent pact is some kind of syphilitic delusion) — or if it is far too little — since the self-willed fate of Germany (and perhaps of the West generally) cannot be redeemed. Though the life and work of the artist seem deeply involved with the culture of his time, the question remains, however, as to whether or not art can be at all redemptive of culture and history.

In a less tragic, though equally intriguing way, the final collaboration of Virgil Thomson and Gertrude Stein will approach some of these same issues, and it is to this much less frequently discussed work that I will now turn for a fuller discussion.

For Theodor Adorno, music takes its place in the general modernist project of intervening in history. Part of Adorno's defense of the difficult music of Schoenberg in his *Philosophy of Modern Music* (1948), relies precisely on the fact that "the self-locomotion of the [musical] material is of the same origin as is the social process, by whose traces it is continually permeated" (Adorno [1973], 33).<sup>8</sup> Speaking of the harmonic and rhythmic permutations of Schoenberg's use of the twelve-tone system, Adorno points out that these are "configurations of the historical force present in the material" (Adorno [1973], 64);<sup>9</sup> hence, form itself, and not the vagaries of communication, comprises a necessary part of the actual historical intervention of art. Such an intervention is itself aesthetically and historically necessary only insofar as art remains both autonomous *and* in a negative relationship to the social in its current formation: "Art is the social antithesis of society, not directly deducible from it" (Adorno [1997], 8).<sup>10</sup> "[A]rt becomes social by its opposition to society, and it occupies this position only as autonomous art" (Adorno [1997], 225).<sup>11</sup>

Here, within the notion of the negative, and yet necessarily social, character of art's autonomy may be found a profound connection between Adorno's thinking on music specifically, and art gen-

erally, and the work of Gertrude Stein. Stein has often been misunderstood as the most recondite of modernists, whose works maintain a self-enclosure and inscrutability which seems to exemplify the most extreme form of modernism's *art pour l'art* inheritance. I would maintain, however, that this is a severe misreading. Stein thought out the implications of the connections between history, society, and art throughout her long career. Her apparent dismissal of narrative and historical logic since at least the period of *Tender Buttons* (1912), if not before, remains part of a profound skepticism of the practice of history and narration. As she says in her second portrait of Picasso, "If I Told Him," (1923): "I will tell you what history teaches: history teaches" (Stein [1984b], 233). This apparently near circular dismissal of history expresses a deep suspicion of its capacity to exclude her—as a woman, a lesbian, even perhaps as a "genius." A concern with history and official discourses, then, pervades Stein's work throughout her career, and never with more force, and even textual clarity, than in her later texts. Significantly, it is her last major work, an opera libretto called *The Mother of Us All* (1946), which may be seen to sum up (though not "solve") the problems of official history and narrative that Stein had struggled with her whole writing life. Here Stein presents the figure of Susan B. Anthony not as some female version of the great man of history, but instead, as a person of courage rather than of mastery; she is one who is in a way driven both by what she perceives as the need of her time, and by her time's resistance to her. The opera will not allow mastery, or even a sense of the redemption of history, but instead, only persistence within it. When the libretto is combined with Virgil Thomson's "plain-as-Dick's-hatband harmony" (Thomson [1966], 384), we get the strange effect of some kind of linguistic-musical hybrid. Thomson's tonal music would probably be seen by Adorno as regressive, as a capitulation to the ease of musical expectation, or even as a kind of cacophonous return to an outmoded musical aesthetic. For Adorno, after Schoenberg, "it is precisely the triads which, [...] are cacophonous and not the dissonances!" (Adorno [1973], 34).<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, Thomson's resistance to what he considered by his own time the cult of dissonance may be seen, when combined with Stein's libretto, as part of a larger critique of American-ness, and as an inquiry into historical change and subjectivity. The music is, in a sense, as displaced, as anachronistic (in Adorno's terms) as the appearance in the libretto of characters from all periods of American history, characters who often (indeed, usually) could not be related at all, but who appear in the opera with a kind of temporal alacrity, which is at the same time a profound interrogation of the historical subject (see Martin [1988]; and Winston [1987]).

The Stein-Thomson collaboration may outwardly seem to contradict Adorno's rigorous aesthetic-musical historicity in many ways. However, a close examination of the musical and linguistic techniques of the opera will reveal, if not a textbook Adornian practice, then at least one which displays significant historical and aesthetic examination within the heart of aesthetic modernism itself.

The Stein/Thomson opera is a form of public address, not always a clear or easy one to grasp, but an address nonetheless. It is an entry into a public forum and into the narration of the life of a public person. But this is not a person who masters time and fate, nor is she one who is even sure what the place of individual actions are in terms of historical events. This does not mean she does not act; it simply means that she is unsure of the meaning of action, even necessary and ultimately successful action, in the face of real oppression and restriction.

Stein gives the libretto an uncharacteristic sense of linear action: Act one, scene one shows Anthony putting press clippings into a book, while her long-time companion, Anne Shaw, sits knitting.<sup>13</sup> The different activities of the characters immediately delineate Anthony's unwomanly public self in



contrast to Anne's apparently more domestic persona—a division of labor not unlike the Stein-Toklas partnership. The second scene shows Anthony in a curious debate with Daniel Webster; scene four has Anthony worrying about the nature of her suffrage endeavor in a series of dreams; the fifth scene shows Anthony discoursing on the difficulties of marriage for women, though the marriage she is attending does occur. The second act, scene one, features Anthony at home, now performing domestic duties, and others come to seek her help to continue the suffrage struggle; the second scene is marked by ambivalence: Anthony has spoken so persuasively, that the fearful politicians have finally inserted the word “male” into the constitution. Though the scene ends with declarations of hope, we never see the process of change actually happening, just as Anthony herself never did. In the last scene Susan B. returns as a ghost to her own memorial, fourteen years after her death when the nineteenth amendment has finally been changed to include women. Though the scenes follow a more or less chronological order, they really show little by way of progression. Crossing historical time zones are characters such as Lillian Russell, a late nineteenth-century actress, and Donald Gallup, an early twentieth-century scholar, along with such figures as Grant, Webster, and John Quincy Adams, who, though long dead by 1920, continues to court an acquaintance of Stein's, Constance Fletcher. The schema of historical progression is always intersected by characters who could not have co-existed, or who, if they did, were probably not related in the ways they are in the opera.

The combination of historical sequence and anachronism signals not merely the constructedness of historical representation, but in fact, marks the epistemological dissonance of historical experience. This is in fact part of the theme of Stein's earlier lecture, “Composition as Explanation” (1926), where she inquires into the means by which one can *know* that change or progression occurs. In the “Composition” lecture, she seems to expand the notion of “composition” to include not just artistic endeavor, but the process of “living” and creating the composition of the immediate world. The point seems to be an attempt to substitute temporality and the experience of perception (the “continuous present”) for the official historical doctrines of continuity and significance.

In this late libretto, however, Stein's characters are returned to the problems of history and the causal narratives of power. Susan B. Anthony, whose long life exceeds its gender-specific social restrictions, is presented here as one who is aware of herself as a cultural agent, as one who is trying to make the composition of her present time. This public life, however, begins with a recognition of its limitations. Placing the press clippings into her book, Susan B.'s first words are “Yes I was” (0, 4). Susan B. is corrected by Anne, “You mean you are” (0, 4–5). Stein has Susan B. reply with a citation from one of Stein's other works, *Four Saints in Three Acts*, “when this you see remember me” (0, 6–7). Interspersing and directing this dialogue are in fact two third-person narrators, down stage facing the audience: a Gertrude S. and a Virgil T. Of course, these two figures that mark who is speaking do emphasize the contrived nature of this operatic history, and reinforce Susan B.'s already declared sense of her own pastness. However, this is not merely a typical Steinian disruption of continuity, or scrambling of temporal/historical markers. Nor do I think that this is some proto-post-modern gesture which merely accentuates the artificiality of the representation. Artifice is certainly marked here, as it always is in opera. However, it is rarely on display in historiography, even though it may well be at work there. Thus, I think we are being shown the publicness of the representation, and of the figure being represented. The domestic scene is crossed with Susan B.'s own recognition of her public presence. And Thomson's music, with its brass and drums and simple rhythmic dec-

larations, carries over from the beginning of the Overture, which is subtitled “A Political Meeting,” and crosses into this domestic space. The fluid demarcation between private/domestic and public space, is signaled in this passage by the simple drum rolls and the emphatic, tonic of the orchestra (the chord it plays in the first few bars is an F major). The press rolls of the drum and the firm orchestral chords give the opening domestic scene a kind of marshal, public sensibility.

The historicity of the opening of the opera lies not so much in the anachronistic statement of an earlier tonal, American musical practice, but in its conjunction with statements such as Susan B.’s about her own “pastness.” (On the subject of scrambled sequences, it is worth noting that Thomson and scenarist Maurice Grosser actually begin the opera with what was originally Stein’s last scene of the first act.) Virgil T. will state that “This was the beginning” (1, 6), but even Susan B. seems to know that this is not true. Moreover, Anne Shaw’s presence at this point also suggests that this is not really the beginning, since Shaw knew Anthony from 1888 until the end of Anthony’s life, and Anthony had been active in suffrage and abolitionist movements for many years before their meeting. This is not a history concerned with “facts,” but rather one that is intent on disparaging progression as a causal chain of events: Anthony’s “pastness” is as much a “fact” at the beginning of the opera as it will be at the end, when she sings from beyond the grave. Yet, it does not doubt the “facts,” either of male political resistance to woman suffrage, or of Anthony’s role within the movement to change this resistance. What is present, facts aside, is the voices of those who were involved with the actual events — not *their* voices, of course, but representations of their voices. The opera focuses not merely on the past and its events, causal or otherwise, but on vocality itself, as the instrument of the individual in time and history, an instrument which is most definitively and irrevocably lost. Indeed, that which is most anachronistic in the opera — in the sense of being outside of their proper places in time — is the voices themselves; for these would have been used at a multitude of public events, would have articulated thousands of words, opinions, ideas, arguments — many more than the written records contain. This site or articulation is the least accessible, yet, could arguably have been of most importance in this history. Let me discuss a moment in the opera which more clearly illustrates what I mean.

In the third scene of the first act, Susan B. and the politician Daniel Webster engage in a debate. This did not occur in fact, but it is a scene which clearly articulates the complex representation of voices in the opera. Webster is presented with a full measure of pomposity. He enters with a very grave sounding ditty which the chorus at the political rally neatly punctures by transmuting it into a version of “London Bridge is Falling Down” (17, 10). If his gravity falls flat, he is nevertheless incurable. When the debate with Susan B. begins, there is no sense of communication between them at all. In her plays, Stein often uses dialogue which does not “connect,” but in this particular case, the non-communication has a rather unique purpose. Into this “debate” Stein has inserted twelve successive segments from a speech Daniel Webster gave on 26–7 January 1830, the Second Reply to Hayne (Winston [1987], 122). These clearly carry no response at all to Susan B.’s statements: he refers to the “honorable gentleman” consistently as “he,” and refers all his comments to “Mr. President,” the chair of the Senate. Webster’s speech is so full of the forms of public address that, in a sense, the particular issue he is discussing does not matter: he offers up, and participates in the very structure of a speech which is already spoken, and which in turn speaks him. This apparently “full” speech is at the same time, in fact, quite empty. As Slavoj Žižek reminds us with regard to Lacan’s notion of empty speech, the model of empty speech is the password, which is “a pure gesture of

recognition, of admission into a certain symbolic space, whose enunciated content is totally indifferent" (Žižek [1993], 94). By lifting Webster's speech and imperfectly reassembling pieces of it in this fictional debate, Stein is signaling a historical, social, and vocal context for which someone like Susan B. would have had no password. The historical *narrative* accuracy of the "debate" is sacrificed in order to simulate the political/cultural conditions under which the *voice* of Susan B. would have had to operate. The representation of the voices, one of which recounts the "actual" words of one of the speakers, eludes a history of causality in order more accurately to outline the space in which the voices of these historical figures might have been heard—or not.

Contra Webster's confident, if empty, speech, Susan B. seems to sing into silence. Musically, what goes on during the debate seems like a kind of competition for tonal ascendancy. Susan B. begins in the key of G major, and Webster, at his first phrase, changes to the fifth above, or the dominant of G, D major. At various points he attempts to reassert his own key, and at times Susan B. will seem to go along with this. She even ostensibly wins the "duel" here, musically, if not rhetorically: by about the middle of this section Webster seems to come around to her key. However, there is a moment where Susan B. seems near to capitulating to Webster's tonal dominance—not because of mere weakness, but rather because she perceives, or attempts to perceive herself and her position in terms which do not occur to Webster.

Webster is completing one of his declarations—interestingly, one in which he states his dismay at being "unaccountably misunderstood" (51, 9–10). Susan B. too responds with a question about understanding (most verbal connections between the two are tangential at best, but even these tangents *are* there), but her question exists outside of the certainty of any socially sanctioned space. She is singing it seems to herself; the harmony at first too is ambiguous, wandering but then finally asserting a near cadence (B major, D major, G major) in her original key of G major. She asks herself: "Do we do what we have to do, or do we have to do what we do? I answer" (52, 10–53, 3).

Susan B.'s self-questioning in fact casts doubt on the possibility of gaining access to the symbolic, though empty, vocality of Webster. Indeed, her remark, and perhaps her whole part in the debate, might make us wonder if she is really "speaking" at all. She will address Webster at various points, but at no time does he speak to her. Perhaps, Susan B. wonders the same thing. Interestingly, it is Webster himself who at his next entrance will sing in Susan B.'s key of G major; but note what he says: "Mister President, I shall enter on no encomium upon Massachusetts, she needs none. There she is. Behold her and judge for yourselves" (52, 4 to 53, 2). Anthony was born in Massachusetts, and Webster was a representative of that state, but of course, nations, ships, and sometimes even cars, are often gendered feminine. And he is not addressing Anthony directly, but Mister President, as usual.

Is Susan B. "winning" this debate, or is Webster's change of keys simply a gesture, largely musical, of condescension? Unlike Susan B., Webster does not have "to do" what he does here in allowing himself into the union of her tonal center. Certainly, if it costs nothing, why not join hers? His musical gesture remains ambiguous; his verbal one is consistent with a kind of inconsequential gentility. Susan B. remains unheard, at least by her on-stage interlocutor. However, she speaks anyway; as she says "I answer." We can hear now, not only the conditions under which suffrage speech-making might have had to exist, but also a kind of history of the social object. We are hearing a voice that should have remained silent, or which, if it had to speak, should not be heard. She is, effectively, Webster's deaf-spot. We hear this, even if Webster doesn't. Anthony's self-questioning about neces-

sity and action is a form of speech which Webster's obsessively public speech would seem unable and unwilling to articulate. He gestures toward the feminine "Massachusetts" precisely at the moment where Susan B. articulates a sense of doubt or self-inquiry. And such a moment, so close to the threshold of the political symbolic as staged by Webster's speech, is precisely the time to be chivalric and graceful.

So perhaps he *has* been listening, at least in a certain way, one that will maintain the lack of recognition of "Massachusetts," will gracefully block her voice, or descend to "hear" it with deaf ears. Susan B. enacts this intentionally deafened spot in Webster's vocalese. But she also gives voice to a kind of doubt about the whole proposition of being heard, of gaining the symbolic password: its value, its consequences, its meaning. She will state unequivocally just after Webster's allowance of her key, that "I say fight for the right, be a martyr and live, be a coward and die, and why, because they, yes they, sooner or later go away. They leave us here. They come again. Don't forget they come again" (53, 4 to 54, 6). She seems to understand here that a foot-hold in the realm of the password will not guarantee once and for all the place of a woman's voice. Moreover, by the end of the opera, her ambivalence about the success of the project of suffrage remains intact; this is not because she believes it has not been a worthy cause, but rather because she remains unconvinced of the possibility of being "heard" if it means being heard in the *same way* as Webster is heard.

The opera's Epilogue takes place at the unveiling of a statue of Susan B. She is dead, but returns as a ghost to sing into the space of the public unveiling of her image. At the very beginning of this scene, one of the male members of the group asks, in reference to the statue: "Does it really mean that women are as white and as cold as marble, does it really mean that?" (235, 10 to 236, 7). The early suffrage movement was, of course, closely aligned with abolitionist groups. The split for Anthony finally came in 1868–69 when the suffragettes were asked to defer their desire for the franchise in favor of black men (see Barry [1988], 191–4). In this Epilogue, such difficulties are purged, and apparently, Susan B. has become as white and as dead as any of her former male foes. But the public memorial, this visual piece of official evidence, is placed under vocal scrutiny by the now dead Anthony. Her voice rises from the dead like the Commendatore's ghost at the end of *Don Giovanni*; however, she does not drag anyone down to hell. Her voice is still very much of this world, though she sings from the most silent and private of places. The meditation of her final aria recalls the public/private overlap of the first scenes of the opera, and her final lines seem to resist the frozen image and its sanctioning of her as a public and official being. In this way, she is nothing like the soldier known as the Commendatore who comes to collect Don Giovanni. And yet, the "soldier" is nevertheless still here: General Grant seems to refuse to die! Somehow still among the living, he can complain that "the army does not vote" (273, 6–8), and earlier: "Women are women, soldiers are soldiers, men are not men, lies are not lies" (262, 8 to 263, 1). Apparently, he does not approve of the changes to the franchise. Daniel Webster too, is still around, not as a ghost, but as himself. Amusingly, in the Epilogue he is found singing to Angel More, who was a ghost all along, one for whom Webster has a particular affection. Interestingly, he seems filled with anxiety that he be heard by the dead object of his affections, and he asks: "Angel More can you will you shall you may you might you would you hear me" (243, 3–7).

Why are these men here still grousing and longing in the twentieth century? And why are the women, those that Susan B. had to leave behind, so clearly unhappy? Jenny Reefer claims to have "hope and faith [but] no not charity" (262, 1–10)—all sung to a near citation of "When the Red Red

Robin, Comes Bob Bob Bobbin Along”—and a character named Anna Hope, who has, she says, been to California and Kalamazoo, says that “I do not believe I burst into tears and I do not believe” (257, 9 to 258, 1–3).

Susan B. then, in the aria that ends the opera, sings into this ambivalent atmosphere of change. Indeed, she sings across and attempts to undo the static representation of herself in “marble and gold” (278, 5–6). She knows that being so frozen in stone allows for a historical misidentification of her; that becoming part of historical design as a figure of herself is to reduce history to a kind of completion in which change is merely part of some more grand and always complete figuration, one wherein the messiness and uncertainty of temporality, of the moment to moment perception of a historical situation, is no longer taken into account. Anthony notes at the outset of the aria: “We do not retrace our steps, going forward may be the same as going backwards” (275, 2–6). The solidity of the historical monument or representation of Susan B. visually recalls the empty speech that Daniel Webster uses in their earlier debate. While he lives on in this Epilogue, begging to be heard by another ghost, Susan B. is nothing but a voice now, and in any case, she seems less sure about anything more solid than a voice surviving. She has good reason. In another part of Webster’s Second Reply to Hayne, we can read an extended peroration upon Massachusetts and hear just how secure he feels history to be, built as it is upon the blood and bones of its dead sons: “There is her [Massachusetts’] history; the world knows it by heart. The past, at least, is secure. There is Boston, and Lexington, and Bunker Hill; there they will remain forever. The bones of her sons, falling in the great struggle for Independence, now lie mingled with the soil of every State” (Webster [1986], vol. I, 326). Now, he is fighting in this speech for the supremacy of federal law over State law, in the limiting of South Carolina’s control over the sale and management of public lands. In his ultimate goal of saving the union from war, he will, of course, not succeed; but the kind of rhetorical procedure he uses here—of heroic male death, and eternal patriotic memory—is a pattern which will work in many other situations. Susan B. cannot be certain of such a secure heritage or its future. This is because of the very ambiguity she holds about her own movement’s success.

She has wondered earlier in the opera if the attainment of the suffragettes’ goals will make women as “afraid” as men, if “having the vote will make them [women] afraid” (193, 8). Here in the final moments of the opera, before an official image of herself, she both affirms her achievement and questions it. The ambiguity of overlapping spaces which opens the opera, now transmutes into a vocal and musical questioning of her actions and the security of their historical status. In a moving, but ambivalent passage, Susan B.’s vocal line recalls in its intervals, a bugle. This is in fact a trait of many of the melodic lines in the opera, as John Cage pointed out long ago (Hoover and Cage [1959], 202): “it will stay it will pay” (283, 1 to 2). If you listen closely to these statements of apparent triumph you will hear that she sings this affirmation using a phrase from “Taps,” a tune fitting perhaps for the funereal dimension of the scene, but not quite the triumphant music one would expect for the words she is using. The phrase breaks off suddenly, and it is followed by another trademark of the opera, a wholesale and abrupt change of key (in this case, from G major to C minor), as she returns to her opening phrases about not retracing one’s steps. The musical effect of the change to the minor key is conventional—the minor key *does* suggest a “darkness,” a greater “tension” in the sentiments of the language. But we realize here with the “Taps” citation which precedes the change to C minor, that in fact what plagues Susan B. is precisely the “official” way in which her public actions can be swallowed, transformed into part of the blood and bones of an official set of cold, white his-

torical representations. The unexpected key change, then, while perhaps conventionally expressive, nevertheless breaks off the false triumph of the “Taps” citation and returns both Susan B. and the listener to the more difficult task of facing the uncertainty of one’s agency within a larger historical, and representational, context.

Her penultimate words refocus the question and assert the final ambivalence of “knowing” and certainty in the face of official representation: “Do you know because I tell you so, or do you know do you know” (285, 5 to 286, 5). These words could in fact be seen to echo not only the opera’s, but also literary modernism’s sense of ambivalence about history, representation, and agency as these are cast within its relationship to music. The epistemological weight of these words brings us back in a way to where we began: to the problems of expression and representation, and these in relation to the notion of music as an aesthetic model for literary practice. Moreover, coming as they do at the end of an opera which thematizes and performs the problems of history and subjectivity, these lines might be seen to pose, in their combining of words and music, a most eloquent assertion of the ambivalence about the success of aesthetic intervention in the world, even as they seem, also, to demonstrate its necessity, its requirement as part of one’s actions within an equally ambivalent world.

## Notes

1. “in einer abrupten Umkehrung [der] ästhetischen [...] ‘Unbestimmtheit’ des Inhalts nicht mehr als Mangel, sondern als Merkmal des ‘erhabenen’ Stils erscheint und die Distanzierung von der einfachen ‘Sprache des Herzens’ als Ahnung des ‘Unendlichen’ statt als Verstiegtheit ins leer Abstrakte empfunden wird” (Dahlhaus [1978], 59).
2. “So öffnet uns auch Beethovens Instrumentalmusik das Reich des Ungeheuren und Unermeßlichen [...] Beethovens Musik bewegt die Hebel der Furcht, des Schauers, des Entsetzens, des Schmerzes und erweckt eben jene unendliche Sehnsucht, welche das Wesen der Romantik ist” (Hoffmann [1957], 46).
3. “dem wunderbaren Geisterreiche, wo Schmerz und Lust, in Tönen gestaltet, ihn umfingen” (Hoffmann [1957], 48).
4. “Geist, Wesensform, Gestaltung von innen heraus” (Dahlhaus [1978], 112).
5. “suppose avant tout une certaine organisation du temps, une ‘chrononomie’” (Stravinsky [2000], 81).
6. “Tout devient suspens, disposition fragmentaire avec alternance et vis-à-vis, concourant au rythme total, lequel serait le poème tu, aux blancs; seulement traduit, en une manière, par chaque pendentif” (Mallarmé [1945a], 367).
7. “‘Warum muß es mir vorkommen, als ob fast alle, nein, alle Mittel und Konvenienzen der Kunst *heute nur noch zur Parodie taugten?*’” (emphasis in original, Mann [1976], 180).
8. “Desselden Ursprungs wie der gesellschaftliche Prozeß und stets wieder von dessen Spuren durchsetzt, verläuft, was bloße Selbstbewegung des Materials dünkt, im gleichen Sinne wie die reale Gesellschaft” (Adorno [1975], 39–40).
9. “Sie sind Konfigurationen des geschichtlichen Zwanges im Material” (Adorno [1975], 65).
10. “Kunst ist die gesellschaftliche Antithesis zur Gesellschaft, nicht unmittelbar aus dieser zu deduzieren” (Adorno [1970], 19).
11. “Vielmehr wird sie zum Gesellschaftlichen durch ihre Gegenposition zur Gesellschaft, und jene Position bezieht sie erst als autonome” (Adorno [1970], 335).
12. “Kakophonisch sind solche Dreiklänge und nicht die Dissonanzen” (Adorno [1975], 40).

13. All references are to the piano-vocal score of the opera by Gertrude Stein and Virgil Thomson (1948), and are given in the text. References are given according to rehearsal number in bold, for instance 1, followed by bar numbers, for instance 5 to 9. Each rehearsal number marks a section that contains ten bars.

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## Theatrical Modernism

### A Problematic

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It has been a characteristic of the encyclopedia article, the general survey, or the textbook that it displays a great deal of confidence in the idea of modern drama, the modern stage, or modern theatre. Much of this is innocent, indicative only of a sense of periodicity, but it becomes a little comical with time. That modern drama might begin with Ibsen, yet somehow antedates the motor car, the aeroplane, and the telephone is more than a little perverse in terms of an effective nomenclature, but the tradition persists, even into the hyper-reality of a new millennium. So we find the theatre critic Michael Billington, from the left-leaning *Guardian* in Britain, introducing in February 2003 the playwrights Ibsen and Strindberg “as violent, necessary opposites, who between them laid the foundations for modern drama”, and as “the two indispensable props of modern drama”. Appropriating the phrase the critic Jan Kott applied to Shakespeare, Billington asserts that “Ibsen is still our contemporary”, and he writes with firm conviction of “Strindberg’s modernity” and even more passionately of “Ibsen’s raging modernity” (Billington [2003], 17).

Yet in contexts other than the feature articles of newspapers, perceptions of theatre and performance have evolved immensely during the extensive period evoked by this humanist certainty, and it is undeniable that the critical terms applied to theatre need to be sifted, questioned, and reformulated accordingly. So it is that the concept of modernism itself, in relation to theatre, must be re-examined if it is to retain its full value in an historical understanding of theatre. To confine theatrical modernism, by analogy with the written arts, merely to an aspect of the history of drama in the twentieth century is now unacceptable, because theatre is no longer perceived to be the enactment of written dramas, but a complex activity critically embraced by the term performance.

### Modernism and Theatre: Two Large Questions

There are two large, over-arching questions that should affect the study of theatre in relation to the concept of modernism, and both of them concern mapping. Firstly, where should we expect to locate modernism within the complexity of theatre practice? Secondly, is it right to expect to ascribe the major achievements and developments of the theatre in the last century to modernism?

The production of theatre involves a combination of various arts, collocating elements such as the human body and voice, material objects, visual and technological illusion, the physical space of performance, and the relationship of the audience or spectators with all of these. What we call a dra-

matic script may well aim to coordinate all elements of production, but the degree to which it does so will depend on the contingencies of its implementation, and on issues such as authority in theatrical production. There will also be a significant difference between the production of older scripts, particularly those which cannot exercise the claims of copyright, and contemporary scripts. Older scripts will have been conceived for theatrical conditions that may no longer prevail, while contemporary scripts may aim to create specific entailments on the resources of modern production.

Where, then, should we expect to locate a phenomenon or artistic intention such as modernism within this complexity of theatrical production? Much of the emphasis to be observed in the standard assumptions indicated above lies on the concept of drama, an apparently composite phenomenon firmly associated with the writings (scripts) of a named author. In this form of critical history, the artform of theatre is subject to the influence and control of the writer who seemingly addresses the audience (or even society) directly, apparently in an unmediated way, without the intervention or involvement of the theatrical apparatus. Yet we are obliged to confront this form of critical assumption with at least two phenomena which conflict almost totally with it.

It is quite apparent, in any reasonable review of the theatre in the twentieth century, that the role and impact of the figure known as the director have been paramount in the achievements of theatrical production. It is also apparent that an increasing impact of technology has immensely enhanced the function of original design in theatrical production. The result of these two factors has been that informed criticism since 1945 has been prepared to write and speak of director's theatre and designer's theatre quite as much as of playwright's theatre. In these circumstances, how should we define the phenomenon of modernism in relation to theatre? Would it be located merely in some characteristics of the script, on analogy with modernist achievements in other literary forms? Or in visual or material connections between elements of theatrical design and identifiable traits of modernism in the visual or plastic arts? Or in a conception of human performance in some manner capable of being closely identified as modernist, but without real analogy in the other written or fine arts?

In this last respect there must clearly be some relationship with dance, and fortunately dance has its own relatively indicative history in the twentieth century with regard to terms such as modern and postmodern, in contrast to other terms such as classical (ballet), popular or folk (Banes [1980]). But dance is a significantly controlled form of theatre, with the elimination or extreme subordination of voice in favour of physical movement, and the coordinating concept of choreography presides over its production. There is no such presiding concept in spoken theatre, but there is a body of theory about human performance, which presents itself as an outstanding feature of the period in question. I shall consider it seriously below, as a necessary constituent of a more satisfactory definition of theatrical modernism.

The second large question that I introduced can be addressed from many different positions, but it may be most helpful to consider it very briefly in relation to dramaturgy, which I do in the final section of this essay. Is it possible to achieve a definition of a modernist dramaturgy, and if so is it the case that modernism is a major feature of dramaturgy in the period in question, or in the twentieth century as a whole? Can dramaturgy by itself, the authorship of scripts for performance, entail the creation of a theatrical modernism? Here again, we are not so much speaking of an ability to identify reliable instances of the theatrical modernism, or to achieve a full list of theatrical modernists, but to provide indications of the degree to which the concept of modernism might contribute to an understanding of the theatrical practice of an extended era.

So in this contribution I can hope to do three things which may be helpful, after posing these initial questions. The first will be to consider the terminology of modernism as it has been tentatively applied to drama and theatre in some of the most influential works of critical theory; the second will be, by contrast with that tradition, to suggest what an appropriate definition of theatrical modernism might expect to embrace, in the period to which modernism in the other arts is normally ascribed; and the third will be to consider a minimal context of dramaturgy in and over that period in relation to this general problematic of modernism and theatre. What will emerge is not a complete history, but an attempt at a reasoned reorientation of our approach to modernism and theatre.

### Modernism and Theatre: Critical Reflections

Bradbury and McFarlane's collection of closely co-ordinated essays on the subject of *Modernism: 1890–1930*, published in 1976, was one title in a series which had already included *The Continental Renaissance* and *The Age of Realism*. The central problem of the collection was not one of a lack of seriousness or conviction, but of the absence of any convincing analytical definition of the phenomenon in question, in either the opening essay or the collection as a whole. In its absence, each contributor substituted a different, phenomenal description of some interest which tentatively defined by analogy and exclusion: so modernism was seen to partake of classicism and romanticism in different degrees in different phases, but was clearly not either. Similarly realism and naturalism were "themselves modern but not quite Modernist movements", and "it is precisely in the breaking up of the naturalistic surface and its spirit of positivism that one senses the growth of Modernism" (Bradbury and McFarlane [1976], 43 and 44).

A different kind of uncertainty occurred in relation to the concept of style, and to the plurality of movements united, as aspects of the phenomenon, in their diversity. So "in the difference between (say) Symbolism and Surrealism" the editors suggested that it was possible to "distinguish... *two* Modernisms". But the danger in this was that the conceptual unity of Modernism might fall into question, and this prompted a more sophisticated kind of negative description: "Modernism is less a style than a search for a style in a highly individualistic sense; and indeed the style of one work is no guarantee for the next" (Bradbury and McFarlane [1976], 29).

The alternative to an elusive diversity had to be that of combination, a resolution of apparent contradictions:

In short, Modernism was in most countries an extraordinary compound of the futuristic and the nihilistic, the revolutionary and the conservative, the naturalistic and the symbolistic, the romantic and the classical. It was a celebration of a technological age and a condemnation of it; an excited acceptance of the belief that the old régimes of culture were over, and a deep despairing in the face of that fear; a mixture of convictions that the new forms were escapes from historicism and the pressures of the time with convictions that they were precisely the living expressions of these things. (Bradbury and McFarlane [1976], 46).

Cast in these terms, modernism would at least be not hard to find. In fact, the mixture of evasion and certainty, of partial definition and the broad sweep of inclusiveness continued throughout the volume. "Modernism is a particularly urban art", Bradbury later insisted, yet equally "there has

always been a close association between literature and cities" (Bradbury and McFarlane [1976], 96–7). So the cultural chaos of the populous city was not an exclusively modernist phenomenon:

The art of Modernism was not the first art to reach this. These awarenesses are in realism and naturalism; one might argue that the unutterable contingency of the modern city has much to do with the rise of that most realistic, loose and pragmatic of literary forms, the novel. (Bradbury and McFarlane [1976], 99)

Nevertheless, Bradbury and McFarlane did settle on some specifics, not the least of which was the urban experience; internationalism, in some form, was regularly asserted (but contrasted with a fervent nationalism in some manifestations), and "emigration or exile" were noted as characteristics of many writers and artists. Whether these were the topics of a "Modernist art", or the conditions affecting its practitioners along with others, was never particularly clear, and the national-geographic surveys of the stated period contained few common denominators.

Even with these reservations about editorial grasp, one might still hope that such an overtly confident study as this would have had some exacting and incisive guidelines to offer us on modernism in drama and theatre. But the prefatory statement to "Modernist Drama" despaired of any major "groupings", while the most satisfactory designation of much modern drama for Fletcher and McFarlane, in their introductory essay, would seem to be the Renaissance composite tragicomedy. How this was to be aligned with the subject of the culminating chapter, the bizarrely labelled and linked "neo-modernist drama" of Yeats and Pirandello, remained unclear.

In composing their collection Bradbury and McFarlane had been able to rely not just on their own determinations, but on a widespread display of interest in the subject and problem of modernism that had been made during the first half of the previous decade of the 1960s. Modernism in general had been an explicit topic for major English-language critics such as Kermode, Trilling, and Levin in literary studies, and for Greenberg in art criticism, while the poet Spender had published a retrospective study of the modern. In this context, and with regard to theatre in particular, it would seem obvious that the problems of modernism and what is modern could not be detached from phrases such as modern drama, modern theatre, the modern stage, modern tragedy, or modern theories of performance.

Yet the problems of defining a convincing field in theatre were only casually noticed or unapologetically ignored. Even an event of such disciplinary excitement as the death of tragedy could not provoke more than a passing confusion on these issues, an almost incidental awkwardness on the part of the critic who assumed the role of a Job's comforter to our culture. George Steiner's book was published at just that time of growing concern for the description or definition of modernism in the early 1960s which gave rise to Bradbury and McFarlane, and ironically it appeared from the publishing house that had been founded by T. S. Eliot. Towards the close of his extended and historical lament, Steiner was quite content to write of "modern fiction" and the "modern novel", "modern poetry", "the modern artist" and "modern abstract art", of "modern literary drama" and "modern poetic drama", of "the modern temper", of "the modern world", and even of "modern suffering" (Steiner [1961], 303–50). It is not that there was a lack of appropriate seriousness; on the contrary, there was more than enough to satisfy even the most hardy cultural pessimist. But Steiner was completely untroubled by his own fascination with the morbid fate of the "modern", so much so that he was willing to apply the term to Dryden (Steiner [1961], 38–9).

A concept of the modern has, of course, been essential to the gradual formation of a modern canon of dramatists and theatrical practitioners, but later in the 1960s Eric Bentley proved incapa-

ble of little more than wonder: "A person like myself who has even lived a good part of his life with 'the thing', and with all the phrases use to describe 'it', such as 'theory of the modern stage', is all the more apt to suppose, first, that the thing is very much *there* and, second, that he very certainly knows what it is. Yet, when the moment comes, one wonders" (Bentley [1968], 10). In referring to his title, Bentley did ask "What *is*... modern?" on behalf of the reader, as he also asked "What (in the book) is theory?" and "what, the stage?". Bentley himself may have been uncertain, but he was in little doubt about the general consensus:

With the word 'modern' I had alternatives: the kind of drama we all call modern can be traced back, and often has been, to the middle of the eighteenth century, but generally we are thinking of Ibsen and after. For reasons of space I certainly had to think as we generally do, though I am glad to say that there is a good deal of referring back to the eighteenth century by the authors I have selected." (Bentley [1968], 9)

Elsewhere Bentley wrote of "the right chronological span—the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth". The phrase "Ibsen and after" is a curious shorthand, which partly conceals the problem of whether it is "the kind of drama" and the "stage" which are (or need to be determined as) "modern", or whether it is "theory" itself. By and large Bentley seemed content with what might be termed a two-stage modernism or modernity: one in which the right of a "mid-nineteenth-century to [...] mid-twentieth-century" theory to be "referring back" to the drama or stage of the eighteenth was a suitable compensation for the absence of an earlier modern theory stemming from the eighteenth century itself.

It may be that, for Bentley, the drama of the eighteenth century was modern, and that the theory was not. Perhaps the drama was modern in so far as it furnished the precursors to a categorically modern theatre of "Ibsen and after", and so participated in that aura. The kind of theoretical construct Bentley seemed to have in mind was that of Lukács, who had no difficulty in 1909 with his definition, which was that modern drama was bourgeois drama (Lukács [1968]). For Lukács, any two of these four terms—modern drama, bourgeois drama, German drama, and the drama of individualism—might be formed into an equation because all were seemingly equivalent.

But Lukács himself had very little specific interest in Ibsen, and even less in "and after", and his sense of continuity from Lenz to Hauptmann (and not beyond) was evidently discarded in what Bentley regarded as the general consensus. In writing of the mid-nineteenth century as a convenient or significant point of departure for that consensus, and the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth as the "right chronological span", Bentley had other models available, determined by his own generation. In the first edition of his study of modern drama, Raymond Williams dated the modern renaissance to Ibsen's *Catilina* of 1850: "When *Catilina* appeared, the drama, in most European countries other than France, was at perhaps its lowest ebb in six centuries. In England, no writer of importance was even attempting to write plays for the theatre" (Williams [1964], 13). For Williams, drama was a writerly medium, and, indeed, Williams's use of "the drama" prescribed for a major literary form its enduring cultural duties. First writing his book just after 1950, Williams had a century at his disposal from *Catilina*, and it mattered little that *Catilina* was predictive or representative of nothing in particular. Indeed, Williams referred without concern to "modern naturalist drama" and "the contemporary theatre", and to the concept of "a complete history of the modern drama", which his book did not aim to be (Williams [1964], 15 and 21).

The first edition of this book, entitled *Drama from Ibsen to Eliot*, was followed by *Modern Tragedy*, in which Williams began with the liberal tragedy of Ibsen and Miller, and concluded with the rejection of tragedy by Brecht (Williams [1966]). Larger explanations of his sense of period came only with the Introduction and Conclusion to the revised edition of his earlier book, which was published as *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht* (Williams [1968]). Here Williams began with Ibsen, Strindberg, and Chekhov: "it is in the substance and range of their work that modern drama, essentially, came into existence" (Williams [1968], 21). The problem for Williams was that of reconciling an insistence not only on a period, but also on an essence of modern drama, with evident diversity: "The most persistent difficulty, in the analysis of structures of feeling, is the complexity of historical change and in particular, as is very evident in modern drama, the coexistence, even within a period and a society, of alternative structures" (Williams [1968], 20).

Williams was also prepared to acknowledge "successive periods" alongside "a period", but the principal means to a resolution lay in an appeal to history as fact: "It is a fact that there is a general historical development, from Ibsen to Brecht, from dramatic naturalism to dramatic expressionism" (ibid.). The real tenor of the explanation by reference to history became apparent in the conclusion. There are historical contradictions in the "lines of development" displayed by modern drama:

Within and across the lines of development, there are continuities, recurrences, new breaks to an already realized position. It is this double character of the history that defines the nature of the movements: there is a historical succession of naturalism, private expressionism, social expressionism, the theatre of illusion and of the absurd; but there is also a continual coexistence, in authentic work, of each one of these tendencies, in the struggle for a common form. (Williams [1968], 342–3)

Peter Nicholls has provided the latest, broad accompaniment to the critical and theoretical discussion of modernism, towards the close of the modernist century itself, and it is significant that theatre occupies a thoroughly subsidiary role in his developing thesis. *Modernisms* has as its subtitle "a literary guide", and it begins, conventionally enough, with an emphasis on poetry in Baudelaire and Mallarmé, extending its critical embrace decisively to the novel and, intermittently, to painting. These are the resolute constituents of a critical modernism, to which theatrical initiatives make only sporadic contributions. The principal connection, notably developed for expressionism, dada and Artaudian surrealism, is what Nicholls terms "the anti-Oedipal thrust of avant-garde theatre" (Nicholls [1995], 293), and figures such as Meyerhold and Tairov make no appearance in his thesis. It is as if (an admittedly "early") modernism at times intervenes in theatre, but that theatre and drama are not to be considered as potentially modernist continuities, in the manner that poetry, painting (but not the fine arts in general, one notes) and the novel may be.

The effect is to imply that theatre and dramaturgy are marginal to modernism, and this leaves us with one of two possible conclusions: either modernism in the theatre must be assessed in a radically different manner, or we must acknowledge that the critical theory of modernism does not provide us with a sufficient account of radical initiative and innovation in the theatre and dramaturgy of the modern period. Either one of these conclusions might be acceptable; but "neither" is not, if our concern lies sincerely with the major cultural phenomenon that theatre has been in the twentieth century.

### Theories of Human Performance, and the Nature of a Theatrical Modernism

Spoken theatre and dance have recently shown an inclination to consider their human enactors conjointly as performers, but for much of the twentieth century the terminological distinction between actors and dancers applied, and it still regularly prevails, since it may mark quite distinctive skills. Traditionally, the theatre had contained dance, and Greek drama, the *noh* theatre of Japan, Elizabethan theatre in a limited way, and the theatre of Molière provide prominent examples. Singing was also, traditionally, a theatrical skill, but at the time when the terms modern and modernist are believed to become applicable to the arts the actor's skills were firmly identified with the rendition of speech and the communication of character. This combination is firmly fixed for us in the teachings and practice of the most influential theorist of acting throughout the twentieth century, the Russian Stanislavski. In fact, the extraordinary feature of Stanislavski is the duration of his relatively narrow conception of the actor, and its evolution at a time when theories of a more total theatre were in the ascendant. I can do no more here than point to Wagner's vision of a music drama that went beyond traditional notions of opera, to Craig whose integral vision imposed a strict function on the actor as part of a spectacle, and to Artaud, who detested what he termed psychological theatre, looking for an event which impacted on the performers and audience in a transcendental manner that would subdue reality.

Stanislavski claimed to advance a system of training for the actor that would ensure an emotive conviction in the audience, and his methods and his philosophy of theatre were embraced not only by the official doctrine of socialist realism in the Soviet Union, and more widely in eastern Europe under Soviet influence, but also by the most influential tendencies in acting in the USA, in both film and theatre. To my knowledge, there is no satisfactory account of this vast and pervasive phenomenon, but a relevant analysis might suggest that it must in some way relate to the appearance of the avant garde and the emergence of the diverse phenomena in the performing arts that many would be willing to associate with the term modernism. Stanislavski was by background, temperament and position an authoritarian figure, who trained the actor partly in order to subordinate the actor's skills to directorial control, binding the actor's emotional experience of reality to that of the audience through the medium of character. The emotive conviction powerfully generated by these means might readily be allied to a normative enactment of reality, of whatever ideological tenor presiding authorities might feel was either firmly established or sufficiently enforced.

There can be no doubt that the Stanislavski system, and the prominence of actor training in general, were in the twentieth century and the period identified as the ground of the modern and modernism virtually required by the rise of the figure of the director. There have been many studies of this phenomenon (e.g. Braun [1982]), but once again I do not know of any that have accounted for it satisfactorily. In the Greek era, the production was subject to the figure of the dramatist, who trained the chorus and directed the actors within relatively stable conditions of performance (Ley [1989]). In later eras, actors were relatively self-sufficient, taking scripts to themselves and their established skills for implementation. But the leading actor in companies and the actor-manager in relation to theatres may provide some explanation of the complex negotiating role that perhaps gave rise to the director. All that can be said with some certainty is that much of twentieth-century theatrical activ-



ity can be understood in a clear division of power between the director and the actor/performer, with companies that aim to reject this hierarchy conscious of standing apart from the main industrial practice, almost universally.

Theatrical theories of (human) performance assert and supposedly sustain the autonomy and integrity of theatre as an artform, matters which had been brought severely into question by the end of the nineteenth century. They also suggest the possibility of control of the producing apparatus, substantially by advancing the role of the director as a potential *auteur*, as a figure within the apparatus itself who may have continuity, exercise artistic initiative, and instigate radical changes in the relationship between apparatus and audience. This functional profile, both for theories of performance and for the director in particular, is notably comprehensible against the constant background of commercial or boulevard theatrical production during the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, a mass of activity in which the apparatus will be (predictably) constrained to serve rather than challenge the dictates of expectation and taste.

Understood in this manner, theories of human performance may carry substantial implications, not only in support of the role of the director, but also for a large number of the elements that compose theatrical production. A director who has a distinctive discipline for actors which is not derived from continuing performance tradition or the script may extend the possibilities of the *auteur* into those of the *metteur en scène*: may, in other words, attempt to be the instigator of a coordinated and artistic, original version of all the significant elements of production. This description is probably true of Meyerhold, in his formative years a pupil of Stanislavski, but who developed his own form of actor training (bio-mechanics) and became a leading director before and after the Russian revolution. Bio-mechanics was partly related to a general accent on the physique of the human frame associated with ergonomics, but it consisted primarily in a series of exercises which concentrated on rhythm and the sequence of physical actions in a kind of mini-narrative — “throwing the stone” or “shooting the bow” are two of the titles. Actors were required through these exercises to absorb the consequences of any one movement in a sequence upon its successor, but the exercises were not designed to enter directly into performances.

Meyerhold is distinctive because he did succeed in extending his interests and attention to almost all elements of production, including space, the variety of relationships with the audience, lighting, design and script-work alongside an approach to actor-training (Leach [1989] and [1994]; Braun [1986]). He was also able to maintain a productive life over several decades until he was murdered by Stalinists. His choice of material for production was immensely varied, and included symbolist works, new political drama, revolutionary satire and Russian classics, and he employed designers who brought the influence of constructivism to bear on *mise en scène*. So it is arguable that if we do wish to entertain the possibility of a theatrical modernism, then Meyerhold may well be a strong contender. He is certainly a figure who placed all the elements of production more or less at his disposal, and aimed at achieving a radical recomposition of them, which was as much in dialogue with an impressive theatrical past and the theatre of other cultures as it was with the transformed audience of his own time.

Related achievements have also been attributed to Tairov by a number of commentators (Worrall [1989]), although Tairov lacks the clear emphasis on a specific theory of human performance that I have identified as an important criterion. But many of the features that are found in Meyerhold's profile are also to be found in that of Brecht, whose ideology and biography have unfortunately

occupied far more critical attention than his theatricality, his involvement with and deployment of the theatrical apparatus. Indeed, a curious example of this division is apparent in two works by the same scholar, Fuegi (Fuegi [1987] and [1994]). Brecht was characteristically a dramaturg, and his ability to create scripts on his own or in collaboration to different purposes and for different circumstances lends even greater strength to his autonomy as a theatre artist. He too concentrated firmly on a theory of human performance, which permitted the separation of character from actor in a radical break from almost all mimetic assumptions, encouraging the performer to present rather than represent the thoughts, feelings and decisive actions of people to those who might question them in forming their own conclusions, namely to the audience of a revolutionary era. Brecht was explicit in believing that there was a need to create a new theatre for the new, modern, scientific age, and his involvement with composers and designers was consistent with that belief, in that production as a whole ranged from the playfully subversive to stark challenges to conventional assumptions, aesthetic, moral, or political. There is every reason to consider Brecht a theatrical modernist in the senses that I have advanced, but his theoretical position is intimately related to his understanding of Marxism. He is also, more formidably, a pedagogic humanist, and it is doubtful whether critical analysis would have much success in compiling a list of possible modernists who were both of these in addition, although the director Piscator, often considered a major influence on Brecht, might be a significant contender (Willett [1978]).

Of those who have aspired to transform the theatrical apparatus, Meyerhold and Brecht stand out as successful, perhaps extending the identifying marks of modernism—critically established for artforms other than the theatre—into a theatrical version, which might then hope to encompass some of the most significant qualities of theatrical achievement in the twentieth century. Were this the case, it might be useful to extend the consideration past 1939–45 to Grotowski, whose activities at least during the 1960s were in some respects analogous. There is, with Grotowski, the presence of a strong theory of human performance (with a strict code of actor-training), which counteracts all ease on the part of actor or spectator, and the assertion of a principle of intensely controlled if scenically spare production (Kumiega [1985]; Schechner and Wolford [1997]). Grotowski's grip on the theatrical apparatus was sufficiently comprehensive to have an abrupt and lasting impact on most serious theatre work in Europe and the USA. The conviction conveyed and accepted was one of the theatre's total integrity and autonomy—its holiness, purity and essence—in an uncompromised disjunction from the simulations and malformations masquerading, commercially or otherwise, in the name of theatre. If it was modernism, then it was a modernism which surfaced at a highly suitable moment for recognition of its key attributes, in the critical era that had just begun to mourn the passing of the glorydays.

### **Dramaturgy and Modernism**

Histories of modern drama are numerous, although few pay close attention to the conceptual problems of the modern or of modernism in dramaturgy, as the review I gave above of relatively forthright writers will have indicated. I cannot hope to do justice here to the nuances and vast diversity of dramaturgical achievement in the last century, still less to present even a moderately representative history. But what I can offer instead is a set of observations on dramaturgy in relation to the central

problem, which might be seen to be that of locating modernism in the modern, as the twentieth century has been inclined to see itself.

1. I have already suggested the leading question which should be put in relation to the possibilities of a modernist dramaturgy: is it possible for a script, by itself, to constitute an act of modernism in the theatre? To put this another way, can a script so construe itself as to determine modernist acts of theatre, or will modernism be implicitly opposed to the theatrical script? I can see no resolutely confident answer to that question, but it is worth noting that the verdict of Artaud here was negative in general, and that verdict has been regularly accepted by the broad tendency that is usually characterized as the avant-garde. In *The Theatre and Its Double* Artaud placed a veto on “a purely descriptive theatre, which narrates, and narrates psychology”. Artaud found the social concerns of much contemporary French drama disgustingly banal, but “psychological theatre” was a tendency which Artaud traced even as far back as Shakespeare, who blunted his evocation of the unknown by returning our concerns back to man, “that is to say, psychology” (Artaud [1964], 118–20).<sup>1</sup> The dramatic text in this stridently metaphysical analysis was an excuse for a division between art and life, and when life itself was deemed to be in crisis then the distraction posed by art must be a dissipation of a necessary energy.

During the last century of performance, the search for an alternative theatrical language to the literary text has taken two extreme forms, one rooted in the body and one in a conceptual alternative to ordinary speech. Artaud’s advocacy of cruelty became an inspiration for practitioners such as Grotowski, who drove the performer’s body to the limits of expressive feeling, to which speech was an adjunct; while Artaud’s hostility to ordinary language led Peter Brook, in conjunction with the poet Ted Hughes, to attempt to create a new spoken language for performance in *Orghast* (Smith [1972]). An additional extreme form of alternative would be that constituted by silence, which indeed has a large place in twentieth-century theatre, but most dramaturgy has continued to insist on varieties of coherence. This in itself constitutes a resistance to one of the possible visions of modernism in theatre, represented by Artaud’s demand for an overwhelming theatricality of multiple components celebrating the absence of conventional speech.

2. Of the likely candidates for dramaturgical modernism, symbolism—in general, a self-aware movement in writerly terms—has been favoured by the standard critical tradition. Symbolism has the advantage of a clear intention to depart from standard conventions in the given artform while retaining a clear relationship to those conventions. It is also international, not only in its point of origin, but also in its deployment, a feature which has been seen as a characteristic of modernism. So, for example, what are regarded as the symbolist plays of Maeterlinck, Strindberg, Ibsen, Blok and O’Neill were all produced outside their own national cultures relatively quickly, and undoubtedly stimulated specific forms of production and adjusted aesthetic principles in a wide range of theatres.

Theatrical symbolism also facilitates an argument by analogy in favour of modernism: if symbolism in the novel and poetry is taken as a sign of modernism in those two genres, then symbolism will indicate the presence and activity of modernism in the theatre as well.

3. Pirandello’s dramaturgy is extremely varied, with much of it exploiting relatively standard conventions towards thematically teasing ends. His work provides a good example (Ibsen is plainly another) of how a dramatist with a substantial modern reputation may engage with modernism only exceptionally. This would have to be argued for Ibsen through symbolism, and it would be argued for Pirandello substantially through *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. But the form/construction of

Pirandello's play is overtly conventional, even if the theme of it is not, and it is questionable whether *Six Characters* gives rise to a modernist act of theatre. The theme of the inadequacy of the theatrical apparatus is strikingly modernist, as is the contrasting authenticity which the characters claim for themselves.

4. Expressionism is unquestionably modern, overtly and intentionally modern. Part of its assumption of modernity is the apparent transformation of conventional drama by the inclusion of taboo subjects (Wedekind) or revolutionary political commitment (Toller). How far such scripts actually demand a re-ordering of the theatrical apparatus, or are concerned to effect a transformation of theatrical practice as such, must be questionable. If the Marxist accusation of subjectivism — the projection of personal experience on to objective reality, in such a manner as to distort our understanding of it — levelled against expressionism suggests a valid critical estimate of this kind of dramaturgy, then it might also associate it more closely with modernism.

I myself am not convinced that it is particularly helpful, critically or theoretically, to dissociate dramaturgical expressionism from dramaturgical naturalism. One might argue, facetiously, that a modern linear play of relatively conventional illusion is called realist when it depicts bourgeois adults, and naturalist when it depicts anyone else. I have severe doubts whether there is any real value (or validity) in ascribing either to modernism, since the type has a genealogy that far exceeds any plausible boundaries determined for modernism in other arts.

It would seem to be the case that the dramaturgy that is called expressionism may give rise to modernism when adopted as working material for another artform, unless Berg's *Lulu* and *Wozzeck* are removed from the modernist litany, which would be rash. There again, the same might be said to be true of the Old Testament (Schonberg's *Moses and Aaron*) and Greek tragedy (Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex*).

5. It would be a matter for sharp debate whether Lorca's acknowledged pre-eminence in modern Spanish drama(turgy) owes anything (of significance) to modernism. In some of the lesser known works, we find a clear allegiance to traditional forms, with attention to the puppet theatre and to *entremeses*, and the major plays betray a similar desire to reconstitute traditional form in a manner that pays homage to enduring social structures, to the kind of oppression which naturalism had embraced. Tragedy may be the term for which most would reach, but the lineage of the *comedia* in its vast scope may well dwarf the relevance of that concept, and the pronounced and intentionally symbolic qualities of the scripts may owe far more to the symbolism with which the *comedia* was imbued than to the more recent, symbolist dramaturgy.

6. There can be no doubt that Witkiewicz (Witkacy) would be generally welcomed as a modernist were his work more widely known. His advocacy of a pure form for the discrete arts and for theatre, his conviction that a certain kind of madness was essential, and his insistence on a metaphysical vision of human existence places him so close to many modernist icons, and notably to Artaud, that if the term is to be used it should be used of Witkacy. Whether his scripts are capable of stimulating a full transformation of the theatrical apparatus is another matter, but Artaud similarly failed to achieve what might be called the production values of modernism, despite a succession of attempts. Both Witkiewicz and Artaud are writers of manifestos, which have an unpleasant habit of substituting for the longeurs of fulfilled practice, not just in the theatre. Nonetheless, this inclination confirms the impulse towards a fundamental transformation of theatre in performance. The manifesto provides a clear demonstration of dissatisfaction and an insistence, implied or explicit, that a declaration of

intent is essential if existing preconceptions are not to suffocate initiative. So it could be argued that Witkacy's limited achievement during his lifetime with his scripts might be taken as confirmation of the radical nature of his theatrical modernism, which required more than an innovative dramaturgy for its full realization.

7. The most decisive claim to dramaturgical modernism comes, of course, with modern French dramaturgy, from Jarry and Apollinaire, Vitrac and Cocteau, through to Ionesco, Genet, and Beckett (who has been, diversely, claimed for postmodernism), a broad movement which has gained massive recognition over an extended period. A central position here is occupied by the resources associated with surrealism and the primacy of Paris as a centre for artistic innovation, although the attitude of surrealism to theatre was always equivocal and ultimately hostile, alienating the devout theatricalism of Artaud in particular. There are, however, several issues that need to be considered in relation to this modernism: I mention only the most striking of these.

Theatrically, the directors Fort and Lugné-Poe were instrumental in providing early realisations of symbolism and of Jarry, who was the Rabelais of the unconventional initiatives in late nineteenth-century dramaturgy. But a (more) decisive role in modern theatre practice was also held by Antoine. If Antoine is claimed for modernism, then so must be the realism which he championed, and by implication the farthest reaches of realist dramaturgy. If he is not claimed, then the theatre of the late nineteenth century and much of the twentieth century has a dynamic major history that cannot be seen to be affected by, or dependent on, modernism.

French dramaturgy also has a history in the same era that is detached and independent from this modernist tradition, but which was (and perhaps still is) thought to be decisively modern (in a clear contradiction to the values of the boulevard), if not always critically esteemed: this history would certainly include the work of Giraudoux and Anouilh.

Beckett was a disciple of Joyce; his modernist credentials are overtly impeccable. But it is remarkable that a dramaturgy that can be claimed for modernism relies for its fundamental impact so thoroughly on the reintroduction of the classical unities of time, place and action (*Waiting for Godot*) to an apparently astounded critical reception. One wonders what earlier members of that modernist canon that has been established by criticism (Jarry, Apollinaire, the surrealists) might have made of this.

Contrastingly, Beckett is also interesting because of the prescriptive nature of his dramaturgic theatre, which controls *mise-en-scène* to a degree that is virtually absolute. In that respect, he provides an example of how the script and dramaturgy may attempt to provide a complete aesthetic for the theatre, to control the theatrical apparatus, and that might make him a modernist *auteur* rather than an author. By assertions of the stringencies of copyright, it may be that the Beckett estate is effectively contriving to preserve a distinctive dramaturgical modernism, in a manner that is normally thought to be impossible for an ephemeral artform such as theatre.

8. Both Futurism and dada played with theatrical interventions, but neither had a high value for theatre. They were, however, less antagonistic to theatre than surrealism, a movement with which Artaud was closely associated until his theatrical convictions caused a breach. It is abundantly plain that, despite this breach, Artaud shares many aesthetic values with surrealism, not least in his emphasis on the dream.

9. It is arguable that the shape of British dramaturgy in the twentieth century was more fundamentally altered or affected by the abolition of pre-censorship of theatrical scripts in the late 1960s than by any other factor. British and Irish theatre may be regarded as divorced from a mainstream

of influence, but both continue to be acknowledged well beyond their own immediate region. In this connection, if we take Beckett to represent one kind of modernism—a dramaturgical modernism—then the British playwright notoriously most influenced by him, Harold Pinter, has plainly naturalized or domesticized the modernist impulse, while retaining some degree of stylistic imprint. In fact, the largest legacy of Beckett in British and Irish dramaturgy lies in a modernizing of realism, notably in forms of language or dialogic exchange. The abolition of pre-censorship, by releasing constraints on the expression of sexuality and of political conviction or critique, transformed both the subject matter, appeal, and generic characteristics of script- and theatre-making, but not in modes that have any manifest connection with modernism.

However, this should not be seen as a qualification that is confined to modernism. Whether British theatrical practice, or the theatrical apparatus in general, has ever been substantially affected by anything resembling a major artistic movement in the twentieth century is open to question.

### Concluding Summary

In this essay, I have drawn attention to the frailty of critical and theoretical attention to theatrical modernism, in the general context of the antiquity of the modern. I have suggested that we should expect a more robust and holistic account of theatrical modernism, which does not depend exclusively on analogies with literary or artistic modernism, but which includes within it recognition of a theory of human performance. I have also questioned the degree to which we may associate modernism with the dramaturgy of the twentieth century, by acknowledging the general limitations of the verbal script in imposing a modernist vision on the complexities of the theatrical apparatus.

### Notes

1. “un théâtre purement descriptif et qui raconte, qui raconte de la psychologie”; “c’est à dire, de la psychologie”; “le théâtre psychologique” (Artaud [1964], 118–20).

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## Chapter 8

### Social and Political Parameters

Postcolonialism, multicultural analysis and eco-criticism as recently developed critical approaches provide examples of an alternative focus on modernist art and literature and can shed a new light on modernism's social and political genealogy, functions and characteristics. The four essays in this section thus aim at extending recent scholarship that has re-mapped modernism in terms of the recognition of contributions to modernism.

Revisiting two crucial instances of fascist modernism, the works by the Italian Futurist F.T. Marinetti and the German author Ernst Jünger, **Jobst Welge's** analysis of the relationship between fascism and modernism scrutinizes new figurations of subjectivity and collectivity, which were played off against conceptions of the bourgeois nineteenth century poetics considered outdated. The fascist politics and the fascist brand of modernist aesthetics converge in a shared rhetoric of mythic regeneration (Marinetti) and dehumanized, mechanized "gestalt" (Jünger). Welge firmly binds these manifestations of a modernist poetics to the political context of the 20s and 30s, uncannily anticipating the Fascist and National Socialist regime.

While race has rarely been examined in texts that take the Western centers of Empire as their setting and source of reflection, **Urmila Seshagiri** and **António Sousa Ribeiro** approach this issue in their contributions. Both draw on and modify Edward Said's conceptualization of the dialectic relation between imperial centers and colonial peripheries. While Urmila Seshagiri in the subsequent essay argues that Said's binary paradigm of imperialism and otherness was only one of the prevailing racial discourses shaping modernism's political, racial context, Ribeiro expands his analysis to contexts beyond the amply assessed Anglo-American native fiction to instances of Portuguese and Austrian Modernism, more specifically to analogies between the works by Fernando Pessoa and Hugo von Hofmannsthal. Ribeiro analyzes their use of "Empire" as the poetic figure for an "imagined community" within the experienced crisis of identity during the *fin de siècle*. In both poets the construction of identity is intertwined with its deconstruction, nationalism with deterritorialized cosmopolitanism, historical tradition with visionary dreams of the future.

Seshagiri states in her contribution on race and the forms of modernism that diverse racial discourses structured the literary experiments through which many British authors explicitly declared themselves 'modern' in the opening decades of the twentieth century: imperialism, cosmopolitan racial attitudes, fascination with non-white racial alterity (e.g. 'negrophilia' or a vogue for Orientalist fashion and design). After a brief review of the development of Western scientific racism from the mid-eighteenth century to the early twentieth century (in particular creationism, climatic the-



ories and the racial semiotics of the skull and the head) and a discursive analysis of social, scientific and artistic constructions of race in the modernist era, Seshagiri focuses on racial discourses at stake in the avant-garde journal BLAST and in Rebecca West's "Indissoluble Matrimony," which are critically evaluated as two contrasting instances of racialized aesthetic modernist experiment.

In a meticulously close reading of Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, its middle section "Time Passes" in particular, **J. Scott Bryson** uses methodological principles offered by the emergent field of eco-criticism to discuss the relationship in modernist poetics between works of art or literature and the physical environment in the world outside and its concept of order and of art in its ordering function. In applying concepts from ecological criticism to modernist works of art, Bryson clarifies the connection between the Scientific Revolution and modern art. While Woolf evokes a possibility and a longing for art as an ordering principle, she points through the introduction of textual ambivalences to the limitations as well as the destruction resulting from an attempt to use art to order the world.

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## Fascist Modernism

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### Fascism and/or Modernism?

The convergence between modernist art and literature, on the one hand, and the ideology of fascism, on the other hand, seems to be inherently problematic. Even today, the very term “fascist modernism” is likely to encounter skepticism and resistance, since it cannot easily be accommodated with an understanding of modernism that stresses the liberating and generally “progressive” tendencies of the movement. However, in recent years not only experts of the fascist period but also scholars of modernism became increasingly aware that the period of high modernism during the 1920s-30s cannot adequately be understood without the complex relationship between fascism and modernism. To acknowledge such a relationship, then, complicates any assumption about the inherently “good cause” of modernism. On the other hand, once one pays closer attention to the concrete historical formations of fascism, namely the inter-war regimes in Italy and Germany, one would also have to qualify one’s assumptions about the reactionary politics of these totalitarian regimes—a point that becomes clear with regard to the more “liberal” and differentiated cultural politics of Italian fascism vis-à-vis the Hitler regime in Germany. In any event, the apparent paradox of convergence between fascism and modernism calls for the realization that “fascism was, for better or worse, *one* dominant form which modernization took in Italy and elsewhere” (Schnapp [1990], 54; see also Golsan [1992], ix–xviii).

The present essay revisits two of the most important instances of fascist modernism in the literary culture of the period. The guiding question of my comparative analysis will be how key authors, such as F. T. Marinetti and Ernst Jünger modeled new forms of subjectivity and collectivity that were explicitly directed against what were perceived as the outdated assumptions of nineteenth-century literary realism and bourgeois subjectivity—assumptions, in other words, that were at the root of the modernist project at large. The term “fascist modernism” is usually applied to describe a fairly circumscribed group of literary figures whose association with fascist ideology is relatively obvious: F. T. Marinetti, Ernst Jünger, Gottfried Benn, Louis-Ferdinand Céline, Knut Hamsun, Ezra Pound, and Wyndham Lewis. This essay deliberately focuses on two such paradigmatic figures in order to tease out the problematic nature of fascist modernism even in these “obvious” cases. However, I would also like to suggest that an exclusive focus on these authors tends to reinforce a picture of fascist modernism that would be content with a cordoned-off circle of obviously compromised, securely located figures. In my view, such a picture would be incomplete, as long as it does not also include artists whose relationship to fascism might be more ambivalent, or takes the form of a short-term fellow-travelling (Ferrall [2001], 5–16). Especially in the case of Italy, the relation between fascism

and modernism can take on very different forms, as it effects virtually all authors of the period, including such figures as Luigi Pirandello, Massimo Bontempelli, and Curzio Malaparte. The opinion of George Mosse is representative: "Italian Fascism surely was more open to the future than German National Socialism. The new man of the South owned features of the avant-garde, which his counterpart in the North was missing; there presumably Hitler had reawakened the age-old Arian ideal from a thousand-year long slumber. Mussolini, on the other hand, was much more ambiguous" (Mosse [1980], xx). Accordingly, the Italian regime was able to admit and to absorb a wide variety of cultural agendas, including not only futurism, but also the magical realism of the *Novecento* movement and the rival tendency of ruralist modernism of the Tuscan *Strapaese* circle (Schnapp, [2000]).

Moreover, recent scholars have also acknowledged the family relationship between fascist modernism and other contemporary forms of modernism, some of them of an explicitly "leftist" orientation; one need only mention the sometimes similar rhetoric in the writings of Jünger and Brecht, writers whose ideological stance could hardly be more different. Similarly, it could be argued that the art and literature of fascist Italy resonate more with the art produced during the Weimar period in Germany, than with the representative *Blut und Boden* "culture" of the Hitler regime. An adequate understanding of fascist modernism, therefore, must pay close attention to its convergence with other forms of modernism, rather than to enclose it in a monstrous, perversely fascinating corner of aberration. Of course, the purpose of such a project would not be to compromise modernist art *tout court*, but to emphasize how modernism, despite its own claims, is hardly immune to the forces of history.

The following essay looks specifically at how fascist modernism models a stance against liberal mass democracy, following a Nietzschean rejection of all sociability. I will concentrate on the figures of Marinetti and Jünger who both sought to counter what they saw as contemporary decadence with a resurgence of myth. As Gottfried Benn, a fellow-traveler of fascism himself, noted in 1932, the age was marked by a critique of inwardly focused notions of the human subject:

There are more than a few indications that we are on the verge of a decisive anthropological turning point. A banal way to put it: displacement from inside to outside, a surging forth of our last specific substance in formative activity, translations of power into structure. Modern technology and modern architecture point in this direction: space is no longer philosophic-conceptual, as it was in the Kantian epoch, but dynamic-expressive; spatial feeling is no longer in-drawn in lyrical lonesomeness, but projected, extruded, metallically realized. (Benn [1986], 138)

### Marinetti and Italian Futurism

In the case of Italian fascism politics and culture converge because of their common rhetoric of mythic regeneration, a rhetoric that did not abide but rather intensified since the time of the *Risorgimento* and the nation's unification in 1861. As Walter Benjamin has famously argued in the "epilogue" to his artwork essay, fascism itself might be seen as an aestheticization of politics: "The logical result of Fascism is the introduction of aesthetics into political life [...] All efforts to render politics aesthetic culminate in one thing: war" (Benjamin [1968], 68).

However, it would be equally accurate to speak here of a politicization of the aesthetic. The fascist revolution is initially complemented and has even been anticipated, or modeled by cultural

narratives of catastrophic regeneration, rooted in the experiences and the rhetoric of war. In fact, several years before the Italian expansionist campaigns and the outbreak of the First World War, Marinetti had already called for the glorification of war, “the only hygiene of the world” (Marinetti [1998], 9) and had obsessively praised the power of destructive technology and of the virile hero as its dominator. While Mussolini’s ascendancy to power in 1922 marked the end of futurism as a political movement in the strict sense of the word, most of the futurists continued to support the fascist regime until the very end, including the puppet regime of the so-called Republic of Salò, even though they might have objected to some of the regime’s cultural and political decisions, notably Mussolini’s compromise with the Catholic Church, or the racial laws of 1938. As Mussolini’s regime began to consolidate itself, Marinetti considered fascism as the realization of the futurist “minimal program”:

This minimal program promoted Italian pride, the unlimited faith in the future of the Italians, the destruction of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, daily heroism, the love of danger, reinforced violence as a form of decisive argument, the religion of speed and novelty, of optimism and originality, the ascendancy of the young to power against the parliamentary, bureaucratic, academic, and pessimistic spirit. (Marinetti [1998], 494, my translation)<sup>1</sup>

It is precisely the futurism of the so-called “heroic phase” (circa 1906–16), which earlier Italian scholars sought to absolve from its association with fascism, that provides the greatest convergence with fascist ideology. Like fascism itself, futurism had formulated an anti-traditional, “anti-ideological” call for action that was highly flexible and eclectic, drawing upon a social-revolutionary and vitalist rhetoric, as well as anarchist and nationalistic ideas. As Mussolini himself stated: “I formally declare that without Futurism there would never have been a fascist revolution” (cited in Gentile [1994], 55). Italian artists of the avant-garde sought to overcome the separation between culture and politics, between art and life, which was seen as one of the principal reasons for cultural and national decadence. Insofar as this vitalist, Bergsonian rhetoric of cultural revolution was aimed at the destruction of tradition, or *passatismo*, it must be said that such a “progressive” position is by no means incompatible with radically nationalist aims. How does this relate to each other? In fact, fascist modernism is distinguished precisely by its mobilization of the reader and the renunciation of the artwork’s autonomy, despite Benjamin’s somewhat paradoxical claim that the “aestheticization of politics” is predicated upon the autonomy of art, “the consummation of *l’art pour l’art*” (Benjamin [1968], 242). This much has been argued by Russell Berman: “The identifying modernist feature of fascist literature was not its political character but its refusal to restrict itself to an aesthetic realm and its efforts to penetrate social life” (Berman [1986a], 97). However, in 1919, looking back on the initial success of the futurist agenda, Marinetti argues for the difference between the political party of futurism and the artistic movement as such. The latter “continues in its task of renewing and reinforcing the creative Italian genius. The artistic movement of Futurism, the avant-garde of Italian artistic sensibility, is necessarily always in advance of the slower sensibility of the people” (Marinetti [1998], 349, my translation).<sup>2</sup> It is this unique constellation of culture and politics in the Italian situation that is insufficiently grasped by theorists such as Walter Benjamin and Peter Bürger, who center their discussion of avant-garde art in the less ambivalent cases of Dada and Surrealism, movements that seem to be founded on a “natural” alliance between cultural innovation and political liberation (Hewitt [1993], 1–23). In order to characterize the specifics of the Italian situation,

Emilio Gentile uses the concept of a “modernist nationalism,” which is defined not only by the sacralization of politics, but also by a principle of activism and vitalism, a cult of youth that emphatically affirms the forces of modernity and aims at the reintegration of individuals within a reborn national collective. As Gentile writes:

Born from the experience of the Great War, fascism was a manifestation of political modernism, an ideology that accepted modernization and thought it possessed the formula by which to give human beings, swept by the whirl of modernity, the power to face the challenges of history and create a new civilization. Fascism was not anti-modern, but rather had its own vision of modernity which opposed the visions of liberalism, socialism, and communism, and which claimed the right to impose its own form of modernity on the twentieth century. (Gentile, [1997], 41)

With the launching of F. T. Marinetti’s *Fondazione e Manifesto del Futurismo* (Founding Manifesto) on the front page of the French daily *Le Figaro* in 1909, futurism is generally considered the first avant-garde movement. Directed against all manifestations of liberal-bourgeois values of the Giolitti era (1842–1928) and its *passatismo*, its orientation towards tradition and psychology, futurism aims to do away with myth. In the process it creates a new, palingenetic mythology, a new techno-martial religion of national renewal: “Mythology and the Mystic Ideal are defeated at last. We’re about to see the Centaur’s birth and, soon after, the first flight of Angels!” (Marinetti [1991], 47–8).<sup>3</sup> While from the start futurism has been conceived as an international, pan-European movement, with Marinetti as its tireless propagator and impresario, it is also firmly grounded in principles of patriotic rejuvenation and militant nationalism: “It is from Italy that we launch through the world this violently upsetting, incendiary manifesto of ours. With it, today, we establish *Futurism* because we want to free this land from its smelly gangrene of professors, archeologists, ciceroni, and antiquarians” (Marinetti [1991], 50).<sup>4</sup>

With regard to national borders, then, futurism is both expansive and nationally centered. The same double movement might be observed with regard to futurism’s re-conceptualization of the human subject. On the one hand, futurism directs its rhetorical violence against the notion of the traditional, literary individual: “We systematically destroy the literary I so that it may scatter into the universal vibration, and we reach the point of expressing the infinitely small and molecular agitations” (Marinetti [1998], 100, my translation).<sup>5</sup> Similarly, in the *Manifesto tecnico della letteratura futurista* (Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature) from 1912, Marinetti calls for the destruction of the literary “I” and all traditional psychology: “The now exhausted human psychology has to be replaced with *the lyrical obsession of matter*” (Marinetti [1998], 50, my translation).<sup>6</sup> The emphasis on matter and its interpenetration with the human subject amounts to the fusion of the organic with the inorganic world. Yet this “intuitive psychology of matter” is perceived “from the heights of an airplane,” the prototypical medium of futurist empowerment. In other words, the destruction and dispersion of the old self is accompanied by the emergence of a new, sovereign subject that is technologically fortified, the “mechanical man of exchangeable parts” (Marinetti [1998], 54). As Cinzia Blum has observed in this regard, “the declared destruction of the literary ‘I’ does not involve the deconstruction of the unitary subject, but its expansion, its transformation into a new all-powerful ‘I’” (Blum [1996], 41; see Poggi, [1997]).

Futurism was distinguished by its social-revolutionary agenda and by its appeal to art as a transformative, vitalist power. As Marinetti writes in *Al di là del comunismo* (Beyond Communism)

from 1920: "Art must be an alcohol, not a balm [...] This intellectual art-alcohol must be extended to everyone. Thus will we multiply the artist-creators. We will have a race almost entirely composed of artists [...] We will solve the social problem artistically" (Marinetti [1991], 164).<sup>8</sup>

In contrast to some other varieties of the avant-garde, futurism goes generally against the decentralization and dissolution of the human subject. True, futurism imagines an extension of the human body, its delving into matter and its merging with a technical landscape. Yet these tendencies ultimately reinforce rather than undermine the autonomy of the subject, despite Marinetti's avowed claim in the "Technical Manifesto" that futurism is aiming at the destruction of the literary "I". Futurism, like so much modernism, is directed against the conventional psychology of nineteenth-century realism, and in the process it imagines a vitalist expansion and "multiplication" of man:

The acceleration of life, which is today characterized by a fast rhythm. Physical, intellectual, and sentimental equilibrium on the tight rope of velocity between contradictory magnetisms. Multiple and simultaneous states of consciousness in one single individual. [...] Horror of the quiet life, love of danger and aptness for daily heroism. [...] Destruction of the sense *for the Beyond* and increased value of the individual who wants *to live his own life* [...] Multiplication and extension of ambitions and human desires. (Marinetti [1998], 66–7)<sup>9</sup>

As Marinetti claims in his manifesto "Futurism and Fascism" (1924), dedicated to his "dear friend" Mussolini, futurism has had a common history with the early fascist movement: both movements participated in the interventionist campaign during the First World War and during the 1919 elections they shared a common political platform. Marinetti himself makes clear that futurism has an important share in the genealogy of fascism: "For fourteen years we have been teaching Italian pride, courage, daring, the love of danger, the habit of energy and recklessness, the religion of the new and of speed. [...] War as the world's only hygiene, militarism, patriotism. A firm belief in our racial superiority. Obedience to Italy, absolute sovereign" (Marinetti, [1998], 569, my translation).<sup>10</sup>

## Jünger

In contradistinction to Marinetti's more or less direct association with Mussolinian fascism, Ernst Jünger had never joined the Nazi party and kept studiously aloof from politics after 1933. Yet, despite his own attempts to distance his literary work from the ideology of fascism and to claim even an anti-fascist, resistant stance for his later texts, the early prose of the "conservative revolutionary" Ernst Jünger stands as one of the clearest embodiments of modernist fascism in Germany and demonstrates many affinities with other members of the right-wing avant-garde (Bohrer [1978], 336–43). This being said, however, it is still difficult to determine what exactly characterizes his texts as such. However, it has also been argued—not quite convincingly in my opinion—that Jünger's writing is certainly fascist, but that it does not qualify as modernist, but rather as its opposite, on the grounds that it does not problematize representation and language, the assumed defining features of all modernist projects (Huyssen, [1995], 136). This is clearly an area where Jünger indeed differs from other modernist writers, since his fairly traditional prose style is far from aiming at the "destruction of syntax" as Marinetti would have it. Yet, little is gained by excluding Jünger from the

rank of “real” modernism. The specificity of his writing is rather to be sought in its attempt to forge an alliance between a reactionary-fascist agenda and a typically “modernist” embrace of technology.

One of Jünger’s most famous texts, the quasi-autobiographical *In Stahlgewittern* (Storms of Steel) from 1920 describes a new community of front soldiers, united by a code of honor and military discipline, that was formed in the qualitatively new *Materialschlachten* (battles of material), the grueling, increasingly “anonymous” trench warfare of the First World War, as exemplified by the battle of the Somme (Jünger [1994], 71). While the text exhibits a rhetoric of fatalism and excitement that is quite common to many mythologizing accounts of the Great War by the generation of 1914, it can nevertheless be linked to Jünger’s later, more overtly “fascist” texts, insofar as it already presents an ideal individual that has become submerged in the homogenization of battle troops, where all class, regional, and social differences have been transcended; the first soldier with the steel-helmet encountered by the narrator is prophetically greeted as “the inhabitant of a foreign and harder world” (Jünger [1994], 95; see Weyergraf [1995]).

The experiential basis of the war, recorded also in the voluminous war diaries, is exploited again and again in subsequent works. While *Storms of Steel* consistently acknowledges the horrors and sufferings of trench warfare, even as they are represented with morbid pleasure, the later texts obsessively return to the mythic core of the *Fronterlebnis* (front experience) and render it increasingly aesthetic, as they translate it into a social-political utopia of the postwar industrial situation (Huysen [1995], 134).

A logical, utopian extension of this model appears in the text *Der Arbeiter* (The Worker) from 1932, an extended essay that became a veritable best-seller in 1933, the year of Hitler’s ascendancy to power, whose Fascist regime the text uncannily anticipates. The murky mysticism and pseudo-philosophical tone of this work clearly were instrumental in bringing a larger public into contact with a conservative-revolutionary, proto-fascist world-view. In this work the ideal prototype, or *gestalt* of the worker appears as an abstracted form of the front soldier. The “worker” signifies no longer the to-be-emancipated subject of Marxism, but rather a “metaphysical form” to be realized in a fixed, stable order, informed instead by “Prussian” ideals of discipline, order, and obedience (Jünger [1962a], 76). Thus Jünger notes explicitly “that by worker I do not mean a social standing in the traditional sense, nor a class in the sense of the revolutionary dialectic of the nineteenth century” (Jünger [1962a], 84, my translation).<sup>11</sup> The notion of work designates not an activity, but a “particular mode of being that seeks to occupy its space, its time, its order” (Jünger [1962a], 97, my translation).<sup>12</sup> Although Jünger never directly mentions the NSDAP (National Socialist Worker Party) by name—as he generally refrains from all too-specific references to contemporary figures and events—he points out that during this time power likes to associate itself with the name of work (Jünger [1962a], 79).

While many “observations” are clearly keyed to the case of contemporary Germany, Jünger’s diagnosis really aims at a new, “planetary” world order that will be brought about through a cataclysm of wars and civil wars (Jünger [1962a], 86), driven on by an ethos of action and battle that “knows no whys and wherefores” (Jünger [1962a], 118). A dictatorial regime will emerge only as a “transitory form,” for the ideal type knows no difference between freedom and obedience (Jünger [1962a], 160). It cannot be denied that the increasingly globalized industrial society, or “productive landscape” has a destructive effect on nature and tradition, but such destruction is inevitable,

and “one cannot advance toward new harmonies without having passed through such destructions” (Jünger [1962a], 234, my translation).<sup>13</sup>

As in Marinettian futurism, the notion of work and the (armored body as) machine transcends all class-based, or economic understanding of these terms (Hewitt [1993], 142; see Theweleit [1989], 157). It is the means of technology, specifically the “centauric” symbiosis (Jünger [1962a], 134), or “organic construction” between man and machine, which Jünger represents as the liberating, regenerative force against what he perceived as the waning forms of the liberal-democratic order; against individual autonomy and isolation, as well as bourgeois nihilism and “decadence,” but also traditional, anti-modern forms of conservatism—just so many forms of a bourgeois need for security. Jeffrey Herf has usefully characterized Jünger’s ideology as a form of reactionary modernism: “An amoral aestheticism of technological form rather than the pastoral landscapes of *völkisch* kitsch was the end point of Jünger’s anti-materialism. The armed male community of the trenches was his utopian alternative to ‘lifeless’ industrial society” (Herf [1984], 80).

The type of the worker sets the model for an “adventurous heart” (Jünger [1962a], 61) and anticipates the complete transformation of society in the form of a *totale Mobilmachung* (total mobilization): “Insofar as the single human being sees himself as a part of the working world, his heroic conception of reality manifests itself through the fact that he sees himself as the representative of the *gestalt* of the worker” (Jünger [1962a], 72, my translation).<sup>14</sup> In fact, this new societal model aims at a totalizing system that eliminates the “antithetical” thinking of the liberal age, where religion stubbornly defends its own value sphere against the forces of secularization. In the new world order, on the other hand, “life and cult will be identical” (Jünger [1962a], 171), and this “totality of the type” will be complemented by the “totality of the technical space,” the mutual assimilation of the organic and the mechanical world into an “organic construction” (Jünger [1962a], 187). Precisely because the mechanical is subsumed in a higher, total form, Jünger’s fantasies of body/machine complexes can be regarded as a myth of “metallization” (Schnapp [1996], 111).

If the worker-subject becomes submerged in a larger collectivity, this collectivity is distinctively a disciplinary formation, the precise opposite of the individual and the crowd, which are said to be mirrors of each other, insofar as they mutually define each other (Jünger [1962a], 50): “The existence of the mass is threatened in the same measure, as the notion of bourgeois security has become suspect” (Jünger [1962a], 123, my translation; see also Jünger [1962b], 177; Widdig [1992]).<sup>15</sup> The new type of the warrior-worker is conceived as the embodiment of a “new race,” a “new aristocracy” (Jünger [1962a], 90)—a utopian, resolutely timeless construction that is designed to redeem the martyred dead of the First World War for a higher, metaphysical purpose (Jünger [1962a], 89). Through such a totalitarian model of collectivity, where every form of “work” is symbolically conceived as “service,” Jünger’s text amounts to one more effort to overcome the opposition between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, a sociological quandary that haunted the intellectual life during the Weimar years (Hamacher [1996]).

*The Worker*, as well as Jünger’s other paradigmatic texts, display an enthusiasm for the de-individualization brought about by the technical warfare of the First World War. They register and celebrate the disappearance of the bourgeois, liberal individual. Significantly, the essayist prose form of these texts from the 1920s and 30s departs from the model of nineteenth-century novelistic realism and its attendant ideology, rejecting the notion of individual development and education so central to the predominant form of the *Bildungsroman*, in favor of a mode of narrative “iteration,” as Rus-



sell Berman has aptly termed it (Berman [1986b], 222; see also Berman [1989]). They model a specific form of anti-individualist, essentially timeless subjectivity that assumes both a merging with the technical landscape and the enclosure of the male body within a hard, impenetrable surface. As Jünger writes in *The Worker*:

A gestalt *is*, and no development furthers or diminishes it. Evolutionary history is therefore not the history of the gestalt, but at the most its dynamic commentary [...] a historical gestalt is deeply independent from time and circumstances, from which it seems to have originated. [...] History does not produce the gestalt, but it changes together with the gestalt. It is the tradition which a victorious power attributes to itself. (Jünger [1962a], 89, my translation)<sup>16</sup>

The typological necessity and the self-evidence of the *gestalt* eschew any notion of development, value, and even language, as they define the psychology and moral system of the present (Jünger [1962a], 88; 92). A gestalt “cannot be described in the ordinary sense,” it can only be “enframed through language,” and the reader must “resort to another activity than reading” (Jünger [1962a], 92). The unchangeability of the worker-gestalt is matched by the endlessly repetitive and circular style of Jünger’s writing that also seems to be fixed in a frozen stasis, where apodictic statements take the place of analysis, and visual representation is more prominent than verbal narrative. Literature as memorial-autobiographical record is displaced through the timeless, immediate presence of the image that stands above and beyond history. Significant contemporary events, such as feats of aviation, would certainly be worthy of literary representation, Jünger suggests, but literature has to render homage to the typical, not the individual: “The much-lamented decline of literature means only that an outmoded literary question has lost its significance. Without any doubt, today a train schedule [Kursbuch] has more importance than the last enfolding of the single experience in the bourgeois novel” (Jünger [1962a], 156, my translation).<sup>17</sup>

The new type, its advent visible on the eschatological horizon of a catastrophic regeneration, marks the imminent demise of democratic society with its emptied-out concept of civil rights: “The single human being is no longer able to invoke the inviolability of subjectivity, it no longer appears as individual, and similarly the mass does not appear as the sum, as a countable number of individuals” (Jünger [1962a], 108, my translation).<sup>18</sup> Taking the place of these outlived forms of subjectivity and social differentiation are rapidly moving geometrical patterns and ornaments of faces, “ant-like troops” that are driven forward not by volition, but by “automatic discipline.” Accordingly, “one no longer congregates, but one marches in unison. One no longer belongs to a club or party, but to a movement or formation [Gefolgschaft]” (Jünger [1962a], 108, my translation).<sup>19</sup>

The increasing social “unification” that Jünger observes across European one-party-states entails the uniformity of individual subjects, leveling the differences between different social groups, including the difference between the sexes (Jünger [1962b], 171; Presner, [2001]). Jünger repeatedly returns to this notion of the “objectification” of the human subject, coupled with new modes of “objective” and distanced observation, and exemplified by sober modes of visual representation, notably photography and the mathematical discourse of the natural sciences.

This static character exemplified by the type of the worker is further elaborated in the text *Über den Schmerz* (On Pain) from 1935, where the transformation of an individual into a type, or soldier-subject is imagined through a process of biological breeding (*Züchtung*) which essentially amounts to a reduction of complexity, an act of destruction reconceived as liberation: “Seen from

the perspective of pain, this transformation takes the form of a surgical operation, through which the zone of sentimentality [sensitivity; *Empfindsamkeit*] is cut out from life, and this is why it is initially perceived as a loss" (Jünger [1962b], 168, my translation).<sup>20</sup> The transformation of the body through discipline and uniformation amounts to a de-sensitization by means of which man changes his relation to "pain" and becomes less vulnerable to it. Life becomes increasingly objectified: "The technological order is the great mirror in which the increased objectification of our life has become most visible and which is isolated against the impact of pain in a special way. *Technology is our uniform*" (Jünger [1962b], 180, my translation).<sup>21</sup> The essay exhibits a highly ambivalent relation to its subject. On the one hand, "pain" embodies a vitalist principle and is said to be a form of real, authentic experience; on the other hand, the text constructs an entirely invulnerable subject equipped to ward off any sensibility—a "heroic evasion from the body" (Koschorke, [2000], 216). It is precisely this ambivalence with regard to bodily sensation, both sought after and expelled, that is at the core of the envisioned symbiosis between technology and life.

The result is a different facial physiognomy with closed contours—not unlike the undisturbed surfaces that defined the aesthetics of the New Objectivity during the 1920s. The open face of liberalism gives way to the closed face of the age of discipline, the individual gives way to the racial type:

What the liberal world had understood as the 'good' face, was really the fine face, nervous, flexible, changeable, and open to all kinds of influences and suggestions. The disciplined face, on the other hand, is closed; it has a fixed viewpoint and is one-dimensional, objective, and fixed. With every form of directed training one will soon notice, how the influence of stable, impersonal rules and orders is reflected in the hardening of the face. (Jünger [1962b], 171, my translation)<sup>22</sup>

Similarly, in *The Worker* Jünger notes that the "face under the steel-helmet" has lost in individuality what it has gained in determination and sharpness: "It has become more metallic, galvanized, so to speak, in its surface appearance; the bone structure is clearly visible, the facial features are sparse and tense. The gaze is calm and fixed, trained in the observation of objects to be grasped in rapid movement" (Jünger [1962a], 119, my translation).<sup>23</sup> Here he also maintains that the new anti-psychological subject cannot only be observed in magazine photographs, but that it is actually determined by photography as a technological medium. The prosthetic, "artificial eye" provides the model for a "cold, passionless gaze" (Jünger [1962a], 136), uncoupled from moral judgment, and directed, for instance, against the similarly object-like faces of athletes: "The new face [...] is without soul, as if formed out of metal [...], and it has doubtlessly a relation to photography [...] Sport is a part of the process of work, which becomes here especially visible, since it has no real purpose [...] Sport is only one area where the hardening, sharpening, or galvanization of the human contour can be observed" (Jünger [1962b], 193–4, my translation).

Again, the text of *The Worker* itself is meant to demonstrate this very same virtue of dispassionate observation, as Jünger clearly notes in the preface from July 1932: "Everything depends on the sharpness of description, provided the eyes that are given the full and unbiased power to see" (Jünger [1962a], 13; see also Presner [2001], my translation).<sup>24</sup>

In *On Pain*, Jünger associates the technique of photography with what he calls a "second, colder type of consciousness," the ability to see oneself as an object (Jünger [1962b], 187). Photography, first used on a large scale during the documentation of the First World War (Jünger [1962b], 188),

becomes the privileged metaphor for a new psychology, or rather anti-psychology of perception, the *impassibilité* of distanced observation, of seeing as aggression (Jünger [1962b], 189): “The photograph stands outside the zone of sensibility. It is distinguished by a telescopic character; you notice that the procedure is seen by an unfeeling, hard eye. It records the bullet in flight just as the human being that is torn apart by an explosion. This is our distinctive way of seeing; and photography is nothing else but a tool for this distinction” (Jünger [1962b], 188, my translation).<sup>25</sup>

Photography, in fact, becomes for Jünger the privileged medium to capture an objectified world and the shock experiences of modern culture through a technological distancing device, as has been noted by Jeffrey Herf:

Despite his own claims to have lived through the battle as an inner experience, Jünger’s aesthetics guaranteed that he would be immune from any genuine emotional confrontation with the past. Photography appealed to Jünger because it was a mechanical eye completely severed from the heart. Jünger’s heroic realism also sought to foster the illusion that this cool and distanced observer was immune to the horrors he presented. (Herf [1984], 100)

Helmut Lethen has shown that the ideal type of the “cold persona” is a broad phenomenon in the *neusachlich* (neo-objective) literary anthropology of the Weimar Republic, which tends to be associated primarily with male figures, but which is ideologically flexible. By figuring the human as a machine or mask, the “cold persona” of the *New Objectivity* seeks to get rid of the “complicated,” tormented psychology of the nineteenth century, as well as of the confessional and accusatory rituals of the Expressionist “sons” (Lethen [1991], 66). In contrast to the complex bourgeois subject, or the fragmented and centrifugal lines of the Expressionist body, “the historical avant-gardes of the years 1910–1930 are fascinated by the person with a simple contour” (Lethen [1991] 53). Moreover, “the demoralization of perception is accompanied by the de-psychologization of the observed objects, which conduct themselves like physical bodies” (Lethen [1991], 198). Through the construction of a “cold persona” Jünger rejects the mimetic tradition of the nineteenth century, yet with its characteristic blend of archaism and modernism, Jünger’s aesthetics does not destabilize the subject in a radical way. Similar to Marinetti, then, the destruction of an older form of “psychological” subjectivity gives way to the mythic emergence of a fortified, all-powerful subject.

In both Jünger and Marinetti it is ultimately futile, I would maintain, to look for a strictly definable “fascist” core, or essence of their work. The convergence with fascist ideology emerges rather from the anticipatory nature of their respective texts, staking out aesthetically a utopian territory that henceforth comes to be occupied, or “fulfilled” by the fascist regimes of both Germany and Italy. A comparative reading of these two authors, however, alerts us also to the different ways in which the relation between fascism and modernism/modernity was historically played out.

## Notes

1. “Questo programma minimo propugnava l’orgoglio italiano, la fiducia illimitata nell’avvenire degli italiani, la distruzione dell’impero austro-ungarico, l’eroismo quotidiano, l’amore del pericolo, la violenza riabilitata come argomento decisivo, la religione della velocità, della novità, dell’ottimismo e dell’originalità, l’avvento dei giovani al potere contro lo spirito parlamentare, burocratico, accademico e pessimista” (Marinetti [1998], 494).

2. "Questo continuerà nella sua opera di svecchiamento e rafforzamento del genio creativo italiano. Il movimento artistico futurista, avanguardia della sensibilità italiana, è necessariamente sempre in anticipo sulla lenta sensibilità del popolo" (Marinetti [1998], 349).
3. "Finalmente, la mitologia e l'ideale mistico sono superati. Noi stiamo per assistere alla nascita del Centauro e presto vedremo volare i primi Angeli!" (Marinetti [1998], 8).
4. "É dall'Italia, che noi lanciamo pel mondo questo nostro manifesto di violenza travolgente e incendiaria, col quale fondiamo oggi il 'Futurismo,' perché vogliamo liberare questo paese dalla sua fetida cancrena di professori, d'archeologi, di ciceroni e d'antiquarii" (Marinetti [1998], 11).
5. "Noi distruggiamo sistematicamente l'Io letterario perché si sparpagli nella vibrazione universale, e giungiamo ad esprimere l'infinitamente piccolo e le agitazioni molecolari" (Marinetti [1998], 100).
6. "Sostituire la psicologia dell'uomo, ormai esaurita, con *l'ossessione lirica della materia*" (Marinetti [1998], 50).
7. "l'uomo meccanico dalle parti cambiabili" (Marinetti [1998], 54).
8. "L'arte dev'essere non un balsamo, un alcool. [...] Questa arte-alcool intellettuale deve essere profusa a tutti. Così moltiplicheremo gli artisti creatori. Avremo una tipica razza quasi integralmente formata d'artisti [...] Avremo la soluzione artistica del problema sociale" (Marinetti [1998], 487).
9. "Acceleramento della vita, che ha oggi, un ritmo rapido. Equilibrio fisico, intellettuale e sentimentale sulla corda tesa della velocità fra i magnetismi contraddittorii. Coscienze molteplici e simultanee in uno stesso individuo [...] Orrore del quieto vivere, amore del pericolo e attitudine all'eroismo quotidiano [...] Distruzione del senso dell'*al di là* e aumentato valore dell'individuo che vuol *vivre sa vie* [...] Moltiplicazione e sconfiggimento delle ambizioni e dei desideri umani." (Marinetti [1998], 58, 66–7).
10. "Da 14 anni noi insegniamo l'orgoglio italiano, il coraggio, l'audacia, l'amore del pericolo, l'abitudine all'energia e alla temerità, la religione del nuovo e della velocità [...] La guerra sola igiene del mondo, il militarismo, il patriottismo. La convinzione della nostra superiorità di razza" (Marinetti [1998], 569).
11. "daß unter dem Arbeiter weder ein Stand im alten Sinne noch eine Klasse im Sinne der revolutionären Dialektik des 19. Jahrhunderts zu verstehen ist" (Jünger [1962a], 84).
12. "der Ausdruck eines besonderen Seins, das seinen Raum, seine Zeit, seine Gesetzmäßigkeit zu erfüllen sucht" (Jünger [1962a], 97).
13. "daß man zu neuen Harmonien nicht vordringen kann, ohne durch diese Zerstörungen hindurchgegangen zu sein" (Jünger [1962a], 234).
14. "Insofern der Einzelne sich der Arbeitswelt zugehörig fühlt, äußert sich seine heroische Auffassung der Wirklichkeit, daß er sich als Vertreter der Gestalt des Arbeiters begreift" (Jünger [1962a], 72).
15. "Die Existenz der Masse ist in demselben Maße bedroht, in dem der Begriff der bürgerlichen Sicherheit trügerisch geworden ist" (Jünger [1962a], 123).
16. "Eine Gestalt *ist*, und keine Entwicklung vermehrt oder vermindert sie. Entwicklungsgeschichte ist daher nicht Geschichte der Gestalt, sondern höchstens ihr dynamischer Kommentar [...] ist eine historische Gestalt im tiefsten im tiefsten unabhängig von der Zeit und den Umständen, denen sie zu entspringen scheint [...] Die Geschichte bringt keine Gestalten hervor, denn sie ändert sich mit der Gestalt. Sie ist die Tradition, die eine siegreiche Macht sich selbst verleiht" (Jünger [1962a], 89).
17. "Der vielbeklagte Niedergang der Literatur bedeutet nichts anderes, als daß eine veraltete literarische Fragestellung ihren Rang verloren hat. Ganz ohne Zweifel besitzt heute ein Kursbuch größere Bedeutung als die letzte Ausfaserung des einmaligen Erlebnisses durch den bürgerlichen Roman" (Jünger [1962a], 156).
18. "Ebensowenig also, wie der Einzelne sich noch mit der Würde der Person zu bekleiden vermag, erscheint er als Individuum oder erscheint die Masse als Summe, als eine zählbare Menge von Individuen" (Jünger [1962a], 108).
19. "Man versammelt sich nicht mehr, sondern man marschiert auf. Man gehört nicht mehr einem Verein oder einer Partei, sondern einer Bewegung oder einer Gefolgschaft an" (Jünger [1962a], 108).

20. "Am Maßstab des Schmerzes betrachtet, stellt sich diese Verwandlung als eine Operation dar, durch welche die Zone der Empfindsamkeit aus dem Leben herausgeschnitten wird, und damit hängt zusammen, daß sie zunächst als Verlust empfunden wird" (Jünger [1962b], 168).
21. "Es ist dies die technische Ordnung selbst, jener große Spiegel, in dem die wachsende Vergegenständlichung unseres Lebens am deutlichsten erscheint und die gegen den Zugriff des Schmerzes in besonderer Weise abgedichtet ist. *Die Technik ist unsere Uniform*" (Jünger [1962b], 180).
22. "Was man in der liberalen Welt unter dem 'guten' Gesicht verstand, war eigentlich das feine Gesicht, nervös, beweglich, veränderlich und geöffnet den verschiedenartigsten Einflüssen und Anregungen. Das disziplinierte Gesicht dagegen ist geschlossen; es besitzt einen festen Blickpunkt und ist einseitig, gegenständlich und starr. Bei jeder Art von gerichteter Ausbildung bemerkt man bald, wie sich der Eingriff fester und unpersönlicher Regeln und Vorschriften in der Härtung des Gesichtes niederschlägt" (Jünger [1962b], 171).
23. "Es ist metallischer geworden, auf seiner Oberfläche gleichsam galvanisiert, der Knochenbau tritt deutlich hervor, die Züge sind ausgespart und angespannt. Der Blick ist ruhig und fixiert" (Jünger [1962a], 119).
24. "kommt alles auf die Schärfe der Beschreibung an, die Augen voraussetzt, denen die volle und unbefangene Sehkraft gegeben ist" (Jünger [1962a], 13).
25. "Die Aufnahme steht außerhalb der Zone der Empfindsamkeit. Es haftet ihr ein teleskopischer Charakter an; man merkt, daß der Vorgang von einem unempfindlichen und unverletzlichen Auge gesehen ist. Sie hält ebensowohl die Kugel im Fluge fest wie den Menschen im Augenblick, in dem er von einer Explosion zerrissen wird. Das ist die uns eigentümliche Weise zu sehen; und die Photographie ist nichts anderes als ein Werkzeug dieser unserer Eigenart" (Jünger [1962b], 188).

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## A Center That Can Hold

### The Figure of Empire in Portuguese and Austrian Modernism

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Within modernist studies, the link between imperialism and modernism—imperialism meaning “the imperialist dynamic of capitalism proper” (Jameson [1988], 6)—has long been recognized as a crucial one and has been the subject of extensive research, particularly in the context of Anglo-American modernism. In the wake of Edward Said’s pathbreaking *Orientalism* (1978), a number of studies, including work by Said himself (Said [1994]), have pursued this issue in considerable detail, again especially regarding Anglo-American narrative fiction. Other contexts, however, that are no less important for an overall assessment of this intricate relationship, have received much less attention.

The Orientalist gaze, if one recalls Said’s argument, is intent on imposing on an Other perceived as chaotic and meaningless a homogenizing sense of order and integration that in the end renders alterity invisible and reasserts the absolute dominance of a unifying center. This is coherent with a notion of imperialism as being self-generated by an existing nation, that is to say as the “natural” extension of the national state. But a striking paradox is involved in this process: while imperialism strives to construct a unified whole, “spatial disjuncture has as its immediate consequence the inability to grasp the way the system functions as a whole” (Jameson [1988], 11). In other words: while the center defines itself through the ability to incorporate its periphery, that is, the possibility to determine its own borders, this definition from the margins tends to destabilize the very notion of a center and to disrupt any sense of a coherent identity. Thus, the process of globalization carried about by imperialism as an essential aspect of capitalist modernization goes hand in hand with a process of fragmentation, in that the fiction of a self-centered national culture becomes increasingly exposed as simply “a discursive device which represents difference as unity or identity” (Hall [1992], 297). All the more so, because, we recall, capitalist modernization is not just an economic or social, but also a general cultural development.

As a self-critique of modernity, modernist writing finds itself deeply entangled in the above-described paradox and fully immersed in what has often been called a crisis of identity, resulting from the explosion of any notion of system or totality. Apolitical though it may claim to be, Modernism is, nonetheless, not simply an individualistic response to a modern condition where “all that is solid melts into air.” Indeed, the fragmented condition of modernist subjectivity is in no way solipsistic; on the contrary, it incorporates a reflection on the nation represented as an imagined community very much in the sense of Benedict Anderson’s definition (Anderson [1991]). In the context



of this reflection, the figure of Empire comes to play an essential role and becomes an integral part of the aesthetic project of modernism. In other words, for modernist writing Empire becomes an immanent issue, an aesthetic idea in Kant's sense, as part of an aesthetic solution to the problem of the fragmented relation between the self, art, and community in modernity.

This is particularly evident in situations where imperialism as a political system of rule seems exhausted, as aptly summarized by Edward Said in his short "Note on Modernism" in *Culture and Imperialism*:

When you can no longer assume that Britannia will rule the waves forever, you have to reconceive reality as something that can be held together by you the artist, in history rather than in geography. Spatiality becomes, ironically, the characteristic of an aesthetic rather than of political domination. (Said [1994], 190)

It is my contention that this conception of the role of the artist as the producer of a notion of identity no longer based on territorial possession but rather on some kind of "spiritual space" has found a particularly forceful expression within the context of those imperial systems that, by the turn of the twentieth century, were facing deep political crisis and were being driven to the periphery of the world system. Indeed, the peculiar brand of nationalistic cosmopolitanism (or, for that matter, cosmopolitan nationalism) that is to be found in Portuguese and Austrian modernism does not arise out of a strong national project, but out of its crisis, and essentially recodes the notion of imperialism in terms of aesthetics. It is clear in both contexts analyzed in this essay how much the figure of Empire, as a sign connoting contact and assimilation, and suggesting the bringing together of disparate and distant parts under a common rule, presented the literary imagination of modernism with a powerful metaphor. The ambivalence of this metaphor offered a poetic solution to the crisis, under the condition of modernity, of the very notion of a center capable of organizing aesthetic practice in a meaningful way.

The two cultural contexts I am going to approach—those of Portuguese and Austrian modernism, as seen mainly through two of its most salient representatives, namely Fernando Pessoa and Hugo von Hofmannsthal—present striking structural analogies, although they have hardly been in direct contact with each other. As a matter of fact, despite their very different trajectories, one can detect both in Pessoa and in Hofmannsthal a number of highly significant similarities. I was able to find in both a very similar use of "Empire" as the poetic figure for an "imagined community" utterly dependent on a peculiar dialectics of memory and vision.

The notion of a crisis of identity has found, in the context of Viennese modernism, a much-quoted expression in the euphoric celebration of the "loss of self" by the influential critic Hermann Bahr. From this perspective, the modern fragmentation of the self and the radical ambivalence of perception that inevitably goes with it are not experienced negatively; on the contrary, they provide a new solution—one might say a theatrical solution: the lost unity of the self survives in the ability of the aesthetic subject to stage his own crisis of identity. This is a strategy that can easily be recognized as also lying at the core of Pessoa's heteronymic enterprise, his "drama-in-people" ("drama em gente"), which is the assumption of several different authorial identities. I shall take as a starting-point a passage in *Livro do desassossego* (The Book of Disquietude), where Pessoa's semi-heteronym Bernardo Soares, a fictitious humble assistant bookkeeper in downtown Lisbon, describes himself as a true man without qualities:

And I, what's truly I, am the center that doesn't exist in any of this except by an abyss-based geometry; I'm the nothing around which this movement spins, existing only so that it can spin, being a center only because every circle has one. I, what's truly I, am a well without walls but with the walls' viscosity, the center of everything with nothing around it. (Pessoa [1996], 155)<sup>1</sup>

The loss of self is presented in this crucial passage as being inseparable from a postulated center that almost magically is able to organize that loss. We are reminded of the famous line in Yeats's "The second coming" that is so often quoted as the quintessential expression of modern sensibility: "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold." Nonetheless, in the passage I quoted, it is all too clear that the radical experience of non-identity goes along with a reconstruction of identity: the I is nothing, but this nothing is conceived of as an absolute center. It reveals itself as the geometric location from where, in the end, a reorganization of experience may, however precariously, be carried out. *This* center can hold. From this point of view, disquietude turns out to be, not an existential, but, rather, an aesthetic condition, the metaphor for that simultaneously disruptive and productive situation that enables giving meaning to the loss of meaning.

It is well known that this ex-centric center provides the foundation for Bernardo Soares's experience of the city as the metaphor for the absolutely random nature of meaning in modernity. Such randomness, represented by the sheer materiality and strangeness of signs on the streets, is, however, not the end of the story. The city is at one and the same time the suffocating place where human beings appear to the *flâneur* as "enemy ghosts" (Pessoa [1982], vol. 1, 56), as that repulsive "common mankind" he feels "physically nauseated" by (86) and—as a place like home: "Oh, Lisbon, my home!" (65).<sup>2</sup> In the casual encounters the city offers one can find the possibility of that profane revelation Walter Benjamin would later extensively theorize—the possibility of an epiphany, of the sudden glimpse of a meaningful constellation. This, however, it must be added, is essentially a matter of language: only its relation to language provides the self lost in a hostile environment with the means of turning chaos into meaning.

Language and nation seem to be interconnected in precisely the same sense. We have seen that the recovery of the possibility of experience is dependent on language—the place left empty by the I that has turned into nothing is filled by the body of language. This, however, is identified with the body of the nation as expressed in the probably most often quoted, interpreted and overinterpreted passage in *Livro do desassossego*: "I have no social or political sentiments, and yet there is a way in which I'm highly nationalistic. My nation is the Portuguese language" (Pessoa [1996], 151).<sup>3</sup>

The equation of language and nation is indeed central to Pessoa's poetic endeavor, as has been convincingly demonstrated by Irene Ramalho Santos's pathbreaking studies on the Portuguese modernist poet as an "Atlantic poet," to which my own analysis of Pessoa is very much indebted (Santos [2002]). In 1912, Pessoa had written in the series of essays entitled "A nova poesia portuguesa" (The New Portuguese Poetry) that "an *absolutely* original poetry and an *absolutely national* poetry are interchangeable expressions" (Pessoa [n.d.], 64).<sup>4</sup> Nation—or more exactly, as we shall see, the imperial nation—is in this sense the ultimate metaphor for the totality of poetic experience, that figure of unity and identity without which the I that is nothing would not find its way to language.

Let us look at this whole matter a bit more closely. It is probably a coincidence, but no doubt an interesting one, that 1908, the year of the Portuguese regicide and the beginning of the final crisis of the monarchist regime (to be overthrown only two years later by a republican revolution), should

also have been the year when Pessoa took his final, most conscious decision to become a poet, not in the English language—the years spent in South Africa, where he received his education, would easily have enabled him to follow this path—but in the Portuguese language. It is well known to what extent, for Pessoa's generation, the experience of social and political crisis and the disillusionment with politics went hand in hand with the hope for a national renaissance. The magazine *A Águia* was to be the organ for this renaissance in its distinctively nationalistic facet, whereas *Orpheu*, a few years later, would put value in provocatively stressing the cosmopolitan impetus it was prepared to give to a stagnant cultural scene. This cosmopolitan stance, however, is concomitant with the program of a "reconstruction of national literature and mentality," this being the self-assigned mission of a literary elite intent on creating "Cosmopolis" and capable of "joining together in its work a maximum of what is usable in Portuguese sensibility with a maximum of what is usable in contemporary European tendencies" (Pessoa [1916], 46).<sup>5</sup> Such a literary elite is already in itself the incarnation of a national project as the work of a few exceptional personalities. This conforms to a notion of national history as a series of poetic creations, as not only Pessoa but also other collaborators of *Orpheu*, such as Almada Negreiros, clearly state on various occasions.

From this perspective, nation is understood primarily as a project, the mythical reinterpretation of the historical past is nothing else than the establishment of the narrative pattern that may give structure and substance to that utopian projection. The misery of the present time is a decisive argument, not against, but in favor of the inevitability of a national renaissance—where the nation is nothing, all conditions are set for it to become everything. This is exactly the rhetorical pattern we have already met in the poetic image of the lost I, of non-identity as a definition of the center, that center that would receive its most cogent poetic configuration in the long poem *Mensagem* (Santos [2002]).

The central concept regarding this whole problem is that of imperialism. But "imperialism" is explicitly meant by Pessoa as a purely cultural imperialism, an "imperialism of poets":

Is it an imperialism of poets? So be it. The phrase is only ridiculous for those who are adepts of the old ridiculous imperialism. The imperialism of poets lasts and dominates; the one of the politicians goes by and is forgotten, if the poet singing them does not keep remembrance of it. (Pessoa [1979a], 240)<sup>6</sup>

Similar statements can be found in countless texts and fragments. Pessoa distinguishes, as we just saw, between different types of imperialism, in particular between what he calls an "imperialism of domination," on the one side, and an "imperialism of culture," on the other. That which characterizes Portugal, he writes, is not "imperialism understood as domination by force (who would theorize such a thing for our small people?), but imperialism as a civilizational influence" (Pessoa [1980], 238),<sup>7</sup> in the form of an "imperialism that struggles to create new civilizational values in order to awaken other nations" (Pessoa [1979a], 222).<sup>8</sup> The author goes on to explain that this can be achieved only by a small country (Pessoa [1979a], 225). As a matter of fact, Germany could have done it too, but has forsaken this possibility with the foundation of the *Reich* in 1871, which created a country marked by an "imperialism of domination," a view strikingly reminiscent of Nietzsche's diatribes against the new Bismarckian nation. The creation of the new empire of the spirit—and here the messianic overtones are perfectly audible—has thus fallen to Portugal as a national mission to be accomplished, since Portugal is the country "whose first discovery was the discovery of the idea of discovery" (Pessoa [1979a], 223).<sup>9</sup> So Portugal "shall remain in the world after it has dis-

appeared" (Pessoa [1980], 240),<sup>10</sup> a formulation that makes it perfectly clear that we are not dealing here with a territorial concept of nation or empire, but with a purely imaginary topology—elsewhere, for instance, Pessoa writes that the African colonies are not only superfluous but even an obstacle in the way of a true national vocation (Pessoa [1979a], 51). And indeed, while European colonial discourse typically envisages colonial space as a feminine body to be the object of penetration, Pessoa theorizes an "androgynous imperialism, uniting masculine and feminine qualities" (Pessoa [1979a], 226).<sup>11</sup>

The notion of an "imperialism of poets" inextricably unites memory and vision, since the past is conceived of as simply the imaginary pattern giving substance to a utopian project. Now, this project belongs in the first instance to those capable of assuming the role of the creator. That is: the ultimate foundation of the imperial nation is the poet as a genius. When Pessoa asks, "who as a Portuguese would live in the narrowness of only one personality, one nation, one belief," he is no doubt thinking of himself. In much the same sense, Hofmannsthal writes of himself just after the war that he is "the last of the Austrians," drawing upon the same identification between the poet and the nation.

Let me summarize my argument so far, before I turn to the Austrian context: I have argued that Pessoa's aesthetic project, the search for the decentered center capable of providing identity to the non-identical, organizes itself in the end around the notion of the universal—"imperialistic"—mission of Portuguese culture. In these terms, Portuguese culture will be an inter-culture or it will not be. This is a radically modern idea, in that it is not dependent on a substantialist notion of culture, but rather arises out of the crisis of that notion, out of the assumption of non-identity, or, if you will, of inter-identity. Such a universalism corresponds exactly to the idea of poetry as language, as an autonomous construction creating a world for itself. However, the ambivalence of the concept of imperialism (which Pessoa himself recognizes, without drawing the necessary conclusions) casts strong doubt on its postulated universalism and clearly exposes the ultimately particularistic nature of this poetic fiction. Universalism is inseparable from the symbolic reconstruction of identity in a way that is distinctly national; the intended cosmopolitanism in this way reveals itself as intensely nationalistic in character. One last passage by Pessoa: "Imperialism does not mean the artificial grouping of several nations in one, but the tendency of every nation to convert the other nations into its own psychic substance" (Pessoa [1980], 211).<sup>12</sup> Compare the following quotation from a note written by Hugo von Hofmannsthal in 1927: "The function of poets: to bring strange worlds nearer, in order to provide the national spirit with more power in itself through new ingredients" (Hofmannsthal [1979], vol. III, 590).<sup>13</sup> Hofmannsthal's essays are certainly very different in tone from those by Pessoa. The messianic paroxysms, the driving of the argument up to the explosion of paradox, the utter disregard of any established boundaries that characterize Pessoa's texts and fragments, all of these can be found only in a mitigated form in the Austrian author. Although the latter, in an early fragment, had defined his vocation as lying in the ability "to create abysses inside oneself and around oneself" (Hofmannsthal [1979], vol. III, 350),<sup>14</sup> the total ruthlessness that is characteristic of Pessoa was to prove essentially alien to him. And yet, Hofmannsthal follows poetic strategies and uses concepts and lines of argument that are strikingly parallel to Pessoa's and that would justify a book-length comparative study. One of those concepts is the notion of empire as a way of defining a national identity essentially understood as a poetic creation.

The notion of an identity crisis I have been using as relevant to modernism as a whole is of particular importance to Viennese *fin de siècle* culture and especially to Hofmannsthal's literary

generation, the so-called “Young Vienna,” as is almost unanimously stressed in the vast bibliography on the subject (see Le Rider [1990]). The way that generation dealt with the problem of national identity — a very intricate one in this context, to be sure — has, however, received comparatively little attention (one notable exception is Pollak [1992]). In the Viennese *fin de siècle*, empire is still a tangible political reality, the reality of that agonizing Austro-Hungarian empire defined by the great Austrian satirist Karl Kraus as a “laboratory of Apocalypse” shortly before the outbreak of the Great War. The writers of “Young Vienna” essentially turned their backs on what was for them a disappointing and inscrutable social and political scene and took refuge in the realm of art. Their aesthetic theory and practice were driven by a distinctly cosmopolitan impulse. And yet, here too, this goes hand in hand with “the great dream of a new Austrian art,” to quote Hermann Bahr again. We can witness the emergence, out of the experience of crisis, of a national idea that has very little to do with the contemporary political scene, with the misery of an empire about to fall apart, but that is an essentially literary construction.

An essential recurring concept in Hofmannsthal’s essays is “das Gleitende,” meaning “that which slides,” a concept that points at the essential instability of the relation between the subject and the world in modernity. The way towards the reinvention of a center that will provide for a renewed stability is by definition a precarious one, since it goes through language. What is significant here, and to my mind absolutely parallel to Pessoa, is that this precarious center finds a precise embodiment in an idea of nation. Indeed, in the essay “Das Schrifttum als geistiger Raum der Nation” (Literature as the spiritual space of the nation) of 1926 — notice the expression “spiritual *space*” — Hofmannsthal would assert that beyond the spirit of the language there lies the spirit of nation (Hofmannsthal [1979], vol. III, 24). This is just another way of stating, to paraphrase Pessoa’s famous, above quoted assertion, “my nation is the German language.”

As for Pessoa, the experience of negativity and non-identity is deeply embedded in Hofmannsthal’s literary imagination. Let me start by picking up an early fragment (1894), well reminiscent of some passages in *Livro do desassossego*. Here, Hofmannsthal fantasizes the landscape of a post-apocalyptic Vienna and wonders what it would be like “to be the guard in one of the towers of the Karlskirche that is still standing and to wander through the ruins, immersed in thoughts no one here can understand any longer” (Hofmannsthal [1979], vol. III, 383).<sup>15</sup>

A year earlier, in his famous first essay on d’Annunzio (Hofmannsthal [1979], vol. I, 174–84), Hofmannsthal had portrayed a decadent generation defined by an acute consciousness of belatedness and by a concomitant excess of lucidity leading to an insurmountable distance in regard to life. Such a distance, Hofmannsthal argues, is characteristic of a small literary elite spread throughout Europe, the community of those unhappy few whose distinctive mark is to be engaged in a never-ending search. The figure of the search, which is a recurrent one in Hofmannsthal’s essays, points at how problematic the notion of tradition has become. It has become a matter, not of roots or the past, but of options and of the future. So nation too is less a matter of tradition than of invention. The poetic utopia of a new spiritual space thus can easily be conflated with the fantasy of a nation that, as we can read in one of Hofmannsthal’s earlier essays, would be “an image of one’s own liberated soul, freed from the hands of the barbarians” (Hofmannsthal [1979], vol. I, 122).<sup>16</sup>

In a conference of 1906, a central text entitled “Der Dichter und diese Zeit” (The Poet and the Present Time; Hofmannsthal [1979], vol. I, 54–81), two essential functions are assigned to the poet: to be the seismographer of his time, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, to produce an aes-

thetic synthesis that is able to give a stable meaning to the chaos of history and, thus, to overcome its own time. In an epoch whose essence (I am paraphrasing Hofmannsthal here) is “ambivalence” and “vagueness,” there is a need for men (and the author does mean *men*) who have the qualities that are required of leaders. These can only be geniuses—defined as exceptional personalities and as “creative personalities,” as creators of civilization. “[C]ivilization is made by geniuses,” so too Pessoa would write some years later (Pessoa [1979b], 301).<sup>17</sup> “There is nothing that won’t fit” into “the order of things” defined by the poet; his function is to “create a world of relationships,” “the present time is in him or it isn’t anywhere else;” that is, the poet is defined in this essay in a very broad sense, one that will allow Hofmannsthal a few years later to stylize salient personalities of Austrian history in a way that very much corresponds to that definition and is quite similar to Pessoa’s strategy in *Mensagem* regarding key figures in the Portuguese historical past. Austria, according to Hermann Bahr, the mentor of Young Vienna, has been so far only “a living content without form and a juridical form without content” (Bahr [1915], 47).<sup>18</sup> To give form to that living content is the mission that falls to the poet conceived in Hofmannsthal’s terms.

In a letter of August 1913 written under the impact of the Balkan crisis, one finds the following: “We have a homeland, but we do not have a fatherland—in the place of this one, there is simply a phantom” (Hofmannsthal and Andrian [1968], 198).<sup>19</sup> A passage written the year before (Hofmannsthal [1979], vol. I, 430–1) suggests that times of hardship can be blessed times for the definition of a national project. So, for the ghostly empire that is Austria-Hungary, the hope of a cultural renaissance as the mission presented to the poet—who is by definition at one with his nation—lies precisely in the experience of crisis.

If we now turn to some key essays written by Hofmannsthal during World War I, in the years of the final crisis of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, we shall find very much the same pattern that we have already seen in Pessoa. It is vital to understand that the clearly nationalistic tones in the essays under consideration are not momentary lapses or the effect of the impact of the widespread patriotic hysteria upon their author, but, instead, have their foundation in the very core of Hofmannsthal’s aesthetic project. We are dealing here with a type of discourse that is clearly performative in the sense of Homi Bhabha’s distinction. It is not a pedagogical discourse simply resting on an established common sense or on received tradition, it is structured in the form of a poetic vision producing its own, purely fictional object—the nation, in a way, is like the poem waiting to be written. Consider the following passage in the essay “Wir Österreicher und Deutschland” (We, Austrians, and Germany) of 1915: “Austria is not something that simply exists, but a task to be fulfilled. [...] Austria is the specific task posed in Europe to the German spirit. It is the field of action assigned by fate to a purely spiritual imperialism” (Hofmannsthal [1979], vol. II, 393–4).<sup>20</sup> We are clearly reminded here of Pessoa’s “imperialism of poets.” For Hofmannsthal too the “spiritual imperialism” he conjures up is not intent on domination; its essential feature, on the contrary, is the ability to assimilate and to mediate. Very much in the sense of Pessoa’s “androgynous imperialism,” the mediating position of that ideal Austria is defined in the following terms: “Towards east and south Austria is a giving country, towards west and north it is a receiving country” (Hofmannsthal [1979], vol. II, 394).<sup>21</sup>

We cannot be surprised to find, at the end of the essay, Beethoven named side by side with Prince Eugene, the mythical army leader who at the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth drove the Turks towards the east, conquering large portions of the territory that was to

constitute the core of the empire. Beethoven and Prince Eugene—they are both part, at exactly the same level, of the creative synthesis whose name is Austria.

Such a synthesis, however, exists only in a history transfigured by poetic imagination; in the end, it is only a vision of the future, a poetic utopia. So Hofmannsthal insists that Austria has yet to be discovered: it is, he writes, an “European America,” “America is here or nowhere else” (Hofmannsthal [1979], vol. II, 394).<sup>22</sup> This yet-to-be nation is understood as the consummation of that “German being that has once conquered the world” as one can read in the essay “Österreich im Spiegel seiner Dichtung” (Austria in the mirror of its literature) of 1916—with the provision that this conquest must be understood, to use Pessoa’s terms, not in the sense of an “imperialism of domination,” but of an “imperialism of culture”: the vocation of Austria as the ideal mediator is to “colonize without conquering” (Hofmannsthal [1979], vol. II, 23).

Let us turn briefly to another significant, though much lesser known figure in Austrian modernism, the expressionist writer Robert Müller. Müller’s *chef d’oeuvre* is the fascinating novel *Tropen* (Tropics), published in 1915. This novel, which has been justly characterized as one of the most complex literary constructions in modernist German-language literature, narrates a strange voyage to the “heart of darkness” of an exotic landscape somewhere between Brazil and Venezuela. The voyage that builds up the external plot is nothing else than an exploration into the abysses of modern subjectivity, a metaphor for the impossible search for that stable self lost in the turbulence of modernity.

A year earlier, in 1914, Müller had published a key cultural-political essay entitled “Was erwartet Österreich von seinem jungen Thronfolger?” (What does Austria expect from the young heir to the throne?). Müller’s convoluted line of argument in this essay essentially comes down to a definition of Austrian collective identity set within an “imperialistic” framework quite similar to the one we have found in Pessoa and Hofmannsthal. The solemn announcement by Müller that “the discovery of imperialistic Man is imminent!” and will be an ethical imperative for future generations (Müller, [1995], 46)<sup>23</sup> is indeed the culmination of a series of reflections on Austria’s national mission recast in the mould of a conception of Empire. “The epoch of nationalism,” Müller writes, “is past. Nationalism was nothing else than the predecessor of imperialism, which has now become the law of the great creative nations” (Müller [1995], 21).<sup>24</sup> Imperialism, he goes on to argue, is not about uniformity, but diversity: it provides the necessary framework for the mediation and assimilation of difference that is the distinctive mark of the Austrian, as a “boundary type” (Müller [1995], 20) who has developed his complex identity in the course of a constant contact with a strange Other. Austria-Hungary is thus the first realization of imperialism as “a form of modern political development” (Müller, [1995], 22), with the consequence, in Müller’s eyes, that “being an Austrian is still the most fitting way of being in the world” (22).<sup>25</sup>

The perfect embodiment of the ideal type of the Austrian is the Prince, defined not as a figure of rule but, literally, in the very first sentence of the essay, as “a poetic value of the nation” (Müller [1995], 7).<sup>26</sup> Such a definition requires, as the author goes on to explain, that the figure of the Prince has its justification and purpose in itself; in this sense it is a self-centered source of meaning, its most immediate analogy being the work of art. Thus the Prince is at one with the nation as an aesthetic creation rather than as a concrete political reality; in the end, the Prince, as a creative principle in its own right, is conceived of as the poetic genius, in a way very similar to the one analyzed above in relation to Pessoa and Hofmannsthal.

It is interesting to note that Müller explicitly polemicizes against the generation of “Vienna 1900” when he states that the Austro-Hungarian intellectuals “after having exiled themselves in a sterile way in the realm of literature and in artistic conceptions of life are striving to assume leadership in politics” (Müller [1995], 23)<sup>27</sup> and, in the process, have understood very well that the only sense for their existence lies in their role as mediators towards Eastern and Southern Europe as the fulfilment of the utmost mission of the Austrian nation. In 1915, in the essay “Macht. Psychologische Grundlagen des gegenwärtigen Atlantischen Krieges” (Power. The psychological foundations of the present Atlantic War), Müller was to invent the ultimate figure for that mediation in the vision of “Atlantis” as a “German continent.” This continent, characteristically, has nothing to do with physical conquest. It has the form of a bridge and that is why it is named “with an ungeographical, but very wise concept,” “Atlantis.” “Because this concept,” as the author goes on to explain, “means that there exists something that does not exist; or that something exists in a form that is superior to a form that is banally real” (Müller [1995], 134).<sup>28</sup>

The guiding principle for the construction of such a bridge is defined by Müller in terms that are already quite familiar to us: “Imperialismus des Geistes” (spiritual imperialism), as an imperialism that “does not weigh heavily as a building, but, instead, is aerial, and connecting, and hovering freely above the peoples and the lands like a bridge” (Müller [1995], 135).<sup>29</sup> Although they belong to different generations, with very different backgrounds, there is, as we can see, a strong convergence between Müller and Hofmannsthal in their conception of “imperialism” as essentially a cultural task where art and politics become one. Let us then return to Hofmannsthal and add a final example from the already mentioned essay on “Literature as the spiritual space of the nation,” written in 1926 towards the end of the author’s life: “Nothing is real in the political life of the nation that is not present in its literature in the form of spirit, nothing is contained in this vital and lucid literature that does not materialize itself in the life of the nation” (Hofmannsthal [1979], vol. III, 27).<sup>30</sup>

Again, an emphatic notion of literature is conflated here with a no less emphatic notion of nation. Considering that in the 1920s some of Hofmannsthal’s essays revolve around the idea of Europe, I think this passage from a central text may help us to put his “cosmopolitanism” into the right perspective. Indeed, we would jump to a hasty conclusion, were we to accept the claim some have been raising in favor of the present-day cultural and political relevance of Hofmannsthal’s idea of Europe. As a matter of fact, not only is this idea totally Eurocentric, but also it cannot be dissociated from the emphatic concept of nation I have been highlighting throughout my essay. In the end, the “European idea” is for Hofmannsthal simply an extension of his definition of the “Austrian idea.” This, he had written in 1917, in perfect accordance with the logic of his “imperialism of poets,” is the ultimate model for Europe, since, he argues, it is the very incarnation of the “ideas of conciliation, of synthesis, of filling the gaps” (Hofmannsthal [1979], vol. II, 457).<sup>31</sup> Conciliation, synthesis: these are keywords that have nothing to do with a notion of hybridization but point instead to a type of relationship between parts that depends upon a mediating instance, striving towards a unifying center that will in the end subsume difference through assimilation.

As a matter of fact, in both contexts that have been under scrutiny here, the figure of the decentered subject provided by modernist literary imagination finds in the figure of Empire the model for a universalism that provides the possibility of recentering, by offering a new pattern of identification. The figure of Empire—a center that can hold—is constructed as a poetic synthesis, as a fiction of unity and totality through diversity. However, as a purely imaginary projection of a deterritori-



alized concept of nation, the cosmopolitanism suggested by that figure turns out in the end to be highly particularistic in character. Thus, it is no wonder that both Pessoa and Viennese Modernism have acquired such a prominent position as cultural icons in their respective national contexts. The universalistic definition of cultural identity provided by the nationalistic cosmopolitanism of Modernism makes it possible to recast relations, historically defined by inequality, conflict and sheer violence, in a code marked by the figure of dialogue and mediation, which perfectly fits the political goals of post-imperial small states in an increasingly globalized world.

I was not concerned here with the genealogy of the “imperialistic” universalism of Modernism, whose Romantic roots (Makdisi [1998]) can be unmistakably detected in the authors I have chosen as representative for my case study. My aim was to show to what large extent these author’s apolitical politics rely upon the reconfiguration of national destiny in the form of a universal mission in terms that are congenial to the aesthetic project of Modernism. To extend a concept Boaventura de Sousa Santos has proposed as an analytical tool for the understanding of the Portuguese state’s repositioning in Europe and in the world-system at large since the eighties, the figure of Empire in Modernism testifies to a strong “imagination-of-the-center”—an imagination, it must be added, that (here the topos of *translatio imperii* is still very much present) is totally inseparable from a notion of diversity and fragmentation and from a consciousness of loss. In the end, the true hero turns out to be the modernist poet, as the only one in a position to offer meaningful answers to the crisis of modernity. Modernist imperial fictions fully testify to the inner tensions and insurmountable ambivalence of the precarious solutions presented in those answers.

## Notes

1. “E eu, verdadeiramente eu, sou o centro que não há nisto senão por uma geometria do abismo; sou o nada em torno do qual este movimento gira, só para que gire, sem que esse centro exista senão porque todo o círculo o tem. Eu, verdadeiramente eu, sou o poço sem muros, mas com a viscosidade dos muros, o centro de tudo com o nada à roda” (Pessoa [1982], vol. I, 31).
2. “fantasmas inimigos” (Pessoa [1982], vol. I, 56); “humanidade vulgar,” “nausea physica” (86); “Oh, Lisboa, meu lar!” (65).
3. “Não tenho sentimento nenhum político ou social. Tenho, porém, num sentido, um alto sentimento patriótico. Minha pátria é a língua portuguesa” (Pessoa [1982], vol. I, 17).
4. “Poesia *absolutamente* original e poesia absolutamente *nacional* são expressões interconvertíveis” (Pessoa [n.d.], 64).
5. “reconstrução da literatura e da mentalidade nacionais”; “uma plêiade luzida que nas suas obras enfeixa, com o máximo utilizável do sentimento português, o máximo aproveitável das actuais correntes europeias” (Pessoa [1916], 46).
6. “É um imperialismo de poetas? Seja. A frase não é ridícula senão para quem defende o antigo imperialismo ridículo. O imperialismo de poetas dura e domina; o dos políticos passa e esquece, se o não lembrar o poeta que os cante” (Pessoa [1979a], 240).
7. “O imperialismo entendido como domínio pela força (quem o iria teorizar para o nosso pequeno povo?), mas o imperialismo como influência civilizacional” (Pessoa [1980], 238).
8. “Um imperialismo que procura criar novos valores civilizacionais para despertar outras nações” (Pessoa [1979a], 222).
9. “a nossa primeira descoberta foi descobrir a ideia de descoberta” (Pessoa [1979a], 223).

10. “deixar ficar Portugal no mundo depois de ele desaparecer” (Pessoa [1980], 240).
11. “Um imperialismo andrógino reunidor das qualidades masculinas e femininas” (Pessoa [1979a], 226).
12. “Por imperialismo não se entende o agrupamento artificial de várias nações numa só, mas a tendência de toda a nação para converter em sua substância psíquica as outras nações” (Pessoa [1980], 211).
13. “Funktion der Dichter: das Heranbringen fremder Welten, um durch neue Ingredienzien dem Nationalgeist grössere Mächtigkeit seiner selbst zu geben” (Hofmannsthal [1979], vol. III, 590).
14. “Abgründe in sich und um sich zu machen” (Hofmannsthal [1979], vol. III, 350).
15. “Und Wächter zu sein in einem der Trajantürme vor der Karlskirche, der noch aufrecht steht und mit Gedanken, die hier keiner mehr versteht, zwischen den Ruinen herumzugehen” (Hofmannsthal [1979], vol. III, 383).
16. “ein Bild der eigenen, den Händen der Barbaren entzogenen, befreiten Seele” (Hofmannsthal [1979], vol. I, 122).
17. “A civilização é obra de homens de génio” (Pessoa [1979b], 301).
18. “ein lebendiger Inhalt ohne Form und eine gesetzliche Form ohne Inhalt” (Bahr [1915], 47).
19. “Wir haben eine Heimat, aber kein Vaterland—an dessen Stelle nur ein Gespenst” (Hofmannsthal and Andrian [1968], 198).
20. “Österreich ist kein schlechthin Bestehendes, sondern eine ungelöste Aufgabe. [...] Österreich ist die besondere Aufgabe, die dem deutschen Geist in Europa gestellt wurde. Es ist das vom Geschick zuwiesene Feld eines rein geistigen Imperialismus” (Hofmannsthal [1979], vol. II, 393–4).
21. “Österreich [ist] gegen Osten und Süden ein gebendes, gegen Westen und Norden ein empfangendes Land” (Hofmannsthal [1979], vol. II, 394).
22. “ein europäisches Amerika”; “hier oder nirgends ist Amerika” (Hofmannsthal [1979], vol. II, 394).
23. “Die Entdeckung des imperialistischen Menschen steht bevor!” (Müller [1995], 46).
24. “Die Zeit des Nationalismus ist überschritten. Er war nur ein Vorgänger des Imperialismus, der gegenwärtig das Gesetz der großen schöpferischen Völker geworden ist” (Müller [1995], 21).
25. “Man ist als Österreicher in der Welt noch immer besser aufgehoben” (Müller [1995], 22).
26. “Der Prinz ist ein poetischer Wert des Volkstums” (Müller [1995], 7).
27. “Die Intelligenzschicht des Deutsch-Österreichertums, die sich langsam wieder nach öder Selbstverbanung in die Literatur und in artistische Lebensauffassungen der Führerherrschaft in der Politik zu bemächtigen strebt” (Müller [1995], 23).
28. “mit einem ungeographischen aber sehr weissen Begriffe. Denn dieser sagt, dass etwas da ist, was nicht da ist; oder dass etwas in einer höheren als banal wirklichen Form ist” (Müller [1995], 134).
29. “nicht schwer wie ein Gebäude, sondern luftig, verbindend und frei schwebend über den Völkern und Ländern wie eine Brücke” (Müller [1995], 135).
30. “Nichts ist im politischen Leben der Nation Wirklichkeit, das nicht in ihrer Literatur als Geist vorhanden wäre, nichts enthält diese lebensvolle, traumlose Literatur, das sich nicht im Leben der Nation verwirklichte” (Hofmannsthal [1979], vol. III, 27).
31. “Ideen der Versöhnung, der Synthese, der Überspannung des Auseinanderklaffenden” (Hofmannsthal [1979], vol. II, 457).

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## Racial Politics, Modernist Poetics

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On a gorgeously decorated Covent Garden stage in 1911, the young Russian dancer Vaslav Nijinsky danced the role of the Golden Slave in the *Ballets Russes'* production of *Schéhérazade*. With his skin darkened to copper, and clad only in an ornate breastplate and harem pants, the now-legendary Nijinsky astonished London audiences with the decisively modern language of his ballet. *Schéhérazade's* lavish trappings and balletic asymmetry signaled the end of the austerity that had characterized classical dance through the late nineteenth century. Léon Bakst designed the Arabian costumes of billowing jewel-toned silk robes and ingeniously wrapped turbans; Michel Fokine choreographed movements for a cast of characters that included eunuchs, odalisques, and Negro and Hindu footmen; and a large orchestra played the sensual melodies and intricate metrical patterns of Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's symphonic suite. But it was Nijinsky's gravity-defying performance that held audiences spellbound. As the Golden Slave who dies violently after seducing the Shah's favorite wife, Nijinsky brought a new sexual and racial explicitness to the traditionally ascetic figure of the *danseur*. At once primitive and classical, masculine and feminine, Eastern and Western, ancient and modern, the Golden Slave was the first of many roles through which Vaslav Nijinsky and Sergei Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes* would transform the expressive and technical possibilities of traditional Western dance.

The *Ballets Russes* was one of the most fantastic collaborative enterprises of the modernist era, bringing together visionaries from several artistic disciplines across Europe and providing a platform for many of the early twentieth century's aesthetic revolutionaries and iconoclasts. The dance company's theatrical spectacles reflected the international, cosmopolitan character of their creators, and, accordingly, formed a nexus for several modernist proto-movements. From dreamlike pieces like *L'Après midi d'un Faune* (A Faun's Afternoon) from 1912, a minimalist, cubist ballet based on Stéphane Mallarmé's symbolist poem and set to Debussy's impressionist music; to the elemental, primitive *Le Sacre du Printemps* (Rite of Spring) from 1913, Stravinsky's notorious ballet that derived from Ukrainian and Slavic folklore and provoked the outrage of Paris audiences; to the machine-age ballet *Parade* (1917), whose atonal music by Erik Satie and geometric costumes by Picasso made it an apt vehicle for futurist aesthetics, the *Ballets Russes'* performances offered a palimpsest of modernism's competing, contradictory credos. The *Ballets Russes'* sheer artistic breadth exemplified the larger cultural climate of modernism, which, in the words of Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, encompassed

the futuristic and the nihilistic, the revolutionary and the conservative, the naturalistic and the symbolic, the romantic and the classical. It was a celebration of a technological age and a condemnation of it; an excited acceptance of the belief that the old régimes of culture were over, and a deep despair-

ing in the face of that fear; a mixture of convictions that the new forms were escapes from historicism and the pressures of the time with convictions that they were precisely the living expressions of these things. (Bradbury and McFarlane [1991], 46)

And in nearly every production that Sergei Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes* contributed to this extraordinary cultural climate, the visual, musical, and narrative poetics of racial difference highlighted what was most radical or "modern" about the ballet. Whether the sinuous Indo-Persian and Syrian movements in *Cléopâtre* (1909), the earthy, barbaric Cossack and Tartar dances woven into *Prince Igor* (1909), the poses inspired by Hindu statues in *The Blue God* (1912), or the Chinese magician's rites in *Parade* (1917), the very form of dance was liberated from its classical Western legacy by the imagined realms of the Orient, the exotic, and the primitive. If the *Ballets Russes*' eclecticism symbolizes the sometimes elegant, sometimes fierce, aesthetic dialogues of early twentieth-century modernism, then it becomes apparent that race and racial difference animated these dialogues at a foundational level.

I wish to show that diverse racial discourses structured the literary experiments through which many British authors explicitly declared themselves "modern" in the opening decades of the twentieth century. Once read in isolation from broader cultural phenomena, modernism is certainly understood now in terms of its participation in mass culture, consumerism, and national politics. However, the problem of race in metropolitan modernism's varied spheres has yet to be fully explored. While race has been examined in texts about the Empire's far-flung colonies and about Ireland, it has rarely been examined in texts that take the Western centers of Empire as their setting and source of reflection. This essay re-assesses metropolitan modernism through its preoccupations with race and offers a fresh context for understanding modernism's widely noted political and artistic heterogeneity. Modern social, scientific, and artistic constructions of race, I argue, lend form not only to the aesthetic radicalism but also to the self-conscious historicity that characterize experimental British modernist fiction. In what follows, I will first provide an overview of emergent racial discourses in the early twentieth century and then focus on the aesthetics and politics of race in two important modernist works: the avant-garde journal *BLAST* (1914) and Rebecca West's short story, "Indissoluble Matrimony."

The relative scarcity of scholarship on race and modernism is partially due to the assumption that racial tropes in twentieth-century literature correspond directly to British colonialism's racial categories. What Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism* calls "contrapuntal reading" has brought much-needed visibility to the dialectical relation between imperial centers and colonial peripheries, but it has also entrenched imperialism's binary distinction between white and non-white peoples as the dominant critical paradigm for understanding race in modernist literature. By contrast, I wish to demonstrate that imperialism was one among several race-based discourses that engaged and authored alterity in the early twentieth century. Racialized discourses in the early twentieth century diffused themselves into new and unexpected cultural realms, moving well beyond the exploitative dominions of the British Empire. It is vital to re-contextualize modernist literature's racial preoccupations within the dynamic urban and artistic landscapes of England and Western Europe, where post-War Asian and African immigrant-expatriate communities flourished and a new fascination with non-white racial alterity transformed the art-world. Emergent cultures of popular black performance fueled negrophilia in Paris, Berlin, and London; the *Ballets Russes*' enactments of Middle

Eastern and Indian mythology created a vogue for Orientalist fashion and design; and an international network of art-collectors and museums sparked unprecedented respect for non-Western art-forms in modernism's metropolitan centers. Imaginative divisions between the white self and the non-white Other, hard and clear in the late nineteenth century, became marvelously supple in a great deal of modernist work produced in and about these fast-changing urban landscapes. On one hand, as scholars like Simon Gikandi and Vincent Cheng have noted, British modernist writers were certainly influenced by the enormous legacy of nineteenth-century imperial race-science. However, what remains to be fully considered are the multiple ways in which developments in modernist literature also contributed to and borrowed from a growing body of cosmopolitan racial attitudes.

A brief review of the development of Western scientific racism between the mid-eighteenth century and the early twentieth century is helpful in understanding the relationships between modernism, modernity, and discourses of race. During these years, the word "race" itself eluded precise definitions, referring at different points to complexion, religion, language, or nationality. The movement to abolish slavery, which began in the Enlightenment and ended successfully in 1833, should theoretically have deepened European racial sympathies. But abolitionist idealism met with a nineteenth-century cultural backlash that produced violent, enduring views of non-white, non-Western peoples. As Jean-Paul Sartre trenchantly observes in his Preface to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*:

[T]here is nothing more consistent than a racist humanism since the European has only been able to become a man through creating slaves and monsters. While there was a native population somewhere this imposture did not show up; in the notion of the human races we found an abstract assumption of universality which served as cover for the most realistic practices. (Sartre [1963], 26)

All manner of "realistic practices" were vindicated by nineteenth-century imperial expansion, best symbolized by the 1884 Berlin Conference that parceled out Africa to Western European nations. A huge array of popular, religious, and especially scientific discourses combined to justify the brutal racial asymmetries of a colonized world. The new scientific (and pseudo-scientific) disciplines — paleontology, embryology, craniometry, craniology, anthropology, taxonomy, archaeology, geology — created seemingly irrefutable empirical criteria with which to identify and order human beings. And although Charles Darwin's theories of evolution and natural selection radically realigned the coordinates of racial thought in the mid-nineteenth century, earlier ideas about race as the immutable cause of human self-actualization persisted well into the twentieth century. The modernist re-ordering of the aesthetic universe avails itself of pre- and post-Darwinian racial attitudes; my brief reconstruction of the history of scientific racism will therefore touch on the ideas most relevant to modernism's multiple visions of racial identity.

Natural history and race-science in the eighteenth century in Great Britain and Western Europe developed largely within the context of Judeo-Christian creationism. George Stocking explains that "all men were presumed to be descended from one original pair, who had been formed by God as the final act of Creation, and to whom he had revealed the one true religion and certain other fundamental institutions of civilization" (Stocking [1987], 44). Theological belief in humanity's common origins translated into the doctrine of scientific monogenism, which argued that all human beings belonged to a single species, regardless of their physical differences. But as exploration, trade, and imperial conquest brought Europeans into contact with more and more of the world's peoples,

physical variation presented itself in an incredible range of skin color, hair texture, smell, and skull size that demanded scientific explanation. Scientists maintained faith in humanity's original, Edenic perfection, but positioned the various existing races in hierarchies that inevitably exalted white bodies and degraded black ones.

Compelling evidence of Enlightenment-era scientific Eurocentrism surfaces in the numerous theories that explained the phenomenon of human racial difference by turning to external factors like climate and environment. In *The Complexion of Race: Categories of Race in Eighteenth-Century British Culture*, Roxann Wheeler describes the English view to race and climate in the mid-eighteenth century:

Because of the excessive heat that was believed to enervate the body, mind, and morals, commonplaces about the torrid zone being the home of darkskinned people who were indolent, lascivious, and subject to tyranny often seemed confirmed when Englishmen confronted social and political life as well as labor arrangements that were alien to them. In the same vein, excessive cold was believed to produce effects similar to hot climates, and the contemptuous descriptions of the physical features and cultural life of the populations from the torrid and arctic zones were largely interchangeable. (Wheeler [2000], 23–4)

Such beliefs assumed that England and Western Europe stood as civilization's temperate cradles; the farther one traveled from the British Isles or the Continent, the less civility one would encounter. More than one hundred years later, as we will see, the London avant-garde recuperated climatic theories about race for the revolutionary 1914 war-journal *BLAST*; Wyndham Lewis, Ezra Pound, and their supporters scorned the intemperate passions of artists from Southern or Mediterranean nations and extolled the cold Northern climate that produced English artistic genius. Assumptions about climate and racial character also pervade Ford Madox Ford's 1915 impressionist novel *The Good Soldier*, in which the narrator John Dowell tells the "saddest story" of two marriages that disintegrated, in part, because of tropical madness and transatlantic colonial liaisons. And a bleak belief in climatic theory runs through Jean Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), where the self-destructive Creole narrator Anna Morgan frames her horrifying cultural displacement as a failure to adjust to England's cold temperatures. Caught in a dehumanizing cycle of alcoholism and prostitution, Anna inhabits an emotional geography that connects skin color, climate, and happiness: "I wanted to be black, I always wanted to be black. [...] Being black is warm and gay, being white is cold and sad" (Rhys [1982], 31).

Paradoxically, as the abolitionist movement in Britain gained momentum, culminating in the end of slavery in 1833, the science of race divorced itself firmly from Enlightenment humanism and became more systematically, overtly violent in its approach to non-European, non-white peoples. The monogenist explanations of human anatomical differences based on the external influences of environment and climate proved unsatisfactory, and the turn of the nineteenth century brought a surge of new scientific efforts to theorize race. As Nancy Stepan argues in *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain 1800–1960*, the transition between eighteenth-century belief in the "physical and moral homogeneity of man, despite superficial differences" was supplanted by the nineteenth-century insistence on the "essential heterogeneity of mankind, despite superficial similarities" (Stepan [1982], 4). The early nineteenth century witnessed a period of intense debate between the monogenists and their opponents, the polygenists, who espoused the non-Biblical view

that different races were in fact completely different and unequal species. Both monogenists and polygenists agreed that the white races were physiologically and morally superior to the dark races; however, they diverged on the exact *cause* and *character* of this racial hierarchy. In the decades leading up to Darwin's theories of evolution, phrenology, the science of the mind, created the main arena for the monogenist-polygenist debate. Beginning with the assumption that the mind was the locus and index of human civility, Victorian phrenologists developed a number of ways to measure, quantify, and evaluate the brain and the skull. Both the monogenists' and the polygenists' impassioned devotion to the possibilities and practices of skull-measuring created a broad platform from which nineteenth-century racial prejudices could be affirmed; craniometric scholarship gave scientific authority to the idea of the world's non-white races as perverse, stupid, criminal, indolent, deviant, and lascivious.

Late Victorian and early modernist fiction reflects a widespread fascination with the racial semiotics of the skull and the head. Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), for example, registers the view that travelling to the savage, tropical Dark Continent would negatively alter the structure of the head. A doctor tells Marlow before he leaves for the Congo that "I always ask, in the interests of science, to measure the crania of those going out there" and then uses calipers to get "the dimensions back and front and every way, taking notes carefully" (Conrad [1996], 26). During the War years, competing views of race and skull size appear in Sax Rohmer's best-selling Fu-Manchu novels, where the criminality as well as the genius of the Chinese villain Dr. Fu-Manchu get attributed to his abnormally large head. And as late as 1934, when the connections between anatomy and character had been weakened by science if not by popular culture, Elizabeth Lackersteen in Orwell's *Burmese Days* draws on phrenology and craniology to rationalize her hatred of Burmese natives:

"[T]hey have such hideous-shaped heads! Their skulls kind of slope up behind like a tom-cat's. And then the way their foreheads slant back—it makes them look so wicked. I remember reading something in a magazine about the shape of people's heads; it said that a person with a sloping forehead is a criminal type." (Orwell [1962], 123)

The racial differences evident in skull size were thought to manifest themselves most dangerously in the reproduction of races. As Robert Young's study *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* has shown, the many gray areas between "race" and "species" in the mid-nineteenth century were shaped by questions of fertility, hybridity, and miscegenation. Monogenists like James Cowles Prichard believed that human beings of all races could breed with no negative effects. At the other end of the spectrum, Arthur Comte de Gobineau's notorious *Essay on the Inequality of Races* (1853) warned readers that the racial purity of whites, on which civilization itself depended, would be fatally jeopardized by miscegenation: "Such is the lesson of history. It shows us that all civilizations derive from the white race, that none can exist without its help, and that a society is great and brilliant only so far as it preserves the blood of the noble group that created it, provided that this group itself belongs to the most illustrious branch of our species" (Gobineau [1967], 210). A number of other hybridity theories bridged the chasm between Prichard's benevolence and Gobineau's doom-mongering. Polygenists like Edward Long, Josiah Nott, and Paul Broca believed that while two different races could breed, the offspring would be infertile and degenerate in varying degrees, and might, therefore, face the danger of extinction. Again, Elizabeth Lackersteen's attitudes towards mixed-race characters in Orwell's *Burmese Days* express the enduring imaginative



power of Victorian hybridity theories: “So thin and weedy and cringing; and they haven’t got at all honest faces. I suppose these Eurasians are very degenerate? I’ve heard that half-castes always inherit what’s worst in both races” (Orwell [1962], 123).

The Victorian race debates became increasingly vociferous as the British Empire extended its reach; bloody political events like the Sepoy Mutiny in India (1857) and the Morant Bay Uprising in Jamaica (1865) compelled scientists to imagine the human races in a fixed hierarchy that naturalized the Anglo-Saxon nation’s ability and right to rule over its permanently savage, demonic, or childlike imperial subjects. But in the middle of the nineteenth century, Charles Darwin’s theories of human evolution and natural selection, published in *On the Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871), irrevocably changed the terrain on which race could be defined. Through Darwin’s eyes, the relatively static natural world of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century scientific thought was replaced with a natural world that evolved constantly; human beings, regardless of their color and skeletal structure, were all linked by their common descent (Banton [1998], 88). The monogenist-polygenist debates became irrelevant because, as Douglas Lorimer remarks, “Darwin had proved not only that the European was related to the Negro, but that all men were related to the ape” (Lorimer [1978], 142). But despite Darwin’s pathbreaking moves away from the prevailing nineteenth-century belief in fixed human types, his theories did not immediately transform the biases of race science in his own lifetime. Indeed, the principles underlying biological evolution were quickly re-oriented to meet sociopolitical ends, leading to the tenacious ideas behind social Darwinism. In 1869, Francis Galton published his *Hereditary Genius*, a study based on the premise that mental ability and intelligence, like physical traits, can be inherited. Galton pioneered the science of race-hygiene called eugenics, a breeding practice that would build a powerful society by eliminating the weak and selecting the strong. Galton’s ideas, and the larger body of social Darwinist thought, attracted many adherents as the nineteenth century drew to a close.

In particular, social Darwinism became one of the most powerful weapons of Queen Victoria’s Empire, which acquired millions of miles of territory and millions of new subjects between 1870 and 1914. In these years, a virtually endless stream of imperial propaganda—ranging from advertising to exhibitions to music hall ditties to picture-postcards—adopted the vocabulary of social Darwinism to disseminate the values of British monarchism, Christian missionary activity, and imperial authority to an English public. Although the forms of this propaganda were wildly varied, their message could almost always be distilled to one of white superiority in an era of forward technological, social, and biological progress. But if social Darwinism provided the language of racial and cultural progress, it also raised fears of racial and cultural regression. At the *fin de siècle*, a widespread cultural obsession with racial degeneration counterbalanced the jingoism that extolled the Empire’s racial hierarchies. General Gordon’s crushing defeat at Khartoum in 1883 shook British confidence in the Empire’s invincibility, and reports of the murder, torture, and other atrocities in the Belgian Congo reached England in 1897, exposing the deep-rooted hypocrisy of the imperial mission. Further, the heavy British casualties during the Boer War in South Africa (1899–1902) caused panic about the physiological soundness of the nation’s men. Anxiety about military and colonial incidents abroad was matched by growing social unease within England. A large body of writing about the metropolitan corruption and poverty resulting from industrialization and immigration—for example, Andrew Mearns’s pamphlet *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London* (1883), W. T. Stead’s prostitution exposé “The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon” (1885), George

Gissing's *The Nether World* (1889)—deployed the vocabulary of race and imperialism to sound an alarm about the nation's moral and physical integrity. The proliferation of poor, criminal, or sexually unregenerate white bodies in the imperial metropole incited as much fear as the dark-skinned pagan masses in the Empire's subject-nations.

Like popular journalism and sociological writings, late Victorian and early modernist fantasy literature expressed fears of social decay through racially coded metaphors. Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) imagines the monstrous criminal form lurking inside the rational English scientist; Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) brings out the hidden but inexorable decay of a society afflicted with decadence and depravity; Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) creates terror through the racial Other who invades London and literally sucks out its lifeblood. And perhaps most powerfully evocative of Darwin, H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895) narrates the futuristic tale of the beautiful white Eloi who live harmoniously above ground and are threatened by the dark, nocturnal savagery of the underground, under-evolved Morlocks. The very culture of *fin de siècle* literature and art inspired the era's best-known work on social (and implicitly, racial) collapse, Max Nordau's *Degeneration* (1895). Nordau's enormous volume railed against the immorality, excessive emotionalism, and hysteria that would inevitably be caused by the *fin de siècle* poets, playwrights, and artists who belonged to "the elements of the race which are most inimical to society" (Nordau [1993], 337). E. M. Forster's novel *Howards End* (1910) would gather together these various different spectres of cultural disintegration, depicting the contaminating degeneracy of the city slum-dwellers (embodied in the tragic figure of Leonard Bast) as well as the feminizing degeneracy of Oxford-bred aesthetes (embodied in the Schlegels's ineffectual younger brother, Tibby).

On the eve of British literary modernism, dominant British and Western European racial discourses reflected a powerful concatenation of scientific evolution, social Darwinism, and imperial ideology. While much early twentieth-century literature uncritically reproduces Victorian attitudes to race, modernism's mercurial, diverse racial formations complicated the nineteenth-century's hegemonic black/white binaries. Loosened from the confines of Victorian science, racial discourses became crucial instruments of aesthetic and intellectual revolution. In 1899, Sigmund Freud rewrote evolutionary models of race to foster a new awareness of human consciousness. Casting the chain of races as a template for the human psyche, Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* argues that each individual's movement from infancy to adult consciousness re-enacts humanity's development from (dark) savagery to (white) civilization. And in the same year, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* not only explored the intersections of human consciousness and imperial racial conquest, but also hybridized the foundational act of storytelling itself. Conrad's Marlow stands at the crossroads of multiple cultural traditions:

He had sunken cheeks, a yellow complexion, a straight back, an ascetic aspect, and, with his arms dropped, the palms of hands outwards, resembled an idol. [...] [W]ith his legs folded before him, he had the pose of a Buddha preaching in European clothes and without a lotus flower. (Conrad [1996], 18–21)

Un-white and pagan, partially Western and partially Eastern, the racial disparities of Marlow's physical appearance displace him from any single historical or literary legacy and anticipate his narrative's resistance to unified, stable perspectives.

In the decades following the publication of *Heart of Darkness*, several modernist artists and

intellectuals moved away from linear narratives of racial development, rejecting the concept of ordering human beings by degree of civility in much the same way they rejected the concept of life as a knowable series. Modernist writers invoked a host of new racialisms to mark literary innovations like free indirect discourse, nonlinear chronological sequences, the emphasis on rupture and fragments rather than continuity and wholeness, the proliferation of narrative perspectives, the dissolution of objective certainty, and the valorization of abstraction and artistic autonomy. In D. H. Lawrence's primitivist theories of "blood-consciousness," Wyndham Lewis and Roger Fry's hortatory writings about the formal virtues of African art, and Jean Rhys and Katherine Mansfield's stories about race and metropolitan modernity, an individual character or artist's multiple racial identities coexist alongside multiple chronological, spatial, and perceptual vantage-points. Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* (1930), one of the most lyrical reinventions of the English novel, intertwines historically grounded representations of race with timeless racial abstractions to subvert the master-narratives of imperial Britain. Submerged, sculptural visions of race steal through the six soliloquies in *The Waves*: whether the silhouette of the absent imperial hero Percival and the dark Indian bodies he governs, or the stylized forms of Egyptian women and turbaned warriors, Woolf's materialist and formalist investigations of modern British subjectivity re-define the racial hierarchies of nineteenth-century alterity.

The diverse visions of alterity I have mentioned here indicate that race-based aesthetics in the early twentieth century re-orient post-Enlightenment Western European conceptions of the racialized self. When modern subject formation gets refracted through modernism's linguistic and narrative prisms, numerous and contradictory racial tropes contribute to the genesis of new literary landscapes. If, as Peter Childs has noted, modernist writing is the "compressed, condensed, complex literature of the city, of industry and technology, war, machinery and speed, mass markets and communication, of internationalism, the New Woman, the aesthete, the nihilist and the flâneur" (Childs [2000], 3–4), it should be added that categories of race elementally inform the artistic treatment of these distinctly modern cultural phenomena. In the world of the moderns, as the next section of this essay will demonstrate, race manifests itself in the warp and weft of urban tapestry; it provides an unexpected forum for the sex-wars of the suffrage era; and it supplies one of the raw materials of renegade avant-garde art.

One of the richest sites of modernism's racialized aesthetic experiments is Wyndham Lewis's war-journal, *BLAST*. Its publication on 29 June 1914 represented a breakaway moment for artists working to establish a definitive English avant-garde, and the London Vorticists who contributed to Lewis's interdisciplinary and militant journal hailed the ascension of modern Anglo-Saxonist art and thought. Vorticism's political and artistic reach in the pages of *BLAST* was self-consciously vast: with their lists of Blasts and Blesses, multi-page manifestoes, and programmatic attacks on the Past and the Future, the Vorticists sought to re-order what they saw as the weakened, passive priorities of Anglo-Saxon civilization. Lewis's "puce monster" (*BLAST*'s covers were shockingly red) contained art and literature that announced their modernity relentlessly: in addition to pages of anti-mimetic sculpture and drawings, the journal showcased Ezra Pound's early Imagist poems, the opening chapter of Ford Madox Ford's impressionist novel *The Good Soldier*, Rebecca West's Vorticist short story "Indissoluble Matrimony," an excerpt from Wassily Kandinsky's *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, and Lewis's play *Enemy of the Stars*. And in several of these works, the avant-garde preoccupation with racial difference and racial identity generates formal distinctiveness as well as

political thrust: *BLAST*'s representations of race create a nexus for the radical aesthetics and the historical self-consciousness that were modernism's signature gestures.

The core concept that holds *BLAST*'s wild and often inconsistent statements together is the idea of *energy*, the Vortex's most crucial characteristic. At the end of *BLAST*, Wyndham Lewis, Ezra Pound, and the young sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brzeska all call for unceasing energy and motion in their separate definitions of the Vorticist agenda. Lewis declares that "The Vorticist is at his maximum point of energy when stillest" (Lewis [1981], 148) and that "Our Vortex is proud of its polished sides. Our Vortex will not hear of anything but its disastrous polished dance" (149). Similarly, Pound defines the Vortex as "the point of maximum energy" (in Lewis [1981], 153) and explains that "VORTICISM is art before it has spread itself out into a state of flacidity [sic], of elaboration, of secondary applications" (in Lewis [1981], 154). And Gaudier-Brzeska makes perhaps the pithiest set of claims: "VORTEX OF A VORTEX! VORTEX IS THE POINT ONE AND INDIVISIBLE! VORTEX IS ENERGY!" (in Lewis [1981], 156). Militantly opposed to French Impressionism's cultivated softness, Italian Futurism's worship of speed, and commercial art's crass pandering, *BLAST* called for a concentrated, warlike energy to revitalize England. Paintings and drawings by Lewis, Jacob Epstein, Edward Wadsworth, and Frederick Etchells—geometric and angular "fields of discord" (Lewis [1981], 142)—conveyed this energy throughout the pages of *BLAST*.

*BLAST*'s racial politics are usually suppressed in dialogues about its abstraction. But the war-journal's call for energetic, penetrating lines and angles derives from strict racial oppositions that pit modern Western humanism and rational thought against the supposedly savage or primitive instincts of non-Western cultures. William Wees's *Vorticism and the English Avant-Garde* traces Vorticism's origins to William Worringer's 1908 treatise, *Abstraction and Empathy*, which divided art into two antithetical modes: 'vital' art created by empathy, and 'geometric' art created by abstraction. Vital art, embodied by the humanistic traditions of the ancient Greeks and the Renaissance, reflects harmony between individuals and nature; conversely, geometric art, which Worringer associates with African, Chinese, Byzantine, and Egyptian cultures, indicates a troubled, uneasy relationship between humans and their natural surroundings. The English poet-philosopher T. E. Hulme disseminated Worringer's ideas to London art-circles in his famous 1914 lecture, "Modern Art and Its Philosophy." Following Worringer's lead, Hulme promoted the virtues of abstraction by relying on Western primitivism's core axiom: the unquestioned assumption that non-white, non-Western races exist in perpetual pre-modernity without the influences of reason and philosophy.

Hulme championed Worringer's distinction between vital and geometric art, insisting that modern English artists should cast off the cultural baggage of traditional naturalistic Western art and concentrate on geometric art that is "absolutely distinct from the messiness, the confusion, and the accidental details of existing things" (Hulme [1949], 87). Hulme's praise for the African or Asian "tendency to abstraction" retains a belief in Western cultures as more advanced (and more capable of advancement) than the non-Western cultures that exist in disharmonious relationships with nature. Primitive people, Hulme argues,

live in a world whose lack of order and seeming arbitrariness must inspire them with a certain fear. [...] In art this state of mind results in a desire to create a certain abstract and geometrical shape, which, being durable and permanent shall be a refuge from the flux and impermanence of outside nature. (Hulme [1949], 86)

As laudable examples of geometric art, Hulme points to Byzantine mosaics, Egyptian paintings, Indian sculpture, and Chinese ideograph art. Hulme promoted his racially determined art-theories to London painters and sculptors like David Bomberg, Jacob Epstein, Edward Wadsworth, and of course Wyndham Lewis, who devised the Vortex as the ultimate abstract geometric entity.

In executing Worringer and Hulme's theories, *BLAST* carved out the space for renovating English culture by lauding a "primitive" non-Western past and simultaneously exalting the dynamic newness of the machine-age. "We are Primitive Mercenaries in the Modern World" (Lewis [1981], 30) roars Lewis in the opening Manifesto, going on to declare that "The Art-instinct is permanently primitive" (33). Virtually all of the visual and plastic arts depicted in *BLAST* deploy non-Western, pre-modern abstraction to express modern English aesthetic practices and philosophies. The Vorticist ideas and artwork that reflect primitive urges include Henri Gaudier-Brzeska's Chinese-inspired sculpture *Stags* and his admiration for the ancient Egyptian and Mongolian "VORTEX OF DESTRUCTION" (Lewis [1981], 157); Pound's "Epitaphs" for Fu I and Li Po; and Lewis's tracts on Chinese feng-shui and his praise for "the black core of Life" (Lewis [1981], 136) in African art. On the one hand, we can read the commingling of ethnicities and chronologies as a vision of a new pan-global art. But *BLAST*'s rhetorical celebration of the art of dark races and pre-modern civilizations only extends the aesthetic colonialism of Worringer and Hulme's theories. The "puce monster's" eclectic statements about race, ultimately, instrumentalize non-Western cultures in order to glorify modern Anglo-Saxondom.

Vorticism's agenda explicitly aimed to separate England and Anglo-Saxon men from continental European nations and artistic innovations, insisting that post-Victorian England is "the most favourable country for the appearance of a great art" (Lewis [1981], 33). The English character's "unexpected universality" (35), explains *BLAST*'s first Manifesto, ensures that "a movement toward art and imagination could burst up here, from this lump of compressed life, with more force than anywhere else" (32). And because "The Modern World is due almost entirely to Anglo-Saxon genius,—its appearance and its spirit" (39), new artistic possibilities "will be more the legitimate property of Englishmen than of any other people in Europe" (Lewis [1981], 41). Vorticism, as Janet Lyon puts it, declared itself "an individualistic, noncollectivist, racially coded, and decidedly English affair" that was "inspired by an elite 'northern genius'" (Lyon [1999], 99). And in the process of strengthening the London avant-garde's oppositional, Anglo-Saxonist stance, Lewis and the Vorticists obliterated the actual non-white artists whose practices they praised, denying them visibility as well as the capacity to participate or reciprocate in aesthetic exchange. In other words, *BLAST* generated the intense, monomaniacal energy of the Anglo-Saxon Vortex by reducing non-Western primitive cultures to formal qualities that had to be wrested from their backwards birthplaces and incorporated into the modern Western metropolis.

Rebecca West's short story "Indissoluble Matrimony" complicates the masculinist, Anglo-Saxonist Vorticism espoused by *BLAST*'s male authors. Published a year before T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1915), West's "Indissoluble Matrimony" is filled with remarkably prescient moments anticipating the various crises spawned by the Great War. West foretells of a world where men are afflicted with hysteria, where teleological national histories have lost their meaning, and where women assume prominent positions in the public sphere. George Silverton, an ineffectual solicitor's clerk, returns one evening to his suburban home and is outraged to find that his black

wife Evadne has been invited to speak at a socialist meeting. George first accuses Evadne of having an affair with Stephen Longton, a prominent local socialist, and then forbids her from speaking at the meeting. Evadne, whose physical and intellectual passions terrify George, bursts furiously out of the house; George follows her to a nearby reservoir and holds her under the whirling waters until he is convinced that she has drowned. But when he returns home intent on committing a martyr's suicide, he finds Evadne sleeping on their bed and realizes, anti-climactically, that she has simply escaped him in the reservoir. The story ends with George abjectly getting into bed next to Evadne "as he had done every night for ten years, and as he would every night until he died" (West [1982], 289). Like Eliot's Prufrock, marginal and paralyzed in a metropolis where women "come and go" freely, George Silverton's Anglo-Saxon masculinity has neither autonomy nor authority in his aggressively modern world.

The climax of "Indissoluble Matrimony"—the violent physical battle between George and Evadne—exemplifies Vorticist principles of energy. Facing each other on the edge of the reservoir, George and Evadne realize "that God is war and that his creatures are meant to fight" (West [1982], 280) and then fall into the water:

The feathery confusion had looked so soft, yet it seemed the solid rock they struck. The breath shot out of him and suffocation warmly stuffed his ears and nose. Then the rock cleft and he was swallowed by a brawling blackness in which whirled a vortex that flung him again and again on a sharp thing that burned his shoulder. All about him fought the waters, and they cut his flesh like knives. (West [1982], 282)

A "vortex" of water solid like rock and polished like knives: here are the "polished sides" that Wyndham Lewis describes and the "indivisible" energy praised by Gaudier-Brzeska. The formal aesthetics of this passage provide, on one level, a literary complement to the visual art printed in *BLAST*. The battle in the whirlpool captures the intense immediacy of consciousness that Lewis and Pound describe as the still center of the Vortex. And like the other elements of *BLAST*, West's story describes the crisis of modernity as a racialized conflict between the need to overthrow traditional forms of authority and the cultural chaos that follows such a paradigm shift. However, the racial politics of "Indissoluble Matrimony"—English masculinity trounced by larger-than-life black femininity—offer up a complex, challenging counter-discourse to the foundational racial politics of *BLAST* and the Vorticist movement. The publicly visible, politically successful Negress protagonist of this story dominates the industrialized modern world of "Indissoluble Matrimony," a world over which the white male authors of *BLAST* had claimed total sovereignty. Evadne Silverton's racial alterity—extreme in physical attributes as well as character traits—becomes an unsuspected weapon in the Vorticist crusade to be absolutely modern. This story's vision of race conjoins primitivism and modernolatry, demonstrating aesthetic and political mutuality between two typically divergent avant-garde doctrines.

West's "Indissoluble Matrimony" re-orders Vorticism's cultural hegemonies, re-introducing the absent primitive artist in the socialist-activist character of Evadne Silverton. Evadne's racial alterity is not merely a conduit to English self-fashioning but stands as an epistemological force in its own right. Her combined sensuousness, intelligence, and autonomy delegitimize the Worringer-Hulme-Lewis polarization of vital and geometric form. The following passage, which describes Evadne's entrance into the vortex-whirlpool, illustrates the formal subversiveness of West's writing:

She was clad in a black bathing-dress, and her arms and legs and the broad streak of flesh laid bare by a rent down the back shone brilliantly white, so that she seemed like a grotesquely patterned wild animal as she ran down to the lake. Whirling her arms above her head she trampled down into the water and struck out strongly. Her movements were full of brisk delight and she swam quickly. The moonlight made her the centre of a little feathery blur of black and silver, with a comet's tail trailing in her wake. (West [1982], 277)

The controlled, penetrating energy of Evadne's dark body presents a feminized, racially marked incarnation of Pound and Lewis's abstract Vortex. To elevate the Anglo-Saxon male subject, *BLAST*'s manifestoes aver that "The artist of the modern movement is a savage" and that the "enormous, jangling, journalistic, fairy desert of modern life serves him as Nature did more technically primitive man" (Lewis [1981], 33). In sharp contrast, West uses Evadne to reject the separation of nature and culture that exiles "technically primitive" dark races from industrialized modernity. No English hero strides through this text: West's re-orientation of the Anglo-Saxon Vortex transforms the "fairy desert of modern life" into the territory of a culturally potent black woman.

In making Evadne, rather than George, the text's sovereign modern character, "Indissoluble Matrimony" ironizes the primitivist tropes and discourses deployed by *BLAST*'s avant-garde artists. West makes George Silverton the voice of reductive racial and primitivist assumptions and then sweeps those assumptions aside to showcase Evadne's total command over socialist thought, urban terrain, and modern marriage. To George, Evadne embodies an essential, concentrated *négritude*, a feminine sensuousness intent solely on physical pleasure:

Under her curious dress, designed in some pitifully cheap and worthless stuff by a successful mood of her indiscreet taste—she had black blood in her—her long body seemed pulsing with some exaltation. The blood was coursing violently under her luminous yellow skin, and her lids, dusky with fatigue, drooped contentedly over her great humid black eyes. Perpetually she raised her hand to the mass of black hair that was coiled on her thick golden neck and stroked it with secretive enjoyment, as a cat licks its fur. And her large mouth smiled frankly, but abstractedly, at some digested pleasure. (West [1982], 267)

George always connects Evadne's blackness to sexual excess and indiscretion, assuming that her physicality renders impossible either serious intellectual activity or emotional depth. His readings of her body reflect with comic precision a catechism of imperial-era Orientalism and primitivism. He understands their romance through a series of oversimplified racial formulas. Initially drawn to Evadne's "smouldering contralto such as only those of black blood can possess" and inspired to rescue her from her mother's "mean flat crowded with cheap glories of bead curtains and Oriental hangings" (West [1982], 270), George soon finds himself repulsed by Evadne's "excited candour" (271) and her "uncanny, Negro" demeanour "that made him feel as though they were not properly married" (268). Evadne's blackness blinds George to her political convictions and success as a socialist writer: "In the jaundiced recesses of her mind he took it for granted that her work would have the lax fibre of her character: that it would be infected with her Oriental crudities" (West [1982], 271).

However, West quickly dispenses with the imperialist and patriarchal dichotomies that conventionally pit the white mind against the black body or the virtues of masculine strength against the vices of feminine weakness. The story's opening line itself—"When George Silverton opened the

front door he found that the house was not empty for all its darkness" (West [1982], 267)—metaphorically troubles the relationships between plenitude, emptiness, and racial identity. In West's narrative, the *négritude* that has suggested a dark vortex of pre-modern, pre-linguistic knowledge to Pound and Lewis becomes the locus of feminine cultural autonomy. Evadne's blackness generates a complacent, confident rationality that contravenes against George's characterization of his wife as a "depraved, over-sexed creature" (West [1982], 272). Her untroubled intelligence not only mocks George's violently phobic racism, but also skewers large-scale fears about women's social empowerment in England during the 1910s. Aesthetic primitivism combats anti-feminism in "Indissoluble Matrimony," and West re-invents the racial underpinnings of abstract avant-garde art for political and materialist critique.

Despite George's demeaning view of his wife's socialist activity as a crude, Oriental "caper of the sensualist" (West [1982], 271), Evadne has established her public credibility: "...after reading enormously of economics, she had begun to write for the socialist Press and to speak successfully at meetings." A handbill announcing Evadne's speech at Stephen Longton's socialist meeting catalyzes George's ire: "He saw her name—his name—MRS EVADNE SILVERTON. It was at first the blaze of stout scarlet letters on the dazzling white ground that made him blink. Then he was convulsed with rage" (West [1982], 272). Linking the Silverton name to Evadne's active, public, and vocal socialism obviously sparks the fear of a greater feminine appropriation of male positions of power; Eliot's "Prufrock" would express the identical fear a year later, when the War had led to the collapse of sexual codes in both private and public spheres. "Indissoluble Matrimony" trivializes George's anxieties by framing his fear of Evadne's intellectual and political autonomy as a laughable fear of her *négritude*:

'You mustn't have anything to do with Longton,' he stormed.

A change came over her. She became ugly. Her face was heavy with intellect, her lips coarse with power. He was at arms with a socialist lead. Much he would have preferred the bland sensualist again. (West [1982], 272)

But the narrator reveals that Evadne's 'coarse' and 'heavy' features—characteristics stereotypically associated with black women—represent merely chimerical projections of George's sexual terror. Evadne's effortless calm leads her to victory in the argument over Stephen Longton's moral character:

'George. I suppose you mean that he's a bad man.' He nodded. 'I know quite well that the girl who used to be his typist is his mistress.' She spoke it sweetly, as if reasoning with an old fool. 'But she's got consumption. She'll be dead in six months. In fact, I think it's rather nice of him. To look after her and all that.' (West [1982], 272)

Evadne's sexual and social pragmatism reduces George to "a transport of hysterical sobs" (272). Her rationality denies his race-induced paranoia any legitimacy.

Outraged by Evadne's self-absorption and public visibility, George wonders if the town's asylum holds any lunatic "so slavered with madness as he himself" (West [1982], 276). The symbolically significant equation of George's weak Anglo-Saxonism with madness and hysteria anticipates the War's shell-shock epidemic, a psychological phenomenon that would hospitalize thousands of Englishmen just months after *BLAST*'s publication. In "Indissoluble Matrimony," feminine assert-



iveness, political autonomy and sexuality are the “shells” that break down the veneer of English masculine strength. (Ten years before the story’s opening, we are told, the men who work in George’s law-firm “had been reduced to hysteria over the estates of an extraordinarily stupid old woman” (West [1982], 269) whose “vast income” throws the all-male legal practice into an inexplicable frenzy.) Masculine paranoia wells up in George’s marriage to Evadne, where the couple’s racially coded conflicts make George “determined to be a better man than her” (272). Misha Kavka argues that “World War I rifted the moral masculine order of the Edwardian era, shocking it out of its supposedly natural foundations and exposing it as a construct” (Kavka [1998], 153); in this context, George’s recognition of his powerlessness presages the traumatic masculine self-knowledge that the War would induce. The story’s depiction of George’s uncontrollable hysteria—a signifier for racial and sexual failures—provides a remarkable simulacrum of the psychic horrors that the English War poets would convey in bleak verse, that West herself would explore in *The Return of the Soldier* (1919), and that Virginia Woolf would create for Septimus Smith in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925).

If through race the story foreshadows the sexual anarchy caused by the War, it also racializes the sexual debates contemporaneous with *BLAST*’s publication. By casting Evadne as a socialist platform speaker, “Indissoluble Matrimony” yokes itself to the heated, turbulent discourses surrounding feminism and women’s suffrage before the War, discourses that Rebecca West herself was instrumental in developing. Although West does not identify Evadne as a suffragette, Evadne’s feminism speaks directly to the dominant concerns of England’s vote-seeking women. Uninterested in cultivating domestic skills, impassioned about politics, and childless, Evadne seems to conform to the vicious stereotypes linked to suffragettes who rejected late Victorian or Edwardian idealizations of passive, gentle, and maternal femininity. Like George Silverton’s charge that Evadne’s political commitments make her sound “like a woman off the streets” (West [1982], 272), pre-War public discourses about suffragettes cohered most fundamentally around definitions of morality, femininity, and womanhood. As Lisa Tickner has demonstrated in *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign 1907–1914*, the massive campaign for women’s suffrage—its demonstrations, protests, pageants, journalism, artwork—met with an equally massive barrage of anti-suffrage sentiment, which pathologized women’s desire for autonomy as a sign of unwomanliness, madness, or disease. Opposition to women’s suffrage produced a kind of anti-feminist typology; pejorative categories like the ‘Shrieking Sister,’ the ‘Modern Woman,’ the ‘Hysterical Woman,’ and the ‘Militant Woman’ accrued around suffragettes and politically active women in English newspapers, editorial cartoons, and propaganda. In this context, Evadne’s intellectual lucidity and physical magnificence reproach the widespread paranoia about degeneration and unwomanliness augured by women’s entrance into public and political spheres.

West’s painterly renderings of Evadne appropriate primitivist iconography to subvert the anti-feminist iconography wielded against ugly, hysterical, or mannish suffragettes. “Indissoluble Matrimony” ironizes pre-War images associated with womanliness and motherhood, putting Evadne in classic maternal poses when she is most explicitly political or self-sufficient. For example, in what George assumes is a conciliatory gesture following the fight about Evadne’s speech, Evadne “lay back with his head drawn to her bosom, rocking herself rhythmically” (West [1982], 273). The visual image of a black woman providing non-verbal solace to an Anglo-Saxon man troubled by modernization seems complicit with the primitivist semiotics of *BLAST*’s other artwork. But the rhythms of Evadne’s body express neither the abstract natural harmony that *BLAST*’s authors attribute to the

dark races nor the abundant generosity that supposedly characterizes wives and mothers. Rather, Evadne rocks herself according to the phrases of the socialist speech she is rehearsing: “Then it struck [George] that each breath was a muttered phrase. He stiffened, and hatred flamed through his veins. The words came clearly through her lips [...] ‘The present system of wage-slavery...’” (West [1982], 274). Evadne’s racial alterity radicalizes the iconic images of traditional femininity that were being used to upbraid politically active Englishwomen for their putatively anti-maternal and anti-familial attitudes.

Similarly, the formal virtues of primitivist or Africanist aesthetics work to feminist advantage at the story’s close, when George has his anti-climactic realization that Evadne has not drowned in the reservoir:

Evadne lay on his deathbed. She slept there soundly, with her head flung back on the pillows so that her eyes and brow seemed small in shadow, and her mouth and jaw huge above her thick throat in the light. [...] Her breast, silvered with sweat, shone in the ray of the street lamp that had always disturbed their nights. The counterpane rose enormously over her hips in rolls of glazed linen. Out of mere innocent sleep her sensuality was distilling a most drunken pleasure. (West [1982], 288)

The gigantism of Evadne’s black body suggests the primitivist sculptures of Gaudier-Brzeska and Henry Moore, as well as the Africanized Venus in Henri Matisse’s culturally dense painting *Blue Nude* (1907). George’s belief in his racially or sexually determined dominance collapses at the spectacle of Evadne’s self-sufficiency. His anti-epiphanic realization that “[b]odies like his do not kill bodies like hers” confesses the Anglo-Saxon male’s powerlessness to control or destroy the modern-primitive-feminist Evadne, whose physical strength and intelligence trivialize masculinity and virulent misogyny. The story’s concluding lines augur an ineluctable masculine cultural paralysis: “He was beaten. He undressed and got into bed; as he had done every night for ten years, and as he would do every night until he died. Still sleeping, Evadne caressed him with warm arms” (West [1982], 289). While George surrenders to the devastation of his worldview and his agency, Evadne presents a final, compelling imbrication of Vorticist doctrine, primitivist imagery, and feminine independence. The single image of her unconscious caresses offers a feminist précis of Pound and Lewis’s Vortex, where maximum energy can be found at a still center.

Jo Anna Isaak avers that avant-garde primitivism “was one of the major strategies to facilitate the creation of the autonomous, autotelic work of art—a work of art relieved of its semantic or representational function, precisely because meaning with an *a priori* existence had been repudiated” (Isaak [1982], 73). Rebecca West’s Evadne Silverton re-directs the modernist idea of autotelic art: the sensuous calm of Evadne’s body corresponds to a self-sufficiency that is both aesthetic *and* political. In other words, the formalist primitivism of Evadne’s body gives rise to a public cultural autonomy that liberates her from the patriarchal strictures represented by George. Simultaneously primitive and contemporary, sexual and intellectual, Evadne wrests modernity’s private, public, and natural spaces from the Anglo-Saxon artists who claim to dominate them. Her blackness operates as a powerful instrument of critique in the story’s sexual and political battles, upholding and upending Wyndham Lewis’s Vorticist principles.

Wyndham Lewis’s war-journal exemplifies Raymond Williams’s claim that modernism exhibits an “internal diversity of methods and emphases: a restless and often directly competitive sequence of innovations and experiments” (Williams [1989], 43); and *BLAST* reveals the centrality of race

for some of the most contradictory, least harmonious angles of avant-garde experimentation. In *BLAST*'s structurally and thematically divergent artistic offerings, manifold visions of race express the abundant meanings that accrued around conceptions of "the modern," so that race shapes a language of cultural critique and yields the material for artistic innovation. The journal's polemical manifestoes rely on racial identities to signify the effects of modern mechanization and capitalism on selfhood; for Wyndham Lewis and his contemporaries, racial difference expresses modernity's prison houses as well as its vistas of progress. And when race becomes the foundation for artistic abstraction, as it does in *BLAST*'s self-consciously experimental sculpture, drawings, and literature, it also provides a bridge connecting the abstract form of a work of art to the historical moment in which it intervenes. In other words, racial identity—colonial, anti-colonial, extra-colonial—mediates the avant-garde's material concerns as profoundly as it structures self-referential or autotelic art. If the reaction-formations that constituted modernism were obsessed with "making it new," then *BLAST*'s artistic evocations of *being modern*—whether departures from the past, reifications of the present moment, or movements toward the future—illuminate a complex mutuality between discourses of race and emergent discourses of twentieth-century modernity.

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## Modernism and Ecological Criticism

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One wanted fifty pairs of eyes to see with, she reflected. Fifty pairs of eyes were not enough to get round that one woman with, she thought.

*To the Lighthouse*

Although in the field of literary studies the term “modernist” often indicates a movement in English and American literature that reached its high point in the first half of the twentieth century, the roots of Western modernism lie in the sixteenth-century events of the Scientific Revolution. Many of the attributes we normally associate with literary modernism—obscurantism; moral relativism; pessimism; inner, cultural, and formal fragmentation—emerge from and respond to the narrative of events that began with the advent of modern science and the discoveries of Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler, and Newton. One modern artistic impulse in particular is significant in this regard, that of early twentieth-century artists’ ambivalence in their attempts to employ creativity to order their worlds and discover meaning for themselves and others. Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* serves as an especially fruitful text to investigate this concept. In exploring this novel in the light of the broader philosophical history of modernism, and using principles offered by the emerging field of ecocriticism, we are better able to understand the modernist approach to the issue of art and its ordering function.

Ecocriticism, as defined by Cheryll Glotfelty in her introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader*, “is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach” (Glotfelty and Fromm [1996], xviii). “Ecological criticism,” as it is also called, works from “the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it. Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artifacts of language and literature” (Glotfelty and Fromm [1996], xix). An ecocritical methodology has much to offer as an approach to modern literature, not only because modern artists displayed a significant interest in natural elements in their work—think, for example, of the natural imagery that dominates the conclusion of Eliot’s “The Waste Land,” or of Hemingway’s Nick Adams stories—but also because a central question for artists and intellectuals in the early part of the twentieth century became how humans could somehow render their experiences with a more-than-human world.

Much of the often discussed alienation of twentieth-century humanity results directly from a fundamental uncertainty about the relationship between human and non-human nature, an uncertainty

that did not exist prior to the dawn of modern science. In *The Reenchantment of the World* (1984), Morris Berman articulates an argument that has almost become an ecocritical commonplace. In short, he maintains that the modern split between humanity and non-human nature has resulted from what he calls a “progressive disenchantment” of the world roughly since the advent of the Scientific Revolution, and that as a result our sense of place in the world has been seriously undermined, if not eradicated. Whereas pre-modern Westerners lived out of what Berman calls a “participating consciousness,” we in the late twentieth century have lost any sense of this type of perspective that “involves merger, or identification, with one’s surroundings, and bespeaks a psychic wholeness that has long since passed from the scene” (Berman [1984], 2). According to Berman,

[t]he view of nature which predominated in the West down to the eve of the Scientific Revolution was that of an enchanted world. Rocks, trees, rivers, and clouds were all seen as wondrous, alive, and human beings felt at home in this environment. The cosmos, in short, was a place of belonging. A member of this cosmos was not an alienated observer of it but a direct participant in its drama. His personal destiny was bound up with its destiny, and this personal destiny was bound up with its destiny, and this relationship gave meaning to his life. (Berman [1984], 2)

Berman contrasts this feeling of belonging with what he calls “scientific consciousness,” which “can best be described as disenchantment, nonparticipation, for it insists on a rigid distinction between observer and observed”:

Scientific consciousness is alienated consciousness: there is no ecstatic merger with nature, but rather total separation from it. Subject and object are always seen in opposition to each other. I am not my experiences, and thus not really a part of the world around me. The logical end point of this world view is a feeling of total reification: everything is an object, alien, not-me; and I am an object too, an alienated ‘thing’ in a world of other, equally meaningless things. (Berman [1984], 2–3)

Berman’s description of this “alienated consciousness” represents the crisis that romantics have been trying to address for a couple of centuries now, and it is emblematic of the “wastelandic” state of affairs that literary modernists attempted to address during the first half of the twentieth century.

Berman’s argument has been expounded upon by numerous critics from a myriad of fields. The historian Carolyn Merchant offers slightly different terms for the same general phenomenon, explaining that the contemporary Western worldview, which she characterizes as a “mechanistic” view, replaced the “organic” perspective of the Renaissance in which the cosmos “was a living organism” (Merchant [1980], 42). And the physicist Fritjof Capra, who focuses primarily on the evolution of Western science, employs essentially the same terms as Merchant, observing that the nature of medieval science was organic and thus “very different” from that of the more mechanistic contemporary science: “It was based on both reason and faith and its main goal was to understand the meaning and significance of things, rather than prediction and control” (Capra [1983], 53).

In applying these contemporary thinkers’ ideas to early twentieth-century art, the connection between the Scientific Revolution and modern art becomes more clear. Modern science’s lesson that the world is a machine to be studied led eventually, over several centuries, to a perspective that left many humans wondering if they themselves were merely mechanistic parts of a great machine, rather than central and significant members of an organic, interdependent, symbiotic world full of meaning. This disconnected, disenchanted “feeling of total reification” that Berman, Merchant,

and Fritjof describe, is, of course, much of what modern artists, in different media, railed against and tried to work through, largely by means of the structuring functions of art, myth, and tradition. However, a keen ambivalence accompanied these attempts at order. On the one hand, modern artists (like those in previous centuries) chose Prometheus as a favorite symbolic presence to demonstrate the heights to which humans can climb as they break free from societal and cultural constraints concerning what is allowed or proper. This liberating aspect of the myth increasingly extended to artists as they portrayed themselves as creators with the ability, through their work, to steal spiritual fire from the gods and deliver it to an alienated humanity in a coherent and meaningful way. On the other hand, though, due to the isolated fragmentation and deracination they experienced in the modern world, artists became increasingly less confident about art's ability to provide the means to clearly and effectively understand and convey the reality they encountered. Thus their work became more and more fragmented, less and less "controlled," resulting in, for example, Eliot's and Crane's poetry, Joyce's and Stein's and Faulkner's fiction, Picasso's and Braque's cubist painting.

Virginia Woolf's literary career has been examined with regard to her perspective on this issue of art's ability to order and give meaning to a chaotic modern experience. The Woolf canon contains a large number of artists, modern Prometheuses who attempt to employ creativity to order their worlds and gain freedom for themselves and others. In Rachel Vinrace's music, Clarissa Dalloway's parties, Mrs. Ramsay's dinners, Lily Briscoe's painting, and Miss La Trobe's awkward, limping dramatic production, we perceive the modern impulse to bring meaning and order to a chaotic existence. Speculating on these characters with regard to Woolf's perspective on art and its liberating power, critics often interpret *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and *Between the Acts* (1940) as the two distinct bookends of the spectrum, with the earlier *To the Lighthouse* representing the apex of Woolf's belief in art's Promethean power to offer "an escape into a higher, self-created realm of being" (Swingle [1980], 90), and *Between the Acts* revealing Woolf's (at least partially) lost faith in these powers. Proponents of this view argue that Woolf, who earlier in her career had affirmed art's creative powers, forsook this vision by the end of her life, in 1941, largely as a result of the War and what she called the "menace of the real world," which repeatedly broke into and disrupted the unified and coherent vision she was attempting to create with her art.

Although this argument is very plausible, to read *To the Lighthouse* as a non-problematic, enthusiastic endorsement of art's Promethean powers, is to overlook many of the undercurrents that present themselves through the course of the novel. A close reading of *To the Lighthouse*, and in particular its middle "Time Passes" section, reveals that by the mid-1920s, Woolf was well on her way to recognizing the problematics involved in relying on art to present a totalizing, final portrayal of reality, to have a "vision" as Lily Briscoe calls it. In other words, like her modern artistic contemporaries, Woolf was, even early in the century, reacting against the ethos of control that had emerged in the West roughly four centuries earlier. While Woolf does appear to be open to, at times even longing for, the possibility of art's ordering function, a keen ambivalence also exists within the novel, as she points out both the limitations and the destruction that result from an attempt to use art to order the world.

It is easy to see why this concept of art's creative, liberating powers has been so popular in the discussion of *To the Lighthouse*. After all, the novel's climactic statement—Lily Briscoe's "I have had my vision"—is hard to read as anything but an example of art's triumph over a world of opposites and uncertainties. And this is only one example. In fact, virtually every major character is connected



with a prominent scene in which she or he employs some sort of art hoping to attain a “vision,” a coherent, un-chaotic perspective on the world. For instance, in the famous “Boeuf en Daube” scene, Mrs. Ramsay’s art brings order to the chaos of diverse and incongruous guests at the table. Likewise, Mr. Ramsay’s alphabetical ordering of his consciousness, though not exactly an attractive alternative to most readers, does structure the divergent thoughts of his mind. Also, Mrs. MacNab is able to take the disordered world of the forsaken house, overgrown by non-human nature, and restore order to the wild and unmanageable scene. And James, as a result of his successful navigation of the unstable waters surrounding the lighthouse, wins the affirmation of his father and thus stabilizes that relationship.

Inherent in each of these artistic expressions is an attempt to capture life, to environ, circumscribe, and contain experience. L. J. Swingle discusses this concept of enclosure in relation to *Between the Acts*, quoting Woolf from *The Common Reader*: It is modern critics’ duty to look upon “writers as if they were engaged upon some vast building, which being built by common effort, the separate workmen may well remain anonymous” (Woolf [1967], vol. II, 161). Swingle then explains that for Woolf, “[t]he artist is a builder, a creator of enclosures, which implies that there is a world to be protected, and also a world to be shut out” (Swingle [1980], 89). This artistic process of building, enclosing, and shutting out also appears throughout *To the Lighthouse*, for instance in Mrs. Ramsay’s ability to “resolve everything into simplicity” (Woolf [1981], 160), in Mr. Ramsay’s fear of the ebb and flow of the surf and subsequent need for the dependable, structured alphabet, or in Lily’s belief that participating in the artistic moment means “exchang[ing] the fluidity of life for the concentration of painting” (Woolf [1981], 158). Like Lily—who considers empty space as “this formidable ancient enemy of hers” and thus paints because she knows that when she “score[s] her canvas with brown running nervous lines,” “no sooner [had the lines] settled there than they enclosed [...] a space” (Woolf [1981], 158)—the characters attempt to environ their individual experiences of the world, to freeze life by encompassing it within their own respective forms of art. And to a certain extent, these attempts are successful; to quote Lily, they allow the artists to say, “Life, stand still here”.

After a second look, however, each of these Promethean “orderings” is somewhat dubious, each of these environ-ments quite fragile; they are momentary at best, and illusory at worst. After all, as soon as Mrs. Ramsay leaves the dinner table, she realizes that the entire “scene was vanishing even as she looked, and then, as she moved and [...] left the room, it changed, it shaped itself differently; it had become, she knew, giving one last look at it over her shoulder, already the past” (Woolf [1981], 111). Likewise, as Alex Zwerdling points out, despite the pride that both James and Lily take in their respective accomplishments at the end of the novel, these victories are just as fleeting: “Can we really imagine that Mr. Ramsay’s praise of his son will significantly alter their tense relationship? Or that Lily Briscoe’s completion of her painting will make her less prone to the self-lacerating doubts that had undermined her confidence as an artist?” (Zwerdling [1986], 209). In these instances art proves to be transitory; at other points it is not even capable of momentary fruition. Consider, for example, the intensity with which Lily longs to understand and give meaning to her world:

What was it then? What did it mean? Could things thrust their hands up and grip one; could the blade cut; the fist grasp? [...] Could it be, even for elderly people, that this was life?—startling, unexpected, unknown? For one moment she felt that if they both got up, here, now on the lawn, and demanded an explanation, why was it so short, why was it so inexplicable, said it with violence, as two fully equipped

human beings from who nothing should be hid might speak, then, beauty would roll itself up; the space would fill; those empty flourishes would form into shape; if they shouted loud enough Mrs. Ramsay would return. (Woolf [1981], 180)

But of course Lily does call Mrs. Ramsay's name, and of course Mrs. Ramsay does not return. Whereas at times art creates temporary fulfillment, here we see its impotence. As Abel writes, "[p]aint no more than words can conjure this return, except momentarily in fantasy" (Abel [1989], 77). Ultimately, art is not quite up to the task of completely ordering the chaos. In the end, life continually refuses to "stand still here."

It would seem that if any part of *To the Lighthouse* could be used to endorse the human ability to manage a disordered experience, it would be "Time Passes," which narrates the ten years the house stands empty of the influence of the Ramsays. After all, it is during this middle section that the world at its most uncontrollable is tamed by Mrs. MacNab and her own brand of art. However, a close reading of "Time Passes" reveals the depth of Woolf's ambivalence toward the ordering function of art.

In order to demonstrate this ambivalence, I would like to use the framework set up by environmental historian William Cronon, who echoes narrative theorists when he explains that the narrator of a story, and the perspective which that narrator takes with regards to his or her work, matters immensely. Regardless of who the narrator is, the telling of the story involves legitimation and power:

Narrative succeeds to the extent that it hides the discontinuities, ellipses, and contradictory experiences that would undermine the intended meaning of its story. Whatever its overt purpose, it cannot avoid a covert exercise of power: it inevitably sanctions some voices while silencing others. A powerful narrative reconstructs common sense to make the contingent seem determined and the artificial seem natural. (Cronon [1992], 1349–50)

In his analysis of the connections between nature, history, and power relations in narrative, Cronon argues that historical narratives dealing with both people and place usually flow in one of two general directions at a time. A *progressive* tale is one that shows the world evolving toward some sort of golden age when things will be better than they are now. A *declensionist* tale, on the other hand, travels in the opposite direction, showing the world moving farther and farther away from an idyllic golden age; in this type of narrative, things get worse.

To use Cronon's framework, two different readings can exist based on the events that occur within "Time Passes": the conventional one that begins as declensionist and ultimately turns progressive, and an alternative version that is initially progressive before turning declensionist in the end. In both perspectives, Mrs. MacNab represents an artistic Prometheus, envining, subduing, and giving order to the unruly world she faces; yet the different interpretations suggest two different takes on how we should read this Prometheus and her attempts to control nonhuman nature, the story's silenced "other."

To oversimplify somewhat, the conventional reading of "Time Passes" goes more or less like this. At the beginning of the story, the inhabitants of the house leave, thus initiating the declensionist portion of the narrative. Over ten years, despite Mrs. MacNab's attempts to battle the forces of time and nature, the "deserted" house is slowly overcome: dust accumulates, cobwebs appear, rust and

decay set in, toads make their way into the rooms of the house, swallows nest in the drawing-room, the place goes “to rack and ruin” (Woolf [1981], 137–8); and all of this occurs in complete indifference to humankind. In fact, details about the Ramsays are relegated to parenthetical brackets. But in the end, the narrative turns progressive, moving from negative to positive as Mrs. McNab, along with Mrs. Bast and her son, subdue the wild forces of nature and restore a semblance of civilization to this chaotic world. As a result, the Ramsays and their friends are allowed to return to the world that fortunately looks, as Mr. Carmichael says, “much as it used to look” (Woolf [1981], 142).

On one level, this interpretation certainly works. Indeed, it appears to be the only version of the story considered by Mrs. McNab, Lily Briscoe, Mr. Carmichael, and the recently returned Ramsays. It also appears to be the one most readily accepted by most Woolf critics. For an earlier example of this interpretation, consider Thomas A. Vogler, who writes that in “Time Passes,” “[w]e enter sleep, death, chaos, nothingness, a house without a soul, a world without a consciousness except that of the author” (Vogler [1970], 33). More recently, Rosenman has argued that the section represents the time when “[d]eath deconstructs the maternal icon” of Mrs. Ramsay; “here nature overcomes her, breaking its vessel and becoming inhuman, terrifying, fatal” (Rosenman [1986], 105). (For other examples of critics who view the story strictly from the perspective of the humans, see Ruotolo [1986], 134–5 and Emery [1992], 217–31.)

However, on closer examination, when viewing the events from the perspective of non-human nature itself, we notice the narrator offering an alternative version of this narrative, one that is much less progressive in the end. According to this reading, Mrs. McNab is not a heroic artist attempting to save civilization from the monstrous wilderness, but rather an intruder who “lurch[es],” “leer[s],” and “grind[s],” who “tear[s] the veil of silence” that has been created by nature, “grinding it with boots that had crunched the shingle” (Woolf [1981], 130). Instead of nature, it is now Mrs. McNab who is the “other.” From this perspective, the narrative begins as a progressive tale, with the departure of the human inhabitants of the house signaling nature’s liberation; and like the conventional reading, this one also shifts as a result of Mrs. McNab’s efforts. The difference is that this reading views the events from the perspective of non-human nature and thus interprets the narrative as declining, instead of progressing, in the end. By offering this subversive version of the “Time Passes” chapter, the narrator suggests an alternative interpretation of the modern Promethean impulse to order the world.

From the opening to the conclusion of “Time Passes,” the narrator’s wording, tone, and rhetoric all suggest that a reading such as this is warranted. Nature’s liberation begins in the first section of the story as the humans put out the lamps. For the next two sections, an imposing human presence still exists within the house. Nature, initially represented primarily in the form of the “certain airs, detached from the body of the wind,” creeps throughout the house but is unable to roam where it wants, for since the Ramsays still inhabit the bedrooms, the airs must stop their progress there (Woolf [1981], 126). But by the opening of section IV, the house is “empty,” human barriers no longer precluding the non-human essence from exploring and filling the entirety of the house: “So with the house empty and the doors locked and the mattresses rolled round, those stray airs, advance guards of great armies, blustered in, brushed bare boards, nibbled and fanned, met nothing in bedroom or drawing-room that wholly resisted them” (Woolf [1981], 128–9). As a result, this world becomes one where “loveliness reigned and stillness, and together made the shape of loveliness itself” (Woolf [1981], 129). Here, “loveliness and stillness clasped hands” and asked two questions

to the non-human inhabitants of the house: "Will you fade? Will you perish?" Yet even these questions "scarcely disturbed the peace, the indifference, the air of pure integrity" of the natural scene, for the "question they asked scarcely needed that they should answer: we remain" (Woolf [1981], 129). In this world it is nature itself that is immortal.

By emphasizing the "peace" and "integrity" of the natural scene, the narrator sets the reader up to experience the disturbing presence of Mrs. McNab. The narrator explains that "[n]othing it seemed could break that image [of peace, indifference, integrity], or disturb the swaying mantle of silence" that existed "week after week" within and around the house (Woolf [1981], 129). But in direct contradiction to her statement, the narrator immediately depicts the appearance of Mrs. McNab—here the artist figure—within the peace, her very presence "tearing the veil of silence with hands that had stood in the wash-tub, grinding it with boots that had crunched the shingle" (Woolf [1981], 130). Section V continues the description of the destructive Mrs. McNab, who "lurched (for she rolled like a ship at sea) and leered (for her eyes fell on nothing directly, but with a sidelong glance that deprecated the scorn and anger of the world—she was witless, she knew it), as she clutched the banisters and hauled herself upstairs and rolled from room to room" (Woolf [1981], 130). The ugly, almost sinister verbs that the narrator employs imply that the woman we see is not to be viewed as our heroine.

This idea of Mrs. McNab's eyes falling "on nothing directly" is key here, as the narrator offers this detail to point out the key flaw in Mrs. McNab, the flaw that prevents her from perceiving, appreciating, possibly even becoming a part of the silence. She lacks the necessary vision to acknowledge the unity and fecundity of the scene. As a point of contrast, the narrator presents "the mystic, the visionary," who appears to be able to see things "directly":

The mystic, the visionary, walking the beach on a fine night, stirring a puddle, looking at a stone, asking themselves 'What am I,' 'What is this?' had suddenly an answer vouchsafed them: (they could not say what it was) so that they were warm in the frost and had comfort in the desert. But Mrs McNab continued to drink and gossip as before. (Woolf [1981], 131)

Whereas the mystic sees nature as concrete, as real, Mrs. McNab on the other hand views it, when she thinks of it at all, sentimentally, in the romantic sense. The narrator tells us that Mrs. McNab is "fond of flowers," that she picks them because it would be "a pity to let them waste," not because she intuitively feels some sort of connection between herself and something real (Woolf [1981], 135).

For the next three-and-a-half sections of the story, the natural forces within the house become more and more wild, extending themselves throughout the house. As they do so, they become more and more "eyeless and watchful and entirely careless of what was done or thought by the beholders" (Woolf [1981], 131). Simultaneously, nature grows increasingly wild and full of "this silence, this indifference, this integrity" (133). As the narrative progresses, Mrs. McNab continues to interrupt the peace of the natural world, the narrator telling us that she once again "broke in and lurched about" (133). And again, Mrs. McNab is juxtaposed and contrasted with those whose eyes are capable of seeing things directly, those whom the narrator calls "the wakeful, the hopeful" (132), who are capable of experiencing "imaginings of the strangest kind—of flesh turned to atoms which drove before the wind, of stars flashing in their hearts, of cliff, sea, cloud, and sky brought together to assemble outwardly the scattered parts of the vision within" (132). In short, these "wakeful" people are capable of realizing their connection with the nonhuman world. They realize that their

minds, “the minds of men,” are only “mirrors [...] of uneasy water” that reflect the reality of the natural world. And with this vision, it is “impossible to resist the strange intimation which every gull, flower, tree, man and woman, and the white earth itself seemed to declare (but if questioned at once to withdraw) that good triumphs, happiness prevails, order rules” (132). Notice here that from the perspective of the wakeful, who see things directly, humanity is included in the litany of natural beings, the “tokens of divine bounty” (133).

In section VIII, Mrs. McNab returns again to disturb the scene; she feels regret that the house has “stood all these years without a soul in it” (Woolf [1981], 135). But the evidence that the narrator offers throughout “Time Passes” belies this statement about an absence of soul in the house. On the contrary, nature has been anthropomorphized to the extent that it has not only a soul—it is portrayed as feeling compassionate, immortal, even malevolent—but also a personality. Ironical statements such as this one by Mrs. McNab are often employed by the narrator to point out the short-sighted vision that is the result of considering only one version of the story.

For instance, the penultimate section of “Time Passes” displays most clearly the narrator’s irony. She begins the section by explaining that “life had left” the house (Woolf [1981], 137). Such a statement demands that we read it ironically, especially with regard to what the narrator has told and will soon tell us about the intense fecundity that exists within and around the house. In reality, despite the fact that humans have “deserted” it, the house is more alive than ever. The narrator portrays nature at its height, having been allowed to grow wild; it has moved where it will, since “[n]othing now withstood [it]; nothing said no to [it]” (Woolf [1981], 138). We see the “swallows nested in the drawing-room,” the floor “strewn with straw,” and rats and butterflies moving freely about the house (137). Flowers and weeds commingle, and “the gentle tapping of a weed at the window” makes “the whole room green in summer” (138). Whereas in the conventional reading, this scene represents the lowest depths of decline, human civilization having lost control of the nonhuman world, from this alternate perspective the scene represents the highest point of progression.

Almost laughingly, the narrator at this point asks what appears to be a merely rhetorical question:

What power could now prevent the fertility, the insensibility of nature? Mrs McNab’s dream of a lady, of a child, of a plate of milk soup? It had wavered over the walls like a spot of sunlight and vanished. She had locked the door; she had gone. It was beyond the strength of one woman, she said. (Woolf [1981], 138)

The rhetorical answer to the narrator’s question would seem to be “No, of course not. Mrs. McNab was right to view herself as unable to ‘prevent the fertility, the insensibility of nature.’” But as the story continues, we discover that she not only can, but actually does prevent this fertility of nature.

However, before turning the narrative back toward its decline, the narrator offers a vision of the idyllic future that could take place if nature were allowed to have its way and continue its autonomous growth. She speculates that “[o]ne feather” could tip the scale and produce the future she envisions, a future where in “the ruined room, picnickers would have lit their kettles,” because

the roof would have fallen; briars and hemlocks would have blotted out path, step, and window; would have grown, unequally but lustily over the mound, until some trespasser, losing his way, could have told

only by a red-hot poker among the nettles, or a scrap of china in the hemlock that here once some one had lived; there had been a house. (Woolf [1981], 138–9)

The narrator is quick to note, though, that her vision is mere speculation:

*If the feather had fallen, if it had tipped the scale downwards, the whole house would have plunged to the depths to lie upon the sands of oblivion. But there was a force working; something not highly conscious; something that leered, something that lurched.* (Woolf [1981], 139; emphasis added)

Had the feather fallen, the narrative could have continued its progression. But as a result of the “not highly conscious” force, the feather does not fall. The narrator does not explicitly state until the next sentence what the force is, but by the repetition of the signal verbs “leered” and “lurched,” we understand where the force comes from: Mrs. McNab again. Also, by stating that it is Mrs. McNab, not nature, who is “not highly conscious,” the narrator once again subverts the surface reading of the narrative.

The narrator’s tone remains full of irony as she humorously depicts the “slapp[ing] and slamm[ing]” of Mrs. McNab who “groaned,” and Mrs. Bast who “creaked,” as they attempt to get the house “ready” (Woolf [1981], 139). Parodying a colonizing propagandist, she tells us how the two old women courageously “*stayed* the corruption and the rot,” how they “*rescued* from the pool of Time that was fast closing over them now a basin, now a cupboard,” and how they “*fetched up from oblivion* all the Waverley novels and a tea-set” (Woolf [1981], 139; emphasis added). She tells us that “some rusty laborious birth seemed to be taking place,” and here is where the irony of the scene hits full force. Added to the humor, which still exists within the scene, is the acknowledgment that to the “other,” a birth for those in power is often oppression for those who are not. To ensure that we at least examine, if not question, the imperialistic concepts of “creating” by destroying, of “civilizing” what is “barbaric” or chaotic, the narrator describes Mrs. McNab and Mrs. Bast’s work with other typical colonialist terms such as “conquest” and “triumph” (Woolf [1981], 139–40).

Then finally, as section IX closes, the narrator presents what amounts to a eulogy for the non-human nature that has been put down, though not killed, by “the cleaning and the scrubbing and the scything and the mowing”:

And now as if the cleaning and the scrubbing and the scything and the mowing had drowned it there rose that half-heard melody, that intermittent music which the ear half catches but lets fall; a bark, a bleat; irregular, intermittent, yet somehow related; the hum of an insect, the tremor of cut grass, dissevered yet somehow belonging; the jar of a dorbeetle, the squeak of a wheel, loud, low, but mysteriously related; which the ear strains to bring together and is always on the verge of harmonising, but they are never quite heard, never fully harmonised, and at last, in the evening, one after another the sounds die out, and the harmony falters, and silence falls. (Woolf [1981], 141)

Of course on a literal level, this passage simply refers to the falling of night, as darkness approaches and sounds die out. But when read in concert with the rest of “Time Passes,” more than a hint of mourning comes through in the tone of words and phrases like “drowned,” “tremor,” “dissevered,” “die out,” “falters.” Then finally, as if to solidify the notion that this mourning is a result of the return of humans, the section ends with a parenthetical reference telling us of Lily Briscoe’s reappearance at the house (Woolf [1981], 141).

The narrator concludes her “Time Passes” narrative by portraying the relationship between the human and non-human worlds. In this description, which occurs once the humans have regained control of the house, nature appears to be something of a tame, peaceful, caring, patient, guardian angel, watching over the humans as they sleep. The “voice of the beauty of the world” speaks to the humans, “too softly to hear exactly what it said.” Although the exact meaning cannot be ascertained, the ultimate request of the voice is made clear. Nature asks the humans “if they would not actually come down to the beach itself at least to lift the blind and look out” (Woolf [1981], 142). Having lost the freedom and autonomy it was allowed for ten years, nature appears to be exploring its final option: to ask humans “at least to lift the blind and look out” and see things directly, at least to awaken to the possibility of other voices and, by extension, alternative readings of familiar stories.

Ultimately, this challenge represents the key concept the narrator offers her readers by telling a story with alternative interpretations. She shows us that something else is going on underneath the everyday “ordinary” world, that stories can be viewed in many ways, and that doing so often allows us to recognize that certain voices are sanctioned at the expense of others’ ability or opportunity to speak. Mrs. MacNab is indeed able to use her art (along with the lawnmower of Mrs. Bast’s son) to bring order to disorder; in effect, she is able to say “Life stand still here.” But a broader perspective on the story implies that life will not stand still indefinitely. And by revealing the many voices who are silenced as a result of those efforts, the story exposes the losses incurred in trying to force it to do so.

When considered in connection with Woolf’s views on art, the implications of a reading such as this are highly significant. By allowing us to view this narrative from the point of view of the victim, nature, the narrator effectively alters the form of her story. The extreme version of the narrative’s traditional interpretation allows it to approach the status of what Roland Barthes called a *myth*, free from the fetters of complexity and able to be employed to legitimate the destruction and denial of the other “natural” souls in the house. As Barthes writes,

In passing from history to nature, myth acts economically, it abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences, it does away with all dialectics, with any going back beyond what is immediately visible, it organizes a world which is without contradictions because it is without depth, a world wide open and wallowing in the evident, it establishes a blissful clarity: things appear to mean something by themselves. (Barthes [1972], 143)

Considered in terms of the conventional reading, the story of Mrs. McNab’s triumphant victory over the chaotic natural elements within and around the house constitutes a myth that “establishes a blissful clarity”; as such, it serves to legitimate the Promethean impulse to create order out of a disordered world.

However, drawing on the work of René Girard, who has looked extensively at myths and their connection to sacrificial violence, we can see that underneath the more traditional reading, the narrator is purposely subverting the authority of her own narrative, by allowing us to sympathize with the victim of the story. In Girardian terms, this alters the narrative dramatically, making it no longer a *myth*, but instead a *text of persecution*. The difference between the two types of narrative is subtle but important. According to Girard, myths are always told from the point of view of those carrying out a particular act of violence. The reason is simple. Sacrificial victims are chosen not for any actual crime they have committed, but rather because they represent outsiders onto whom can be

focused the collective hatred and violence of the society. It is therefore imperative that the perpetrators of the violence do not realize that the victims may very well be innocent of the crimes of which they are accused. Girard elucidates this idea in an extended passage from *Violent Origins*:

Let us suppose, now, that a myth is an account of scapegoating narrated from the viewpoint of the persecutors. Can this myth inform us that its scapegoat is really innocent, that he was chosen more or less at random, or for reasons completely alien to the misdeed he supposedly committed? Can such a text advertise the scapegoat status of its own scapegoat? Certainly not. We can expect from this myth only what we would expect from any account of a violent deed provided by its perpetrators. We can expect the victim to be seen as guilty and therefore to be mythically guilty. We can expect the violence of the group to be condoned and justified. This violence will be presented as a legitimate defense against a fearsome monster, as the just punishment of a guilty criminal. (Girard, Buckert and Smith [1987], 79)

Throughout what I am calling the progressive reading of “Time Passes,” nature represents the chaos-producing outsider, the monstrous other invading the house of the Ramsays and destroying its order. Consequently, Mrs. McNab’s actions — described as “stay[ing] the corruption and the rot” and “rescu[ing]” the house “from the pool of Time that was fast closing over them” are “presented as a legitimate defense against a fearsome monster.”

However, according to the alternative reading, “Time Passes” presents a narrative in which the reader is not only allowed to view the story from the perspective of the victim, but encouraged to sympathize with that victim. This action effectively shifts the status of the story from myth to persecution text. In a text of persecution, Girard explains, “persecution [is] demystified” (Girard, Buckert and Smith [1987], 126); the story narrates the violence from the perspective of the victim and exposes the persecutors’ choice of victim and the subsequent victimage mechanism as unjustified, thus preventing the persecutors from employing the story to legitimate their actions. To demonstrate this idea, Girard cites Biblical mythology as the primary source containing persecution stories, citing examples such as Job and Jesus, both of whom were sacrificed, either literally or figuratively, by their respective societies; both societies legitimized their actions based on the potential harm the victims represented to the social order. Yet in both cases, the story is told in such a way that the victim receives the sympathy of the audience, thereby significantly altering the narrative. Girard explains that in the Crucifixion story, “the unanimity [of the prevailing powers and the mob] is not emphasized in order to bow before, or submit to, its verdict as in all mythological, political, or even philosophical texts, but to denounce its total mistake” (Girard [1986], 115). As James Williams explains, “Girard finds in the Bible the revelation or disclosure of a God who does not want victims, a God who is disclosed in the action of those who take the side of the victims” (Williams [1991], 12).

I offer this admittedly lengthy discussion of the terms “myth” and “text of persecution” for more than mere semantic reasons. This distinction, in my opinion, is vital to understanding the importance of “Time Passes” in relation to Woolf’s ambivalence toward artistic creation at this point in her life. By allowing us to view the story progressively on one level, while *simultaneously* subverting that very reading on another level, Woolf challenges us to call into question the surface readings of the other attempts at mastery that we witness throughout the novel, artistic attempts that before now we could observe with a certain amount of simplistic admiration. By recognizing the narrative as a text of persecution, as opposed to a simple myth, we are forced to take a different look at the way other forms of artistic environment are carried out and to rethink the heretofore unproblematic notion that



art is simply a praiseworthy endeavor to bring order to a chaotic existence. To put it differently, by allowing us to view her story from the perspective of nature, the narrator gives us license, whether inadvertently or not, to read the earlier and later portions of her text against themselves, and to draw different conclusions than we would have otherwise drawn. In doing so, she allows us to question the justifiability of the Promethean impulse—represented as the hegemonic authority that is subverted by the text—and to view this motivation in a much more questionable light.

This is not to say that the traditional, progressive interpretation is wrong, or even that the human attempts at environment in the novel are bad; after all, these attempts do at times bring some sort of transcendence, even if it is fleeting. Rather, the narrative suggests that we must see alternative versions of the story, such as the one the narrator points to in “Time Passes.” In the bumbling Mrs. MacNab, Woolf presents us with a visual image of how easy it is to misinterpret or close our eyes to other versions of a story. By allowing her narrator to present us with an alternative version of her narrative, Woolf suggests an expanded type of vision and challenges us to lift the blinds, to see things directly. The important point here is not only that an alternative interpretation exists for every narrative, for even that statement is too limiting. Rather, Woolf suggests that we, along with Lily, should wish for *fifty* different pairs of eyes with which to view life and our experiences. For when we choose to limit ourselves to one particular type of vision or art, or even two as I have done with “Time Passes,” we necessarily preclude ourselves from viewing the many other various dimensions of life.

What we come down to in the end, then, is the realization that the consequence of Prometheanism is the closing of the blind to all other options. While an artistic vision may bring moments of wholeness, even transcendence, it also shuts us out (or in) from other possibilities. For Lily to have her vision, she must choose one vision, eschewing all others. Labeling her experience *my* vision, rather than *a* vision or even *this* vision, is an act of artistic self-defeat. By reducing her experiences with the Ramsays to one totalizing vision, she moves away from the expansive fifty-pairs-of-eyes view she desires, and moves toward a vantage point similar to that of Mrs. MacNab, the one who is incapable of seeing things directly.

Let me once more assert that I am not arguing that Woolf, at this point in her career, does not believe in art’s liberatory powers; there is ample evidence in the text to suggest that she does, as has been documented by many critics. However, what seems to have been missed to a large extent is Woolf’s warning against believing too wholeheartedly in this Promethean project, inherent in which are two distinct problems. First, while artistic environment may at times produce the desired results, these results are usually either fleeting or illusory. Second, the unavoidable consequence of using art to select and communicate one perspective of the world, is the silencing of other voices. These voices may be those of other “souls,” as we see in “Time Passes,” or they may be alternative perspectives on familiar stories. But regardless, voices are silenced each time an artist has “my vision.”

In making this point concerning art’s ordering powers, earlier in her career than is usually thought, Woolf proves herself in step with the modernist sensibilities of her contemporaries. Eliot, in *The Waste Land*, for instance, responds to a disoriented and deracinated existence by mining religious and cultural traditions. This geological excavation results in a ruptured poem that offers numerous voices and visions in an attempt to discover meaning within the chaos. Likewise, the polyphony of Faulkner’s fiction seems to be a direct reaction against the idea of an authoritative,

transcendental center. In choosing multiple narrators in his novels, Faulkner acknowledges the problem, even the danger, of allowing one “story” to serve as an all-encompassing encapsulation of reality.

And the same warning would appear to apply not only to artists, but to art critics as well. When we choose, for example, to endorse one “vision” of Woolf and her perspective on art, we face the same two problems. In the first place, our interpretations of such a complex and dynamic author will often be contradicted by portions of her work, making our judgments just as transitory or even illusory as the different forms of art in *To the Lighthouse*. More significantly, by choosing a single perspective on Woolf’s art, we necessarily prevent both her and ourselves from communicating and exploring other options. In other words, we forfeit the possibility of using the fifty pairs of eyes we need in order to see her and her art.

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## Chapter 9

### Cultural Conjunctions

The four essays in this section question and relativize the view of modernism as a pre-eminently aestheticist endeavor. Against earlier assessments of modernism's emphasis on formal characteristics and intratextual relations at the expense of more general cultural and social issues, these articles focus on a variety of modes of bringing external references into play in modernist texts. Two of the articles discuss the relationship between canonized, "high modernist" works and popular art and culture, two others shed light on the ways that religious and anthropological concerns fuel and interact with the production of modernist and avant-garde art. The first two essays challenge the conventional view that modernism operated in complete isolation from market concerns, publicity and popular culture. In their discussion of the relationship between modernism and popular culture they show how modernism was more closely connected to mainstream literary venues and had a closer proximity to work that was defined as non-modernist and popular, "low" art than is often acknowledged. In contradistinction to the demise of the auratic in the discussions of the interrelatedness of high-brow art and popular culture, the concluding two essays explore the residues of pre-modern spirituality in modernist literature and art.

**R. Brandon Kershner** situates the rise of postmodernism and the reflections by Leslie Fiedler and Susan Sontag as turning points in the evaluation of popular culture. Discussing concrete examples from Joyce and Eliot scholarship, he emphasizes the interplay between popular tendencies on the one hand and the elitist and aestheticist stances usually associated with these figures on the other.

**Elizabeth Majerus** argues against the accepted view of modernism as misogynist and shows how many modernist artists incorporated elements of traditional and "feminine" culture into their work. Specifically, her article discusses the dialogical relationship between women, artistic modernism and cultural modernity in popular cultural magazines. Women writers and artists greatly contributed to the conceptualization of a popular version of modernism by forging connections between elements of modernist art and cultural modernity that are often seen as incompatible: irony and intimacy, private love and public space, sophisticated artifice and political critique.

**Wendy B. Faris** and **Steven Walker**, in their analysis of art works by Claude Monet, Virginia Woolf, Vincent Van Gogh and Rainer Maria Rilke, develop a redefinition of the sacred. This dimension of the sacred manifests itself in secularised creations of iconic images. The authors of this essay argue how the awareness of such "latent icons" infused with spiritual signification in modernist texts can modify the often sterile way we conceive of modernism and its place in cultural history.

Drawing on C. G. Jung's contemporaneous theory of the "compensatory symbol" and his description of the cultural work of the "visionary artist," they uncover the repressed sense of the sacred and spiritual symbolism and argue for its inclusion into modernist discourse and its scholarship.

While Faris and Walker emphasize the universality of certain a-historical symbols of spirituality stemming from the collective unconscious, **Vita Fortunati** and **Zelda Franceschi** contextualize the interest in primitive cultures and situate this fashion in the rise of the status of anthropology and ethnology in the modernist era. Their methodology, which stems from discourse analysis, clarifies the manifold meanings of the ideologically loaded and stratified terms "primitivism" and "barbarism." Furthermore, the authors uncover the ambiguity inherent in the appropriation of so-called primitive art by modernist art and by new tendencies in anthropology around the *fin de siècle*. An evaluation of Franz Boas's efforts at establishing anthropology as a scientific discipline as well as his problematic ideology exemplifies the ambiguous (re)appropriation of primitive culture in modernist art and discourse.

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## Modernity, Postmodernity and Popular Culture in Joyce and Eliot

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It seems only appropriate to begin in postmodern academic style by invoking a “Calvin and Hobbes” cartoon from several years ago. The boy and tiger are admiring a framed painting on the wall, while Calvin observes: “A painting. Moving. Spiritually enriching. Sublime [...] ‘high’ art!” In the next panel they are looking at a newspaper on the floor while Calvin notes: “The comic strip. Vapid. Juvenile. Commercial hack work. [...] ‘low’ art.” Next they are looking in a book of reproductions, and Calvin points out: “A painting of a comic strip panel. Sophisticated irony. Philosophically challenging [...] ‘high’ art.” Finally, Hobbes asks (metatextually): “Suppose I draw a cartoon of a painting of a comic strip?” “Sophomoric,” replies Calvin with a child’s unconflicted confidence. “Intellectually sterile [...] ‘low’ art.” Because this is a four-panel comic strip the argument stops here; an academic critic, of course, would have been able to continue for any number of reiterations. And since the entire discussion takes place in a comic strip, I suppose it must be intellectually sterile, unless it is rescued by someone like Roy Lichtenstein.

The sort of attitude toward the popular that Calvin articulates here has two main historical roots. As Patrick Brantlinger establishes in his wide-ranging study *Bread and Circuses: Theories of Mass Culture as Social Decay* (1983), the kind of social analysis that views mass or popular culture as another opiate of the populace allowing a ruling class to maintain its dominance has its roots in classical antiquity, and exists in both conservative and radical forms. But the twentieth century has contributed a distinct conceptualization of “low” art. The specific phrase “mass culture” gained general currency in the 1930s and carried with it the context of the great totalitarian systems. As Brantlinger puts it, “‘mass culture’ appears on the modern scene as a primarily political and apocalyptic term, used to refer to a symptom of social morbidity, the cancer or one of the cancers in a failing body politic” (Brantlinger [1983], 31; see also Swingewood [1977]). This second source for the critique of the popular is a distinctively modern formation, dependent upon the development of both modernity and modernism. Ironically, the modern critique of popular culture is virtually identical whether it issues from the right — the American “Fugitives,” for example — or from the left, as with the Frankfurt School.

The presumption of this position is that with the twentieth century “popular culture” takes on a new and pernicious character as it transforms itself into “mass culture.” Terry Eagleton is one of many critics who have observed that high modernist art is “born at a stroke with mass commodity culture” (Eagleton [1986], 139). Fredric Jameson finds that “from the structural breakdown of the older realisms in the late nineteenth century” there emerges not modernism alone,

but rather two literary and cultural structures, dialectically interrelated and necessarily presupposing each other for any adequate analysis: these now find themselves positioned in the distinct and generally incompatible spaces of the institutions of high literature and what the Frankfurt School conveniently called the 'culture industry,' that is, the apparatuses for the production of 'popular' or mass culture. (Jameson [1981], 207)

In Eagleton's view (which is a Marxist variant of the conventional academic version of modernist art's position vis-a-vis popular culture), modernist art, terrified of being reduced to a mere commodity, "brackets off the referent or real historical world, thickens its textures and deranges its forms to forestall instant consumability, and draws its language protectively around it to become a mysteriously autotelic object, free from all contaminating truck with the real" (Eagleton [1986], 139).

The American "New Criticism" as it developed during the 1940s and 1950s, taking its cue from some comments of Pound's and Eliot's and some early pronouncements of Joyce and of his character Stephen Dedalus, solidified the notion that "high" modernist art was in fact the antithesis of popular art. The attributes of "true" art, especially complexity, allusiveness, ambiguity, irony, self-reference and self-enclosure, were more or less by definition pronounced to be what was lacking in popular art. Literature professors believed that the specialized techniques of reading and evaluation developed by the New Critics would not only reveal the richness of great art works of the canon, they would equally well reveal the paucity of the popular.

In Britain, up to the rise of the Cultural Studies movement in the 1960s the most influential version of popular culture was the negative one presented by F. R. Leavis and Q. D. Leavis. The Leavises, extending their interpretation of the cultural criticism of Ortega y Gasset and Eliot, saw popular culture as the most deadening aspect of modern industrialized society, an agent actively undermining the possibility of genuine selfhood and moral responsibility. In her study *Fiction and the Reading Public*, Q. D. Leavis, using an approach she termed "anthropological," concluded that unlike genuine literature, which allows the reader "to live at the expense of an unusually intelligent and sensitive mind, by giving him access to a finer code than his own," popular novels "substitute an emotional code which [...] is actually inferior to the traditional code of the illiterate." Popular novels, Leavis continues, "actually get in the way of genuine feeling and responsible thinking by creating cheap mechanical responses and by throwing their weight on the side of social, national, and herd prejudices" (Leavis [1932], 74).

A number of commentators have noted that the rise of literature as a profession in the twentieth century, which depended upon the institutionalization of "professional" aesthetic reading protocols in literature departments, itself had a stake in highlighting the dichotomy between high and low arts. Especially in the period immediately following the Second World War, American academics were concerned to establish a literary professoriate who could claim to have mastered a group of arcane techniques for evaluation and interpretation and who had available for study an established and yet expandable canon with both traditional and modern components. A different but parallel process transpired in Britain, with the rise of "Cambridge English." Thus, as Thomas Strychacz argues, "the kind of text we usually call modernist was shaped profoundly by a convergence of professional discourse and the rise of mass culture" (Strychacz [1993], 5). The particular form of the professional discourse that arose during the twentieth century in literary studies depended upon the category of the "literary" being held apart from other forms of discourse, so that it would require

a specialized vocabulary and set of techniques for its analysis, in a way that could be successfully promulgated by the literary professoriate.

The assertion of textual exclusivity for the literary, most vividly and influentially voiced by F. R. Leavis, helped give to canonical works the aura of a sacred text and also seemed to justify the increasingly elaborate set of protocols through which such writing was to be interpreted. A further mode of self-justification arose through the assertion that a number of texts unknown to the public at large, such as on the one hand the lyrics of certain “metaphysical” poets and on the other poetry by Ezra Pound or Wallace Stevens, deserved inclusion in the canon. Thus the function of the literary critic would include not only interpretation and evaluation but search and retrieval. And the scholar/critic was able to claim vastly increased importance for his profession by endorsing, tacitly or explicitly, the enormous claims made for art by modernist writers. Joyce’s Stephen Dedalus feels that by virtue of his role as artist he has the opportunity to save the Irish: exercising a sort of spiritual eugenics, he hopes to “cast his shadow over the imagination of their daughters before their squires begat upon them, that they might breed a race less ignoble than their own” (Joyce [1993], 205). If this was what was at stake in art, then it appeared all the more important to the critic that the realm of the literary should be kept inviolate, uncorrupted by the merely popular or the pseudo-literary.

We should note, however, that this institutional scapegoating of popular culture was by no means univocal or unopposed. To cite a few examples: the strain of modernism stemming from Marinetti, with its enthusiasm for speed, mass production, and the other technologically-determined aspects of modern culture, was indigestibly present within modernism from the beginning. Dada, of course, with its implicit contempt for high art, expended much of its energy in an attack on the very concept. Especially in America, the “high modernist” 1920s coincided with a period of enthusiasm among the intelligentsia for jazz, for the “Negro” and his “folk culture,” for the movies, and so forth (see North [1994]). Somewhat later, the increasingly leftist ideology of the cultural elite as the 1920s gave way to the 1930s meant that a “mandarin” aesthetic stance was increasingly untenable, and writers from Auden and Orwell to Dos Passos and Steinbeck combined some high modernist characteristics with an interest in and adaptation of forms of popular culture. Artists generally accomplished this balancing act by stressing their solidarity with “working-class culture” as opposed to “bourgeois” or “middle-brow” culture, which had been the real *bête noir* of the modernists from Flaubert on in any case.

Some of these tendencies are illustrated as early as 1923, when the American critic Gilbert Seldes published *The Seven Lively Arts*, whose title was meant as a contrast and a tribute to the classical seven arts and to the (recently defunct) eponymous journal. The book is an appreciation of a variety of American popular culture, including jazz and ragtime music, the extravaganzas of Florenz Ziegfeld, the circus, the burlesque and vaudeville, the Krazy Kat cartoon, mass-market movies —pre-eminently those of Chaplin—and even “popular” writers like Ring Lardner. Near the end, Seldes sets forth a group of “propositions” that he holds self-evident:

That there is no opposition between the great and the lively arts.  
That both are opposed in the spirit to the middle or bogus arts.  
That the bogus arts are easier to appreciate, appeal to low and mixed emotions,  
and jeopardize the purity of both the great and the minor arts.



That except in a period when the major arts flourish with exceptional vigor, the lively arts are likely to be the most intelligent phenomena of their day.

That the lively arts as they exist in America today are entertaining, interesting, and important.

That with a few exceptions these same arts are more interesting to the adult cultivated intelligence than most of the things which pass for art in cultured society.

That there exists a 'genteel tradition' about the arts which has prevented any just appreciation of the popular arts, and that these have therefore missed the corrective criticism given to the serious arts, receiving only abuse. (Seldes [1962], 294–5)

In a commentary added for the 1962 reissue of the book, Seldes claims that in retrospect, there are two theories about the popular arts in the 1920s: one "that they were 'discovered' by intellectuals who then made a great fuss over them, exaggerating their virtues, using them as a weapon against gentility in the arts," and a second view "that a remarkable outburst of creative vigor did come about in the popular arts right after the First World War." Seldes favors the second position, adding that where creative energy in the "high arts" was readily seen in the "Keynes-Strachey axis in London, the Joyce-Pound international, Dada in Paris, and *Der Sturm* in Berlin," in America it was the popular arts that most obviously flourished (Seldes [1962], 301). I think that in further retrospect, this position both devalues the high cultural production of America in the 1920s and ignores the flourishing of the "lively arts" in London and in most European centers during the same period. Regardless, the point remains that a substantial minority of critical opinion originally saw the flowering of what we now term modernism as closely linked to popular cultural production; and though Seldes nowhere challenges the common terminology that distinguished these modes, his own propositions would make it difficult to maintain any essential difference between them.

As New Critical precepts began to be challenged in the American academy, the rise of postmodernism—or, more accurately, the origin of several postmodernisms—in the 1960s marked the beginning of the professoriate's embracing of popular culture. Hans Bertens shows in his magisterial survey *The Idea of the Postmodern* that the earliest form of American anti-modernism in the 1950s, most prominently championed by Leslie Fiedler, involved a rebellion against institutionalized high culture and a turn to the popular. Bertens quotes Andreas Huyssen: "Pop in the broadest sense was the context in which a notion of the postmodern first took shape" (Bertens [1995], 34–5). What Bertens calls "Fiedler's post-male, post-white, and post-Protestant postmodernism" (Bertens [1995], 43), originally formulated as a more immediate, more authentic alternative to the bourgeois American literary mainstream, gradually took on the lineaments of a revolt against high culture, especially literature. At the same time, Fiedler, himself a paragon of the high-culture, European-oriented intellectual, began to transform his writing persona into an enthusiast of mass culture. "It was during a public argument with Lionel Trilling on the 'soaps' that I became fully aware, first, of how obsessed I had become with such uncanonical literature," Fiedler observed, and "second, of how I had passed from snide analysis to passionate apology" (Fiedler [1982], 21). That this transformation had altered Fiedler's cultural self-image was apparent from his comment, "I began by thinking that I was Stephen. [...] But I ended, as you will end, as Joyce ended, by knowing that I was Bloom" (Fiedler [1970], 29).

The question of popular culture's relationship to high culture and its overall role in modernity is—and always has been—a political one. During the later 1970s and the 1980s, two critical trends converged to cast popular culture in a new light. First, in the wake of Fiedler, Susan Sontag, and

other early theorists of what came to be known as the postmodern, popular culture was refigured as both a positive aesthetic and psychological force in itself and, increasingly, as an element within (or in positive tension with) postmodern “high” culture. The implication, often made explicit, was that unlike modernism, “[o]ne of whose characteristic features [...] is a gesture of warding off the threat of a developing mass culture” (Berry [1992], 169), postmodernism characteristically embraces the popular—or in fact is no longer fundamentally distinguishable from it. Jim Collins’s *Uncommon Cultures: Popular Culture and Post-Modernism* (1989) and Brian McHale’s *Postmodernist Fiction* (1987), however they may otherwise differ in their characterizations of Postmodernism, agree on this. Indeed, in his more recent book *Postmodernism: Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991) Jameson, who had earlier avoided such generalizations, now claims that in the contemporary period most of the arts show “an effacement of the older distinction between high and so-called mass culture, a distinction on which modernism depended for its specificity” (Jameson [1991], 63).

The second trend transforming the study of popular culture was the growing realization that under careful analysis the political effects of popular culture might not be so uniformly negative as had been generally claimed by both the left and the right. Citing such recent collections as Colin MacCabe’s *High Theory/Low Culture* (1986), Tania Modleski’s *Studies in Entertainment* (1986), and Tony Bennett, Colin Mercer, and Janet Woollacott’s *Popular Culture and Social Relations* (1986), Jim Collins finds in them a shared “recognition that all cultural production must be seen as a set of power relations that produce particular forms of subjectivity, but that the nature, function, and uses of mass culture can no longer be conceived in a monolithic manner” (Collins [1989], 16). The British Cultural Studies movement, which took on institutional identity with the founding of the Birmingham Centre in 1963, investigated exactly this kind of effect. In the 1980s, Stuart Hall

developed his model of encoding and decoding whereby media codes were analyzed, not in terms of complete ideological closure, but according to ‘preferred’ or ‘dominant’ meaning which could be decoded by viewers from within similar frameworks or [...] ‘negotiated’ or ‘opposed’ in various ways. (Brunt [1992], 70)

Clearly such a nuanced approach left little room for presumptions of univocality in any cultural form.

Meanwhile, feminism and cultural studies had produced a sort of consensus view of recent literary history that became dominant during the 1980s. Most influentially elaborated in Andreas Huyssen’s *After the Great Divide*, this held that high modernism, coding itself as “masculine,” defined popular culture as feminine and rejected it, along with the contributions of women artists who might otherwise have been recognized as pioneering modernists (Huyssen [1986]). One of the effects of this critical reorientation was to suggest the outlines of an alternative, unrecognized feminine modernism that was politically progressive and in alliance with popular culture—or, alternatively, to label this feminine literary strain “postmodernism” (see Gilbert and Gubar [1987], Scott [1990], Clark [1991]). Either perspective shattered the image of monolithic modernism by portraying it as divided against itself, with texts by Stein, Woolf, and H.D. on one side, and those of the dominant male modernists on the other.

I want to argue that the most recent development in the critical refiguration of popular culture is to question its relationship with modernist art—a move whose most radical implication is to reject the accepted political and aesthetic understanding of “high” or “classical” modernism, best embodied for Anglophone readers by the writing of Joyce, Yeats, Woolf, Eliot, and Pound. This is the shared

position of the contributors to Kevin Dettmar's collection *Rereading the New: A Backward Glance at Modernism* (1992) and of most of the contributors to my own collection *Joyce and Popular Culture* (1996). I believe that Joyceans were the first to stake out this ground, perhaps because of the sheer quantity of references to popular culture in Joyce's work. Popular cultural allusions presented themselves as the natural material for notes or short articles whose main intent was identification. Major Joyceans such as Hugh Kenner did not hesitate to publish their investigations into the minutiae of Joyce's world—including speculations upon Joyce's use of the personal development charts included in copies of Eugen Sandow's *Strength and How to Obtain It* (Kenner [1980], appendix). The importance of *everything* in Joyce's works, no matter how trivial, was simply assumed, much as early Biblical exegetes assumed there was significance in every textual detail—and for comparable reasons. Thus Marvin Magalaner's early article on Joyce and Marie Corelli (Magalaner [1972]), or Gerhard Friedrich's article relating Bret Harte's novel *Gabriel Conroy* to "The Dead" (Friedrich [1954]) or the many articles by Mary Power, culminating in her identification of *Ruby, Pride of the Ring* (Power [1981])—all these may assume the superiority of Joyce's work to the popular work they discuss, but that is certainly not the major stress of the article, or particularly important to it. But Hodgart's pioneering book *Song in the Works of James Joyce* (1959), like Zack Bowen's more sophisticated *Musical Allusions in the Work of James Joyce* (1974) clearly reflected their authors' affection both for Joyce and for the "banal" popular melodies he so cherished.

The first book-length investigation of the subject, *Joyce's Anatomy of Culture* by Cheryl Herr (1986), was part of a wave of Joyce studies, beginning in the mid-1970s, which reflected the new interest in Continental theory. Herr's orientation at the time was grounded in semiotics, which seemed to offer a means of "reading" institutions as well as texts. There is a clear political thrust to Herr's analysis, which could be termed Marxist; she is interested in the economic basis of the "cultural contradictions" that she reads in *both* Joyce's texts and the popular texts and institutions to which she refers. Her implication is that both Joyce's "elite" texts and the "low" cultural texts of Ireland that she examines (such as the music hall and popular stage) are in some ways oppositional to the dominant culture of colonized Ireland. But her semiotic methodology, which treats all cultural texts alike, allowed her to avoid the problems of a study based either in the writer's intentionality or in the high culture/low culture opposition that had been endorsed within cultural studies as a whole.

My own *Joyce, Bakhtin, and Popular Literature* (Kershner [1989a]), which relies in good part on Bakhtin's theoretical formulations, sidesteps the same problems because Bakhtin's terms of analysis recognize no necessary difference in the ideological positioning of "high" and "popular" texts. I argue that Joyce's invocation of a work of popular fiction is virtually never simple citation or quotation, and the relationship between the two fictions is seldom simply ironic. In *Joyce, Bakhtin* my overall implication is that the relationship between Modernist art and instances of popular culture is *dialogical*—that is, that it involves a dialogue and a dialectics, but a dialectics thoroughly grounded in the material and ideological context of each "voice" (Kershner [1989a], 1–21, 297–303). But I want to stress that both Herr's analysis and my own are strongly motivated by the specific popular forms we studied, whose "texts" lend themselves so much more readily to a subversive reading than to a conservative one. Herr's study of cross-dressing in the "panto" and the music hall, which she sets against the "Circe" chapter of *Ulysses*, cannot help finding significant similarities in the two cultural expressions.

My own favorite example of a modernist theme echoed or even anticipated in popular literature is what Douwe Fokkema discusses as the *déracinement* and *détachement* of the modernist artist in early Gide, which he relates to Stephen Dedalus's embrace of "silence, exile, and cunning" (Fokkema [1984], 20–1). This stance of empowering and impassive exile has of course been long recognized as a major avatar of modernist alienation. But what most strikes me is that Stephen's announced model for this position is the elder Dumas's *Count of Monte Cristo*, whose book he "pored over": "The figure of that dark avenger stood forth in his mind for whatever he had heard of divined in childhood of the strange and terrible" (Joyce [1993], 65). In this popular novel, whose hero would conventionally be called a degenerate version of the Byronic hero, there is a passage where Edmond Dantes, returned from exile, addresses a horrified listener who has tried to impress him with his political power. He himself is among "those men whom God has placed above kings and ministers," he says.

My kingdom is bounded only by the world, for I am neither an Italian nor a Frenchman, nor a Hindu nor an American nor a Spaniard. I am a cosmopolite [...] I adopt all customs, speak all languages [...] You may, therefore, comprehend, that being of no country, asking protection from no government, acknowledging no man as my brother, not one of the scruples that arrest the powerful or the obstacles which paralyze the weak paralyze or arrest me. Unless I die, I shall always be what I am, and therefore it is that I utter the things you have never heard, even from the mouths of kings. (Dumas [1946], 611–12)

Here, surely, is what Joyce in *Ulysses* referred to as "the language of the outlaw" (Joyce [1986], 117). This is a single example of a modernist theme in an unexpected place; but examples of modernist themes, techniques, and attitudes abound in popular literature of the turn of the century. The famous "mythic method" of modernism, whose use in *Ulysses* was publicized—and idiosyncratically interpreted—by Eliot in his essay "*Ulysses*, Myth, and Order," was in fact widespread in popular literature of the late nineteenth century. Elsewhere I have discussed Tom Greer's Irish best-seller *A Modern Daedalus* (1885), and Charlotte Yonge's *A Modern Telemachus* (1886) seems equally interesting in a Joycean context. But one of the most thoroughgoing practitioners of the "mythic method" was Marie Corelli, the all-time best-selling novelist up through the First World War. Corelli's spiritualist romances reflected her own brand of Theosophy, which she termed "Electric Christianity," and often featured modern-day characters who by way of what Leopold Bloom would call "metempsychosis" are reborn versions of mythic prototypes (see Kershner [1989b] and [1994]). We would do well to keep in mind that in *Ulysses* itself the idea of "transmigration of souls" is first introduced because Molly has read of it in the racy "circus novel" *Ruby, the Pride of the Ring*. I do not mean to suggest that there is no distinction between Joyce and Corelli in their use of this technique. But I am suggesting that both popular and "high modernist" literature during the period 1885–1925 may have been responding similarly to cultural currents in ways that would repay rethinking. And I am suggesting that the accepted rationale of the mythic method, as a high cultural attempt to rescue degraded modern daily popular existence by means of appeals to a literary tradition, better reflects the conservative ideology of the New Criticism's new professoriate than it does the workings of Joyce's texts—or, for that matter, Eliot's.

Perhaps I could add a final example illustrating our reluctance to look to popular culture when analyzing Joyce's work. A Joycean scholar and classicist named R. J. Schork recently examined a manuscript in Joyce's hand included among "Unidentified Manuscripts, Letters, and Papers" in

the Cornell Joyce Collection and found it to be a Latin poem narrating the tribulations of a woman referred to as "Balía." He published a translation of the poem in the *James Joyce Literary Supplement* (Schork [1991]), admitting that the Latin poem could not be definitely attributed to Joyce, but added that he had searched classical literature in vain for the poem. He appealed to readers for suggestions regarding the manuscript's source, either in Latin or in English. I was one of a number of readers who immediately recognized the poem as a translation of a British comic song entitled "Unfortunate Miss Bailey" that was in fact recorded on an early album by the Kingston Trio. Somewhat later, Wes Davis identified the song as the work of George Colman, the younger, who included it in his farce *Love Laughs at Locksmiths*; he also discovered the author of the Latin version, a clergyman named George Henry Glasse, who published it in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1805 (Davis [1995]). Apparently Joyce either copied the translation (with some minor slips or emendations) or wrote it down from memory. None of this, of course, is of any large significance for Joyce's work; but it does nicely illustrate a habit of his mind and our own critical bias.

I could go on multiplying Joycean examples at length, but it may be of more interest to look briefly at the case of T. S. Eliot, who is often seen as the great conservative force behind high modernism. A good deal of recent critical work has seriously questioned that portrayal: Gregory S. Jay's "Postmodernism in *The Waste Land*: Women, Mass Culture, and Others," argues not that *The Waste Land* is a postmodernist text, but that "it seems important to discover how it is still Modernist, and how it calls forth, dialectically, the reactions that will constitute the Postmodern" (Jay [1992], 222). Jay examines a number of the characteristics often thought to separate modernist from postmodernist art, such as the nostalgia for origins, the treatment of the "embattled Self and its threatening Others (women, homosexuals, the lower classes, savages, and so on)" (Jay [1992], 227), or the attitude toward mass culture implied in the work, and finds that in all cases the poem expresses an ambivalence, which is at root "an ambivalence between a nostalgia for origins and a drive for revolutionary fragmentation" (Jay [1992], 222).

A recent essay by David Chinitz entitled "T. S. Eliot and the Cultural Divide" tackles a similar array of issues, but concentrates on the mediation provided by Eliot's poems between high and low cultural artefacts. Eliot, Chinitz argues, "developed a quite progressive theoretical position on the relation between high culture and popular culture and attempted repeatedly to convert this theory into art" (Chinitz [1995a], 237). Chinitz points to Eliot's lifelong attraction to elements of "low-brow" culture, such as comic strips, boxing, melodrama, vaudeville, and Tin Pan Alley's music. His respect and affection for Marie Lloyd is of course well known, as is the essay in which he celebrated the "working man who went to the music hall and saw Marie Lloyd and joined in the chorus," because "he was engaged in that collaboration of the audience with the artist which is necessary in all art" (Eliot [1932], 371). Certainly when he calls her death "a significant moment in English history" (Eliot [1932], 371), he does not appear to be at all condescending, although he may betray some desire to *épater le bourgeois* by praising what he sees as the authentic art of the lower class.

Chinitz notes that Eliot was overjoyed when *The Cocktail Party* became a popular hit; Eliot also stated that "the poet naturally prefers to write for as large and miscellaneous an audience as possible. [...] I myself should like an audience which could neither write nor read" (Eliot [1933], 146). Chinitz's point is not that Eliot was a closet progressive, but that in him democratic, even populist tendencies were intermixed with the elitist and aestheticist stance into which he hardened in his later years. After all, we are not *required* to hear the refrains of popular songs and vulgar speech

that punctuate *The Waste Land* as a mark of modern damnation; it is quite possible that Eliot was also warmly amused and pleased by the energy of “The Shakespearean Rag.” We must not mistake the attitudes in which we have been instructed for the more complex attitudes of the modernists. Indeed, Ronald Schuchard has pointed out that many of the 1890s poets, such as John Davidson and Arthur Symons, enthusiastically patronized the music hall and, at least to some extent, took it seriously. Schuchard suggests that Eliot “was to become the last inheritor of the music-hall mystery, the poet-detective who would crack its comic code, the dramatist who would see in its bizarre comedians the possibility of reviving poetic drama in the modern world” (Schuchard [1999], 104). To invoke a final Joycean example, when Bloom considers submitting a story to the “prize *Tibbits* competition,” we may be condescendingly amused; but we should temper our condescension with the realization that Joyce himself did exactly that (Ellmann [1982], 50).

Re-energizing and re-examining the paradigm of modernism is obviously not a project confined to those of us who study popular culture at the turn of the century. Andreas Huyssen’s attempt to distinguish between an elitist high modernism and an “avant garde” is another such attempt (Huyssen [1986]), as are the recent efforts to “periodize” modernism, such as Michael Levenson’s distinction between early and later modernist poetics (Levenson [1984]), or Christopher Butler’s scrupulous, trans-cultural examination of early modernism (Butler [1994]), or the variety of movements sketched in Peter Nicholls’s significantly-entitled book, *Modernisms* (Nicholls [1995]). Clearly the day of monolithic modernism is over. I would also like to suggest that the day of conservative, autotelic, purely aesthetic modernism, dependent upon the gesture of exclusion of popular culture, is also passing; too often recently this modernism has been merely the whipping boy for a postmodernism that is conceived—not without considerable difficulty—as populist and progressive.

Despite the anecdotal and biographical evidence I have been invoking, the question is not one of authorial attitudes but of textual relations. As Astradur Eysteinnsson has pointed out, the relationship of author to modernist text—his or her “presence” or “absence” in it—is by no means clear, for all the modernist talk of a poetics of impersonality (Eysteinnsson [1990], 27). And even if we were to accept an author’s critical commentary as decisive, the modernists were characteristically ambivalent in most of their statements about art. David Chinitz admits that Eliot recorded plenty of statements testifying to his elitism and aestheticism; what he is asking is that we accord the same attention to Eliot’s artistically populist, progressive statements (Chinitz [1995b], 1053). I would suggest that with renewed attention to the interplay of popular intertexts within modernist texts we will discover a richness of interaction impossible in the totalizing perspectives conventionally brought to bear upon both popular culture and modernism. The relationship between the two is dialogical, which implies not only the historically embedded aspect of the interlocution but the weight each side willingly or not grants to the other.

No doubt there is a modernist text that justifies itself through the exclusion of the popular and thus of the historical specifics of modernity. But that same modernist text through its pervasive irony, its internal dialogics, and through the frequent instances of a *mise en abîme* of high culture, demonstrates that there is no such thing as a purely aesthetic cultural product, and that cultural artefacts of all “levels” share in the perpetual semiotic interchange that is the condition of art. The modernist text—and this emphatically includes the high modernist text—precisely parallels the popular cultural text in that its political function as praxis is indeterminate, contingent upon historical particulars. Finally, I want to suggest that this is an inevitable conclusion when we read modernism in

a postmodern age—not because as critics we are compelled to find our own condition in what we study, but because aesthetic and pseudo-historical categories such as modernism, postmodernism, and popular culture are imbricated with the modes of analysis we bring to bear upon them. Once we discover a language through which we can approach both *The Waste Land* and Tin Pan Alley, both *Ulysses* and *The Count of Monte Cristo*, we will find that each of these has begun to read the other in unanticipated ways.

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## **“Determined and Bigoted Feminists”**

### **Women, Magazines, and Popular Modernism**

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In the October 1927 issue of *Vanity Fair*, Heywood Broun makes the following proclamation: “I call on all men, including the modernists, to take off their hats to the American mother [...] boldly I declare that the young gentlemen in the schools of advanced writing, versifying, and painting have gone too far. No man need accept this modern rule and hate his mother” (Broun [1927], 57). Broun’s admonition illustrates Ann Douglas’s claim that modernist artists, writers, and critics “had something to gain from the demise of the Victorian matriarch” and thus “aimed to ridicule and overturn everything the matriarch had championed” (Douglas [1995], 6). Douglas’s thesis—that both male and female “moderns” sought to rebel against anything associated with Victorian womanhood—certainly accords with much of what we know of mainstream modernism’s anti-feminine and anti-traditional impulses. But it also overlooks the significant extent to which many modernist artists incorporated traditional and “feminine” elements into their work and the fact that at times modernism coexisted peacefully with more traditional elements of culture, particularly in popular contexts. A number of popular magazines published during the modernist period promoted modernism and at the same time embraced a wide array of feminine culture, providing a more open forum for different kinds of modern women writers and artists than exclusively modernist venues.

Scholars of modernity increasingly see tremendous shifts in women’s roles, habits, and self-understanding as an essential aspect of cultural modernity. Yet, high modernism, which has traditionally represented the artistic and literary face of modernity, was often very anxious about women and the ways modernity brought women into public life. While women played key roles in defining and promoting high modernism, many of the most influential male modernists were explicitly and aggressively misogynist. Conversely, popular modernism—forms of cultural and artistic modernism aimed at a wide and relatively heterogeneous public rather than a small and fairly exclusive modernist coterie—often embraced women and women’s culture because it had much to gain from doing so.

Popular modernist magazines illuminate the imbricated relationship between women, artistic modernism, and cultural modernity. As Michael North observes, genealogical examinations of literary modernism have historically employed interpretive methods that construct “a modernism disconnected from all other varieties of historical crisis, a modernism that lives in the deepest imaginings of its most radical perpetrators,” neglecting to consider “modernism as a social fact, as part of [...] lived experience” (North [1999], 6). Early twentieth-century modernity in the United States and Britain involved tremendous shifts in women’s roles and identities, in perceptions of race and interaction

among racial groups, in political identity and activism, and in mass media and popular culture. Yet, high modernism has traditionally been perceived as aloof from these historical shifts. Critical history has also tended to assume that high modernism was disconnected from the myriad literary and artistic activity that occurred during the modernist period but is not strictly defined as modernism. In fact, high modernism in its day was more closely connected to mainstream literary venues and had a closer proximity to work that was later defined as “non-modernist” art than is often acknowledged. As a number of scholars in recent years have shown, modernism influenced popular culture in significant and lasting ways, and popular culture similarly affected modernism. Popular modernism both illuminates these connections and helps elucidate modernity as a historical moment.

Modern mass culture helped shape and define modernity for a majority of people, as Nina Miller observes:

The periodical forms of popular modernism—cartoons, newspaper columns, farcical sketches, short fiction, and the glossy magazines of urban life—comprised the most prominent area in the 1920s for the negotiation of modern selfhood, a selfhood that came to be (and in many ways, still is) defined by irony, urbanity, and humor. More visibly than any other discursive project of the time, middle-brow culture made modern selfhood its explicit and relentless business. (Miller [1999], 88)

The creators and purveyors of popular modernism promoted modernity and incorporated modernism into a popular culture that was swiftly evolving, yet linked to older forms of culture. Women writers and artists catalyzed this synthesis, and their work in the magazines that promoted a popular version of modernism forged connections between elements of modern culture—irony and intimacy, wit and sentiment, private love and public space, sophisticated artifice and political critique—that are often seen as separate or contradictory.

The role of the little magazine in the development and promotion of high modernism has been central to many critical discussions of modernism, but a number of magazines with wider popular appeal and less focused artistic agendas also played a role in the creation and development of modernism’s public identity. In New York City, magazines like *Vanity Fair*, the *Smart Set*, and the *New Yorker* offered mass versions of modernism that presented modernist aesthetics and ideas within a mix of highbrow and middlebrow art and elite, together with popular culture. These mass-cultural venues often showcased the modernist future alongside elements of the nineteenth-century past, apparently perceiving no contradiction between them. The promotion of modernist works, styles, and ideas by these popular magazines illustrates the extent to which high modernism was grounded in mainstream literary markets and helps illuminate some ways that modernist artists influenced and were influenced by popular culture. The version of modernism and modernity that these magazines promoted, also suggests that women were central to public perceptions of modernism, which was popularly portrayed as a community of men and women artists of equal standing rather than an elite boy’s club that only allowed in a select few women.

That modernist art would be associated in the popular imagination with women is not surprising, given that media and advertising portrayed women as a primary cause and measure of modernity. Women’s clothing, habits of speech, public behavior, and professional choices—including the choice to become an artist or writer—were associated with the modern, whether modernity was being celebrated or condemned. That women increasingly drove the commercial economy was well understood both by advertisers who sought to promote women’s consumption and socially con-

servative forces that sought to limit it. The combination of mass-cultural commerce and modernist art never appeared as a contradiction in popular modernist magazines, and this may be part of the reason that they embraced women more freely than high modernist venues and coterie tended to, and with fewer strings attached.

The idea that high modernism operated in complete isolation from market concerns, issues of publicity, and popular culture, is now understood to be largely specious. A number of scholars have recently examined the market consciousness and business savvy that underpinned the work of modernist artist and impresario Ezra Pound and other central figures of modernism, and important work has been done exploring modernist interest in and association with mass culture. Yet we can and should distinguish between the promotional strategies of canonical modernism and the commercial, mass-cultural nature of popular modernism. In part, the difference lies in the fact that in their public face and their work, Eliot, Pound, and other members of the self-perceived modernist avant-garde often presented the illusion of being separate from market matters—even though they were at times very open about their interest in these crass concerns in correspondence with editors, publishers, and patrons. “Moreover, although they were ‘marketing modernism’ to a significant extent, the trope of modernism as a commodity is limited; after all, anyone who markets a product that appeals to the few and antagonizes the many does not belong in the world of commercial advertising” (Materer [1996], 26). The popular forms of modernism were explicitly concerned with reaching as wide an audience as possible and with making money. Popular modernist magazines presented themselves as purveyors of cutting-edge modern culture and suggested to their readers that “being modern—and by extension even being modernist—was not about market *phobia* at all, but precisely about market *savvy*” (Murphy [1996], 64). Moreover, being modern, in the cultural world of these magazines, meant being sophisticated and advanced enough to see women and men as equal participants in modern culture and art.

Unlike the small-circulation little magazines where many modernist writers first published their work, magazines like *Vanity Fair*, the *New Yorker*, and the *Smart Set* had wide circulations and glossy, ad-heavy formats. Still, all of these magazines published modernist art and were influenced by modernist ideas and aesthetics. But the version of modernism they promoted tended to be inclusive rather than exclusive—they offered modernism as part of a larger conception of modern public life that encompassed mass culture, and they did not completely reject the recent past in the way that some of the best-known modernist writers and thinkers often did. This more inclusive version of modernism created unusual opportunities for a wide array of women artists and women readers, since much of the art and culture that high modernism defined itself against was associated with a feminized mass culture or with past traditions that were similarly feminized. As a result, many women contributors to *Vanity Fair*, the *Smart Set* and the *New Yorker* were able to combine modernist formal strategies with domestic, social and/or political concerns that drew on forms of feminine or traditional culture that was marginalized by elite modernism but embraced in the popular modernist context of these glossy magazines.

Although *Vanity Fair*, the *Smart Set* and the *New Yorker* differed in some important ways, all three shared a self-conscious sense of modernity that they sought to impart to their readers. They all published writing that they defined as avant-garde, radical, or challenging to a perceived literary status quo, but also embraced existing literary traditions to varying extents. During the early decades of the twentieth century, they functioned in size and intention as a middle ground between mass-cir-

culuation magazines like *McClure's*, the *Saturday Evening Post* and *Collier's*, and avant-garde little magazines like the *Little Review*, the *Dial*, *Poetry*, and *Contact*. They shared with the little magazines a commitment to promoting a modern literary culture and publishing new kinds of writing, but they strove for as wide a circulation as possible and used definitions of “modern” and “new” that were fluid enough to encompass much that was traditional and connected to older modes of writing. They served as accessible guides to modernity for the uninitiated, offering an introduction to modernism that many people—mainstream readers who were nonetheless interested in becoming sophisticated and modern—could understand and incorporate into their existing conceptions of art, literature, and culture.

In different ways, these magazines were all purveyors of popular modernism. Popular modernism and high modernism overlapped and interacted, but while high modernist coteries tended to be self-consciously exclusive, popular modernist venues were catholic in their allegiances and more inclusive of cultural modernity. As a result, popular modernism tended to celebrate modern women as figures of modernity and to target women as readers and consumers. The historian William R. Taylor reminds us that the commercial culture that heralded modernity “beg[an] with the entrance of women into the cultural marketplace” (Taylor [1992], 73). Scholars like Rita Felski and Shiela Rowbotham also foreground the role of women in catalyzing and defining modernity. But although some contemporary commentators suggested that women were “the cause of modernism,” as a 1917 *New York Evening Sun* profile on modernist poet Mina Loy proclaimed (An. [1917], 10), many modernists expressed anxiety about the ways modernity brought women into public life. Examples of male modernists defensively distancing themselves from women and women’s culture abound. Ezra Pound’s explicit anti-feminism is notorious. Timothy Materer cites one of many examples; working to sharpen the focus of the new movement in arts that he was trying to promote and publicize,

[Pound’s] most remarkable plan was to eliminate half the human race by founding a ‘Male Review,’ or at least by placing on the masthead ‘No woman shall be allowed to write for this magazine.’ Admitting this plan would eliminate some good writers (‘about six’), he argued that the ‘ultimate gain [...] in vigour’ would be worth it. (Materer [1996], 20)

T. S. Eliot shared Pound’s skepticism about the possibility of women creating great modernist art, and remarked in a letter to his father during his tenure as editor of the *Egoist*: “I struggle to keep the writing as much as possible in Male hands, as I distrust the Feminine in literature” (Eliot [1988], 204). Pablo Picasso also implied that the rigor of modernism required distance from the feminine. Attempting to separate the use of things in avant-garde art from the things that make up what he sees as a woman’s chaotic and inartistic daily experience, he reminded an interviewer that “[a] painting isn’t a market basket or a woman’s handbag, full of combs, hairpins, lipstick, old love letters, and the keys to the garage” (cited in O’Connor [1999], 97). In Picasso’s view, mundane fragments of everyday life could be incorporated into modernist collage, but the fragments of women’s daily lives did not qualify.

Conversely, modernist-oriented glossy magazines presented modernism as a movement created by men *and* women, and connected it to elements of popular culture that increasingly included and even courted women. In their popular conception of modernism, high art was not at odds with feminized forms of culture like fashion, shopping, and hostessing. Popular modernism often embraced

women and women's culture, in part because it was fueled by a commercial culture that had much to gain from selling to women, and in part because it was created by women to an even greater extent than modernism proper. *Vanity Fair*, the *New Yorker* and the *Smart Set* all relied heavily on women contributors and promoted culture marked as feminine. The *Smart Set* had a "shopping column," and both *Vanity Fair* and the *New Yorker* carried regular fashion features as well as copious ads. *Smart Set* editor H. L. Mencken boasted that his magazine was "read mostly by women of superior intelligence but perhaps inferior virtue" (cited in Dolmetsch [1966], 46), a statement that turns on its head the conventional valuation of women's chastity over their intellect. Both the *Smart Set* and the *New Yorker* often implicitly conveyed feminist points of view, and *Vanity Fair* explicitly embraced feminism.

More generally, these magazines affirmed that modernity was to a great extent *about* women's large-scale entrance into public life and culture. As public ventures that stood to gain both popularity and profit from including women in their promotion of modern life and art, they did not suffer the kind of backlash against women and women's culture evinced by some of the most prominent architects of high modernism. This multiple, inclusive context opened up more and different kinds of roles for women contributors: they could be modern without necessarily being modernist, and they could draw on modernism while still retaining other more traditional or mass-cultural elements in their work.

While *Vanity Fair* has begun to receive some attention for its relationship to modernism, the *Smart Set* and the *New Yorker* are rarely discussed in connection with modernism, and yet they played a significant role in the sympathetic dissemination of modernist writing to a large public. Many magazines and newspapers covered modernist writers and their work, but often in a disapproving, dismissive, or parodic manner. Even the relatively positive 1917 *New York Evening Sun* story on Mina Loy (which judged Loy as an example of the quintessentially modern woman) treated its subject with a tone of bemused whimsy. Cartoons and sketches that made fun of or parodied modernist art and writing were common in New York's daily newspapers and in humorous magazines, such as *Life* and *Judge*. Particularly after the 1913 Armory Show, the first large-scale public exhibit of modern art in the United States, they brought modernism to the attention of a wide public. *Vanity Fair*, the *Smart Set* and the *New Yorker* presented modernism in a more sympathetic light, publishing modernist art and writing, offering intelligent criticism of modernist works, and providing profiles on modernist figures and updates on their activities as individuals and groups. In addition to their significance as popular venues for modernist art, criticism and "news," popular modernist magazines were unusual because they addressed their discussions of modernism to women readers and connected modernism with women artists.

The *Smart Set* did not promote modernism in the explicit and self-conscious way *Vanity Fair* did, yet during the years when it was edited by H. L. Mencken and George Jean Nathan, it strove to be avant-garde and was perceived as such by its readers. The *Smart Set* is rarely mentioned in accounts of modernism, but it played a significant role in the growth of literary modernism in the United States by introducing American audiences to James Joyce with "A Little Cloud" and "The Boarding House" in its May 1915 issue, by helping to establish D. H. Lawrence's reputation in the United States, and by publishing F. Scott Fitzgerald's earliest fiction. During its prime, under the editorship of Mencken and Nathan, it also featured work by Eugene O'Neill, Ezra Pound, Djuna Barnes, Theodore Dreiser, Frank Norris, Sinclair Lewis, Edna St. Vincent Millay, W. B. Yeats, Padraic Colum,

Somerset Maugham, Carl Van Vechten, Damon Runyon, Dashiell Hammet, and Dorothy Parker.

From 1913 to 1918, Ezra Pound “was virtually ‘European editor’ of the *Smart Set*, as he was in fact for *Poetry* and the *Little Review*,” directing a number of English, Irish, and American expatriate writers to the magazine. Despite the services that he performed for the *Smart Set*, Pound “refused fees, commissions, or formal ties with the editors for his services” (Dolmetsch [1966], 186), suggesting that although he was happy to use the magazine as a springboard for writing that he hoped to expose to an American public, he was not interested in being associated with the *Smart Set* beyond having his work published there. But he did try to influence the direction of the magazine, suggesting to Mencken that it would be better if it were more “weighty” and less “Comstockian” (Pound [1950], 98, 114). Pound’s derisive remarks probably arose from the fact that, in addition to many modernist and hard-boiled writers, the *Smart Set* published traditional, sometimes sentimental writing throughout its history. In its poetry selections in particular, the *Smart Set* usually favored continuity with nineteenth-century traditions over radical experimentation, regularly publishing traditionalist and genteel poets like Robert Bridges, Lizette Woodworth Reese, Sara Teasdale, John Hall Wheelock, Charles Hanson Towne, Maxwell Anderson, Margaret Widdemer, and Robert Hillyer. It printed modern poetry alongside traditional poetry, but apart from a rare foray into free verse like Amy Lowell’s “Summer Rain” (April 1916) or Lizette Woodworth Reese’s “Drought” (June 1913), the modernity of its poetry often arose from mood, style, or subject matter rather than experimentation with form. Elinor Wylie’s contributions, for example, tend to present spare, understated irony in carefully polished formal stanzas. Frequent contributor Muna Lee’s poems often convey restrained, imagistic lyric in simple rhythm and rhyme. Modernist writers who published in the *Smart Set* tended to place their more conservative or traditional poems there. Despite Pound’s suggestions, Mencken continued to publish sentimental writing by both women and men in the *Smart Set*. According to Rhonda S. Pettit, in spite of his own professed distrust for sentiment, “poetry springing from emotion was the type of poetry Mencken preferred” (Pettit [2000], 45). Partly because of this preference, the *Smart Set* was open to more and different kinds of writing by women than many magazines that considered themselves artistically cutting edge.

The *New Yorker* was not committed to experimental writing in the way that *Vanity Fair* and the *Smart Set* were; in fact, it “disliked what Edmund Wilson in 1927 rebuked as the ‘development of language beyond its theme’” and “relied on spoken and speakable language” (Douglas [1995], 69). In the prospectus for the *New Yorker*, Harold Ross said the magazine would be “sophisticated,” but “not what is commonly called radical or high-brow. [...] It will hate bunk” (cited in Wood [1971], 260). Although the *New Yorker* was not a promoter of modernism per se, it embraced and fostered central elements of a particularly American brand of modernist writing. Ann Douglas locates a strident belief in “truth-telling” and an obsession with “reality and fact-checking” as key features of American modernity and American modernism, and points out that the *New Yorker*, “one of the most successful and long-lived products of the [1920s] interest in the popular arts, set standards for accuracy of fact and word that were legendary” (Douglas [1995], 35). Harold Ross “clung to facts as a shipwrecked man clings to a spar” (Gill [1975], 14).

While it strove for truth and facts in its writing and reviews, the *New Yorker* cultivated an urban sophistication that hooked readers into the social, intellectual, and artistic life of New York and other cosmopolitan centers. Women columnists were an important part of this aspect of the magazine. Janet Flanner began writing the *New Yorker*’s “Letter from Paris” column in 1925 (under the

pseudonym “Genêt”) and used this column to keep a large American audience abreast of developments in modernist art and European and expatriate American artistic circles, writing profiles of Isadora Duncan, Pablo Picasso, and Igor Stravinsky, reviewing James Joyce’s later work before it was available in the United States, and informing readers about Gertrude Stein’s new projects. Mollie Panter-Downes started a “Letter from London” column in 1939. Lois Long, “the most dashing figure on the *New Yorker* [...] the embodiment of the glamorous insider,” took over the “Tables for Two” department in 1925, reporting on fashionable nightclubs, cabarets, and restaurants (Gill [1975], 203). In 1927 she was appointed fashion editor in the “On and Off the Avenue” department, where, unlike most fashion writers who engaged in the “sedulous puffing up of certain favored shops and designers,” she “instruct[ed] and entertain[ed] her readers by the extraordinary device of taking clothes seriously and writing about them honestly” (Gill [1975], 206). Taking both modernist art and popular fashion seriously, the early *New Yorker* bridged the putative “great divide” between modernism and mass culture.

During its two-decade life span, from 1914 to 1936, *Vanity Fair* was the most ardent and explicit promoter of artistic modernism and cultural modernity among the glossy magazines. It was also explicit in its embrace of feminism and in its conviction that women played a foundational role in the creation of modernist art. In his first editorial, editor Frank Crowninshield announced that he and his staff were “determined and bigoted feminists” and thus intended to do something particular for women, “something which, so far as we can observe, has never been done for them by an American magazine. We mean to make frequent appeals to their intellects” (Crowninshield [1914], 15). More than just seeing women as intelligent consumers of intellectual culture and modernist art, however, Crowninshield emphasized women’s key role in *creating* modernism: “we even make bold to believe that it is they who are contributing what is most original, stimulating, and highly magnetized to the literature of our day” (Crowninshield [1914], 15).

In its aims, *Vanity Fair* was as focused and high-minded as a little magazine; in its tone, aesthetic, and ad content it was unapologetically slick. Michael Murphy describes *Vanity Fair* as “dedicated [...] to the reproduction of what we would now generalize as ‘modernism’ through the regular publication of works by such important modernist figures as Picasso, Gauguin, Matisse, T. S. Eliot, André Gide, e. e. cummings, Gertrude Stein, D. H. Lawrence, and Colette, among many others” (Murphy [1996], 62–3). Murphy’s characterization of *Vanity Fair* is accurate, but far from precociously disseminating what came to be known as modernism, *Vanity Fair* called modernism by its name and self-consciously promoted it. It nominated many modernist figures to its monthly “Hall of Fame,” including Paul Klee, Virginia Woolf, Rebecca West, Ernest Hemingway, and James Joyce. Alongside many representatives of high art and culture, middlebrow artists like Ring Lardner, George Herriman, Robert Benchley, Fanny Brice, Al Jolson, and numerous other stars of stage and screen were represented in the “Hall of Fame.” The magazine presented its commitment to avant-garde art and modernist literature as perfectly consistent with its celebration of middlebrow popular culture, its publication of more traditional art and literature, and its advertisement of a range of commercial goods, from mundane items like Campbell’s soup to luxuries like French Line ocean crossings.

Among the “many other” modernists that Murphy mentions, *Vanity Fair* published the work of Djuna Barnes, Ezra Pound, Amy Lowell, the cross-dressing woman poet Michael Strange, the Italian futurist Giovanni Papini, the modernist critic and Harlem Renaissance impresario Carl Van Vechten, the photographer Edward Steichen, and the painter Amedeo Modigliani. The magazine



also regularly published middlebrow writers like Dorothy Parker and many of her Algonquin Round Table cohorts, the regular *New Yorker* contributor Janet Flanner, and the popular light novelist Anita Loos (author of the bestseller *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*). Occasionally it featured writing by popular entertainers like Harry Houdini, Charlie Chaplin, and Theda Bara. Its mix of avant-garde, journalistic, and popular cultural contributors reflects *Vanity Fair*'s inclination to celebrate modernism as part of a dynamic, multifaceted, smart, and above all fun modern urban culture. Rather than attempting to set modernism apart from more accessible and primarily entertaining elements of culture, *Vanity Fair* offered modernism as part of a mix of modern sights, sounds and ideas to amuse and elucidate sophisticates and would-be sophisticates.

In addition to presenting modernism and popular culture as part of the same public modernity, *Vanity Fair* explicitly celebrated instances where modernism entered into popular culture, and vice-versa, often in the person of women artists. It nominated Virginia Woolf for the "Hall of Fame" "because, despite the fact that her style is advanced and her subject matter recondite, she has become a popular novelist" (Amory and Bradlee [1960], 173); the painter Marie Laurencin "because she has founded a new school of French art, and because her work has influenced the world of fashion as well as that of the galleries" (Amory and Bradlee [1960], 139); and the designer Gabrielle Chanel because "she was the first to apply the principles of modernism to dressmaking" (Amory and Bradlee [1960], 203). Rather than presenting modernism as inaccessible, *Vanity Fair* promoted it as simply one of several significant elements of the varied cultural life of modern New York, a cultural life that increasingly included women.

The simultaneous celebration of popular culture and modern art in *Vanity Fair* arose out of the vision of editor Frank Crowninshield, who sought to bring modernism into the daily life of New York and the daily life of New York into modernism. An avid collector of modern art and one of the organizers of the 1913 Armory Show, Crowninshield used his magazine to make modern art accessible to a large readership. He reproduced the work of scores of avant-garde painters, sculptors, and photographers, despite the fact that this annoyed many of his advertisers, some of whom threatened to withdraw their pages because of what they termed the "decadent and distorted" reproductions of work by artists like Picasso, Modigliani, and Gauguin (Bradlee [1960], 11). Other advertisers who were perhaps more attuned to *Vanity Fair*'s readership capitalized on the popularity of modernist art and created modernist-inspired advertisements.

In addition to using *Vanity Fair* to bring modern art to the public, Crowninshield worked to bring the carnival liveliness of popular culture to art and literature by creating a venue where entertainment, fashion, humor, and art mingled and at times merged. Crowninshield makes this aim of injecting art and writing with the chaotic multiplicity of modern urban life explicit in his first editorial in 1914:

it will be one of *Vanity Fair*'s most pleasant duties to wean [American artists and authors] from their stiff, unyielding ways and make them [...] a little more free in their technique—a shade less academic and 'tight'—a trifle more fluent, fantastic, or even absurd. (Crowninshield [1914], 15)

In this sense, *Vanity Fair* sought not only to promote modernism but to have a hand in shaping it, or at least in defining it for some of its contributors and certainly for its audience. As Michael Murphy notes, *Vanity Fair* marketed modernism "not only by transcribing it, but by embodying it as well [...] the magazine simply became modernism for many of its readers" (Murphy [1996], 64). As

“determined and bigoted feminists,” the creators of *Vanity Fair* consciously chose to make women a central aspect of the modernism that the magazine bodied forth, both as modern artists and as figures of modernity.

*Vanity Fair* was a magazine historically and constitutionally directed at women. Its origins in 1913 as *Dress and Vanity Fair* gave it a predominately female audience, and when it transitioned from a women’s fashion magazine to a “smart” magazine of art, culture, society, and fashion, it made a point of addressing male readers as well, in part by adding a short-lived football column. It also came to be identified with a gay fashion subculture, a connection “reinforced by the figure of Crowninshield, the magazine’s famous dandyish ‘bachelor’ editor” (Murphy [1996], 84) and illustrated by the fact that it not only carried fashion advice “For the Well Dressed Man” from 1914 to 1935, but also briefly ran a feature called “Buying by Men for Men” in the spring and summer of 1917. But *Vanity Fair* never lost its allegiance to women readers. In a sense, it transformed back into a women’s fashion magazine when it ceased to be *Vanity Fair* in 1936, at which point it was incorporated into its Condé Nast sister publication, *Vogue*. During its twenty-two-year run as *Vanity Fair*, it regularly offered essays, features, and sketches that treated modern women and feminism sympathetically. It covered women’s sports as faithfully as men’s sports, making a point to applaud both young and old women athletes. Like many magazines of its day, *Vanity Fair* covered Broadway theater and Hollywood film, providing ample coverage of popular stars of stage and screen, where women outnumbered men. It also covered avant-garde theater, offering analysis and illustrations of experimental futurist and expressionist plays or productions of classic plays that used cubist or futurist costume and set designs. What is most remarkable about *Vanity Fair*’s coverage of these two very different dramatic spheres is that both were treated with equal seriousness as modern art and with equal levity as modern diversion.

More salient than its interest in women as active and independent figures of modern culture, *Vanity Fair*’s pointed interest in and celebration of women was a key element of its promotion of modernism. As Crowninshield’s conviction that women were responsible for the “most original, stimulating, and highly magnetized” writing of his day suggests, *Vanity Fair* understood that women played a central role in the production of modern art and literature, and the magazine proudly printed the work of experimental modernists like Gertrude Stein, Djuna Barnes, Colette, Marie Laurencin, and Georgia O’Keefe. But it also published non-modernist women artists and women who were partly modernist but also drew on older traditions, worked in mass-cultural forms, or incorporated non-modernist elements into their work. Barnes published crookedly ironic prose in *Vanity Fair* (both under her own name and her pseudonym, Lydia Steptoe), most of which conveyed a modern, absurdist perspective on the constructedness of gender roles. She also published a series of poems written in conventional verse forms and offering fairly traditional treatments of nature or romantic love. Elinor Wylie and Edna St. Vincent Millay published their popular lyric poetry as well as their humorous and sardonically modern prose sketches in *Vanity Fair*. The magazine’s embrace of different aspects of women artists’ work departs from a common approach used by many promoters of modernism, who often viewed women artists as great to the extent that they were unlike “most” women and commonly approached the women modernists they sought to publicize in extremely reductive ways as a result.

The extent to which the magazine’s definition of “modern” included both modernist and non-modernist women becomes apparent from the equal interest it took in the careers of the godmother

of serious modern dance, Isadora Duncan, and the queen of vaudeville comedy, Fanny Brice. These two very different women artists were featured in *Vanity Fair* numerous times and in 1923 the magazine captured both in portraits by Edward Steichen. Duncan was displayed in a geometric composition amid the walls of the Parthenon, and Brice positioned in a similarly stark and angular setting in the shadowed corner of a room, dressed in drag in tuxedo and top hat, with a wide masculine stance and her hands in her pockets. The magazine takes both women equally seriously as important modern artists, even though one is a highbrow modernist and the other a lowbrow artist of mass culture.

*Vanity Fair's* coverage of the careers of modernist visual artists also demonstrates its relatively flexuous definition of modernism, one that allowed more room for women artists to be modern and represent aspects of "femininity" that were often ignored or rejected by many elite modernists. The magazine had a continuing and very warm interest in the career of Chana Orloff, a Russian sculptor whose works during the *Vanity Fair* years consisted mostly of portrait busts executed in a distinctive style that was angular and clearly cubist-influenced, yet fairly representational in its portrayal of the human figure. Although busts represent the most common of Orloff's subjects, many of her sculptures represent animals, dancers, children, pregnant women, and mothers with children. *Vanity Fair* presented her work in nine separate illustrated features between 1921 and 1930, including some of her most modernist work—portrait busts of distinguished artists and intellectuals executed in her more angular style—along with some of her least modernist—figures of children and mothers with softer curves and animals executed in a nouveau medieval style. Orloff was nominated for the December 1922 Hall of Fame, where the magazine praised her prowess as a sculptor but also approvingly noted her diversity of artistic skills: "because she has studied dyes, colour printing, and ceramics" and "because she always works in extremely unusual materials" (An. [1922], 90). *Vanity Fair* presented Orloff as a serious and influential artist, an innovator who "is leading a new movement in sculpture" (An. [1924a], 55), and also pictured her with her young son on more than one occasion, foregrounding both her identity as an artist and as a mother without presenting the combination as a novelty.

Marie Laurencin is another artist *Vanity Fair* took a particular interest and pride in, celebrating both the modernist and "feminine" elements of her work. Laurencin was "a modernist by association and predilection" (Hyland [1989], 78), but although she was influenced by cubism, Dadaism, and primitivism, most of her large body of work is seen as too feminine to fit neatly into any clearly modernist category. Heather McPherson notes that while other women artists like Mary Cassatt, Berthe Morisot, and Frieda Kahlo have been recuperated in the late twentieth century, Laurencin's "uncompromisingly feminine (and decorative) aesthetic" has led to her continued neglect by many museums and departments of art history (McPherson [1989], 9). Many of Laurencin's paintings work in a soft pastel palate and depict graceful women draped in gauzy costumes, often accompanied by large-eyed animals, qualities that for some modernist art critics limited her stature as a great artist. Despite their prettiness, however, Laurencin's most pastel paintings are often striking and at times disturbing due to their haunted, alienated mood and the expressionistic anonymity of her portraits. McPherson sums up this unsettling combination when she refers to Laurencin's work as "charmingly deviant" (McPherson [1989], 15). *Vanity Fair* embraced both Laurencin's feminine and deviant qualities and gave her the great and quite uncommon honor of nominating her twice for its Hall of Fame (in November 1923 and September 1927). Although she often received attention as

the mistress of Guillaume Apollinaire and an intimate of Pablo Picasso and Gertrude Stein, *Vanity Fair* lauded Laurencin on her own merits. Presenting her work as both feminine and experimental, the magazine emphasizes her “lightly feminine grace” (An. [1923], 45) and the innovative and fantastic elements of her “essentially exclusive vision,” which “refuses to come to terms with reality” in paintings that “completely captivate a public habituated to realism” (An. [1924b], 25).

In contrast to Picasso’s skepticism toward the possibility that the reality of women’s everyday life can provide rich material for avant-garde art, *Vanity Fair* took a particular interest in avant-garde art arising from spaces associated with women, as becomes clear by its publication of Margaret Watkins’s photographs. A Canadian-born photographer who taught at the Clarence White School in New York, Watkins combined her skill at creating abstract photographic images out of still-life arrangements of mundane domestic objects with an interest in expanding the commercial uses of modernist photography. Her best-known work consists of a series of photographs from 1919 to 1920, visually radical compositions of kitchen items that “offended some critics” and “elated others” (Borcoman [1993], 144). Several of Watkins’s kitchen-themed photographs were published in a 1921 *Vanity Fair* spread entitled “Photography Comes into the Kitchen: A Group of Photographs by Margaret Watkins Showing Modernist, or Cubist, Patterns in Composition.” Emphasizing both their avant-garde and their domestic qualities, the text observes that “Domestic Symphony” is “strongly reminiscent of the sculptures of Brancusi,” and “The Bread Knife,” the most abstract photograph of the four, is “somewhat in the manner of Pablo Picasso” (An. [1921], 60). The small segment of text accompanying each photograph focuses on elements of its abstract design, but also notes the domestic aspect of the compositions, which contain “the simplest and most familiar objects in the kitchen” (An. [1921], 60). The presentation of Watkins’s photographs in *Vanity Fair* illustrates multiple intersections between avant-garde art, domesticity, and mass culture. Watkins focuses on the mundane world of the domestic sphere, associated most often with women and rarely with art, arranging the mass-produced items that make up this world to create abstract artistic images. As Mary O’Connor notes, *Vanity Fair*’s positioning of Watkins’s photographs as both avant-garde and domestic “echoes the magazine’s own attempts at fusing art with the domestic and gendered world” (O’Connor [1999], 109).

*Vanity Fair*’s willingness to incorporate disparate elements of modern culture that many other venues would have found contradictory made it an extremely productive vehicle for women artists whose work presented a complicated mix of typically modernist and culturally feminine qualities. In the case of Edna St. Vincent Millay, the magazine opened new doors for a writer who was popular and “serious” but often overlooked or denigrated by modernist critics because she was perceived as traditional and markedly feminine, despite the fact that much of her poetry was modernist in attitude and theme. In her pseudonymous prose work for *Vanity Fair*, published between January 1921 and March 1923, Millay foregrounds a specifically feminine brand of the modern by importing elements of mass-cultural femininity into her work. In the process, Millay mounts trenchant critiques of American political and social repression, challenging the association of femininity with superficiality and the notion that mass produced art is inherently watered down and middle-of-the-road. I turn now to this largely overlooked segment of Millay’s work both because it foregrounds complexities historically scanted in Millay criticism and because it demonstrates how women artists used the relatively open context of the popular modernist magazine to intervene culturally and politically in modernity. In her Nancy Boyd work, Millay uses *Vanity Fair* as a vehicle for politically

radical critique by layering pointed allusions to modern cultural crises into her deceptively light-hearted treatments of femininity, humor, and modern mass culture.

In his 1916 *Vanity Fair* essay, "What Is the Matter with Magazine Writing: An Attempt at a Sympathetic Diagnosis," Max Eastman, the editor of the cooperatively run radical magazine the *Masses*, suggests that writing necessarily suffers when it is directly connected to making a living because it is professional rather than passionate. "It is work and not play. And for that reason it is never profoundly serious, or intensely frivolous enough to captivate the soul. It lacks abandon. It is simply well done" (Eastman [1916], 63). Eastman insists that "[a] man is either living or earning his living. He is never doing these two things *purely*, at once." Magazine writing cannot be politically or socially engaged because it is beholden to the business imperative "to please as many readers as possible, and to offend none." Moreover, magazine writing cannot be aesthetically exciting because

[it] contains no accidents. It takes no chances. It is never cracked up the middle. It is never fragmentary. It is never mussy with the individual finger-prints of him who loved it too hard. It is never queer; it is never grotesque; never alien, or exaggerated, or sublime. It has always the smooth round regular decorated mechanical perfection characteristic of all goods that are turned out in large quantities to sell. (Eastman [1916], 63)

Eastman forwards an avant-garde notion of what makes art exciting—its "cracked," "fragmentary," "grotesque," and "sublime" qualities—but presents a romantic notion of how these qualities are achieved. Although he insists upon the importance of connecting art with life, Eastman's definition of "real life" includes all work except popular cultural work: "the dominant feature of real life is the pressure of necessity; and the artist, the writer, ought to taste that, and taste it strong. Only he ought not to *create* under the impulse of that pressure for an insanely competitive market" (Eastman [1916], 63). Assuming that writing for a living inevitably produces work that has "the smooth round regular decorated mechanical perfection" characteristic of mass-produced goods, Eastman anticipates later cultural critics like Theodor Adorno and Peter Bürger in his thoroughgoing pessimism about mass commercial art.

Eastman implicitly criticizes the magazine that provides him his forum, a magazine with advertisers and subscribers to consider. His pessimistic diagnosis is partly accurate, as illustrated by Dorothy Parker's firing from *Vanity Fair* for offending advertisers in her theater reviews four years after Eastman's piece was published. But it is also way off the mark in terms of much of the writing and art published there, not least the deeply irreverent, politically critical fiction Millay published under the name Nancy Boyd.

Millay's double career as Edna St. Vincent Millay the serious poet and Nancy Boyd the cheeky magazine writer illustrates not the constraining aspect of the commercial magazine context but its potentially *freeing* effect. In contrast to Eastman's claim that writing for money will always produce cautious, "superficially and obviously 'pleasant'" work, while writing not tied to profit will make possible the "utter and extreme play" that leads to great art (Eastman [1916], 63), Millay's pseudonymous work for *Vanity Fair* allowed her to break from the pressure of her poetic reputation and freely engage in the "play" of her modern and irreverently critical impulses. Millay's Nancy Boyd fiction provided the bulk of her income during her early career and helped finance her living in Europe for two years in the early twenties. Despite her reliance on the Boyd stories for income,

however, Millay did not hesitate to submit surprising and socially critical work under her pseudonym. Her insistence on using that pseudonym and the striking differences between her Boyd work and the small amount of fiction published under her own name suggest that it was art and not money that most pressured Millay's choices about her writing. She was unwilling to publish her Boyd work under her own name, even when Frank Crowninshield pushed her to do so. Crowninshield clearly understands Millay's artistic anxieties as he pleads with her to drop the Boyd pseudonym:

I want your own name on the sketches, even if you have to elevate the moral, intellectual and literary tone of them to a height level with your lofty position as an artist [...] your name really ought to be on them, in order to make us pay you this money willingly and gladly. If your friend Miss Boyd were to sign them, I would pay this money a little grudgingly. (cited in Milford [2001], 170)

Despite the fact that Crowninshield implies that he is much more willing to pay for a piece signed by Millay than by Boyd, Millay refused to set her *nom de plume* aside. This might suggest that she took this work less seriously as writing, but apparently that was not the case. While she saw the Boyd stories as a money-making endeavor and dictated the details of their publication less strictly than she did with her "own" work, she confessed to spending a great deal of effort on them nonetheless. Millay told journalist Elizabeth Breuer that although the Boyd stories "sound as if they tripped off my typewriter [...] I had such anguish of mind over them, so much preparation went into them, even now I could say some of them off by heart" (cited in Brittin [1982], 144n.). This intensity of planning and preparation is evident in the stories, which are witty, imaginative, and often present subtle, multilayered political and cultural critiques. It seems that because her own literary name was not tied to this work, she could set aside some of her most compelling artistic and cultural commitments in her Boyd writing—the roles of lyric poet and representative of literary tradition that she perpetually balanced with the roles of anti-lyric poet and New Woman—and give free rein to her youthful, modern, and iconoclastic literary persona.

Like Crowninshield's perception of its relatively "unelevated" moral, intellectual, and literary tone, many observers have approached Millay's Nancy Boyd work as less important than her other work. However, a close look at some of these pieces in their historical context reveals their audacity and cultural significance. Many of the Boyd stories break forcefully with traditional American culture, representing an alternative modern youth culture that constituted an important element of American modernity and an aspect of American modernism. As Boyd, Millay is free to reject traditions that she cannot otherwise fully separate herself from; she does so largely by revising traditional American womanhood to create a modern, liberating version of femininity, an identity that a great number of young women in the United States were pursuing and that disturbed and scandalized many Americans. Millay intensifies this cultural revision in several of her Boyd stories, mounting critiques of national politics by identifying and lambasting the traditional conceptions of family and womanhood used to justify a great deal of political and cultural repression in the early decades of the twentieth century. She takes aim in subtle but insistent ways at crusades for social purity and temperance, artistic and political censorship, and mindless patriotism, exposing the ways that early twentieth-century manifestations of these repressive forces deployed traditional conceptions of femininity and the cult of home and family.

Millay's Nancy Boyd stories portray two separate versions of femininity. One is an old-fashioned, traditional, "pure" version of femininity, which Boyd invariably skewers with sardonic critique. The

other is a modern, culturally savvy version of femininity that Boyd celebrates but also satirizes, albeit in a familiar, friendly way. Modern femininity provides the Boyd persona plenty of fodder for humor, but she tends to celebrate modern femininity and its relationship to mass consumer culture as much as she critiques it. Often she does both within the same story by borrowing and transcending the he-she formula common in popular magazines of the time, which usually attempted to create humor by rehashing old stereotypes. Boyd's he-she stories draw on common domestic or romantic conflicts, but their humor lies in upsetting the balance of gendered power between the couples through her rendition of modern femininity even as she exposes the conventionality behind her young characters' supposedly modern thinking.

Although Millay takes a complicated double approach to modern femininity and its attendant tools and rituals in many of the Boyd stories, she makes other feminist critiques in more clearly cutting ways, identifying a wholly pernicious form of femininity associated with extreme limitations not only on women's freedom but on the very spirit of democracy. This brand of femininity is cast as old-fashioned and outdated and is often associated with mindless patriotism and attempts on the part of patriarchal institutions to restrict women's lives and all people's rights and freedoms. Boyd's heroines often embody the dilemma of the modern young woman faced with passé expectations of duty and virtuousness, a dilemma that Margaret Anderson summarizes in a 1914 *Little Review* essay:

The average girl of twenty in a conventional home hates to be told that she must not read Havelock Ellis or make friends with those dreadful persons known vaguely as 'socialists,' or that she must not work when she happens to believe that work is a beautiful thing. She is submerged in the ghastly sentimentalities of a tradition-soaked atmosphere—and heaven knows that sentimentalities of that type are difficult to break away from. (cited in Morrisson [2001], 150)

In her most politically incisive stories, Millay-as-Boyd creates cunningly exaggerated, cartoonish versions of "tradition-soaked" homes and institutions brimming with "ghastly sentimentalities," offering her modern readers hilarious lampoons of American piety and puritanism. By weaving allusions to historical and political conflicts into her stories, she shows that these sentimentalities are more than just tiresome; they connect directly to very serious forms of repression and censorship.

Many of Millay's Boyd stories gloss these connections in passing. Other stories focus more intently on the ways traditional femininity goes hand-in-hand with a patriotism that justifies strictures on individual liberty and expression. "Our All-American Almanac and Prophetic Messenger," published in the March 1923 issue of *Vanity Fair*, associates the seemingly innocent and wholesome phrase "all-American" with every imaginable ban and restriction on art, entertainment, sexuality, and individual liberty. Along with these restrictions comes an absolute insistence on old-fashioned femininity in women, embodied by a law "forbidding women to cut their hair even in case of fever" and senators touting the virtues of modesty and the "meek and retiring woman, a contented and home-loving wife [...] seldom setting foot outside her own immaculate kitchen" (Millay [1923], 40). The question of women's control over their lives and bodies, particularly women's limited choices with regard to marriage and children, comes up repeatedly. In cloaked but biting details, this narrative exposes the compulsory nature of marriage for women as well as the pressure to have children, and lots of them. The story envisions an increasingly repressive culture in the United States and conveys a future-looking "history" of mounting limitations on art, imagination, sex, youth, and

women in the form of a month-by-month almanac covering a quarter-century from 1925 onwards. This almanac is full of various indications of increasing puritanism and repression: on New Year's Day 1925, dancing is abolished, an Anti-Tobacco Bill passes in 1926, on All Fool's Day in 1926 censorship czar Anthony Comstock is canonized, in 1938 the Metropolitan Opera House is given over to "the Anti-Art League and the Society for the Restoration of Side-Saddles for Women," in 1948 all motion-picture houses are closed and their equipment taken over "by the Society for the Suppression of Youth among the Young." Toward the end of the almanac, we find the following entry:

September Hath XXX Days

1. Labor Day. Twenty-eighth Amendment, requiring that every woman shall marry at or previous to the age of eighteen, and give birth to no less than sixteen children [...] adopted by Congress, 1950. (Millay [1923], 36)

This law is the culmination of a position the almanac alerts us to in 1927, when "Senator Lovejoy" makes a speech hailing "the holy cause of Female Modesty" with a distorted allusion to Christian scripture: "though a woman speak with the tongues of men and senators, and have not modesty, she has become as sounding zimbarimbaphones and tinkling tomato-cans!" (Millay [1923], 40). Millay's almanac makes a clear connection between political and cultural repression and the control of women's bodies. In this dystopic vision of the future, women's "modesty" is glorified at the expense of their public and political voice, and their confinement is achieved through mandatory early marriage and forced maternity. Immodesty is associated with public, political discourse—"speaking with the tongues of men and senators"—and with the modern forms of cultural expression that we see prohibited throughout the almanac, particularly that multicultural and morally suspect form, jazz—the "sounding zimbarimbaphones and tinkling tomato-cans" that the senator decries.

Although this is a humorous piece, the force of Millay's critique arises from the fact that her almanac alludes to a very real present while it predicts a farcical future. Congress may not yet have passed an amendment requiring early marriage for women, with sixteen children minimum, but at the time of this story's publication, strong cultural pressure to marry, which Millay glosses in several other Boyd stories, ensured that many women did marry early, and the widespread prohibition against birth control for all but the most privileged women ensured that many women had lots of children whether they wanted to or not. The Comstock law that Millay ([1923], 29) alludes to (the canonization of Comstock and "thousands of post-cards held up in the mail") helped thwart attempts to disseminate birth control information like that presented in Margaret Sanger's socialist-feminist newspaper *The Woman Rebel*. Thousands of copies of Sanger's paper were confiscated by the U. S. Postal Service in 1914 under the authority of the Comstock Act (Sanger [1976], 9).

Millay's lampoon of Comstock in "Our All-American Almanac and Prophetic Messenger" is part of a larger critique she mounts in several of her most politically incisive Boyd stories. These stories address the ways early twentieth-century conservative crusades, in particular Comstockian censorship and Prohibition, used traditional conceptions of women, home, and family toward antidemocratic and culturally repressive ends. For nearly half a century, Anthony Comstock represented America's symbol of Puritan inhibition and moral censure. His lifelong moral-purity crusade began with a campaign against vice in the media in the 1870s, targeting mass-market novels, racy photographs, and any other materials that he felt might threaten the young. He created the New York



Society for the Suppression of Vice in 1872 (the institution that Boyd mocks in the form of “The Society for the Suppression of Youth among the Young”) and within a year helped launch the law that banned “obscene” materials from being carried by the U. S. postal service. Comstock headed up the agency that policed the U. S. mails, acting as czar of postal censorship for four decades. His zealous campaign against “sin” blamed moral decay on changes taking place in modern American culture, including the shifting nature of sex roles and generational power relations. Similarly, the dry crusades that brought in Prohibition in 1919 relied heavily on the notion that women, children, and the sanctity of the domestic sphere needed to be protected from the ill social effects of alcohol (Rose [1996], 22–3).

Millay uses her Boyd persona to extend similar critiques of American cultural and political repression in the name of family and home in stories such as “How to Be Happy Though Good” (1922) and “Out of Reach of the Baby” (1922). In the Boyd stories, Millay takes advantage of the freedom she has as a woman writer in *Vanity Fair* to redefine rather than reject femininity, in the process creating a critique of American culture. Contrary to Ann Douglas’s notion that male and female moderns fought to exorcise the stifling influence of the Victorian “titaness,” Millay’s critique places the blame for socially repressive laws and customs on the shoulders of patriarchal rather than matriarchal figures.

Much of the humor and satire in *Vanity Fair* seems to share Millay’s goal of undercutting restrictive notions of home and family without rejecting femininity wholesale. This perspective is illustrated in a particularly pointed way on the magazine’s July 1924 cover. Presumably celebrating the anniversary of America’s independence from Great Britain, the cover asserts a distinctively modern and feminist brand of independence by depicting two young women situated in the branches of a fruit tree and pitching fruit at a fleeing male figure in revolutionary-era dress. The young women are both feminine and modern: they wear modish dresses and hairstyles and have clearly rejected standards of what is appropriate for “ladies” by climbing a tree and throwing fruit. They seem to be asserting their independence by driving out an old-fashioned founding father figure and choosing their own definitions of behavior appropriate for women. This is an especially fitting Independence Day cover for a magazine invested in an active and independent conception of modern femininity and in women’s full participation in modern culture and art, one that embraced various forms of “feminine” culture and celebrated many different kinds of women. *Vanity Fair*, along with a few other magazines that promoted modernism to a wide public, celebrated the New Woman, but not necessarily at the expense of the “old woman.”

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## Latent Icons

### Compensatory Symbols of the Sacred in Modernist Literature and Painting

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Modernist texts, viewed from a purely formal or social perspective, seem to encode Nietzsche's declaration of the death of God, suggesting even the demise of the religious impulse itself. However, modernism's acknowledged masterpieces belie this apparent erasure; in them, over and over again, the repressed religious function returns in the form of what we shall be calling "latent icons." Jean-François Lyotard defines modernism as a particular modality of the sublime — something "that takes place [...] when the imagination fails to present an object which might, if only in principle, come to match a concept." He links modernism's "powerlessness of the faculty of presentation" to a "nostalgia for presence," and concludes that "modern aesthetics is an aesthetic of the sublime, though a nostalgic one. It allows the unrepresentable to be put forward only as the missing contents; but the form, because of its recognizable consistency, continues to offer to the reader or viewer matter for solace and pleasure" (Lyotard [1984], 78–81). We contend, however, that the unrepresentable is in fact present, if only in latent form, in many notable modernist texts as "latent icons." These latent icons are not miscellaneous motifs but numinous images whose submerged symbolic content is religious in the broadest and least dogmatic sense of the term; they are compelling symbols that redefine the sense of the sacred in modern secular terms. Thus, for us, part of modernism's cultural work involved the creation of iconic "compensatory symbolic images," a term we have taken from Jung's theory of the cultural function of the artist.

A recent book by Marianna Torgovnik, *Primitive Passions: Men, Women, and the Quest for Ecstasy* (1997), deals primarily with the phenomenon of modern primitivism as an expression of the West's desire to experience "oceanic feeling," as Freud labeled it. (Torgovnik claims — after Jeffrey Masson — that Freud got the term from the Bengali mystic Ramakrishna via Romain Rolland.) She emphasizes modern civilization's yearning for a renewal of ecstatic merging with nature and with others and Western culture's various attempts to contain and/or appropriate archaic techniques of the sacred. We will be more concerned, unlike Torgovnik, with the activities of writers and artists seen metaphorically as modern mystics-in-spite-of-themselves, and less with the interface of modernist art and literature with archaic cultures; our focus is mainly aesthetic and psychological, not anthropological.

As the culture around them increasingly affirmed a world view which seemed to have excluded a sense of the sacred, artists such as Monet, Woolf, Van Gogh and Rilke created works that subverted this dominant cultural vision. What they did is not to be confused with the pious estheticism of Pater

and Ruskin, however. The modernist subversion of nineteenth-century positivism did not result in a purely esthetic “religion of art.” Rather, it engaged less directly but not less effectively with the need for contact with the sacred through the creation of a new set of subliminally perceived iconic representations. In doing so, modernist art and literature tended to validate William James’s contemporaneous theory, in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), that a truly modern experience of the divine could no longer be contained and accounted for by traditional theologies. James defined his method as the “abandonment of theological criteria” and as the “testing of religion by practical common sense and the empirical method” (James [1958], 290). He considered the experience of the divine, especially in his area of research into what he called “personal” as opposed to “institutional” religion, as a natural feature of human psychological life. Even mystical experiences (“trance-like states of insight into truth”) were for him “special cases of kinds of human experience” (James [1958], 37). Hence he did not dismiss the experience of the sacred as a sentimental or pathological illusion; in the course of speaking out against “the fashion, quite common nowadays among certain writers, of criticizing the religious emotions by showing a connection between them and the sexual life” (James [1958], 27), he added rather testily in a footnote that “few conceptions are less instructive than this re-interpretation of religion as perverted sexuality.” For James the experience of the sacred was psychologically healthy and of great pragmatic value for individual lives. Unlike Freud, who termed it “an illusion,” James defined the religious impulse, in a deliciously vague and provocative manner, as a “sense of reality, a feeling of objective presence, a perception of what we may call ‘something there’” (James [1958], 61). Thus for us it is James, rather than Freud, who defines the modernist paradigm of the sacred, and it is Jung’s later theories, not Freud’s, that best illuminate the latent symbolic content of many major modernist texts.

To discern the presence of latent icons in modernist texts means revising the way we conceive of modernism and its place in cultural history. However one defines modernism, whether in terms of a dehumanization that involves a focus on form, as in Ortega y Gasset’s early essay on “La Deshumanización del arte” (The Dehumanization of Art); or of ways of knowing (what Brian McHale, in his *Postmodernist Fiction* [1987], has called epistemological in contrast to the postmodern ontological); or of an engagement with the unconscious, as in Gide, Conrad, Mann, Joyce, and Woolf—an engagement which is defined primarily in terms of the discovery and literary exploitation of unconscious, often sexual, desires (as Richard Allen Boone proposes in his *Libidinal Currents: Sexuality and the Shaping of Modernism* [1998]); or of the workings of the cultural unconscious in the disjunctive images in a poem like *The Wasteland* (1922); or of its use of the readymade discourses of popular culture like the ones studied by the contributors to Richard Pearce’s collection, *Molly Blooms: A Polylogue on “Penelope” and Cultural Studies* (1994); or of its own self-commodification as it accommodates itself to the literary marketplace, a process studied by the essays in Kevin Dettmar and Stephen Watt’s *Marketing Modernisms: Self-Promotion, Canonization, Rereading* (1996), modernism has never been theorized as a discourse that incorporates spiritual symbolism. Thus we are focusing, via a discussion of several revealing examples, on a neglected element in modernist discourse and its cultural work, that is, on the capacity of its formal innovations to plumb the cultural unconscious of the age and express its repressed sense of the sacred.

In this context, Monet’s series of paintings of the 1890s, such as the Rouen Cathedral group (1892–3; twenty-eight views of the façade, two of the old western tower) and the poplar series (twenty-four), set up a hermeneutic dilemma. Why is the relentless repetition of a motif so compel-

ling? Is it only because of the variations in lighting? Or is there something else—something iconic? This seems a difficult question to answer, even when there is a traditional iconographical frame of reference, as there clearly is in the case of the Rouen Cathedral series. A cathedral is by definition suggestive of something religious; that Monet paints the cathedral's stone façade as though it were a natural rockface does not eliminate its potential for religious symbolism, although it certainly diminishes its specific referent. But for poplar trees no such traditional iconic reference is available. What then could be iconic about a line of poplars along a river?

It is true that the poplars can be given a social reading as nationalistic celebrations of the French countryside, as Paul Tucker has noted in his recent study of Monet. Poplar trees were a common feature of the French countryside since they constituted a valuable cash crop; in fact, Monet had to become co-owner of these particular poplars along the Epte river in order to prevent them from being harvested before he had finished painting them. Moreover, the poplar "had been selected after the French Revolution as the tree of liberty," and Tucker notes that "poplar-planting ceremonies occurred often throughout the century even down to Monet's own day" (Tucker [1995], 147). They were thus cultural icons for nationalistic Republican Frenchmen smarting from the defeat of the Franco-Prussian War a generation earlier. Even so, one can hardly imagine Monet being inspired to paint over and over again such a mundane economic and nationalistic allegory.

So why *did* Monet paint the poplars? First of all, we would argue that their repetitious alignment along a stream or road tends to suggest iconic status. A traditional religious icon is, after all, an image that varies little from one variant to another. An icon is a self-replicating image that defines itself in part through that very repetition: one poplar after another, all in a row. Secondly, the repetition provided by a series of canvases further reinforces the poplars' iconicity. Finally, a latent symbolic significance resides in their number, especially the numbers seven, four and three. Each painting of the series, foregrounds a set number of poplars: three, four, or seven. Furthermore, this representation of archetypal number rather than of the process of quantification is reinforced by the characteristic modernist move towards abstraction in the form of thick vertical lines (the long, straight narrow trunks with the bushy foliage beginning about two thirds of the way up). In the case of three and four there is even a visual representation of number: the vertical trunks of the poplars constitute a natural representation of the Roman numerals III and IIII; the number seven, as the sum of three and four, caps the sequence. Even the reflections of these narrow trunks as vertical shadows in the water of the Epte river may be said to amplify the latent numerological symbolism. We may conclude that latent iconic status has been achieved via a numerological abstraction. The poplars' symbolic force does not derive from traditional and familiar iconography; it is impossible, for example, to take the three poplars as emblematic of the crucifixion's three crosses. The viewer is less confronted with the task of discerning hermetically encoded meaning (as in the case of symbolist paintings) so much as induced to become enthralled by an image whose iconic numinosity generates a fascination with the latent symbolic potential of the numbers three, four and seven.

There are similar interpretive issues regarding Monet's Rouen Cathedral series. For Tucker, Monet's choice of subject was motivated by nationalistic concerns, since Rouen Cathedral was a superb example of the Gothic style that many believed was quintessentially French in its origin and development (Tucker [1995], 153–6). We can add that the rediscovery of the spiritual iconography of the sculptural programs of Gothic cathedrals was already underway, as Huysmans's novel on Chartres Cathedral (*La cathédrale*, 1898) would soon witness. Monet, however, was an atheist, and had no

discernible interest either in medieval iconology or in Roman Catholic cult and ceremony. Georges Clemenceau, whose ideas on this subject were much the same as those of his friend Monet, was later to refer, in his book on the Water Lilies series, to what he called “the terrible poverty” of Christian iconographic subjects (Clemenceau [1990], 27).<sup>1</sup> So it is not surprising that the sculptural program of the façade of Rouen Cathedral has been reduced, in Monet’s series, to the barest shadow of indistinguishable figures. What is left, however, after this erasure, is the archetypal image of a place of worship divorced from the medieval Catholic culture that created it, a temple of an unknown god—a numinous image, no doubt, but one with no specific religious content.

That Monet’s painting during the period of his series particularly develops the luminous envelope, the tangible unifying atmosphere surrounding objects, lends the subjects that he paints a numinosity that signals their iconic status (much as the traditional halo would have done in Christian iconography) without however specifying the nature of their symbolic content. Recent commentaries have overstressed the purely aesthetic nature of the modernist enterprise. Such commentaries are of course valid in their reflection of the aestheticism of Ruskin, Pater, and their successors as they influenced the art and literature of this period, and are continued in studies such as Leon Chai’s recent book, *Aestheticism: The Religion of Art in Post-Romantic Literature* (1990). But in such studies the spiritual dimension of a given image is often subsumed by the aesthetic. By contrast, contemporaneous commentators often dealt with the general spiritual dimension of Monet’s painting, but they did not recognize the particular cultural work of the latent icon within it. Monet’s friend Octave Mirbeau, for example, describes Monet’s ability “to touch the intangible, express the inexpressible, who enchants our dream with the whole dream mysteriously enclosed within nature, with the whole dream mysteriously scattered in the divine light” (cited in House [1986], 223). Mirbeau intuitively feels the hidden presence of the sacred, but he has got it only half right. The latent icon is not a *je-ne-sais-quoi* surrounded by the luminous envelope; rather, it has a particular form. The cathedral façade is thus latently iconographic in spite of Monet’s lack of interest in medieval Catholicism; it is not a replaceable object—replaceable, for instance, by a sea cliff or rockface. Still, the ambiguity remains: if Monet was such an atheist, why not choose a motif with less obviously Catholic associations?

To complicate matters further, there is the seemingly minor detail of the clock (which no longer exists on the façade of the actual cathedral today). Nobody seems to know what to make of it, although Joachim Pissarro has observed astutely that “almost every painting of the cathedral centers on the clock” (Pissarro [1990], 23). The actual clock face, however, is not discernible as such in Monet’s series. In fact, if one did not know from photographs of the 1890s that a clock face was positioned just above the central portal, it would not be clear just what is represented by that small circular form on which, as Joachim Pissarro observes, the paintings are actually centered, adding that “the clock reveals only a crust of colours” (Pissarro [1990], 23). The question in this context is, why does Monet center most of his Rouen Cathedral paintings on the clock face depicted as a series of abstract colorful swirls? Our answer is that the indiscernible clockface functions as an abstract symbolic form, a circle, the active organizing center for the shadowy façade. One might assign one meaning (“active organizing center”) or another (a solar disk), but most essentially, it represents the archetypal Center, a latent icon but not a specific symbol to be identified with the iconography of a particular religion. Like the lines of the poplars but in different form, this circle of paint is a pan-religious symbolic image in abstract form. It is Center, Self, Sun, and it has subtly replaced all the

erased iconographical images of the medieval façade. (We would note here that similar qualities of sun worship have been shown to organize many of J. M. W. Turner's protomodernist paintings.) Together with the archetypal image of the house of worship, this Center constitutes a powerful secular icon, all the more numinous and fascinating because the effect on the viewer is largely subliminal.

Like Monet's cathedral façade, though less evidently, the image of the purple triangle in Virginia Woolf's novel *To The Lighthouse* (1927) is a latent icon deriving from a traditional one. In referring to Mrs. Ramsay with her son James on the porch of her house as a purple triangle, Woolf follows the tendency toward abstraction that characterizes modernist latent iconography. This triangular form, compared in the text to the traditional triangular composition of madonna and child paintings, may also be indebted to the triangular iconic geometry of Cézanne's Mt. Sainte-Victoire series, with which Woolf, via Roger Fry, would have been familiar. (The intricacies of Bloomsbury's "debt to Cézanne" are too complex to rehearse here, although they constitute an important component of the interartistic history of modernism and are documented in, among other studies, Clive Bell's "The Debt to Cézanne," in his *Art* [1958], Roger Fry's "Paul Cézanne," in his *Vision and Design* [1974], and, more recently, in Beverly Twitchell's *Cézanne and Formalism in Bloomsbury* [1987].) In Lily's ekphrastic conversation with Mr. Banks, Woolf comes close to describing the creation of a modernist latent icon. In response to Mr. Banks's question about what Lily wished "to indicate by the triangular purple shape, 'just there,'" Lily responds that it was Mrs. Ramsay reading to James, and then continues to think to herself that "she knew his objection—that no one could tell it for a human shape. But she had made no attempt at likeness, she said." She has introduced the shape because in that corner "she felt the need of darkness." Mr. Banks is interested by the idea that "Mother and child, then—objects of universal veneration [...] might be reduced, he pondered, to a purple shadow without irreverence". Lily continues, explaining that

there were other senses too in which one might reverence them. By a shadow here and a light there, for instance. Her tribute took that form if, as she vaguely supposed, a picture must be a tribute. A mother and child might be reduced to a shadow without irreverence. A light here required a shadow there. He considered. He was interested. He took it scientifically in complete good faith. (Woolf [1927], 81–2)

Lily explains her painting's dark triangle in terms of formal innovation rather than of symbolic meaning, her emergent modernist discourse reducing a mother and child to an abstraction of a traditional icon. And Mr. Banks, also true to his age, takes her explanation "scientifically." But the repeated references to reverence and faith from within those formalist and scientific discourses betray them, and confirm our point that such abstract icons express generalized and latent religious feelings through their archetypal form. And even Lily's formalist discourse, gleaned, as is often pointed out, from the aesthetic theories of Roger Fry and Clive Bell, shows some cracks. She only "vaguely supposes" that her picture "must" be a tribute, as if she resents that narrowing of purpose. But to what might it be a tribute? Ostensibly, of course, to Mrs. Ramsay the individual woman, but less specifically, to the queenly purple shadowy triangular vulval womb of woman-and-motherhood.

The purple triangle is also more: a symbolic affirmation of Lily's own female artistry and selfhood, a transformation of reality, an expression of a general reverence for life and its processes, especially as the self differentiates itself from the wave-like flux of the world. The triangle becomes



an abstract form invested with numinosity but whose symbolic content is largely undefined. It suggests maternity and sympathy, which Mrs. Ramsay represents, and, indirectly, artistic creativity, which Lily represents, as well as modernist abstraction itself. Furthermore, it integrates and balances motherly personal and painterly abstract sensations. And like Monet's repeated images, the triangle is effectively present for much of the novel because Lily works on this first painting throughout the first section and on another one of the same scene during the third. Thus the purple triangle is an object of fervent attention, almost worshipped, as it were, but specifically emptied of the traditional Western imagery of triangularly composed Madonnas with children of which Lily was conscious as well as of Eastern triangular abstract images of yonis and yantras of which she presumably was not. David Dowling maintains that Lily's changing the shape of Mrs. Ramsay in her imagination is significant. She moves from a dome which represents a more personalistic connection to Mrs. Ramsay, while the triangle "signals Lily's transcendence of personal need and association to aesthetic appreciation" (Dowling [1985], 153). Dowling's idea that the triangle depersonalizes Lily's aesthetic emotions seems correct, but his interpretation emphasizes the purely formal nature of this icon that we, reversing the post-Victorian formalizing impulse, also see as representing unconscious religious emotions. Finally, as Lily finishes her second painting, ten years after the first, someone inside the house "had settled by some stroke of luck so as to throw an odd-shaped triangular shape over the step," mysteriously occupying the place where Mrs. Ramsay had been when Lily was painting the scene earlier (Woolf [1927], 299). That mysterious presence seems to confirm the latent iconicity of this shape, as well as its evocative power.

In another evocation of the triangle image, Mrs. Ramsay reanimates that latent icon, as she thinks to herself shortly after that first description of her as purple triangle in Lily's painting:

She could be herself, by herself. [...] To be silent; to be alone. All the being and the doing, expansive, glittering, vocal, evaporated; and one shrunk, with a sense of solemnity, to being oneself, a wedge-shaped core of darkness, something invisible to others. Although she continued to knit, and sat upright, it was thus that she felt herself; and this self having shed its attachments was free for the strangest adventures. When life sank down for a moment, the range of experience seemed limitless [...] This core of darkness could go anywhere, for no one saw it [...] a wedge of darkness. (Woolf [1927], 95–6)

In this passage, as Mrs. Ramsay imagines her inner self as a dark wedge, she also feels capable of strange cosmic adventures, so that that self is connected to the cosmos. In his recent discussion of modernism, as he argues against Lyotard's (now quite ubiquitous) correlation of modernism with the nostalgia of the unrepresentable, Calvin Bedient notes a similar presence of the sacred in many modernist texts, including *To the Lighthouse* (1927): "the aesthetical [...] tends to be boundlessly erotic, a psychosensual synthesis, a world-mysticism (as against an introverted soul-mysticism). So it is with Woolf's Mrs. Ramsay when she becomes the world of objects around her, to the point of ecstasy; with Forster's Margaret Schlegel as she virtually roots down and branches up like a human wych-elm on the lawn at the end of *Howards End* (1910); with Lawrence's heroes and heroines as they rejoice in the 'plasm' of a Great Being; with Yeats's representations of a radical innocence of self-delight" (Bedient [1997], 109). Via Lily's painting process throughout the novel, the triangle continues to represent Mrs. Ramsay to herself as a mysterious interior soul, and to others as maternal arranger of lives and familial anchor point; it also pictures Lily's artistically procreative ability to transform the world, to be herself and to be an artist, just as competent as Mrs. Ramsay but

operating in a different realm. It is an icon of selfhood, suggesting that, as Lily hints later when she realizes happily, sitting at Mrs. Ramsay's family dinner table, that "she need not marry," but instead "would move the tree [in her painting] rather more to the middle," that individuals can be themselves in different realms (Woolf [1927], 154). Lily the arranger of abstract forms need not envy Mrs. Ramsay's skill in arranging lives.

Clive Bell's notion of "significant form," developed in Bloomsbury in close conjunction with Roger Fry's idea of the "aesthetic vision," comes very close to articulating the notion of a latent icon (Fry [1974], 50; Bell [1958], 18). But working from within the largely Freudian and formalist secularizing spirit of post-Victorian culture, Bell and Fry do not elaborate on the cultural work these visual and verbal icons were accomplishing. Like critics of Monet's work who stress his purely aesthetic concern with light and color, Bell and (especially) Fry insist on divesting significant forms of symbolic content, and confining the ecstasy these forms provoke to the domain of a purely "aesthetic emotion." Fry's purposely outrageous statement that in a painting "a man's head is no more and no less important than a pumpkin" (Fry [1974], 52) illustrates this aestheticizing tendency under which nevertheless lurks a repressed religious function, a function which the less scholarly Clive Bell recognizes, at least to some degree. Thus while Fry is the more influential aesthete, in part because he initiated the formalist criticism that prevailed in the age that succeeded his, Bell's writing is rather more in harmony with the latent iconicity of modernist art.

In the first part of his *Art*, Bell proceeds from "The Aesthetic Hypothesis" in which he is concerned to establish "a starting point for all systems of aesthetics" in "the personal experience of a peculiar emotion," "the aesthetic emotion," which responds to "the quality that distinguishes works of art from all other classes of objects," to a neo-Platonic "Metaphysical Hypothesis" (Bell [1958], 16–17). In asking why we are "so profoundly moved by certain combinations of lines and colours," Bell believes this is because "'significant form' is a form behind which we catch a sense of ultimate reality" (Bell [1958], 46). However, as in the latent icons we have been discussing, in which an object transmits a numinous sense of the sacred without particularizing either specific meaning or religious doctrine, "the ultimate object of the artist's emotion will remain for ever uncertain" (Bell [1958], 48). By the end of this essay, Bell concludes that "the contemplation of pure form leads to a state of extraordinary exaltation and complete detachment from the concerns of life" (Bell [1958], 54). For Bell, near the end of his book, as for a number of select but seminal modernist iconic moments, "art is the most universal and the most permanent of all forms of religious expression" (Bell [1958], 182). Furthermore, in describing the ways in which he believed a viewer to be sensitive to formal elements in art from all periods, he reflects the abstractly iconizing tendency of contemporary modernist painting and literature: "they are concerned only with lines and colours, their relations and quantities and qualities; but from these they win an emotion more profound and far more sublime than any that can be given by the description of facts and ideas" (Bell [1958], 30).

Bell and Fry's aesthetic theories lead us part of the way toward an understanding of modernist latent icons, because they theorize—and validate—abstract and near-abstract forms as containers of significant but generalized ideas and emotions. But the divestiture of symbolic meaning to which they subscribe means that we need to look beyond their formalist analyses for a full comprehension of modernist iconicity. C. G. Jung's contemporaneous theory of the "compensatory symbol" and his description of the cultural work of the "visionary artist," illuminating and validating as they do the modernist visionary impulse, take us the rest of the way.

It was in his essay "Psychology and Literature" (1930, revised and expanded in 1950) that Jung first defined the visionary mode of artistic creativity and its particular challenges for a modern rational and scientific mind, such as that of Woolf's Mr. Banks. The resistance modernism encountered, such as the English public's jeering at Fry's first post-Impressionist exhibit (in 1910), may have stemmed partly from its visionary mode, for modernist writers and artists were all, to some degree, the "voyants" or visionary seers that Rimbaud had called for already in the 1870s. Three of Oscar Wilde's epigrams from his preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) herald the modernist visionary project, the anxiety that accompanied it, and the resistance that it provoked: "Art is at once surface and symbol. / Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril. / Those who read the symbol do so at their peril." In attempting to define the modern symbolic imagination, Jung concluded that "a deep darkness surrounds the sources of the visionary material" (Jung [1971], 92). But he insisted that this unspecified darkness, akin to James's "perception" of "something there," did not derive from a repressed and unresolved episode in the artist's private life; in fact, according to Jung, such a "reduction of art to personal factors" downplays "the seriousness of the visionary experience" and devalues the artist's attempt to create "an expression for something real but unknown" (Jung [1971], 93–4).

Jung had analyzed the nature of the artist's attempts to draw out this incipient symbolic image in an earlier essay "On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetry" (1922). He based his analysis on the theory that the tendency of a given age to overdevelop its particular strengths can result in a potentially tragic lack of balance. Applying Jung's theory to late nineteenth and early twentieth century culture, we would argue that its affirmation of the primacy of scientific rationalism and positivism, of the ultimate authority of the evidence of the senses and of the belief in material progress as the goal of human history, neglected the basic human need for an attitude of religious awe—in Rudolph Otto's terms (1925), of a sense of "the numinous." But, by providing "compensatory symbols" filled with latent iconic power, modernist art and literature compensated for the one-sided rationalism in such a way that the culturally repressed religious impulse of the age could be satisfied, and satisfied without anxiety, because the numinous symbol was presented in the culturally familiar terms of an ever more refined estheticism. Modernist texts housed the sacred in secular containers, the symbolic content carefully enclosed in increasingly abstract forms increasingly valued primarily for their formal qualities and esthetic impact. This secularization of the icon was, in Jung's terms, a necessary step in the visionary creative process, which "consists in the unconscious activation of an archetypal image, and in elaborating and shaping this image into the finished work. By giving it shape, the artist translates it into the language of the present" (Jung [1971], 82). Or, as he reformulates the theory later on in the essay,

the unsatisfied yearning of the artist reaches back to the primordial image in the unconscious which is best fitted to compensate the inadequacy and one-sidedness of the present. The artist seizes on this image, and in raising it from deepest unconsciousness he brings it in relation with conscious values, thereby transforming it until it can be accepted by the minds of his contemporaries according to their powers. (Jung [1971], 92–3)

Vincent Van Gogh, painting the sunbaked golden wheat fields of Provence, is a compelling example of this modernist transformation. Let us imagine him as he "seizes on this image [of sunbaked golden wheat fields], and in raising it from deepest unconsciousness brings it into relation

with conscious values, thereby transforming it until it can be accepted by the minds of his contemporaries" (Jung [1971], 92–3). Van Gogh began his career as a Christian socialist artist and as an admirer and follower of Millet, celebrating the laborious lives of workers and peasants. But by the end of his life he had discovered his own original latent icons in the often golden tilled fields which occupy the foregrounds of many of his finest last paintings, in the golden sun's disk (a rare motif in landscape painting), and in the golden wheatfields in which a reaper is sometimes positioned. Unlike Monet's serial repetition of the exact same motifs, Van Gogh's repeatedly depicted fields are not representations of the same field, but within his oeuvre, they form a significant group, almost a thematic series. Compared to earlier European landscape painting, the foregrounding of this golden labor is striking. The lively brushstrokes that portray worked earth, and which appear in the foreground almost as in bas relief, metaphorically and metonymically join Van Gogh the painter to his fellow toilers and raise both their labors to the level of icons. Van Gogh's relatively uninspired imitations of paintings on Christian themes of Rembrandt and Delacroix suggest that he was desperately grasping for a conscious icon, but had to copy it from someone else's work. The figure of the sower, who is occasionally present in these scenes, and whom Ronald Pickvance has called "one of the seminal and most obsessive icons in his entire oeuvre," is emblematic of this identification (Pickvance [1984], 102).

Van Gogh frequently heightens the numinous effect of this iconic elaboration of the field by associating it with the sun. Already in January 1890, G.-Albert Aurier's article "The Isolated Ones: Vincent Van Gogh" in *Mercure de France* asked emphatically: "how could we explain that obsessive passion for the solar disk that he loves to make shine forth from his emblazoned skies, and, at the same time, for that other sun, that vegetable-star, the sumptuous sunflower, which he repeats, tirelessly, monomaniacally if we refuse to accept his persistent preoccupation with some vague and glorious heliomythic allegory?" (cited in Stein [1986], 191). The status of Van Gogh's famous sunflowers is a difficult issue to resolve in this context. Are they or are they not latent icons as we have defined them? Well, yes and no. Even though the popularity of the sunflowers among viewers has virtually iconized them in the public domain, we would like to claim that they are only incipient latent icons. Closely associated with fields and sun, they are painted repeatedly and constitute a recognizable motif, but one not yet endowed with the numinosity of the fully realized latent icon represented by Van Gogh's ploughed and sown fields. Unlike those fields, which tend to expand their and the viewer's horizons toward the infinite, the sunflowers remain very much earthly, if entrancing, bouquets. In Van Gogh's particular case, this heliomythicism is highly problematic, of course, as many commentators have recognized. For Bataille, for example, "the eagle-god who is confused with the sun by the ancients, [...] who alone among all beings can contemplate while staring 'at the sun in all its glory,' [...] is, however, [...] nothing other than an automutilator, a Vincent Van Gogh" (Bataille [1985], 70). But in Bataille's economy of ecstasy, finally, "at the moment Van Gogh introduced the sun into his work, 'all of his painting finally became radiation, explosion, flame, and himself, lost in ecstasy before a source or radiant life, exploding, inflamed'" (Bataille [1985], 70; Bataille [1986], 59; cited in Jay [1994], 225). No matter how one chooses to regard it psychologically, the golden field, through its indirect association with the sun, takes on the symbolic resonance of divine light and solar mysticism. Thus Van Gogh seizes on this image of the divine, but by celebrating it in terms of the popular sentimentality surrounding landscape and country life he makes it acceptable to the minds of his contemporaries, accustomed as they were to the senti-

mental approach of Millet. In the most famous cultural icon of the time (a status confirmed by the furor that erupted when it was sold to an American collector, which was only equaled by the relief when it was later returned to France), Millet's *The Angelus* (1857–59), a peasant couple bow their heads in prayer when they hear the sound of the angelus tolling; in Van Gogh this overt sentimentality is lacking. In these late paintings, the golden sun and the golden wheat fields provide a religious resonance which is not specifically Catholic but rather universal in its appeal.

The painting *The Red Vineyard* (1888) is a particularly good example of this iconizing project. The figures in the painting are minimally articulated in comparison to the complexly worked field that surrounds them, a complexity and concentration that help raise the field itself to iconic status. The icon remains latent, however, because the canvas depicts the ostensibly sentimental subject of peasants working. More obvious examples of this same subject matter, composition, and brushwork from Van Gogh's Arles period (during 1888) include several paintings entitled *Wheat Field*, and *The Sower*, as well as *Wheat Field with Sheaves*, *Arles: View from the Wheat Fields*, and *Summer Evening*. The clearest examples are those in which the field usurps a large part of the canvas. This iconization of cultivated earth extends beyond the most common subject matter of wheat or other fields to encompass other subjects, such as gardens—see, for example, the same elaboration of the foreground that we have seen in the depiction of wheat fields in *Flowering Garden*, three pen and ink drawings entitled *Garden with Weeping Tree*, and one drawing called *A Flowering Garden* (all also from 1888). Van Gogh's conspicuous and rhythmical brushstrokes shift our attention from the referent to the formal qualities of the sign. This foregrounding of the act of painting and its coloristic components belongs to the modernist tendency toward iconic abstraction, an abstraction that both evokes and camouflages the compensatory symbol.

In the realm of literature, two of Rilke's early poems illustrate this early modernist tendency towards abstraction allied with powerful latent symbolic content, although the self-conscious and playful irony that wafts over Rilke's symbolic images contrasts with the manic seriousness and raw energy that pervade Van Gogh's last canvases. The title of Rilke's collection *Das Buch der Bilder* (The Book of Pictures), published in 1902 and 1906, emphasizes the iconic impulse within these early poems—not that “Bilder” specifically means “icons,” but that behind this artistic term lies the suggestion of something quasi-religious. (Rilke's close ties with the artistic community at Worpswede and Paris are well known; consequently a visual impulse often underlies his creation of poetic images.) As Rilke wrote after discussing Russian icons in a letter from St. Petersburg, “all things are there in order that they may, in some sense, become pictures for us” (Rilke [1969], 32). *Das Buch der Bilder* thus represents a kind of verbal iconostasis. Consider the opening poem of the collection, “Eingang” (Initiation), 1902, as translated by C. F. MacIntyre:

Whoever you are, go out into the evening,  
 leaving your room, of which you know each bit;  
 your house is the last before the infinite  
 whoever you are.  
 Then with your eyes that wearily  
 scarce lift themselves from the worn-out door-stone  
 slowly you raise a shadowy black tree  
 and fix it on the sky: slender, alone.

And you have made the world (and it shall grow  
and ripen as a word, unspoken, still).  
When you have grasped its meaning with your will,  
then tenderly your eyes will let it go ...  
(Rilke [1968], 21)<sup>2</sup>

The term “die Ferne,” which MacIntyre translates as “the infinite,” literally means “the distance,” but it has a stronger romantic metaphysical connotation, suggesting a yearning for what lies beyond this world. Like Lily Briscoe’s purple triangle, Rilke’s “black tree,” which he raises and fixes “on the sky: slender, alone,” suggests the setting up of an icon. Rilke’s iconic impulse in the poem is in fact prefigured by his description of icon worshippers in a letter from 1899, whose wording is similar to his later poem: “who all create their God with the same kneeling power, again and again, presenting him and singling him out with their sorrow and their joy (little indefinite feelings), raising him in the morning with their eyelids, and quietly releasing him in the evening when weariness breaks the thread of their prayers like rosaries” (Rilke [1969], 32).

Unlike the Russian icons that Rilke admired, this arboreal icon has no preassigned traditional iconological significance. However, the text indirectly (like his “little indefinite feelings,” typically modernist in their spiritual timidity) suggests one with the next line: “and you have made the world.” If the tree is equivalent to “the world,” then the World Tree is the specific mythological subtext here. A universal myth rather than a Christian icon, it is all the more forcefully present through verbal indirection than it would be through direct allusion. This world (Welt) is also a word (Wort) and as such it “grows and ripens in silence”—a sacred mantra, a mystical formula, and, unlike the tree, one for which the poem suggests no specific symbolic content. Foregrounding of specific meaning has been subordinated to sensual evocation, enabling the latent icon to exert its numinosity without offending cultural prejudices. The raising of this universal icon constellates a sacred space in a secular city. The satisfied eyes at the end of Rilke’s poem, in contrast to the weary ones at the start, suggest the successful outcome of this very modernist act of closet adoration.

Although they bear no genetic relationship to each other, a strikingly similar modernist icon—a significant form moving toward abstraction—can be found in Mondrian’s painting *Blue Tree* (ca. 1909–10). Like Rilke’s tree, the defining shape of the tree is black, recalling once again what Jung called the “deep darkness [that] surrounds the sources of the visionary material” (Jung [1971], 92).

And recalling Monet and the impressionists, but in a later and more abstract modernist mode, the blue brushstrokes constitute a roughly hewn twentieth-century envelope, both black grid and blue patches suggesting a forceful if nearly undecipherable symbolic message. Finally, like Rilke’s verbal tree, the way in which Mondrian’s tree almost completely fills its pictorial space in a near-abstract pattern of colors, “makes a world.”

A second iconic poem by Rilke, “*Blaue Hortensie*” (Blue Hydrangeas) (from Rilke’s second collection of painterly poems, *Neue Gedichte: Erster Teil* [New poems: first part], 1907), continues his abstract use of color as a means toward encoding a symbolic cryptogram.

Like the last green in the palette’s colors,  
these leaves are without luster, rough and dry  
under umbeled flowers that were duller  
but for a blue reflected from the sky [von ferne].

They mirror it, exhausted as with tears,  
vaguely, as if not wishing it to stay;  
as old blue letter-paper which the years have touched with  
yellow, violet, and gray;

washed-out like a child's apron, no more used —  
nothing else can happen to it now:  
one feels how short the little life has been.

But suddenly the blue seems to renew  
itself in one last cluster — and see how  
the pathetic blue rejoices in the green.

(Rilke [1968], 75)<sup>3</sup>

That at the end of “*Blaue Hortensie*,” “the pathetic blue rejoices in the green,” renewing “itself in one last cluster,” converts the fading hydrangea into a paradoxical emblem of visionary sadness tinged with meagre delight. If Rilke had been writing in a symbolist mode, like Mallarmé in his early poems, the palette color blue would have been replaced by a metaphysically coded term like Mallarmé’s “*Azur*”. Instead, Rilke has foregrounded the purely coloristic components of his image, with only a bare suggestion that there is something heavenly about his blue, since the blue is only “a blue reflected from the sky” (*von ferne*).

As we have seen, this foregrounding of sensation as opposed to meaning marks the difference between modernist and symbolist procedures. In modernism, instead of the articulation of a complex symbol, we have the repeated move toward an increasingly abstract and simple icon, in this case, the color blue (“*das Blau*”), first a daub of paint on the artist’s palette, then a reflection of the blue sky on blue flower petals, “exhausted as with tears,” then a blue that is invigorated — somewhat — by the presence of green.

Rilke’s single image poems set up icons not through the repetition of a motif but via the intense concentration on a familiar object. Thus Rilke’s world tree and heavenly blue flower generate moments of spiritual emotion and ecstatic perception firmly anchored in ordinary sense perception. They compensate for his period’s excessive focus on the material senses as the sole source of knowledge and pleasure by using those same senses to experience spiritual meaning and emotion through the creation and contemplation of near-abstract and archetypal forms.

In conclusion, modernism’s much heralded formal innovations reveal an unexpected capacity for the construction of modern icons, of what Jung rightly defined early in the century as compensatory symbolic images. In the broadest terms, both the Impressionist movement in painting with its intense concentration on light itself, and stream of consciousness in fiction with its focus on the workings of the mind, are themselves major cultural manifestations of latent iconicity. The foregrounding of light and consciousness and the partial marginalization of the object in favor of its luminous envelope do not, however, erase the latent symbolic force of the actual motif. On the contrary, they constitute its secular halo, so to speak. Part of the powerful fascination of these great modernist texts may derive from the force of their latent icons, which allow the repressed religious emotions of a largely secular age to emerge in an acceptable style and context. Paradoxically, then, within these texts, the death of God coincides with the resurrection of the icon.

## Notes

1. "l'incroyable pauvreté" (Clemenceau [1990], 27).
2. Wer du auch seist: am Abend tritt hinaus  
aus deiner Stube, drin du alles weißt;  
als letztes vor der Ferne liegt dein Haus:  
Wer du auch seist.  
Mit deinen Augen, welche müde kaum  
Von der verbrauchten Schwelle sich befreien,  
hebst du ganz langsam einen schwarzen Baum  
und stellst ihn vor den Himmel: schlank, allein.  
Und hast die Welt gemacht. Und sie ist groß  
Und wie ein Wort, das noch in Schweigen reift.  
Und wie dein Wille ihren Sinn begreift,  
lassen sie deine Augen zärtlich los ...  
(Rilke [1966], 127)
3. So wie das letzte Grün in Farbentiegeln  
sind diese Blätter, trocken, stumpf und rauh,  
hinter den Blütendolden, die ein Blau  
nicht auf sich tragen, nur von ferne spiegeln.  
Sie spiegeln es verweint und ungenau,  
als wollten sie es wiederum verlieren,  
und wie in alten blauen Briefpapieren  
ist Gelb in ihnen, Violett und Grau;  
Verwaschnes wie an einer Kinderschürze,  
Nichtmehrgetragenes, dem nichts mehr geschieht:  
wie fühlt man eines kleinen Lebens Kürze.  
Doch plötzlich scheint das Blau sich zu verneuen  
in einer von den Dolden, und man sieht  
ein rührend Blaues sich vor Grünem freuen.  
(Rilke [1966], 275)

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## Primitive Art in Modernism

### The Ambivalence of Appropriation

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The distinction between individual and collective, which seems strict to us, has little value in the aesthetic production of primitive societies [...] It is thus necessary to immediately differentiate the pertinent nature of the distinction between individual and collective production, and then make a difference (though you will tell me this is no longer valid today [...]) which consists in the opposition between art that tends essentially toward signification and art that, in keeping with what I recently defined as possessiveness, has over time assumed an increasingly more representative and less signifying nature. Finally, there is a third difference, which is the conscious and systematic tendency of modern aesthetics to close increasingly in upon itself, to place itself in direct relation not with the objects, but with artistic tradition—the example of the great masters, painting according to the great masters—which doesn't exist in primitive art, because there the continuity of tradition is implicit. (Lévi-Strauss [1961], 81–3)<sup>1</sup>

In 1959, Lévi-Strauss and George Charbonnier conversed on the radio about art, language, and culture, and on the fate of ethnology. Heated in tone, yet easy on the ears, their discussion was later compiled by Charbonnier in a volume that still seems profound and modern, even though the constant opposition between the “Western and primitive worlds” does sound obsolete and out of place now. Lévi-Strauss’s “primitives,” those who live in societies “immersed in a historical flux to which they strain to remain impervious”, help the anthropologist build heuristic models and they “perform a rhetorical function not unlike that which, for Rousseau, the state of nature performed in his *Discourse on Inequality Among Mankind*” (Fabietti [1997], 10). However, it is precisely the emphasis that Lévi-Strauss and Charbonnier place on the distance, which seems irreducible, between the “primitive” and the “civilized” that brings into relief the ambiguous nature of the concepts and issues they dwell on in their discussion.

In 1988 James Clifford, an anthropologist skilled in deconstructive strategies, beautifully described the passion and amazement that warmed intellectuals’ souls in the face of primitive art during the first two decades of the twentieth century. The biographical paths of many anthropologists and artists active at that time help to put into perspective the cultural appropriation that is the subject of much discussion and revision to this day. Lévi-Strauss and many of his friends and colleagues before him were keen lovers and tireless collectors of Indian and pre-Columbian masterpieces. Edmund Carpenter often described the atmosphere and feelings that animated these intellectuals. Standing out in Carpenter’s stories are the surrealists, relentless visitors to a museum warehouse in the Bronx. While looking at a fabulous collection of Eskimo masks, they stumbled upon some magnificent visual calembours made by the Kuskokwim Eskimos a century or more

before. The collection, which seemed to be the largest of its kind in the world, was considered a “joke” by the museum director, so much so that he sold half of it at 38 and 54 dollars per piece. The surrealists bought the cream of the crop and then, with quite positive results, also combed through Heye’s North Western Coast collection, stripping it of one masterpiece after another (Carpenter [1975], 10).

In the same way, in 1906 and 1907, the discoveries by Matisse, Derain, Vlaminck, and Picasso of masks and sculpted figurines from Africa and Oceania marked the start of their experimentalism in painting. “Art Nègre” became synonymous with “primitive art”: the simplicity of its forms, its volume and its pronounced, rhythmical geometric structures, the refined aesthetics of “tribal art,” and the artists’ ability, as Picasso said, to evoke a “magical and enchanting atmosphere,” were only some of the aspects which fascinated European artists. Indeed, the Europeans projected their poetics onto these artifacts, which became tangible proof of their experimentation. Robert Goldwater claims that within painting and plastic arts, the term “primitivism” does not define a specific school, but instead “an attitude productive of art,” (Goldwater [1986], xxiv). Goldwater, in fact, classifies painters such as Emil Nolde, a forerunner of expressionism, within so-called “emotional primitivism” (Goldwater [1986], 104); Nolde was fascinated by the ability of such art to provoke intense emotions, and by its power to generate unmediated, instinctive, and natural feelings: “its absolute primitiveness, its intense, often grotesque expression of strength and life in the very simplest form” (Goldwater [1986], 105).

One of the most seductive episodes in Maurice de Vlaminck’s autobiography *Dangerous Corner* (1929) conjures up the intense emotions which the painter felt upon seeing a few African statues behind the counter of a Paris bistro. Their power and charm were so irrepressible that he decided to buy them for two liters of Aramon (Vlaminck [1955], 71). His account, though colored with mythical hues, aptly expresses the strong impact this type of art had on avant-garde painters. Vlaminck’s story, however, should not overshadow the work done by various ethnographers, both professional and non-professional, who, through their fieldwork, had already familiarized themselves with “primitive” art objects. A good example is Charles Wiener, an archeologist who in the 1870s traveled to Peru, where he gathered about 4000 objects. In 1878, Wiener’s collection, as well as other artifacts coming from Colombia, Ecuador and Bolivia, were exhibited in Paris at the Palais de L’Industrie; the show offered the occasion to publish a treaty in defense of all non-European arts, edited by Soldi, a disciple of architect Viollet-le-Duc (Williams [1985], 152). The experience of these men, whose relationship with material culture artifacts was rife with ambiguity and contradictions, paved the way for the appropriation of that art by the modernists. George W. Stocking emphasizes how the relationship between anthropology and tribal art proved ambiguous and contradictory from the very start:

From the perspective of anthropologists, the collection of objects for sale to museums was an important if somewhat tenuous means of capitalizing research on less marketable topics. Between them, at the center of the political economy of anthropological research, stood the museums, institutions premised on the collection and display of objects. Although not often devoted solely to anthropology, they were prior to the First World War the most important single institutional employers of anthropologists, and channelled into anthropological research an amount of support that has yet to be calculated — the return for which was most quickly evident in the boxes and bundles of cultural objects sent back for warehousing and display. (Stocking [1985], 113–14)

Before examining the ambiguous forms of appropriation of primitive art and the ways in which primitive art entered into literary modernism, it is methodologically necessary to first consider complex and stratified terms such as “primitivism” and “barbarism.” The “primitivists” were those intellectuals, artists, anthropologists and novelists who adhered, in strict opposition to “Western” values, to the aesthetic canons of “primitive art.” However, when ethno-anthropological disciplines first came into being, the term “primitive” already had very precise ideological connotations.

Herodotus already spoke of “barbarism” in dichotomous terms. Considered by many as “the first of the anthropologists” (Mercier [1966], 32), Herodotus provided shrewd judgments in his *historiai*, showing how easy it is to come to ethnocentric conclusions and assessments. In Herodotus, “barbarism” is not interpreted as an inescapable ontological condition. It is accepted as an opinion and evaluation criterion for affirming one’s own identity and uniqueness. Furthermore, the origin of “barbarian” and “barbarism” (Fabietti and Remotti [1997], 590–1) is deeply rooted in humanism. In his essay *Des Cannibales*, Michel de Montaigne does not describe the Native Americans in particularly detailed or fantastic terms: “There’s nothing barbarian or savage in these people, as far as I have been told, if not that each of us calls barbarian whatever is not within our own customs; it would indeed seem that we have no other reference for truth and reason but the example and idea of opinions and customs from the country where we live” (Montaigne [1962], 203, our translation).<sup>2</sup> According to the Bulgarian critic Tzvetan Todorov and the Italian anthropologist Francesco Remotti, Montaigne’s notion of barbarism does not concern specific societies or the customs of certain populations. It is rather “a judgment passed on others, it is not a typological characteristic, it designates not a level of cultural development but an aspect of ethnic evaluation” (Remotti [1995], 56–7; Todorov [1989], 59–77). “Barbarian” becomes the “Other” par excellence. It represents all that which is close to the origins (and the origins are mythical and better than the present), but “barbarian” is also whatever is cruelest and most degrading. Thus, Todorov finds that ideas about barbarians, as expressed by Montaigne, simultaneously assume a positive and negative historical and ethical significance. Montaigne’s tolerance is relativistic: there is no reason to prefer a law or a custom to another, and therefore there is not a reason to despise it. Montaigne’s defends a generalized tolerance which, in time, will reveal many traps.

In the history of Western thought, the two concepts of “primitive” and “barbarian” present dual connotations. On the one hand, they point to a primeval state in tune with nature, evocative of an ideal heavenly place; on the other, they refer to a condition of instinctive irrationality and ferociousness. This duplicity takes the form of two great myths that have been handed down to us: the “noble savage” and the “cannibal.”

In the first half of the twentieth century, an interest in primitive cultures together with the crisis in Western civilization stirred up the debate over notions of “culture,” “civilization,” and “barbarism.” These terms had not been neutral since the late 1700s, but now they became loaded with new meaning due to great historical-political events, World War I and II, and profound epochal changes in society, such as the advent of “mass civilization” (for a history of the concept of “culture” and “civilisation” see Spengler [1918]; Kroeber [1944]). As Raymond Williams (1977) aptly noted, the concept of civilization is defined in relation to barbarism, and as a result, the idea that a socially and culturally inferior group exists is always implicitly present. In this sense, the event of war reveals the gap separating intellectuals and artists: historians such as R. G. Collingwood (1942) and intellectuals like Leonard Woolf (1939) saw war as an intense form of barbarism and barbarization, in

which Western civilization was besieged by heavy rhetoric and nationalist-interventionist propaganda. At the same time, artists such as the Italian futurist Marinetti hailed war as “the powerful φαρμακος,” or as “world hygiene” (Marinetti [2000], 6). In the words of Marinetti, a term such as “barbarism” takes on a positive connotation in that it becomes a sort of “rite of passage” from which one emerges regenerated. In opposition to this view, during the period between the two wars, more judicious historians interpreted the nightmare of totalitarian systems and Nazi ideologies based on the superiority of a “pure” Arian race and on exaltation of the mythical origins of Germanic people, as the supreme expression of ferociousness and barbarization, as threatening signs of regression and disintegration of the cultural roots of the Western world.

This threatening duality of the terms “barbary” and “barbarism” can be found in works that Wyndham Lewis wrote between the two wars. Lewis took a polemical position against those who supported “tribal art,” making provocative claims about jazz music, for example, and against those who, like D. H. Lawrence, saw in primitivism and in primitive cultures a possible solution to the crisis in the Western world. Lewis’s position is not an easy one to evaluate because on the one hand, he sought to go beyond the binary perspective he saw in various forms of primitivism, setting forth an idea of a united Europe, a derivation of the American “melting pot” (see Poutignat and Streiff-Fennart [1995]). On the other hand, his discourse contains heavy racial prejudice and hostility towards “miscegenation,” or the mixing of races. In his openly provocative proposal and revaluation for a “New West,” Lewis was incapable of shaking off stereotypes of racial superiority and inferiority. He criticized Lawrence bitterly, considering him a typical representative of the “extreme romantics” school; moreover, he judged Lawrence, who presented a sentimental notion of the “Return to the Savage” and to the “Primitive” (Lewis [1929, 144–7]), as a dangerous advocate of “self annihilation of the white race.” In truth, in his reassessment of the natives, Lawrence carried out a pure and simple reversal of racial hierarchies (see *Mornings in Mexico*, 1927), while in his bitter criticism of Lawrence, Lewis too proved unable to go beyond the binary distinction between black and white. His criticism of modernist primitivism constituted the premises for his theorization of a united Europe where racial contamination would not exist. In *Journey into Barbary*, Lewis compares Berber and European populations: the Berbers are barbarians, an idealized vision of the people of the north Atlas and of the sublimation of a prototypical barbarian society, while the Europeans are the civilized “colonials” who fail to understand the complexity and the dignity of the other cultures, and pursue the “exotic shallowness of the marvelling savage of the West” (Lewis [1983], 42).

In their appropriation of the term “primitive,” various disciplines have brought to light the etymological duplicity of this adjective: in its positive connotation, “primitive” means “pure,” “simple,” and “elementary,” it indicates an earlier phase in time, “that comes before.” Indeed, “Primitive Church” is the church of the origins, and in biology and mathematics, the adjective indicates primary cells and tissues or the first elements. In its negative connotation, “primitive” designates a condition of incomplete development, or remaining in an elementary state. In this regard, to understand forms of appropriation employed by evolutionist anthropology, it is indicative to note how the term “aboriginal” has been used since the late 1700s to indicate people who inhabit non-European lands and who have remained in a “prehistoric” state. Edward Burnett Tylor (1832–1917) is considered the father of anthropology and evolutionism, when in reality many others also contributed to developing an evolutionist idea of society: “primitive” civilizations were felt to survive as “fossils,” the “archives” of a prehistory that was rapidly disappearing, and for whom a global and holistic approach

was reserved. As Francesco Remotti keenly remarked, “the main problem with anthropology of the 1800s consists not in understanding the concrete life of well determined societies, but in developing categories and concepts through which an adequate interpretation of the universe of primitive societies can be provided” (Remotti [1986], 95). Consequently, a generalizing and “abstract” concept of the primitive was still present in modernism. Tylor based his theory of “animism” upon these elements (see Fabietti [1997], 19). According to this theory, all primitives, in belonging to the same level of civilization, are similar in all parts of the world and have animism as their religious and mental form. Tylor deserves credit, however, for not relegating the immense amount of material gathered by ethnographers and travelers into an easy category of “oddities and junk.” Instead, he considered them part of the concept of “culture” that, precisely during those years, was taking shape within ethno-anthropological disciplines. The evolutionists worked by classification, dividing into types and categories on a hierarchical scale whose point of arrival was represented by European society of the late 1800s. Human history thus began to be seen as a single evolutionary development through a series of phases vaguely defined as “savagery,” “barbarism,” and “civilization.” As George W. Stocking (1982) clearly states, late nineteenth-century humanism too was quickly appropriating this “social evolutionism.” Indeed, during the same period in which Tylor, John McLennan, and Sir John Lubbock were active, travel literature linked to European expansionism was accumulating information on tribal societies which, as described in these reports, showed surprising analogies with tribes from ancestral Europe. As early as 1803, Herder had written that only a few centuries had passed since the inhabitants of Germany were “Patagonians.”

Yet, there was a desire to understand the minds, intellect, and soul of the primitives. The work of Lévy-Bruhl, co-founder of the “Institut d’Ethnologie” in 1927 together with Mauss and Rivet, contains many evolutionist assumptions. He investigates and describes the minds of the primitives through a binary opposition between Western and primitive mentalities, which nonetheless allows the French ethnologist to reflect on how it is methodologically wrong to use Western categories for “other” societies: “faced with the evidence of the primitive mentality, the terminological apparatus in Western philosophy, logic, and psychology proved inadequate” (Remotti [1986], 120). The cornerstone of Lévy-Bruhl’s first writings concerned primitive representations which, according to his theories, lacked a logical nature due to a presumed non-differentiation between intellectual, emotional, and body motion elements. According to Lévy-Bruhl’s *Les fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures* (Mental functions in inferior societies) from 1910, such representations include a very profound mystical aspect, not intended here in the sense of religious mysticism, but instead interpreted as “the belief in forces, influences, actions that are imperceptible to the senses yet real” (Remotti [1986], 121). Lévy-Bruhl had no qualms about using strongly ideologized terms laden with profound ambiguity, such as *inferior* societies, *prelogical* minds, and *mystical* aspects: “Oriented differently than ours, preoccupied above all with relations between mystical properties, and having the law of participation as its main law, the primitive mentality necessarily interprets differently than our mentality that which we call nature and experience” (Lévy-Bruhl [1970], 129, our translation).

During those same years, 1913–1918, T. S. Eliot was reading and reviewing Lévy-Bruhl, Frazer, Durkheim, and Tylor at Harvard (among the numerous anthropological texts which T. S. Eliot read, note Frazer’s *The Golden Bough*, Tylor’s *Primitive Culture*, Lévy-Bruhl’s *Les Fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures*, Durkheim’s *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, Wundt’s *Elements of Folk Psychology*, and Weston’s *From Ritual to Romance*). He realized that anthro-

pology was opening new roads for interpreting reality — with Eliot began that ambiguous attitude towards “primitive man” and his culture that would become typical of the European avant-garde. In “primitive” ritual practices and their “material culture” (“material culture” includes all the artefacts of a society, both those related to survival and those produced for ornamental, artistic or ritual purposes, see Malinowski [1931]; Childe [1956]; Evans-Pritchard [1940]; Baudrillard [1976]), Eliot saw a vigor and energy capable of awakening man’s dim and enervated sensibility, yet at the same time his position made him incapable of eliminating the prejudices and stereotypes of his times. At that precise moment in history, both anthropologists and poets took on the task of going to the origins of historical layers, they wanted to unveil the hidden and repressed “primitive sides” of society. Within the evolutionist culture of the time, the physical remains of man, archeological findings, and contemporary material culture constituted the most immediate means for illustrating the development of humanity from a geographical perspective. In this regard, even texts gathered by linguists could be considered “objects” (Stocking [1985], 114). This reading of texts as “objects,” which occurred above all within the Boasian “school,” would prove extremely significant because it allowed for a wide-sweeping reading of the “cultural product.”

For T.S. Eliot, even literature followed a methodological path along the lines of contemporary anthropology. He wrote that: “Literature cannot be understood without going to the sources: sources which are often remote, difficult, and unintelligible unless one transcends the prejudices of ordinary literary taste” (Eliot [1923]). With Frazer, one of the most skilled anthropologists and writers, “the savages became philosophers and poets” (Douglas [1990], 17):

The natives of Laos suppose that the body is the seat of thirty spirits, which reside in the hands, the feet, the mouth, the eyes, and so on. Hence, from the primitive point of view, it is perfectly possible that a savage should have one soul in his sex totem and another in his clan totem. However, as I have observed, sex totem have been found nowhere but in Australia; so that as a rule the savage who practices totemism need not have more than one soul out of his body at a time. (Frazer [1963], 690)

Eliot was enchanted by Frazer’s legendary stories, and just as for the symbolist poets he so admired and for his contemporary Walter Benjamin (see Benjamin [1989]), a profound link existed for Eliot between “savagery” and the most advanced technological society, between the “forest” and the “metropolis,” precisely between sexuality and primitivism. Eliot “read widely in anthropological scholarship [...] was intensely interested in convulsive and hallucinatory violence of the most savage sort. This he imported into urban setting” (Crawford [1987], 74–5).

Studying the rituals of aboriginal people served to understand the ritualism of contemporary society. In his essay “The Interpretation of Primitive Ritual” (1987), published posthumously, Eliot claims that rituals are perpetuated in the same forms, but that they take on different meanings according to the society in which they occur. The artist (and the accurate reader) then is in an ideal position to appreciate the savage, as well as being distanced from him by being on the far side of contemporary civilization. He is at once closer to and further from the savage, another reason for Eliot’s linking of “the poet and the anthropologist,” both of whom are in the business of comprehending “the stratifications of history that cover savagery” (Crawford [1987], 93).

To contemporary anthropology scholars, the monographs read by T.S. Eliot and other modernists such as D.H. Lawrence, reveal a dangerous ethnocentric attitude. If Lévy-Bruhl makes impartial and sometimes unwary use of the synecdoche (the Indians of Brazil, instead of the Aranda of

Central Australia, become the prototype for “Primitive”) when interpreting the primitives, Frazer, in an almost romantic manner, employs a rhetorical device defined by James Clifford as “pastoral allegory.” To Clifford, “a recognition of allegory emphasizes the fact that realistic portraits, to the extent that they are ‘convincing’ or rich, are extended metaphors, patterns of associations that point to coherent (theoretical, esthetic, moral) additional meanings” (Clifford [1986], 100), while the pastoral nature of the allegory sees primitive societies as simple, “natural” photographs of a distant, mythical past, which cannot help but provoke a sort of “primitivist nostalgia.” Indeed, as George Boas stated in 1935, the crisis and discontent of civilization helped provoke a desire to return to the origins, a desire for a simpler, less sophisticated life. Significant in this regard is the definition George Boas and Arthur Lovejoy give to “cultural primitivism”: “The discontent of the civilized with civilization, or with some conspicuous and characteristic features of it. It is the belief of man living in a highly evolved and complex cultural condition that a life far simpler and less sophisticated in some or all respects is a more desirable life” (G. Boas [1935], 20). This feeling of “primitivist nostalgia” represents a constituent part of the ambivalent and contradictory appropriation of primitive art on the part of modernism.

The appropriation of “primitive” art in the West arose in the wake of these conceptions developed by evolutionism, which have been summarized so far. “Primitive art” was spoken of as early as the late 1800s. However, it was Alfred Cort Haddon of Cambridge University, known above all for his famous expedition to the Torres Strait (1898–1899) together with C. George Seligman and W. Halse Rivers, who began applying evolutionist theories (Tylor and Darwin) to aesthetics (see Stocking [1982], [1987]). Thus “primitive arts” were interpreted as simple, childlike, naïve, and instinctive arts. As Giorgio Cardona and Barbara Fiore acutely note in the Italian preface to Franz Boas’s text *Primitive Art* of 1927, it is interesting to observe how modernist artists followed the same path as the ethnologists,

spurred on by a scientific interest in the progressive transformation, or rather ‘degeneration’ of naturalist forms, Haddon and Balfour limited themselves to meticulously delineating the evolution of decorative patterns. In the same way, Gauguin brought only decorative elements into his painting, proving incapable of entering into the primitive conception of volume and three-dimensional space that would have such a profoundly revolutionary effect on later artists. (Boas [1981], 8)

The “primitive” object lay devoid of history for decades, without tradition, ready to spark instinctive emotions and provoke childlike stupor, to reawaken a lost innocence. These objects were collected in *cabinets de curiosités* starting in 1700, and over the course of the 1800s, masks and sculpted figurines were kept in ethnographic museums with no distinction made between artistic objects and artifacts (see Rubin [1984]). During the early part of the twentieth century, anthropologists, novelists, and art historians all had contrasting and ambivalent feelings towards these “primitive” art forms. Furthermore, cultural fervor and the concomitant historical-political events of the early 1900s led to a frenetic circulation of ideas in time and space: literature, art, and anthropology traveled beyond European borders, thus becoming profoundly intermingled. There are the testimonials of Bronislaw Malinowski, avid reader of Stevenson and Conrad on the Trobriand Islands (Ginzburg [2000], 79–88), of T. S. Eliot’s fascination with Frazer’s inventive stories, and of a sparkling Paris where Michel Leiris enjoyed listening to jazz: “For me, it was a form of exoticism in American society. Jazz simultaneously incorporated both industrial and African civilization” (cited in Fournier [1994],



501, our translation).<sup>3</sup> Thus reception was profoundly hybridized in its forms, while equally mixed in its contents: the cinema, the radio, and the phonograph were born, the music of Poulenc, Auric, Ravel, and Stravinsky stormed in, and the Afro-American music of King Oliver, Louis Armstrong, and Duke Ellington came to life (Fournier [1994], 501–3). During this cultural fervor, awareness was gained of objects previously considered only as “barbaric fetishes,” as Vlaminck mentions in his autobiography. Hence, modernism can be credited with transforming these exotic curiosities, or “figures formerly called ‘fetishes’ (to take one class of object) became works either of ‘sculpture’ or of ‘material culture’” (Clifford [1988], 199). Assessment of this appropriation process proves quite complex. While anthropologist James Clifford, like art historian William Rubin, does not categorically condemn this phenomenon, much postcolonial criticism (see Torgovnick [1990]) has above all brought to light the manipulation, misreading, and plagiarism carried out by the Western world. Marianna Torgovnick’s position is exemplary in this regard. She criticizes Rubin’s position, considering it ethnocentric because, while he does admit that tribal art represented the most important influence in the history of twentieth century art, he still maintains that the “modernist revolution” was already under way when the avant-garde artists first became aware of tribal art, “and that it caused no fundamental change in the direction of modern art is equally true [...] Primitive objects had less to do with redirecting the modern painting than with the reinforcing and sanctioning development already underway” (Rubin [1984], 17). On the other hand, Rubin validates his hypothesis by recalling a statement by Picasso, according to whom: “The African sculptures that hang around [...] my studio are more witnesses than models” (Picasso [1923], 2).

This statement of Picasso’s leaves many readers perplexed still today. The work done in avant-garde experimentation and the artifacts produced by tribal art—a Yoruba sculpture of a face and a cubist sculpture by Picasso—hold disconcerting analogies. The two sculptures appear so similar in their formal solutions and in the conceptualization of their volume that it is hard not to think of actual plagiarism (Wentinck [1979], 5). In the same way, a Grebo mask from the Ivory Coast or Liberia most certainly constituted the model for Picasso’s 1913 sculpture *Guitar*. The Picasso sculpture appears shaped around certain elements that (as in African art) project forward the cylinders representing the eyes of the mask and others that recede. Picasso was attracted to and fascinated by African art; he found it “raisonnable,” he considered it the result of a profound and spontaneous process of abstraction. In Picasso’s reading of them, the African masks were appreciated not so much for their religious and ritualistic content as for their formal content. They constituted a non-mimetic representation of the human face, while the cylinders and horizontal bars used by the artists were palpable signs of the masks’ ideographic language. What Picasso did is illustrative of the history and fate reserved for artifacts from primitive material culture in the Western world. As Sally Price notes, in the face of “primitive art,” an ambivalent and contradictory attitude was almost inevitable. In a compact, condensed form, the same prejudices held against “savages,” “native” peoples, and “blacks” spilled over onto primitive art. These objects were capable of evoking and bringing to the surface the most obscure things buried in the depths of Western man’s psyche. As such, exhibits in which these objects were presented as “ethnographic finds” almost always gave information on the technique, society, and religion, denying the idea that the aesthetic quality of the work was capable of “speaking for itself”; or rather, denying the very idea that the object possessed aesthetic qualities worth mentioning (Price [1989]).

From this perspective, a key text is the previously mentioned *Primitive Art* by Franz Boas. With

Boas, anthropology started to become a “scientific discipline” because he began actual field research. The “primitive art” artifacts that he analyzed in greatest detail were, for the most part, those that he (or his pupils) found first hand on the northwestern coast of America. Boas made brief and intense trips to the field, which he loved to call “flying visits.” In 1885, he went to the Kwakiutl area to carefully study the natives’ decorative production, and the first significant text in this sense is from 1897 (see Boas [1897], [1908]). When Boas wrote this volume, many problems linked to the reception of primitive art had not yet emerged. Nonetheless, several *topoi* that later became constants in the debate over “primitive arts” can already be identified within it. Indeed, in the introduction to his monograph, Boas’s first comment concerns aesthetics:

No people known to us, however hard their lives may be, spend all their time, all their energies in the acquisition of food and shelter, nor do those who live under more favorable conditions and who are free to devote to other pursuits the time not needed for securing their sustenance occupy themselves with purely industrial work or idle away the days in indolence. Even the poorest tribes have produced work that gives them esthetic pleasure [. . .]. (Boas [1955], 9)

A recurring problem in the assessment of “primitive art” artifacts (in many disciplines, such as anthropology, literature, and art, the term “artefact” in primitive cultures has a strong ideological connotation which contrasts with the western notion of “work of art”) consists precisely in the methodology used to interpret those objects. Critical literature since the 1950s has emphasized, in fact, how difficult it was to find the key to understanding and decoding this art: it was precisely the aesthetic value of the object that was questioned. In 1975, Giancarlo Scoditti, one of Italy’s most impassioned ethnologists and scholars in this field, made the following remark:

Why is a Karawari sculpture seen today as a cult object, as the image of a spirit, and not ‘just’ as an aesthetic object? It is in response to this question that an analysis must be structured, taking into consideration a series of elements such as: the presumed and expected preference that exists, also on a critical level, solely in favor of the ‘functional’ aspect of each artifact of an ethnological society. (Scoditti [1975], 200)

Douglas Fraser clearly states in his *Primitive Art*, one of many such texts from the postmodern period, that this art was not meant for aesthetic purposes. The artist simply satisfies the request of his society, he produces the exact quantity of objects — no more no less — that are requested of him; moreover, all his works have still another function: they either participate in a ritual or have a social function (Fraser [1962], 15).

This is clearly an attempt to deny “primitive” populations the possibility to make and produce “culture”; insistence on “their” presumed link with nature (the opposition between *Naturvölker* and *Kulturvölker* came again from evolutionism) was indeed so strong that in coming years, elimination of the “naturalistic aesthetic” as an indelible mark of “primitive art” would prove a complex enterprise. In an interesting book entitled *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretative Anthropology*, Clifford Geertz looks precisely at this point, using an example from Yoruba sculpture to underscore the need to study the “sensibility” of a population in order to understand the value and significance of certain art forms. Geertz’s position is quite interesting because it makes us rethink early experiments in the cataloguing of texts and primitive objects in the American sphere. Geertz, in fact, believed that each primitive artistic object should be interpreted as a text that can be read, translated, and interpreted according to the context in which it is used and represented. Geertz’s

discourse is deeply rooted in the views of the father of American anthropology Franz Boas. With regard to primitive art, Geertz wrote:

The intense concern of the Yoruba carver with line, and with particular forms of line, stems therefore from rather more than a detached pleasure in its intrinsic properties, the problems of sculptural technique, or even some generalized cultural notion one could isolate as a native aesthetic. It grows out of a distinctive sensibility the whole of life participates in forming—one in which the meanings of things are the scars that men leave on them. (Geertz [1983], 99)

In this sense, Boas set the foundations for the critical debate that characterized the postcolonial period. He accompanied his research with great historical rigor and with an almost maniacal insistence upon the concept of “culture,” whose structure would become the founding ground for almost all American schools of anthropology. As a result, he succeeded in interpreting “primitive art” also on the basis of its aesthetic and cultural value. While today his text may appear so descriptive as to become almost pedantic, it is precisely the minute detail of his descriptions that keeps the anthropologist from falling into facile generalizations and common stereotypes. Page after page, chapter after chapter, Boas lingers on particularized reflections, taking apart each of the objects he has collected, investigating motives, symbology, and modes of representation. Furthermore, he also made sure that the exhibition of the objects he collected followed his methodological criteria: Boas’s ideal for an ethnological museum was to organize the collections by tribe. Essentially, he proposed to exhibit a complete assortment of objects representative of an ethnic group for the purpose of highlighting the peculiarities of small, specific groups of tribes. Boas insisted on the fact that this type of arrangement constituted not a classification, but a grouping based only on ethnic resemblances (Jacknis [2002]).

The seriousness and rigor of this study are even more evident taking into account that, in order to define “primitive art” as such, France had to wait for the exhibits that followed the ethnological expeditions of the early twentieth century. Following the Dakar-Djibouti “mission” (1931), a vast amount of “indigenous art” was presented to the general public; Marcel Mauss made the following statement in this regard: “Indigenous arts then appeared as though they had as much dignity as our own. Contact with them refreshed our arts; it suggested new forms and styles, even when they were more stylized and sophisticated according to their tradition than ours were” (cited in Fournier [1994], 613, our translation).<sup>4</sup> However, Boas’s monograph does not lack major “ideological downfalls” (for example, primitive art is often associated with children’s art, a postulate that also became popular with avant-garde artists), as the legacy of an evolutionism still in vogue at that time. On the other hand, in French ethnology of the early 1900s, something different was on the horizon, which can also be found in modernist literature: with “primitive art,” it was possible to escape from a tired world, refresh one’s soul, and rejuvenate the spirit. In Marcel Fournier’s biography of Marcel Mauss, many pages are dedicated to the magazine *Documents*, which accompanied the surrealist movement for a number of years. The magazine was subtitled “Archéologie, Beaux-Arts, Ethnographie, variétés” (Archeology, Fine Arts, Ethnography, Varieties), and it represented a sort of “manifesto” for the writings of ethnologists, painters, poets, and musicians:

Each issue appears to be a collage, willingly juxtaposing a Picasso, a Giacometti, an African mask, and an advertising poster (American movie or variety show) [... A]ccording to Michelle Leiris, *Documents* has two faces, one turned towards the sphere of high culture [...], and the other towards a savage zone where one ventures with neither map nor passport of any kind (Fournier [1994], 615, our translation).<sup>5</sup>

It is thus easy to see how much the range of reception to “primitive art” changed and found quick connections with contemporary modernist writing. However, issues related to the presumed aesthetic value of those works took on a variety of facets precisely due to their difficult evaluation. Following an initial period of correspondence and affinity, the distinction between “exotic” and “anthropologic” was strictly reinforced on an institutional level. While “tribal” objects were being shown in galleries and art museums for their aesthetic qualities and their unquestionable formal value, in ethnographic museums they were shown in their “cultural habitat.”

Modernism considered “primitive art” as an “alterity” that could be molded into its own image: there was a desire to find the affinities between tribal and modern artifacts in order to render less destabilizing this art that upset and shattered canons and categories. As was the case in past eras, in modernism primitive cultures were reread from the perspective of classical mythology. The most renowned case in the history of anthropology dates back to German anthropologist Leo Frobenius. In his research on the people of Yoruba, he picks up on Plato’s observations regarding the myth of Atlantis, founding his ethnography upon them. In the introduction to his posthumous work, published in 1949 and emblematically titled *Mythologie de l’Atlantide. Le “Poseidon” de l’Afrique Noire et son Culte chez le Yorouba du Bénin* (Mythology of the Atlantide. The “Poseidon” of Black Africa and his Cult with the Benin Yoruba Tribe) he wrote:

I thus formulated the hypothesis that this fable was not just a fable. I believed it had to be possible to conceive of and bring together all these assertions as if they were the memories of a culture prior to the Greeks, in which navigation was practiced and civilization propagated, not only in the Mediterranean basin, but also beyond it. Thus I asserted that this Atlantis was in the memories of the people: the last surviving trace of a civilization that appeared before the Greek period, in a place situated along the western coast of Africa. But, when Hellenism developed throughout the Eastern Mediterranean, it separated civilizations and races from one another that had at length practiced commerce and navigation throughout the entire Mediterranean basin all the way to Tarschich or Tartessos. During this period, prior to Greek civilization, was the era of Poseidon, god of the sea whose descendents built the fortress of Atlantis. (Frobenius [1943], 9–10, our translation)<sup>6</sup>

Even Bronislaw Malinowski wanted to call his book about the exchange of gifts “Argonauts of the Western Pacific,” comparing the Kula rite and the exchange of necklaces and jewels with the crown, with the gold and pearls sought by the Europeans.

During the same time that Malinowski was at work, Sigmund Freud explained the malaise of Western society by revealing the ambiguous appropriation and misreading of primitive cultures and art: “Our so called civilization itself is to blame for a great part of our misery, and we should be much happier if we were to give it up and go back to primitive conditions” (Freud [1930], 41). It is exactly within the term “reappropriation,”—the operation that characterizes the relationship between “primitive art” and modernism and that cuts across a variety of disciplines—that an implicit dual tension can be read: on the one hand there was the fascination, the attraction, the push towards a condition that could potentially enliven a civilization in profound crisis. On the other hand, there was the fear and anxiety provoked by this meeting due to its mysterious, unknowable, and impenetrable nature. Symptomatic of this ambivalence are the expression “gone native,” which implicated both artists and anthropologists, and the adjective “dark,” used to define the entire continent of Africa. Anthropology set the foundations for its field research on the idea of “gone native,” and as such,

Bronislaw Malinowski made the following remark in the first chapter of his best known text:

Our considerations thus indicate that the goal of ethnographic field-work must be approached through three avenues:

1. The organization of the tribe, and the anatomy of its culture must be recorded in firm, clear outline. The method of concrete, statistical documentation is the means through which such an outline has to be given.
2. Within this frame, the imponderabilia of actual life, and the type of behaviour have to be filled in. They have to be collected through minute, detailed observations, in the form of some sort of ethnographic diary, made possible by contact with native life.
3. A collection of ethnographic statements, characteristic narratives, typical utterances, items of folklore and magical formulae has to be given as a corpus inscriptionum, as documents of native mentality.

These three lines of approach lead to the final goal, of which an Ethnographer should never lose sight. This goal is, briefly, to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realise *his* vision of *his* world. (Malinowski 1978 [1922], 24–5)

R. L. Stevenson was among the novelists who attempted through writing to go to the root of the “native’s point of view” (see Geertz [1983]). He was one of the first European writers who tried not only to break down the dark sides of the myth of civilized man’s superiority, but also to build characters (think of Wiltshire in *The Beach of Falesa*) who experiment personally and radically with “going native” by forming unions with indigenous women and thus mixing races and cultures (for an interesting analysis of the anthropological aspects in the novels and short stories of Stevenson, see Ambrosini [2001]). These unions, by no means new to the world of ethnographers who often wrote and produced ethnographic texts in collaboration with the natives (Michaelsen [1999]), were considered by the British colonial establishment as one of the most degrading and sinful forms of contamination. Throughout the 1800s, for anthropologists, novelists, and artists, Africa was vaguely and generally characterized as “dark”. Much travel literature used this adjective in its titles. Africa was black, dangerous, and unknowable, a test bench for men, a place of adventure, a space where one could seek out everything that was repressed and censored by Western civilization. In this sense, “primitive” became a sort of mirror to better understand one’s own identity, a place upon which to project one’s needs and fears, a territory on which to practice one’s political-cultural dominion. For Jung, like for many intellectuals in the early 1900s, Africa became the place of the primitive par excellence. It told “the eternal beginning” and offered “the most intense sentiment of returning to the land of my youth,” and the “immemorially known” (Torgovnick [1990], 11). In this sense, for Westerners to study the “primitive” meant to return to their origins, where the search for identity inevitably passed through definition of the other.

Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* contains all the ambivalent tensions described above. The title calls upon the great metaphor of Africa as a dark continent that fascinates while simultaneously inciting fear, exposing the white man to the risk of regressing from his condition of rational, dominant being to an illogical, brutal state. The meeting with the African continent generates an upsetting feeling of disorientation in white Marlow, because it questions the certainties upon which the assumptions of colonial experience were founded. In this regard, the following statement by Marlow is emblematic: “Between uncivilized man and ourselves there exists not an irreducible difference, but a fundamental identity” (Conrad [1989], 56).

Like many other novelists and anthropologists of his time who describe their travels, Joseph Conrad destabilizes the relationship with the other and reconfigures it. To make clear the ambigu-

ous value of civilization, he makes use of a painting by Kurtz, which Marlow describes as: “a small sketch in oils, on a panel, representing a woman, draped and blindfolded carrying a lighted torch. The background was somber—almost black. The movement of the woman was stately, and the effect of the torchlight on the face was sinister” (Conrad [1989], 39). Brian W. Shaffer (1993) keenly brings to light how the woman bearing the torch becomes a symbol of the contradictions inherent in the notion of civilization. The torch which should shed light, in truth dulls perception, obscures the surrounding reality, and blinds. In his novels, Conrad always tries to suggest to the reader the intriguing and mystifying power of civilization: underneath the apparent solidity of the Western world lie cracks, gaps, and contradictions. The multiple readings of Conrad’s novel highlight its complex, symbolic plot. Perhaps the most interesting aspect in this context is the metaphorical value of Marlow’s travels—a journey through space and time which becomes the key to understanding the development of human history:

Going up that river was like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings. An empty stream, a great silence, and impenetrable forest. The air was warm, thick, heavy, sluggish [...] till you thought yourself bewitched and cut off for ever from everything you had known once—somewhere far away—in another existence perhaps. There were moments when one’s past came back to one, as it will sometimes when you have not a moment to spare to yourself; but it came in the shape of an unrestful and noisy dream, remembered with wonder amongst the overwhelming realities of this strange world of plants, and water, and silence. (Conrad [1989], 48–9)

The savages Marlow encounters are cannibals, champions of the most unmentionable rituals (Reid [1966], 45) who perform unbridled, hypnotic dances:

But suddenly, as we struggled round a bend there would be a glimpse of rush walls, of peaked grass-roofs, a burst of yells, a whirl of black limbs, a mass of hands clapping, of feet stamping, of bodies swaying, of eyes rolling, under the droop of heavy and motionless foliage. The steamer toiled along slowly on the edge of a black and incomprehensible frenzy. (Conrad [1989], 50)

Conrad’s description of the Africans, forced to do the heaviest work, chained and brutally exploited, and impoverished by the white man’s greed, can be considered an expressionist reading of primitivism (Conrad [1989], 30). Anthropology scholars will recall the Malinowskian readings revealed in the posthumous publication of his *Diaries* (Malinowski [1967]). Indeed, Conrad’s technique recalls painterly expressionism in its almost hyperbolic emphasis of the fiercest, most distressing details. As has been noted, Conrad’s “primitivism” is not only the legacy of a late nineteenth-century evolutionist vision, but it also reveals how, for the Polish novelist, Frazer represented an authority on the subject of anthropology. Kurtz’s practice of human sacrifices and cannibalism always remains implicit, but as other anthropological readings have underscored (Reid, [1966]), the attitude of Kurtz and the natives can be interpreted in light of data and theories of the divine king, found in *The Golden Bough*. There, human sacrifices are presented as a practice capable of conserving the strength of the king and, through the king’s beneficent influence, of ensuring the well-being of the community.

In 1938 Robert Goldwater observed, in a seminal essay on primitivism in modern art, that it is necessary to keep in mind the difference between the adjectives “primitive” and “primitivistic” when speaking about the appropriation of primitivism in European avant-garde art. Modernist art is not “primitive,” but “primitivistic” in the sense that it always starts with the interpretation of tribal

arts by so-called “primitive cultures” (Goldwater [1986], 20–1). Numerous scholars have noted that, in order to comprehend the full complexity of the rediscovery, in the late 1800s and the early 1900s, of tribal art forms from Africa, America, and Oceania, this rediscovery must be included in the wider phenomenon of rediscovery of the great Aztec, Mayan, Persian, Egyptian, Chinese, and Japanese civilizations and of Christian art. An emblematic example of their appeal can be found in the first exhibit of post-impressionist painters, held in London in 1910, entitled *Manet and the Post-impressionists*. The poster for the exhibit shows a Tahitian woman by Gauguin standing beside an African sculpture.

When explaining the ambiguous appropriation of primitive art in twentieth-century European culture, Colin Rhodes highlights the reasons why this art held such great appeal. Primitive art was fascinating because it was a child’s art, an art that had not changed over time, that was static, straightforward and beyond history. Definitively, modernist artists saddled primitive art with the same conceptions that anthropology was developing: tribal cultures were seen as fixed in time and beyond history — a notion that culminated in Lévi-Strauss’s famous opposition between “cold” and “warm” societies (Lévi-Strauss [1962]). To better understand the strong impact primitive art made on the avant-garde, there are two interesting essays by Roger Fry, an art critic belonging to the Bloomsbury group. The two essays, “The Art of Bushmen” (1910) and “Negro Sculpture” (1920) are contained in the volume *Vision and Design*. Both texts reveal how, for many art critics, the future of modern painting lay in primitive art, because it represented a model for going beyond mimetic art and finding abstract and essential forms. In Fry’s texts, it is interesting to note an attitude that would become typical of many art critics. On the one hand he is aware that the art works are truly interesting from an aesthetic perspective, while on the other he repeats a series of prejudices typical of the Western world: primitive art is an art that has not experienced progress and evolution, an art based on instinct and vision, devoid of any form of conceptualization:

We have the habit of thinking that the power to create expressive plastic form is one of the greatest of human achievements, and the names of great sculptors are handed down from generation to generation, so that it seems unfair to be forced to admit that certain nameless savages have possessed this power not only in higher degree than we at this moment, but than we as a nation have ever possessed it. (Fry [1974], 100)

In other words, Fry’s essay brings to light how difficult it was for a Westerner to admit the high aesthetic value of some of those objects. On the one hand he highly values African art, while on the other his praise is full of colonial rhetorical tropes. Fry’s ambiguous and contradictory position also comes through in how he deals with the issue of the lack of a name for the artistic object and for the actual artist. Primitive art questions the concept of the artist as individual creator of a unique, unrepeatable and original work. Fry did not consider the magic and religious and hence ritual value that these objects had in their original settings. By no coincidence, he associates the object’s lack of a name with its nudity, which carries an ambiguous and contradictory value inasmuch as nakedness symbolizes a primordial state, while at the same time indicating a lack of differentiation between nature and culture.

This return to the origins of civilization is characterized by a feeling of nostalgia that takes the form of a utopian dream, of a “return” to an elemental state of grace. Thus it is a nostalgic return, tinged with the melancholic awareness of having lost a primeval condition difficult to regain. Indeed,

the experience of a painter like Gauguin, of extreme importance to the avant-garde, can be understood as a desperate attempt to go back to the dawn of civilization, an attempt which found expression in a form of exoticism interpreted as a move in space and time. It was Segalen, in his essay on exoticism written in 1908, following his trip to the Marquesas Islands on the tracks of Gauguin, who would attempt to formulate “an aesthetic of difference” based on the two categories of space and time. Like Segalen, when Gauguin stood before the landscape and the Maori people, he felt different from them, spatially distant; from here arose the sentiment of exoticism. Again, like Gauguin, Segalen was interested in the more archaic eras, and both artists wanted to gather stories and testimonials because they realized that the Maori civilization and the Polynesian legends were destined to die out (see Segalen [1956]). However, Segalen’s essay is characterized by its effort to differentiate itself from the facile exoticism typical of travel stories and travelogues. By recovering the original meaning of the etymon *ἔξω* (outside), he opens himself to the essence of alterity because, for him, the movement of opening towards the other implies profound knowledge of oneself. “Exoticism is therefore not an adaptation to something; it is not the perfect comprehension of something outside one’s self that one has managed to embrace fully, but the keen and immediate perception of an eternal incomprehensibility.” (Segalen 2002, 21).

Exoticism was thus an opening towards the foreign nature of the other, yet in the work of Gauguin it resulted above all in an extremely sophisticated reworking and rereading of primitive cultures from a late romantic-decadent perspective. Gauguin made numerous claims of feeling “barbarous” and “savage” among the natives of Tahiti, and his letters openly showed a contrast between civilized Europe and barbaric and savage Oceania. This notwithstanding, in his paintings, Gauguin projected his decadent sensibility. Symbols dense with meaning—snakes, an apple, wolves, and plants with flowers resembling peacock tails—underscore the theme of sin and corruption which creates a deep contrast to his paradisiacal view of Tahiti as heaven on earth (Perloff [1995], 239–63).

In the paintings Gauguin produced during his stay in Polynesia (see for example “The Loss of Virginity,” 1890–1891; “The Spirit of the Dead Watching,” 1892; and “The Moon on the Earth,” 1893), the legendary and mythical heritage of the Polynesian people is reinterpreted through a set of images and symbols from the milieu of European decadence, creating artificial and oneiric landscapes (Goldwater [1983], 14–17). Gauguin was influenced by the artifacts he saw at the World Exhibition in Paris in 1889, and by novels written by Pierre Loti (Perloff [1995], 232–5). What Gauguin did in his work was to impose European themes and styles onto the women of Tahiti, creating inevitable contaminations and hybridization, in a process analogous to that undertaken by anthropologists of his time, Malinowski, Radin, and Leiris (in this context, the contemporary anthropological re-readings of classical monographs are extremely relevant in stressing the processes of assimilation of cultures; social and cultural contaminations. See Krupat [1985]; Michaelsen [1999] on Radin; Ginzburg [2000] on Malinowski). The work of Gauguin, like the anthropologist’s monograph, appears as a sophisticated and stratified construction, a cultural artifact. Gauguin’s fascination for primitive cultures arose from his desire to override naturalism in the academic painting of his time. In the geometric forms and decorations of tribal artifacts, Gauguin succeeded in creating fictional images capable of incorporating elements from Oceanic art with elements from Western art (Vanerdoe [1984], 4–5).

Among modernist authors, perhaps D.H. Lawrence’s narrative and painting (see Cianci and Michelucci [2001] for the interesting relationship between Lawrence’s poetics and his paintings



mainly with regard to Cézanne) best exemplify this ambiguous approach to the concept of primitive in modernism. In Lawrence's work, criticism of capitalist society went hand in hand with a fitful search for the primitive: this search materialized through his many trips to countries considered as yet uncontaminated by civilization, such as Sardinia, Mexico, and Australia, and resulted in a study of primitive cultures and religions in search for new forms of religiousness.

A good springboard for investigation of this topic is the comparison Lee Stewart (1999) makes between Lawrence and Gauguin. In an interesting volume on expressionism in Lawrence, Stewart highlights a profound difference between the two artists: Gauguin still believed in the possibility of a definitive rejuvenation of Western civilization through contact with "primitive" cultures, while Lawrence always held a deeply ambivalent attitude towards these cultures. On the one hand, Lawrence was fascinated by the instinctive force released by the artistic displays of primitive cultures. On the other, he was daunted and disoriented by a world and an art that he felt he could not dominate or keep under control. From an artistic viewpoint, Lawrence did not appreciate the extreme formalization of primitive art because to him, it suggested certain aspects of the art of his time, which he saw as an expression of "degenerate" civilization. As a central theme in *Women in Love*, primitivism becomes object of discussion for Birkin and Gerald when they observe some examples of primitive art in Halliday's London apartment, which is full of statues and objects from African culture and thus reminiscent of many expressionist artists' studios:

But there were several Negro statues, wood-carvings from West Africa, strange and disturbing, the carved Negroes looked almost like the foetus of a human being. One was a woman sitting naked in a strange posture, and looking tortured, her abdomen stuck out. The young Russian explained that she was sitting in child-birth, clutching the hands of a band that hung from her neck, one in each hand, so that she could bear down, and help labour. The strange, transfixed, rudimentary face of the woman again reminded Gerald of a foetus, it was also rather wonderful, conveying the suggestion of the extreme of physical sensation, beyond the limits of mental consciousness. (Lawrence [1989], 127)

Over the course of the novel, this statue will lead Birkin to delve deeper into the differences between Nordic and Southern populations. Knowledge of Africa, which is "mindless, utterly sensual" (Lawrence [1989], 133), cannot constitute an alternative to the purely mental, "ice destructive" Nordic knowledge because, in different ways, both aim towards an inevitable disintegration and a regressive form of "sinister mindlessness" (Lawrence [1989], 133). Thus, Birkin explores primitivism as a possibility for reaching the vital unconscious, but he is aware of the profound contradiction between his conscious primitivism and the silent sensuality of the totem, and of the difficulty in finding a balance between the two worlds, between the two experiences. As Stewart keenly notes: "Yet Birkin who rejects the 'Dionysic ecstatic way' along with the 'African process' of mystic sensuality, advocates a reunion of Apollo and Dionysus, 'the senses and the outspoken mind', rather than a simple resurrection of the 'Savage God'" (Stewart [1999], 105).

Thus, this primitivism is hard to reach, just like the continual tormented attempts by Lawrence's characters to find a complete fusion with nature, to feel at one with it; such symbiosis is continually eroded by the painful dichotomy a bourgeois individual feels between body and mind, nature and culture. Primitivism in Lawrence is therefore no longer romantically paradisiacal like in Gauguin, but dialectic and critical. Lawrence denies the possibility of a simple equation, primitivism = the childhood of civilization. It is hence evident how close Lawrence is to the Nietzschean concept of

“civilized barbarism” (see Neilson [1999]): at the height of its rational and technological evolution, modern society is on the verge of destruction and of inevitable and paradoxical regression to a primitive state, which is all the more perverse inasmuch as it is anything but spontaneous. From here arise the criticism and irony with which Lawrence, through Birkin, addresses characters like Halliday and Hermione as a result of their entirely cerebral appreciation for primitive art. In regard to Hermione’s “self-conscious primitivism,” Birkin comments:

Knowledge means everything to you. Even your animalism, you want it in your head. You don’t want to be an animal, you want to observe your own animal functions, to get a mental thrill out of them [...]. Your own tight conscious world, and there is nothing beyond it... But now you have come to all your conclusions, you want to go back and be like a savage, without knowledge. You want a life of pure sensation and ‘passion’ [...]. If one cracked your skull perhaps one might get a spontaneous, passionate woman out of you, with real sensuality. (Lawrence [1989], 91–2)

Consequently, in Lawrence’s work primitivism becomes a way of reckoning with the cutting contradictions of modernity. There is a consciousness that society has reached a point of no return: the extreme development of technology and industry will no longer permit an unconscious return to the origins, to sensual vitalism. Through Birkin’s viewpoint, Lawrence expresses the Freudian concept that would appear ten years later in *Civilization and Its Discontents*: repression of feelings is the high price paid for the advancement of civilization. Accordingly, a return to primitivism hides a deep-running and acute discontent in the face of civilization.

Starting in the 1980s, postcolonial criticism has brought to light certain crucial ethical and epistemological issues in colonial history in relation to anthropology, literature, and the arts. What postcolonial scholars have tried to deconstruct is the dichotomous and binary relationship which saw the colonizers as the bringers of civilization and progress, and the colonized as populations who, due to their culture and social organization models, were considered inferior. Critical observations on the notion of “representation” by scholars such as Jack Goody (1997) could today constitute the most suitable corollary to reproblematicize this issue. In a meticulous and detailed analysis of Western and non-Western plastic and painterly images, Goody shatters and deconstructs forms of appropriation of primitive art in the West and in Africa. Particularly interesting are Goody’s observations recalling Kandert’s studies (1990) on the European art market demand as the primary agent for the production of figurative forms (see, for example, the bronze masks from Eastern Nigeria and Cameroon which appeared on the market with the arrival of the Europeans). Likewise, scholars such as Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, and James Clifford, just to name a few, have tried to demystify the manipulation strategies and misrepresentations carried on by the Western world in its approach to tribal art and culture. These “reappropriations,” as pointed out in the present essay, while sometimes leading to dangerous forms of idealization of tribal populations, nonetheless always underscore “the subjective agency of the West and the unequal passivity of the Other” (Barkan and Bush [1995], 13). Moreover, postcolonial criticism has emphasized how, despite the political and cultural ambivalence of modernist practices towards primitivism, those same practices can nevertheless be credited with bringing dignity and “cultural” and political visibility back to those oppressed populations. Thus, if it is true that postcolonial criticism succeeded in its deconstructive strategies, it is also true that its most useful methodological lesson has been to place anthropology scholars on guard against the constant danger of a dichotomous and essentialist view. Indeed, Clifford criticizes Said’s position sharply, stating that:

If Orientalism, as Said describes, has a structure, this resides in its tendency to dichotomize the human continuum into we-they contrasts, and to essentialize the resultant 'other'; for example, to speak of the oriental mind, for example or even to generalize about 'Islam' or the 'Arabs.' All of these Orientalist 'visions' and 'textualizations,' as Said terms them, function to suppress an authentic 'human' reality. (Clifford [1988], 258)

Perhaps the most profound and complex question raised by colonial criticism transversally in numerous disciplines, is precisely the way in which the "other" is described. "How does one represent other cultures? Is the notion of a distinct culture (or race, or religion, or civilization) a useful one?" (Clifford [1988], 274). Marjorie Perloff also highlights certain dangers which are often implicit for those who work with "primitivism." Indeed, out of a desire to be "politically correct," there is often a tendency to embrace simplistic, utopian solutions, almost as if it were still possible to reach a "true" and authentic idea of the "primitive": "That colonialist 'fictions of the primitive' have been used for at least a century to bolster the West's own self-image is incontrovertible. But that we can now enter a utopia where we approach 'primitive' cultures 'as full and valid alternatives' to our own is perhaps an even more dangerous myth" (Perloff [1995], 352).

It is necessary, therefore, to go beyond a dichotomous vision of primitivism: the process and forms of appropriation and reception of this art are indeed constituted by a progression and movement that is not unidirectional, but that moves and grows in both directions, that comes into being in connected, contaminated, and hybrid territories. Because of this, the position of Homi Bhabha appears quite useful. Bhabha interprets "the encounter with the other and otherness" as a destabilizing yet active moment in the deconstruction of one's own identity processes and in relations between different cultures. Bhabha also criticizes Said's position, emphasizing that the binary opposition of colonialism does not account for a complex and stratified phenomenon such as colonization: "Colonial discourse becomes trapped when, for example, it complains, describing colonized and discriminated subjects with essentialist categories that reveal the impossibility of control, such as the 'inscrutability' of the Chinese, the unspeakable Indian rituals, and the indescribable habits of the Hottentots" (Bhabha [1995], 35).

The colonizer-colonized relationship is never unidirectional. It is a relationship in which the two subjects are ambiguously involved and where the two perspectives become interwoven and contaminate one another. In this regard, Bhabha speaks of a utopian "third space," a territory arising through forms of interpenetration that determine the relationship between colonizer and colonized. The hybridity is the third space, and it begins when the discourse of colonial authority loses univocal control and finds within itself traces of the language of "the other." Cultural, social, and casual connections are what guides interpretation of these reappropriations. Jean-Loup Amselle's electric or informational metaphor provides a thought-provoking explanation for such a connective hypothesis:

By resorting to the metaphor electric or computational connection (*branchement*), or rather to a metaphor derived from particularist signifieds in respect to a network of planetary signifiers, one can distance oneself from an approach that considers our globalized world as the product of a mixture of cultures seen in turn as closed universes, and put the idea of triangulation at the center of our reflections, the idea of drawing upon a third element to establish one's own identity. (Amselle [2001], 7)<sup>7</sup>

## Notes

1. "Cette distinction entre l'individuel et le collectif, qui nous paraît si nette, a peu de portée dans les conditions de la production esthétique des sociétés primitives [...]. Voilà donc la première différence: le caractère pertinent ou non pertinent de la distinction entre production individuelle et production collective. Une seconde différence (et, bien entendue, vous me direz qu'elle ne vaut plus aujourd'hui, mais je vais y revenir; pour le moment, plaçons-nous au point de divergence), c'est l'opposition entre un art qui vise essentiellement à la signification et un art qui, visant à ce que j'appellais tout à l'heure la 'possessivité', a pris pendant longtemps un caractère de plus en plus représentatif, et de moins en moins significatif. [...] Enfin, il y en a une troisième, et qui me semble être cette tendance très consciente et systématique de l'activité esthétique de s'enfermer encore davantage en elle-même, c'est-à-dire de se situer, non pas directement par rapport aux objets, mais par rapport à la tradition artistique: 'l'exemple des grands maîtres', 'peindre d'après les maîtres'. Ici encore, nous avons une distinction qui n'est pas pertinente dans l'art primitif parce qu'on ne songerait pas à se poser le problème, dans la mesure où la continuité de la tradition est assurée" (Lévi-Strauss [1961], 81-4).
2. "Or je trouve, pour revenir à mon propos, qu'il n'y a rien de barbare et de sauvage en cette nation, à ce qu'on m'en a rapporté, sinon que chacun appelle barbarie ce qui n'est pas de son usage; comme de vray, il semble que nous n'avons autre mire de la vérité et de la raison que l'exemple et idée des opinions et usance du pays où nous sommes" (Montaigne [1962], 203).
3. "Pour moi, c'était, de l'exotisme dans la civilisation américaine. Le jazz participait à la fois de cette civilisation industrielle et de l'Afrique" (Leiris, cited in Fournier [1994], 501).
4. "Les arts indigènes apparaissent maintenant comme des arts aussi dignes que bien des nôtres. Leur contact rafraîchit les nôtres; il suggère de nouvelles formes, de nouveaux styles, même quand ils sont aussi stylisés et aussi sophistiqués par la tradition que les nôtres" (Fournier [1994], 613).
5. "Chaque numéro se présente comme un collage et juxtapose volontiers un Picasso, un Giacometti, un masque africain ou une affiche publicitaire (film américaine ou spectacle de music-hall) [...] selon Michel Leiris, Documents a deux faces, l'une tournée 'vers les hautes sphères de la culture [...] et l'autre vers une zone sauvage où l'on s'aventure sans carte géographique ni passeport d'aucune espèce'" (Fournier [1994], 615).
6. "Je formulai alors l'hypothèse que cette fable n'était pas seulement une fable. J'affirmai qu'il devait être possible de concevoir et d'assembler tout cela comme étant le souvenir d'une culture antérieure à celle de la Grèce et au cours de laquelle on pratiquait la navigation et propageait la civilisation, non seulement dans le bassin de la Méditerranée, mais aussi au dehors. J'affirmai alors que cette Atlantide était dans les souvenirs des peuples la dernière survivance d'une civilisation apparue, avant le temps des Grecs, dans un domaine situé sur la côte occidentale de l'Afrique. Mais lorsque l'hellénisme se développa dans la Méditerranée orientale, il sépara les uns des autres des peuples et des races qui pendant bien longtemps avaient pratiqué le commerce et la navigation dans tout l'ensemble du bassin de la Méditerranée jusqu'à Tarschich ou Tartessos. Et ces temps d'avant les Grecs étaient l'époque de Poseidon, le dieu des mers, dont les descendants, précisément, avaient construit la forteresse d'Atlantis" (Frobenius [1943], 9-10).
7. En recourant à la métaphore électrique ou informatique du branchement, c'est-à-dire à celle d'une dérivation de signifiés particularistes par rapport à un réseau de signifiants planétaires, on parvient à se démarquer de l'approche qui consiste à voir dans notre monde globalisé le produit d'un mélange de cultures vues elles-mêmes comme des univers étanches, et à mettre au centre de la réflexion l'idée de triangulation, c'est-à-dire de recours à un élément tiers pour fonder sa propre identité. (Amselle [2001], 7).

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## Chapter 10

### Routes and Encounters

It is an oft-repeated fact that modernism is an international affair, yet modernist literature is all too often discussed and analyzed as if it uniformly resided at a single abode. The articles in this section of the book may seem to point in different directions, but they all address cross-cultural elements and issues, some of which are touched on by other articles in the book, especially those in the opening section. Translation, exile, East-West and African-European connections: the reader faces specific texts and situations here, but this is also a valuable preparation for the even more motley crew of the following and final section of the book.

By foregrounding the idea that transparent communication can no longer be taken for granted, modernism calls into question the traditional notion that translation aims at communicating by offering itself as an accurate reproduction of the original. **M. Teresa Caneda-Cabrera** investigates how recent critical theory enables us to think about translation in other than these terms. Analyzing Spanish translations of works by Conrad, Mansfield and Joyce, she shows that if translation is viewed as an act of rewriting, the importance of translation lies not in the fact that it puts us in contact with an original meaning, but rather in how it self-reflexively speaks of its unfulfilled relation to a previous text.

The nature and significance of haiku as a phenomenon of hemispheric, if not global modernism, is often overlooked, partly because the modernist haiku is, like the inventions of Freud and Picasso, almost part of the aesthetic air we breathe, so universal that it is no longer even noticed in critical histories. **Jan Walsh Hokenson** shows, however, that when haiku was new in the West, it was a perceived way out of a felt crisis in Western aesthetics and lethal socio-cultural ideologies. To reinsert haiku in the incipit of diverse modernisms is to see how “modernism” — across linguistic and cultural confines — entails comparable artistic experiments in new modes of cognition no less than expression.

The perception of the culturally other as an object — or the idea that representation may not only create knowledge of other people but perhaps the very reality that it describes — is dealt with head-on in critical modernist travelogues. **Kai Mikkonen** explores how a premodernist work, Pierre Loti’s colonialist novel *Le Roman d’un spahi* (1880), touches upon crucial cross-cultural issues that are still relevant today. Certain features of Loti’s novel, while reaffirming the nature of the object of colonial discourse as a stereotype, also enable and even prompt one to trace self-transgressive points of resistance within the text.

The experience of exile is not new and has always had great impact on literature, but the dimensions of exile have never been so massive as in the modern era. Considering the enormous effect of



exile on the fate of literature from the first half of the twentieth century onwards, **Anders Olsson** distinguishes between exiled writers such as Joyce, Beckett, and Ungaretti who sought exile voluntarily and those exemplified by Nelly Sachs and Paul Celan who went into exile because of totalitarian terror and persecution. Olson's analysis focuses on the influence of exile on the literary practices of writers from both groups, noting that voluntary exiles tend to build a myth around themselves as brutally expelled, while enforced exiles need to affirm their fate as writers in order to create without resentment.

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## The Untranslatability of Modernism

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Any critical approach aimed at exploring the problematics of translation in a particular literary context should begin by focusing on the assumptions underlying the concept of translation as it has reached us in our contemporary world. If it is true that there are specific aspects which are relevant to the study of a certain literature, since, as in the case of modernism, they inescapably shape the background against which new interpretations are measured, it is equally true that a translation-related study cannot ignore the fundamental shifts which the notion of translation itself has undergone. Whereas the multiple revisions of the concept inform us of the history of the theory and theories concerning literary translation, translation theories often mirror the same transformations which have affected critical perspectives and interpretations of the literary text. Hence, questions related to the possibility or impossibility of translation do not merely depend on specific problems as they may appear to the translator during the process of translating a particular literary work, but necessarily refer to aspects which are intrinsically connected with more general assumptions about language and literature.

Let me begin by considering the implications of some of the most widespread ideas concerning traditional notions of the role and function of literary translation, namely, that a translation must reproduce the meaning of the original and that, in order to “make sense,” it must relate unfamiliar experiences in familiar ways by removing the veil of foreignness in the original text. This perception is based on a notion of the literary text which presupposes that meaning can not only be established but also appropriately transferred into another linguistic system. In this respect, the ideal translation reenacts a pre-existent sense through a relation of equivalency with the original. The translated text is thus cherished mainly as a replica since the translation does not “produce” a new experience, but re-produces instead the experience of the original.

This eminently conservative version of translation poses more than one problem when confronted with the transgressive nature of modernist impulses. If modernism foregrounds the idea that transparent communication can no longer be taken for granted, how can a translation aim at communicating by offering itself as an accurate “reproduction,” a perfect “replica” of the original? Likewise, if translation always implies a process of domestication in order to make foreignness accessible, how can the language of modernism, which often relies on defamiliarization, and must remain somewhat unfamiliar and “foreign” to the original reader, be rendered in translation? What is the relationship between modernism, commonly associated with a “crisis of representation,” and translation, in itself a “mode of representation”? These are some of the questions that I intend to address in the following pages. In this respect, my choice of specific translations of modernist texts

does not aim at either offering an exhaustive study of the history of the translation of those texts in the Spanish language or providing an evaluation of the existing translations in order to discuss deficiencies. Rather, my intention is to analyze, through the comparison of individual passages and words, to what extent the selected translations can aspire to become repository of the tensions and instabilities which characterize the vulnerable and unpredictable discourse of modernism as illustrated by those particular texts. Ultimately, the discussion of what is lost and gained in the process of translating a modernist text can serve the cause of explaining the paradox which the title of this study refers to: the (un)translatability of modernism.

In "Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote" (Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote), a short story from 1944 which has become a classic reference for translation theorists, Jorge Luis Borges ([1997], 41–55) ironically reflects on the popular view of translation as reproduction. He shows a French twentieth-century writer, Pierre Menard, who wishes to write *Don Quixote* anew. In his attempt to *rewrite* the *original* novel, not simply to copy it, Menard himself recreates in detail the life of the Spanish novelist so as to fulfill the task of "reconstructing literally his spontaneous work" (Borges [1997], 50).<sup>1</sup> And, thus, he finally manages to produce a text, exactly identical to Cervantes's, which is described by the narrator as "verbally identical" and yet "infinitely more complex" (Borges [1997], 52).<sup>2</sup> In a typically playful fashion, Borges ridicules the popular notion of translation as it was established in the second half of the eighteenth century when the term "original" was introduced for literary texts. As a result of this essentializing view of originality, the question of translatability begins to be discussed in a systematic way. Due to the "respect for the spirit of the original source-language text" (Friedrich [1992], 15), it was assumed that the perfect translation should aim at preserving the distinctiveness of the "authentic" text by offering itself as an original text written in another language. In this respect, Borges's story can be read as a burlesque commentary on the futile task of attempting to write "perfect" translations. In the end, Menard's obsession with repeating Cervantes's "authentic" text proves to be absurd as he can only produce exactly the same text. Thus, the story parodies the notion of originality by blurring the distinction between author and translator since both Cervantes and Menard remain the authors of the same *Don Quixote*. But, paradoxically, it also suggests the impossibility for a translation to become a mere replica. In his comparative reading of the two texts, the narrator insists on analyzing the different implications for exactly the same words, pointing out that even the most "accurate" translation carries different meanings and thus becomes always a different text.

Borges's story undermines traditional assumptions rooted in the belief that, in order to maintain the identity of the original text, the translation must seek to evoke a perfect relationship of equivalency. Furthermore, through Menard's absurd task, the notions of originality and translatability are called into question. The concern with exploring the nature of the relation between the original text and the translation, which Borges's story dramatizes, has been a constant in twentieth-century translation theory. Recent work has shifted attention away from the obsession with reproduction and has emphasized the transformative and interpretive aspects of translation instead:

The notion that the translator creates the original is one which is introduced by deconstructionists and serves to undermine the notion of authorship and with it the authority on which to base a comparison of subsequent translated versions of a text. Deconstructionists argue that the original texts are constantly being rewritten in the present and each reading/translation reconstructs the source text. (Gentzler [1993], 149)

Thus, affected by the same changes which have dominated the panorama of literary theory under the influence of poststructuralism, contemporary translation theory has raised questions concerning presence, representation and, ultimately, meaning. As the concept of original presence is doubted—"What if the 'original' has no fixed identity that can be aesthetically or scientifically determined?" (Gentzler [1993], 145)—the notion of representation which translation had traditionally assumed is also radically modified—"What if one theoretically reversed the direction of thought and posited the hypothesis that the original text is dependent upon translation?" (Gentzler [1993], 144).

This theoretical reversal significantly subverts previous thought about fidelity in translation. Since the identity of the original text remains ungraspable, the translation, although derivative, is observed as a text in its own right, an equally independent work of signification which assumes "a central rather than a secondary place" (Gentzler [1993], 146). A key assumption in the development of this theoretical approach to translation is the modernist proclamation that language is not so much communicative as constitutive of thought and meaning. In this respect, as Paul de Man argues in his discussion of Walter Benjamin's "The Task of The Translator" (1923), translation, which, after all, relies on particular linguistic realizations, must be seen as inescapably "caught in the gesture which Benjamin calls ironic, a gesture which undoes the stability of the original by giving it a definitive, canonical form" (de Man [1986], 82).

My invocation of deconstructive thought is far from attempting to offer a detailed analysis of the influence of deconstruction on contemporary translation theory. Likewise, my endorsement of Derrida and de Man's approach to translation must be observed, not as an unconditional endorsement of their suspicion of Western metaphysics (namely the radical assumption that there is no pure meaning, nothing to be represented behind language), but, rather, as a theoretical position, an empowering strategy, which can allow us to think about translation in other than traditional terms. Significantly, both Derrida and de Man's redefinitions of translation take as a point of departure the work of Benjamin, one of the most representative figures of modernist thought. As noted, de Man is interested in how, according to Benjamin, translation dismantles the notion of "the stability of the original" and thus, whereas "the translation canonizes, freezes, an original," it simultaneously "shows in the original a mobility, an instability which at first one did not notice" (de Man [1986], 82). Likewise, Derrida questions traditional definitions of translation based on the notion of reproducing or communicating the "meaning" of the original in similar terms. For him, translation might better be viewed as "one instance in which language can be seen as always in the process of modifying the original text, of deferring and displacing for ever any possibility of grasping that which the original text desired to name" (Gentzler [1993], 163).

Thus, the functions of communication and representability of language are always problematized in translation through the paradox that translation itself represents. A translation obligatorily speaks of itself as an act of linguistic provisionality and displacement of meaning which "ironically, transplants the original into a more definitive linguistic realm, since it can no longer be displaced by a secondary rendering" (Benjamin [1992], 77). So conceived, translation explicitly becomes a site of conflict which defers an end or a definitive interpretation. In this respect, by deviating from traditional approaches which regarded fidelity and freedom as competing tendencies, translation commentators open the possibility for a translation theory which can go beyond the obsession with reproduction of meaning. Viewed instead as an act of rewriting, the importance

of translation lies not in the fact that it puts us in contact with some sort of original meaning, but rather in how it self-reflexively speaks of its unfulfilled relation to a previous text.

This redefinition of translation, not as the practice of a mere “crossing over” in order to transport and fix the “same” meaning but as “an action in which the movement among the surface of language is made visible” (Gentzler [1993], 162) is precisely the point of departure that I want to propose for my discussion of the (un)translatability of modernism. Significantly, in his characterization of translation, Benjamin notes that “in all language and linguistic creation there remains in addition to what can be conveyed something that cannot be communicated” (Benjamin [1992], 80). Translation is thus directly related to the notion of incommunicability, since, as Benjamin argues, a total transfer is not possible: “Even when all the surface content has been extracted and transmitted, the primary concern of the genuine translator remains elusive” (Benjamin [1992], 76). The mobility and elusiveness which becomes visible through the process of translation — “the task of the translator is to release in his own language that pure language which is under the spell of another, to liberate the language imprisoned in a work in his re-creation of that work” (Benjamin [1992], 80–1) — would thus seem to suggest an implicit elusiveness and mobility in the original itself. In this respect, this approach to translation as a mode of displacement would appear to fit in with a particular view of the original as a text which does not communicate an authorized meaning through formal wholeness but, rather, as a linguistic construct which self-consciously manifests its ambiguity through open forms and lends itself to being displaced and transformed. Therein lies the attractiveness of Benjamin’s redefinition of translation for an exploration of the relationship between translation and modernism. Ultimately, his notion of translation seems fraught with the same anxiety about language which lies at the heart of modernism.

Most modernist narratives bear witness to the recognition that there no longer exists any inherited reservoir of meaning which can be taken for granted. In its breaking away from assumptions, modernist fiction becomes the space where a moment of crisis is dramatized rather than solved. Thus, the modernist challenge to inherited concepts of culture is recurrently addressed in fictional representations which often deal with tensions in the identification of self and society. Significantly, these modernist narratives portray personal conflicts, the protagonists of which are always “outsiders,” standing in a skewed relationship to the rest of humanity, out of tune with some of the most broadly accepted values and attitudes. Their estrangement from a sense of common experience is symptomatically reflected in their obsession with language. In a self-conscious fashion, language begins to question its own condition as a mode of communication. In this respect, most modernist narratives remain suspicious of their own possibility to communicate, although they paradoxically insist on it.

The forms of narrative immediacy, the repudiation of omniscience and the stylized modes of point of view employed by modernist narratives can thus be understood as a formally acknowledged relief from the traditional burden of representability and communication. However, since both representability and communication are problematized, the emphasis falls on language as a way of negotiating one’s relation to a world which is experienced as “foreign.” Hence, the inadequacy of language and the “foreignness” of experience are obsessively turned into a theme and, in this respect, most modernist narratives seem to proclaim the realization that experience is itself a translation and can only be (mis)represented as such.

Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899) embodies these ideas thoroughly through a narrative process which foregrounds the notions of communication and interpretation in an unprecedented

way: caught between perpetual uncertainty and doubts, Marlow can only tell the story of his own failed attempt at telling the story. Although “Marlow’s narrative plot steadily takes as its story what Marlow understands to be Kurtz’s story,” in the end, “Kurtz’s narrative never fully exists, never fully gets itself told” (Brooks [1985], 252). In this respect, Conrad’s narrative not only emphasizes the gap between one’s experience of reality and its representation through language, but the novel itself also becomes a self-reflexive commentary on the impossibility of finding an adequate vocabulary with which to represent one’s experience. Marlow continuously doubts the reliability of language as he struggles to give an accurate account of events:

He was just a word for me. I did not see the man in the name any more than you do [...] It seems to me that I’m trying to tell you a dream—making a vain attempt, because no relation of a dream can convey the dream sensation. (Conrad [1995], 50)

As Marlow acknowledges, his attempts at communicating his experience turn into vain efforts because representation can only reproduce its relation to experience but is far from conveying experience itself: “No, it is impossible; it’s impossible to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one’s existence—that which makes its truth, its meaning—its subtle and penetrating essence. It is impossible” (Conrad [1995], 50). Marlow’s anxious confession can thus be read as a reflection on the paradoxical qualities of translation. He is, after all, aiming at translating the experience of Africa, a radically foreign place, where normal linguistic categories cannot aptly be used to signify:

We were cut off from the comprehension of our surroundings; we glided past like phantoms, wondering and secretly appalled, as sane men would be before an enthusiastic outbreak in a madhouse [...] The earth seemed unearthly. We are accustomed to look upon the shackled form of a conquered monster, but there—there you could look at a thing monstrous and free. It was unearthly, and the men were—No, they were not inhuman. (Conrad [1995], 62)

However, even as Marlow recognizes that he cannot find an appropriate language with which to narrate his story, his narrative does rely on specific language uses which ultimately reveal an underlying ideology of Africa as a strange, exotic, primal and “dark” experience:

We penetrated deeper and deeper into the heart of darkness. It was very quiet there. At night sometimes the roll of drums behind the curtain of trees would run up the river and remain sustained faintly, as if hovering the air high over our heads, till the first break of day. Whether it meant war, peace, or prayer we could not tell. The dawns were heralded by the descent of a chill stillness [...] we were wanderers on a prehistoric earth, on an earth that wore the aspect of an unknown planet. (Conrad [1995], 62)

In this respect, *Heart of Darkness* can be viewed as a text operating according to the principles which inform the translation process, as discussed earlier in this article. The novel offers itself as Marlow’s retelling through a sort of creative and performative act, the importance of which lies not in the fact that it puts us in contact with the “original” experience, but rather in how it self-reflexively speaks of itself as a reconstruction of a past experience in the present moment. This is so because Marlow inhabits a mediating position which resembles the translator’s. He is inside and outside at the same time, someone whose identity has become terminally displaced through a cross-cultural experience:

You can't understand. How could you?—With solid pavement under your feet, surrounded by kind neighbours ready to cheer you or to fall on you, stepping delicately between the butcher and the policeman, in the holy terror of scandal and gallows and lunatic asylums—how can you imagine what particular region of the first ages a man's untrammelled feet may take him into by the way of solitude—utter solitude without a policeman—by the way of silence—utter silence, where no warning voice of a kind neighbour can be heard whispering of public opinion? These little things make all the great difference [...] Mind, I'm not trying to excuse or even explain—I'm trying to account myself for—for—Mr. Kurtz—for the shade of Mr. Kurtz. (Conrad [1995], 81–2)

Paradoxically, the ungraspable nature of Marlow's original experience remains a constant even while he insistently attempts to recreate it for his audience. The narrative obsessively exposes its uncertain condition through a displacement of the original experience and thus dramatizes how telling is always subject to the possibilities and limits of language and mediated by the formal, ideological, conscious and unconscious decisions of the narrator. Rather than a chronicle, Marlow's tale is better understood as a translation since, as we observed, to tell, like to translate, remains an unaccomplished desire of the text, displaced always in the very process of making the attempt.

If according to the definition of translation that I have been developing, translations are themselves never “total” and in themselves untranslatable (Benjamin [1992], 76), the task of translating *Heart of Darkness* would have to be viewed as a radical challenge. Translating this novel necessarily embodies a sort of *mise-en-abyme* condition, since the translated text becomes a translation of another translation. In the light of this approach, untranslatability occurs because, hypothetically, the translation would have to re-create a text indeterminable to the reader of the original inasmuch as it deals with an experience which cannot be appropriately rendered through language.

Nevertheless, these theoretical premises are utopian since, evidently, translations of *Heart of Darkness* do exist independently of scholarly perspectives on the possibilities and impossibilities of translation. The truth is that translations are not undertaken for scholars but for ordinary readers who do not want to be reminded that the “real thing” is untranslatable but, rather, who believe in translation as the art of the possible. From this point of view, existing translations of *Heart of Darkness*, a text which we have labelled as untranslatable, can be approached as contributions to and projections of Conrad's text in as much as they rewrite it and thus become “not the work but a path toward the work” (Ortega y Gasset [1992], 109).

It has been generally observed that the ambivalent and inconclusive way in which the story is told is a direct expression of Conrad's doubts about universal values and ultimately about the foundations of human thought. The novel would thus demonstrate that “for Conrad, certainty is tenuous, whether it be knowledge of objects and events or the values of western civilization” (Peters [2001], 60). The mode of narration, but also specific language uses constantly emphasize the indeterminacy of experience and the impossibility of explanation. As several critics have noted, the narrative abounds in adjectives such as “unspeakable,” “inconceivable,” “inscrutable” and “nameless” (Watt [1988], 334) which recurrently insist on the “inexpressible and incomprehensible” (Achebe [1988], 253).

The novel's general concern with the abstract and intangible sides of experience is illustrated by the title itself. Ian Watt has commented on how, compared with the more traditional titles of earlier works, *Heart of Darkness* strikes a very special note:

Both of Conrad's nouns are densely charged with physical and moral conditions; freed from the restrictions of the article, they combine to generate a sense of puzzlement which prepares us for something beyond our usual expectation: if the words do not name what we know, they must be asking us to know what has, as yet, no name. (Watt [1988], 331)

As Watt argues, Conrad's defamiliarization of reality — "How can something inorganic like darkness have an organic centre of life and feeling? How can a shapeless absence of light compact itself into a shaped and pulsing presence?" (Watt [1988], 331) — relies on the puzzling combination of the two nouns, "heart" and "darkness," symptomatically suggesting a physical center for an abstract and intangible reality. In this respect, the expression "Heart of Darkness" would have to be viewed as the paradoxical coupling of two words which, from the very beginning, forces the reader to go beyond habitual expectations and thus not only announces but frames the novel's general concern with indeterminacy.

Traditionally, the Spanish translations of *Heart of Darkness* have opted for the title *El corazón de las tinieblas*, this being therefore the "name" which Conrad's novel has "officially" adopted for Spanish readers. An overview of fifteen existing translations, some of them reprinted versions, between the years 1975 and 2000 in Spain and Latin America, shows that only one translator deviated from the norm of standard Spanish which prefers the use of a noun preceded by an article. A close analysis of the semantic problems that the title poses for Spanish translators appropriately illustrates some of the questions with which I began the discussion of the (un)translatability of modernism.

Conrad's obtrusive use of language significantly insists on the inadequacy of words. Thus, the defamiliarization of language present in the title *Heart of Darkness* accordingly reflects the typical modernist attempt to represent the foreignness of experience. In this respect, the "semantic gap" (Watt [1988], 330) which Conrad's title embodies is produced not only through the combination of two contradictory terms, as discussed earlier, but also through the ellipsis of the article. Rather than exploiting the ambivalence and multiplicity of meaning, the Spanish *El corazón de las tinieblas* seems to suggest a homogeneous and univocal relationship between words and the reality they designate. The two definite articles fix and restrict the identity of Marlow's experience which is thus evoked as a voyage into *the* centre (*el corazón*) of, literally, *the* realm of shadows (*las tinieblas*) rather than the formless and infinite abstraction which the word "darkness" suggests.

The various forms of "darkness" which Marlow encounters are referred to in Conrad's explicit use of the word, thus establishing from the beginning an ambivalent play on the endless possibilities of meaning. The connotative potential of "darkness" as introduced in the title is significantly echoed in the text through a constant lexical repetition which produces a complex web of parallels and contrasts. Likewise, the intertextual implications of the word "darkness" cannot be forgotten. Inscribed as it is within the larger context of European discourse on Africa as the "Dark Continent," Conrad's use of the word in the title explicitly incorporates references to popular images of Africa as reflected in geographical and anthropological studies such as Stanley's *Through the Dark Continent* (1878), and *In Darkest Africa* (1890), as Hampson explains in his introduction to *Heart of Darkness* (Hampson [1995], xvii).

In the case of the Spanish translation, however, the choice of the Spanish word "tinieblas" negotiates the inscription of *Heart of Darkness* within the formal context of Judeo-Christian tradition



through an obvious allusion, since “tinieblas” is the biblical word used to refer to the primal “darkness” in the beginning of all things. Unlike in the case of Conrad’s novel, which relies heavily on the repeated use of the noun “darkness” and the adjective “dark,” the lexical choice of “tinieblas” deprives the title of the Spanish text from its being echoed through subsequent references in the narrative. The translators’ choice of the word “oscuro” for dark, “oscuridad” for some specific uses of the word darkness and “tinieblas” for darkness strictly in the occurrence “heart of darkness” insists on emphasizing the separate nature of the different experiences of darkness: “oscuridad” in a physical sense and “tinieblas” in reference to the metaphysical dimension of Marlow’s voyage.

Through what can be seen as a typical modernist strategy, Conrad’s title exploits the capacity of language to produce a plurality of meanings as it ambiguously encompasses numerous implications in an ambivalent way. In opposition to this, *El corazón de las tinieblas* does not stress multiplicity but rather fixes meaning since, as we have seen, it transplants the original into a more definitive linguistic realm. In this respect, the Spanish version of the title explicitly illustrates the transformative and interpretive dimension of translation as we have been discussing it. The rewriting of *Heart of Darkness* as *El corazón de las tinieblas* can be better understood as the translators’ acknowledgement that their struggle to capture the effect of Conrad’s original title must necessarily remain unaccomplished, since a perfect replica, a total transfer is never possible. As we argued, translation always exposes tensions and conflicts in the original thus displacing the possibility of ever recovering the original text while simultaneously making attempts to overcome differences. In the case of the translation of *Heart of Darkness*, the displacement is taken further since, as we have maintained, the power of the original lies in its capacity to remain uncertain through ambiguous uses of language which can only be maintained in the original language itself.

As it derives from the analysis of the problems posed by the Spanish version of the title, *Heart of Darkness* can be typically presented as an example of the (un)translatability of modernism. In Conrad’s title the combination of two familiar words is made strange, likewise the language of the novel is subsequently defamiliarized and the reader’s imaginary relationship with the world is interrupted. As we argued, the main problem of *El corazón de las tinieblas* lies in the fact that rather than estranging the reader from ordinary perception, the title seems to ask him/her to recognize a well established metaphor in Western religious tradition, thus suggesting a sense of continuity rather than constituting an example of “modernist interruption” (Eysteinsón [1990], 202).

Although the aspect of self-referentiality is inherent to translation, since every choice the translator makes informs us of the conventions underlying his/her particular reading and thus emphasizes the question of mediation between two texts, in the case of modernist translations self-reference must be seen as taken to an extreme. As we argued, modernist texts often rely on an elusiveness and open-endedness which translation is compelled to acknowledge. Viewed in this light, individual translations will always have to cope with untranslatability, forced as they are to refer to themselves as one possible reading, one potential recreation. Yet, if we accept that modernist texts lend themselves to being destabilized through interpretation whereas, in their turn, translations always destabilize the original and thematize interpretive differences, then, translation appears as the incapable destiny of modernism. Ironically, modernist untranslatability would seem to contain within itself the claim to translatability.

According to Benjamin, “translatability is an essential quality of certain works” and it means “that a specific significance inherent in the original manifests itself in its translatability” (Benjamin

[1992], 72). As my own choice of title for this article suggests, in the case of modernist texts, the “specific significance” of the original exposes itself through an unresolved paradox as it simultaneously calls for and brackets off the possibility of translation.

As we discussed, the enigmatic expression “heart of darkness” must remain incomprehensible and somewhat foreign to the reader in order to frame appropriately the shocking nature of the experience as reflected in the narrative account. The unusual arrangement of words would thus be untranslatable in that the words “do not name what we know,” and yet, translation should occur precisely because the words ask us “to know what has as yet no name” (Watt [1988], 331). In this respect, the Spanish recreation of the title reminds us that “translation is only a somewhat provisional way of coming to terms with the foreignness of languages” (Benjamin [1992], 76). Hence, the disjunction which “el corazón de las tinieblas” represents in reference to Conrad’s title embodies the idea of translation not as a reproduction of the original but as another form of producing the original.

Titles often constitute interesting examples of how modernist writers exploit language awareness. By means of selecting words with a strong connotative potential and a large range of suggestions and implications which further expand possibilities of meaning, modernist writers deviate from monological constructions of reality and emphasize plurality through an intertextual playfulness which makes strong demands on the reader and remains a challenge for the translator. This is certainly the case for Katherine Mansfield’s short story title “Bliss” (Mansfield [2001], 91–105).

This modernist story, first published in 1920, undermines previous literary conventions, mainly through its minimising of plot and action, its shifting of point of view, its openendedness, its deviation from conventional punctuation and its use of suggestive lyrical images which conform to a highly symbolic structure. In this respect, the suggestion and indirection typical of Mansfield’s style defies translation. The descriptive passages abound in lyrical images, the importance of which does not lie in their offering an exact description but rather in the way in which they contribute to enhance meaning through suggestion and evocation. The fact that Mansfield is not interested in conveying exactness but in exploring the indeterminacy of experience is significantly illustrated by the ambiguous word which gives name to the short story. In this respect, the ambiguity shown by the title is further complicated as the story unfolds and the reader follows the character’s own attempts to come to terms with the meaning of her “bliss.”

The narrative shows Bertha, the protagonist, as she gradually struggles to identify the indeterminate nature of her “blissful” responses to the objects and persons which she encounters during her evening: “Oh, why did she feel so tender towards the whole world to-night? Everything was good — was right. All that happened seemed to fill her brimming cup of bliss” (Mansfield [2001], 101). Contemporary feminist readings of Mansfield’s modernism have appropriately commented on the writer’s “disposition to challenge received assumptions about human relationships and the nature of individual identity” (Dunbar [1997], ix). Thus, in “Bliss,” social limits and rules are examined through the deployment of symbolic analogies which relate external objects to the interior world of Mansfield’s heroine: “How idiotic civilisation is! Why be given a body if you have to keep it shut up in a case, like a rare, rare fiddle” (Mansfield [2001], 92). From the beginning, the text dramatizes the character’s concern with personal alienation, an experience which is accordingly mirrored in her anxiety about the inadequacy of normative language to express her compulsive feelings of “bliss”:

What can you do if you are thirty and, turning the corner of your own street, you are overcome suddenly by a feeling of bliss—absolute bliss! [...] Oh, is there no way you can express it without being ‘drunk and disorderly’? (Mansfield [2001], 91–2)

The trajectory of the protagonist’s “blissful” reactions shows that these oscillate freely as the evening progresses but gain in intensity as they become associated with a plural and diverse range of experience which includes the character’s perception of domestic arrangements through her artistic sensitivity, the expression of love for her baby daughter, the contemplation of a pear-tree in the garden, the moments spent in the company of her new female friend, and the thought of a future intimacy with her husband. As Pamela Dunbar argues, the story must be seen in the light of Mansfield’s concern with interrogating the rigid nature of accepted gender-roles and identities:

Mansfield presents what amounts to an anatomy of female sexual desire. This she renders, not as goal-directed but as fluid and tentative; giving the appearance of randomness yet conveying a strong sense of inner compulsion in the way it moves from artistic arrangement to child, from woman to man. She has also depicted in her heroine a sexual passion that gains in strength and richness through association with artistic sensitivity and maternal affection; and one that connects heightened emotion with a wider range of experience than sexual gratification alone. (Dunbar [1997], 111)

In *Cuentos Completos* (1999, *The Complete Stories*), the only existing collection of Mansfield’s complete short-stories translated into Spanish, “Bliss” appears as “Felicidad,” the Spanish word for, literally, “happiness.” Compared to “Bliss,” the title “Felicidad” strikes a very different note, being as it is a much more neutral and general term which neither emphasizes ambivalence nor relies on connotation. The word “bliss” attempts to express the inexpressible and is thus used repeatedly in the text to refer to what cannot be accounted for otherwise: “all her feeling of bliss came back again, and again she didn’t know how to express it” (Mansfield [2001], 94).

The multidirectional and complex range of emotions which overwhelm the character cannot univocally be contained within a signifier; thereby, by choosing “bliss,” a single word which has multiple meanings grafted onto it, Mansfield stresses the lack of total reciprocity between her character’s reality and conventional signifying systems. As we have mentioned, ultimately, the story dismantles traditional notions of a coherent self and contests the secure simplicity of univocal schemes. In this respect, the interplay between the word of the title and its subsequent reappearances in the text, to refer to a varied range of situations which provoke the protagonist’s “blissful” responses, emphasizes the ambivalent and multiple nature of a woman’s bliss.

The Spanish word “felicidad” is but one of the potential meanings that “bliss” acquires in Mansfield’s text. As the character puts it in her own words, hers is a state of complete happiness: “‘I’m too happy—too happy!’ she murmured” (Mansfield [2001], 96). However, the title also introduces sexual implications which become obvious in the light of the story’s concern with exploring the nature of female sexuality. Therefore, the concept of “sexual bliss,” although not directly named, becomes one of the underlying connotations as the word is invoked through the text: “For the first time in her life, Bertha Young desired her husband [...] But now—ardently! ardently! The word ached in her ardent body! Was this what that feeling of bliss had been leading up to?” (Mansfield [2001], 103–4). Contrarily, the use of “felicidad” cancels the possibility of such reading since it deviates from either explicit or implicit references to the discourse of sexuality.

As it derives from this discussion, the answer to the question “can Mansfield’s title be translated?” is, of course, no. The translator meets the contradiction of having to use language to communicate and yet allow for incommunicable indeterminacy. Whereas the title ostensibly announces that the story is about bliss, the narrative presents the reader with the unsolved dilemma of how to interpret what bliss means. The choice of a word in the Spanish language can hardly do justice to Mansfield’s “intricate tapestry” (Wheeler [1994], 140). Ultimately, since the translation indicates one possible interpretive option it necessarily cancels the text’s concern with semantic ambivalence and, to a certain extent, partly solves the reader’s dilemma.

In a recent translation of Mansfield’s selected stories, *Relatos Breves* (2000), “Bliss” is rendered as “Éxtasis.” As is the case for the English “ecstasy,” the Spanish word also refers to an overwhelming feeling of joy and, unlike “felicidad,” “éxtasis” can indeed be used to suggest sexual bliss. Yet, “éxtasis” which, like “ecstasy,” originate in the Greek “ekstasis,” specifically refers to a state of spiritual uplift achieved through one’s detachment; as the Oxford English Dictionary notes, “standing outside oneself.” Thus, the translator’s choice shows that in her search to interpret the meaning of bliss she focuses on the episode of Bertha’s contemplation of the pear tree in the company of her woman friend:

How long did they stand there? Both, as it were, caught in that circle of unearthly light, understanding each other perfectly, creatures of another world, and wondering what they were going to do in this one with all this blissful treasure that burned in their bosoms and dropped, in silver flowers, from their hair and hands. (Mansfield [2001], 102)

As in the case of “felicidad,” the use of “éxtasis” favours a particular reading at the expense of cancelling others. Although the linguistic collocation “marital bliss” is absent from the text, the story ironically refers to it. The final twist brutally exposes the deceitful nature of the character’s “happy marriage” as she, unexpectedly, catches a glimpse of her husband passionately embracing her friend. Whereas “éxtasis” partly echoes some of the connotations present in “bliss,” it suppresses the possibility of its being an ironic reference to the story’s final revelation.

What becomes apparent in reading the story is the plurality of meanings which lurks undetermined behind Mansfield’s title. In this respect, the word “bliss” appropriately frames a text which offers itself as the site of endless scrutinizing rather than direct revelation. Thereby, individual translations necessarily expose the limits of language as they can only put us in contact with a possible reading of the story, thus “displacing for ever any possibility of naming that which the original text desired to name” (Gentzler [1993], 163). Mansfield’s recurrent use of “bliss” remains “untranslatable” from the point of view of its suggesting an indeterminacy which in translation inevitably becomes less indeterminate.

In the view of our previous considerations about translation, “Bliss” stands as the typical modernist text which paradoxically both calls for and defies translation through its openness and incompleteness. As Gentzler reminds us in his analysis of the relationship between translation and deconstruction which we have been invoking, “for Benjamin and Derrida, the ‘original’ always contains another structure or form—a ‘stage’ for future revival” (Gentzler [1993], 164). In this respect, the attempts to translate Mansfield’s original title do indeed embody the notion of translation “as an action in which the movement along the surface of language is made visible” (Gentzler [1993], 162). Furthermore, the coexistence of different word choices in the Spanish lan-

guage underlines precisely the plurality of meaning already implied in the ambivalence of Mansfield's own choice. Ultimately, "Bliss" necessarily forces us to look beyond the translator's ability to "reproduce" the original and requires instead that we think of translation in terms of its being an inquiry and experiment, a provisional response to the original, both reaffirming and transforming it, thus "enacting [its] survival via a birthing, rebirthing process" (Gentzler [1993], 166).

As announced in the introduction, the concern with the indeterminacy of meaning and the materiality of language which modernist texts exhibit represent a frontal attack on traditional notions of translation. Whereas, generally speaking, translation presupposes that content can be dissociated from its linguistic form, modernist texts in their turn tend to foreground the inextricable relationship between the two. As we have seen, Conrad's and Mansfield's choices of titles show that it is literally impossible to reproduce the various effects that words have in their immediate contexts. The translators face the challenge of having to reconstruct the connections and associations which turn the experience of reading the original texts into a process of discovering multiple possibilities. Yet, as we discussed, the different translations necessarily restrict possibilities, forced as they are to make available to the reader only one of the potential meanings. In this context, the translation of modernism emerges as a partial and unfinished process which provisionally establishes a dialogue between two equally unfinished products: the original and the translated text.

The claim that the special status of modernist texts often makes impossible demands on the translator is nowhere more evident than in the case of James Joyce. For Joyce, language becomes itself the centre of attention in an unprecedented way. Thus, his writing has attracted much commentary on translation from different theoretical standpoints, above all in reference to *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. Fritz Senn, a Joycean scholar who has worked extensively on the question of translation, has noted that in Joyce's work "there seems to be more to the handling of language than ever before," and, consequently "the translator can certainly consider himself grappling with difficulties that he never experienced before" (Senn [1971], 27). For Senn, in the case of *Ulysses* "every translation is bound to reduce Joyce's polyphony to a much more straightforward melody, with fewer vibrations" (Senn [1971], 43) and, as regards *Finnegans Wake*, characterized by "a language continually multi-leveled, obscure and scintillating," he pronounces it untranslatable: "translation in the ordinary sense of the term is no longer viable" (Senn [1971], 47).

*Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* can be seen as extreme examples of what we have been presenting as the (un)translatability of modernism, not only because they undermine transparent communication through opaque uses of language and thus remain "foreign" to native readers but, furthermore, because the two "original" works offer themselves as if they already were translations. In the case of *Ulysses*, the novel can only be understood as a "continuous intratranslation" since the different chapter modes function as translations, illustrating "the idea of a conjugation of all languages' potential and all stylistic ranges" (Senn [1984], 52–3). *Finnegans Wake*, in its turn, becomes "the great challenge to translation" (Derrida [1985], 98), since it is simultaneously original and derivative, a polyglot text which integrates many tongues into one language. Under such circumstances, translation becomes unnecessary and, to a certain extent, contrary to the whole Joycean project because "[it] could only serve to telescope the free play of lexical units into some sense producing and thereby limiting structure" (Gentzler [1993], 170). In this respect, we could argue that, more than any other modernist text, *Finnegans Wake* proclaims the limits of transla-

tion and yet simultaneously owes its own existence to it, being as it is, a text written in a language which only “means” by translating itself.

If the truth is that Joyce’s most experimental works appropriately provide the ultimate ground for any commentary on translation, it is not less true that his early prose, far from being dismissed for the purpose of this study, becomes a remarkable foreshadowing of Joyce’s linguistic concerns as they are developed in his later fiction. Both the stories of *Dubliners* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* could be said to establish the method of *Finnegans Wake*, since they are texts concerned with language and largely about language. Although an analysis of the Spanish translations of those first works is beyond the scope of this essay, I want to refer briefly to two classical translations of Joyce’s early works in a final attempt to throw further light on previous considerations and at the same time begin to outline some conclusions.

I have chosen some representative passages from *A Portrait* and the short story “Clay” (Joyce [1992], 95–102) in order to analyze the problematics of translating Joyce’s early modernism into Spanish. For *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* I will be referring to the pioneering translation by the Spanish writer Dámaso Alonso, *Retrato del artista adolescente* (1926), and for “Clay” I will be concerned here with the work of another writer, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, whose *Dublineses* (1972), has been considered for many years “the” translation of Joyce’s *Dubliners*.

*A Portrait* tells the story of the main character’s gradual encounter with language. The novel deals with young Stephen’s trajectory from early childhood into young adulthood as a process characterized by the fundamentally linguistic nature of his growing awareness of the world. From the opening chapters, language becomes the measuring stick to the protagonist’s evolution. The text is thus saturated with puns, songs, rhymes, riddles and observations about words which offer an obvious resistance to being transferred into another language.

Joyce’s modernist foregrounding of the materiality of language acquires different forms as it evolves from young Stephen’s language games, which rely on the physical suggestiveness of words—“Suck was a queer word [...] the dirty water went down through the hole in the basin. And when it had all gone down slowly the hole in the basin had made a sound like that: suck. Only louder” (Joyce [1968], 11)—to his final artistic commitment which can only be expressed through language’s creative potential: “I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race” (Joyce [1968], 252–3).

In the first case, the Spanish translation attempts to reproduce the childish association which “hears” in the word suck the very sound of the action it defines through a sort of natural correspondence. The choice of the Spanish word “chupito”—“Tú eres el chupito de McGlade” (Joyce [1978], 12)—is justified because of the possibility it gives the translator to emulate the onomatopoeia of water going down the hole of the basin: “chup” (Joyce [1978], 12). However, this rather unusual word, certainly not easily recognizable as an insult, is far from replicating the “ugliness” which the implications of the sound “suck” in the English language have for Stephen: “Suck was a queer word. The fellow called Simon Moonan that name [...] But the sound was ugly” (Joyce [1968], 11).

This is but one of the innumerable occasions when a single word becomes the focus of Stephen’s attention. The challenge for the translator is insurmountable: he must reproduce in another language the protagonist’s shocking encounter with a word’s peculiar physicality as he probes its multiple meanings by attaching it to different contexts. Joyce exploits here the child’s acute sense of the

physical properties of language as an anticipation of the idea that reverberates through the whole novel, the notion that language employs fixed signifiers which nevertheless have diverse and complex interconnections. Thus, Stephen's early experiences of disconcertment as he explores what lies behind the arbitrary use of words are later followed by his painful awareness of the artificially "acquired" nature of his "speech": "home, Christ, ale, master [...] I cannot speak these words without unrest of spirit" (Joyce [1968], 189).

Joyce's remarks about linguistic dispossession and the ironic references to the role of the artist also resist translation, embodied as they are in language uses which do not only defy transparent communication but, furthermore, aim at exploiting the native reader's own linguistic awareness. Thus, whereas the verb "forge" in Stephen's final declaration—"to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race"—enigmatically expresses the paradoxical nature of art in the Irish context as it simultaneously refers to both an original and derivative act, the translation obligatorily disrupts such possibility. The Spanish "forjar"—"forjar en la fragua de mi espíritu, la conciencia increada de mi raza" (Joyce [1978], 288)—cancels the interrelationship between the two possible meanings of English "forge," "make" and "fake," as it is only used to define the work of the blacksmith and implies precisely the original act of a new creation.

The fact that the translation cannot account for the semantic ambiguity of certain expressions results in the neutralization of the constitutive powers of Joyce's language and style and, as a consequence, it deprives the reader of the engagement in the intense interpretative activity which the Joycean text usually requires. *A Portrait* makes strong demands on the reader as it consistently relies on his/her capacity to establish connections and recognise associations. The text "means" precisely through the establishment of a complex pattern of images and symbols, reverberated through the use of recurrent words which often the translation fails to recreate.

This is the case with the expression "unfettered freedom", uttered by one of Stephen's friends as he quotes the protagonist's determination "[t]o discover the mode of life or of art whereby your spirit could express itself in unfettered freedom" (Joyce [1968], 246). This statement significantly echoes a previous image of the protagonist before the "droll statue of the national poet of Ireland" as he "was striving this way and that to free his feet from the fetters of the reformed conscience" (Joyce [1968], 180). In Dámaso Alonso's version, "unfettered freedom" becomes "ilimitada libertad" (Joyce [1978], 279), literally "unlimited freedom," a semantic choice which appropriately refers to Stephen's urges but prevents the reader from establishing the intertextual connection with the previous lexical occurrence of "fetters," which the Spanish writer translates as "cadenas" (Joyce [1978], 202). Again, whereas this choice of word is appropriate from the semantic point of view, it prevents the reader from rediscovering the significant identification between the two episodes which the original text strongly encourages.

In this respect, Joyce's fiction must be seen as the example par excellence of the way in which, in opposition to realist texts, modernist texts demand a more active participation of the reader. As we have discussed in reference to the selected passages, the language of *A Portrait* tends to foreground the very act of reading. The text depends heavily on the reader, who must construct meaning as he/she rediscovers patterns, supplies links, fills the gaps and establishes associations. This particular relationship between reader and text is often substantially modified in the translation process.

The comparison of Joyce's "Clay" and the translation into Spanish by Guillermo Cabrera Infante shows precisely that reading becomes a different experience in each individual text. As is the case

with the rest of the stories in *Dubliners*, the reader of “Clay” is not lured into a comfortable and passive consumption of the text but rather forced “to stop and consider the functioning and positioning (or quite simply the meaning) of a word or phrase” (Williams [1997], 87). Joyce represents the complexities of the character’s consciousness through an uncertain and unstable discourse. The narrative offers itself as contradictory and calls attention to the character’s sublimation of reality through her use of ambivalent words. Thus, the real story awaits to be reconstructed by the reader who is required to question Maria’s words in order to unmask her fantasies.

However, the language of the translation does not seem to be concerned with reflecting the character’s tendency to “poeticize” and “mystify” (Williams [1997], 88) her reality. Often, the Spanish text tends to substitute euphemistic expressions with more straightforward ones, thus simplifying the character’s complex psychology and consequently depriving the reader of the intense interpretive task which Joyce’s “Clay” encourages. I have chosen to focus on Maria’s response to the “colonel-looking gentleman” (Joyce [1992], 98) who gives up his seat on the tram for her, in order to show how even seemingly unimportant modifications result in substantial alterations for the story’s effect. Although it is clear that the man is drunk, Maria insists on seeing him as a respectable gentleman: “she thought how easy it was to know a gentleman even when he has a drop taken” (Joyce [1992], 99).

At first glance, Cabrera Infante’s translation, “se dijo que era fácil reconocer a un caballero aunque estuviera tomado” (Joyce [1987], 100), gives the impression of reproducing Maria’s words. Yet, the use of the participle “tomado,” which is an explicit reference to the gentleman literally being drunk contrasts with the expression “a drop taken.” This euphemism becomes a subtle reflection of the character’s evasion of reality which the rest of the story insists on. In this respect, whereas Maria’s manipulative use of language in “Clay” emphasizes her survival through different stages of self-deception, the language of the translation undergoes a process of neutralization which suspends the necessary reading as interrogating of Joyce’s text. Unlike the latter, the translated text is not grounded on contradictory discourses and does not force the reader to struggle for meaning through discrepant levels of narrative. As the substitution of a euphemistic expression for a more straightforward one in Spanish shows, the choice of signifiers proves to be essential. The expression “a drop taken” is a mild equivalent for “drunk,” a word Maria avoids as it would involve a painful recognition of the reality from which she attempts to escape. Ironically, in the translation, the character explicitly acknowledges a fact which in Joyce’s text she symptomatically tries to hide.

The character’s subtle lying to herself and the reader takes place not only through the employment of ambivalent expressions, but also through the deliberate appropriation of words belonging to a higher class, which reveal Maria’s anxiety about her social status. This is the case of “conservatory,” the term used to refer to the place where she keeps her “lovely ferns and wax-plants” (Joyce [1992], 96). The possibility for the word to become a commentary on what the character lacks and how she wishes to compensate for it is missed in the translation. The choice of “invernadero” (Joyce [1987], 98), what in English is called “greenhouse,” is free from the ideological connotations which “conservatory” brings to the text as it does neither imply a formal register nor does it mirror Maria’s sublimation of reality. In this particular case, the selection of a word which does not have the connotative potential of its English counterpart results in the effacing of discrepancies within the narrative discourse. Consequently, whereas “Clay” invites the reader to contrast the washerwoman’s crude circumstances — “After that break-up at home the boys had got her that position in the *Dub-*



lin by *Lamplight* laundry” (Joyce [1992], 96)—with her pretentious words—“Whenever anyone came to visit her, she always gave the visitor one or two slips from her conservatory” (Joyce [1992], 96)—the translation, through its tendency to cancel ambivalences and neutralize implications of meaning radically transforms the experience of reading Joyce’s text.

As we have seen through our comparison of modernist texts and their respective translations, the problems generally faced by the translators are directly related to the way in which modernist texts grant primacy to the materiality of language. Independently of the individual translator’s ability to discover and recreate the linguistic complexities which operate at the basis of the original text, what remains a major challenge is the fact that signifiers cannot be neglected. Although the lack of “total” reciprocity between linguistic and cultural systems becomes always apparent and is common to all translations, in the case of the translation of modernist texts the impossibility of ever finding a perfect equivalency is made frustratingly obvious.

Undoubtedly, the translations we have analyzed were inevitably unable to account for the associations intended with the specific placement of certain words within the original text, the connotations suggested by different contexts and, above all, the ambivalence and indeterminacy inherent to most modernist narratives. Thus, the claim that the language of modernism is untranslatable would not only be confirming an aspect which is intrinsic to the translator’s activity but, furthermore, it would emphasize the special status of the modernist text. Paradoxically, whereas modernism resists translation through its challenge to the transparency of language by cultivating a discourse which questions communication and reference, the opacity of modernist language becomes specially visible through the translation process.

The fact that modernism corrupts the purity of communication through its foregrounding of modes of cognition and forms of linguistic production subverts traditional notions of translation as “recognition” and “reproduction.” Symptomatically, the demands that modernist texts make on the translator strongly encourage an understanding of translation as a potential production of the original, not an authoritative representation of it. Thus, translation is inscribed within a paradigmatic contradiction as modernism proclaims it both necessary and impossible: it is what the text calls forth and yet is doomed to remain unaccomplished.

## Notes

1. “reconstruir literalmente su obra espontánea” (Borges [1997], 50).
2. “verbalmente idénticos [...] infinitamente más rico” (Borges [1997], 52).

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## Haiku as a Western Genre

### Fellow-Traveler of Modernism

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To trace the reception of haiku in Western literatures, beginning in the late nineteenth century, is to watch a socio-cultural as well as aesthetic process of devolution. The Orientalist genre of British high modernism became an avant-garde form among soldiers in the trenches of World War I, populist *vanguardistas* across Latin America, and communist surrealists on the eve of World War II. As model for a new poetics, the genre served agendas of radical artistic and political challenge in several Western languages through the 1930s. In its translations, critical commentaries, and hundreds of original Western texts, the haiku as a “new” art form acquired dialogic aspects that reveal modernism’s crisis-ridden connections between aesthetics, culture, and political history.

How did haiku become one of the few truly international genres of the twentieth century? How did an antique Asian genre, losing almost all trace of its Japanese provenance, come to serve as a crucial apprentice form for so many modern writers in the West? Around 1906, when haiku was re-visioned as a modernist genre in France, writers’ expressive difficulties with mimetic traditions accelerated under the pressures of wars and totalizing ideologies. The affective capacities of haiku (as opposed to European lyric expressive and mimetic representational forms) brought it into tandem with the oppositional discourses of modernist avant-gardes, where it became as transnational as modernism itself—indeed the fellow-traveler of modernism. Alongside and within modernism, the haiku for decades extended its reach into diverse cultures, and throughout the socio-cultural, aesthetic dislocations loosely characterized as modernist.

Anglo-American scholars, even those who recognize the impact of Japanese aesthetics in the Impressionist and Symbolist foundations of modernism, tend to assume that the haiku is a minor entertainment, identical all over the world. That is to ignore two things: first, the genre has served as source and method for many of the poetic ruptures with tradition that are still often conceived as local events in the West, and second, the Anglo-American critical concept of the haiku is anomalous.

By 1880, Basil Hall Chamberlain’s visualist and reductively Orientalist definition of the haiku pervaded Anglo-American critical discourse. He viewed the genre as a fragile form scarcely capable of content: “the tiniest of vignettes [...] a little dab of colour thrown upon a canvas one inch square” (Chamberlain [1910], 149). This optic governed English-language translations by Aston, Porter, Hearn, and others, and would help ground the Imagist movement in pictorial poetics. In Paris, Paul-Louis Couchoud politely saluted Chamberlain only to disagree in the strongest terms. In 1906 and more fully in 1916, he defined the haiku as “a brief amazement,” a motion in the mind,

like a musical note whose harmonies linger in the reader. Shifting the discursive field from colonialist paternalism to aesthetic harmony and reader response, Couchoud's reading of haiku placed it firmly on modernist ground, inserting it into contemporary discourses of Cubism and literary modernism as "discontinuous poetry" (Couchoud [1923], 7). He argued that haiku's aim, through carefully calibrated fragments and elliptic juxtapositions, is to "make us feel" (90). Since the final resonance has potentially infinite extension, the text's brevity is more on the scale of the immense than the miniature, even as it functions non-subjectively from an implied anchorage in the phenomenal world.

The long mimetic tradition in writing was changing rapidly in the 1900s and 1910s, under the assault of Futurists and Dadaists whose willful irrationalism exploded containing ideas like so much noise. Couchoud's essays of 1916 recall early analytic Cubism (1910–12), which was part of widespread experiments in abstracting imagery and stripping the work of all anterior aesthetics to focus on the medium, paint or words. It is as part of this modernist discourse that Couchoud and his generation of *haïkaïstes* insist that this genre's economy of means is the irreducible essence of writing: "It is the literary genre from which *literature* is the most completely excluded" (Couchoud [1923], 131).<sup>1</sup> The haiku functions not by spiraling upward toward unnamable essences, in the mode of Symbolism, but rather by naming concrete things without ideation or even thought: "The poem takes at its source the flashing lyric sensation, instantaneous, before the movement of thought or of passion has oriented or used it" (8).<sup>2</sup> In such ways, Couchoud brings haiku, as affective discontinuous poetry, into the mainstream of the French and European avant-gardes of the time.

Early modernism, Christopher Butler says, entails a move away from social description "towards a focus on the associative processes within the individual," and develops juxtaposition in art as a primary means to express "radically new conceptions of the nature of consciousness," manifest in simultaneous constructions full of estranging displacements and intuitive leaps of the unconscious (Butler [1994], 261). In many cases such "radically allusive juxtaposition" comes into ironic or absurdist conflict (262). But in others, where I place the Romance-language *haïkaïstes*, techniques of allusive juxtaposition come into harmonies revealing our responses to perception and suggesting the workings of instinct in art—as also pursued through Bergsonian intuition, Jungian archetypes, totemic art, and psychoanalysis. Prismatic reflections of these elementary aspects of modernist poetics recur in Julien Vocance's haiku collection *Cent visions de guerre* (One hundred views of war), written at the front in 1914–15, as well as two others from the front in 1917–18, Ungaretti's *Il Porto Sepolto/La Guerre* (The buried seaport/The war) and Éluard's *Pour Vivre ici: Onze Haïkai* (To live here: Eleven haïkai)—all battlefield productions.

To this generation, "literature" no longer served the writer. To adopt the haiku was to adopt another "vision" of literature; to ply the haiku with the horror of war was to create in an almost purely affective form, as a means of sharing the immensity of the experience of terror and socio-cultural dislocation. The young poets were consciously working in an aesthetic of meaninglessness, in an impersonal world without god, idea, or even reason, without transcendence; the haiku interprets nothing, they said, and no poetic form in 1914 seemed so accessibly anti-Christian and anti-Cartesian (in the continuous emphasis on difference *from* inherited traditions). To such poets as Vocance, Ungaretti, Éluard, who were unaligned then with any literary movement, the genre accomplished the irreducible, elementary function of literature by recreating an affective experience of The Great War.

The diverse writings on and in haiku between 1871 and 1916 reveal the ideological linkages between the critical discourses and the translative practices that shaped the reception of Japanese poetics in these divergent currents of modernism. Historically, there are four discernible moments in the haiku's modernist career. First, as is well known, the arrival of Japanese arts in Europe around 1860 ignited Impressionist painters' *japonisme* or reconfiguration of mimesis with the lineaments of an affective aesthetic, notably uninterested in Japanese cultural provenance. It is important to recall, as Earl Miner noted long ago, that English and American speculation on Japan was long political and cultural, "[b]ut the French interest in Japan was artistic and literary from the outset" (Miner [1958], 77). The Paris painters, and the writers who defended them (Goncourt, Zola, Mallarmé), were notably indifferent to Japanese cultural provenance; they exulted in the *formal* properties of the art (more specifically, the wood-block prints of chiefly Hokusai, Hiroshige, Utamaro): bold vibrant colors in "flat" spaces, stylized figures in oddly cropped views, asymmetry and dynamic motion, astonishing economy of means, in an art of suggestion using swift simple strokes of line and color. Art historians today echo Klaus Berger's judgment that the French painters' graphic *japonisme* was a shift of Copernican proportions, marking the end of Eurocentric illusionism and the beginnings of a new, modern way of seeing and recording the world (Berger [1992], 1–9).

Second, the first French translations of Japanese haiku and tanka (three- and five-line poems) appeared amid the widening streams of *japonisme* in Post-Impressionism, the Japan sections of the new department stores, the poster movement, Art Nouveau and Fauvism (see Weisberg [1975] and Wichmann [1982]). Early French translations derive from within this optic on things Japanese as aesthetic objects—indeed exemplars of an aesthetic scarcely discernible but clearly, wondrously counter to moribund Western conventions. Along with scattered literary translations in *La Revue des Deux Mondes* and *La Revue de Paris* (contemporaneous with Chamberlain's in *Cornhill Magazine*), the first two French books of translations came out at small publishers (scholar Léon de Rosny's *Anthologie* [1871] of haiku and tanka was a university textbook that circulated chiefly among writers and painters because he included both the Japanese text in *kanji*, of great interest as calligraphic *écriture*, along with his own rather stilted, Parnassian renderings in rhymed French; writer Judith Gautier's *Poèmes de la libellule* [Poems of the dragonfly, 1885] was a lavishly engraved, large-format book known and admired in *japoniste* circles, such as her friend Mallarmé's, partly because she translated counter to Parnassian pictorial precepts by emphasizing affective atmosphere and she kept the strict syllabic patterning with some rhyme). Although they remained little known until Couchoud consolidated their premises in his own work, these translations were overtly admiring if hesitant, pre-modernist efforts to render verbal texts from the land of Hokusai (see Hokenson [2004]).

Third, across the Channel, the first British translations (1877–1911) were selling briskly in London, as well as Boston and New York, under the aegis when not by the hand of Basil Hall Chamberlain. Chamberlain's Orientalist view of Japanese genres was purveyed in several reprintings and rewrites of his "Bash and the Japanese Poetical Epigram" (as in the *Classical Poetry of the Japanese* [1880], multiple editions of *Things Japanese* [1891–1939] and *Japanese Poetry* [1910–11]). He viewed the haiku as minor exemplar of a primitive (and "feminine") literature deficient in the West's highest values: "what Japanese literature most lacks is genius. It lacks thought, logical grasp, depth, breadth, and many-sidedness. It is too timorous, too narrow to compass great things" (Chamberlain [1905], 295). By labeling the genre a lyric "epigram," Chamberlain further constrained it

with Western rubrics. Yet Chamberlain's was so much the reigning conception that haiku interpreters in several languages routinely cited him in introducing the genre (for example, Karl Florenz, Auguste Pfizmaier, William Aston, William Porter). In *A History of Japanese Literature* (1899), for example, Aston typically makes the requisite nod to Chamberlain (quoting his phrase "a pretty vignette") when he restates this conception of haiku as consisting in such "tiny effusions" that "[i]t would be absurd to put forward any serious claim on behalf of Haikai to an important position in literature" (Aston [1972], 293–4; see the discussion of these translators in Martins Janeira [1970], 294–9). The point is not that these discourses enact the colonialist agenda of their social contexts, as they obviously do, but rather that they lead us into the heart of what Susan Stanford Friedman calls "the contradictory dialogic running through the historical and expressive formations" of modernism (Friedman [2001], 510). The dismantling of this arrogantly Greco-Roman orthodoxy by young British proponents of the haiku came within decades via French translations.

Fourth is the Continental redefinition by Paul-Louis Couchoud (1906) and his posterity in the following generation of modernists and avant-gardists. Couchoud's amplified version of the 1906 essay, in his book *Sages et poètes d'Asie* (Sages and poets of Asia) from 1916, led to several reprintings, two newly prefaced reprints (1923, 1926), and multiple European translations. Indeed in England, the young poets' attention to haiku began in 1907–8 with F. S. Flint's and T. E. Hulme's interest in French *vers libre* via Mallarmé and "haikai" via Couchoud (Miner [1958], 101). Flint was writing reviews of the new poetry in France (by for instance, Mallarmé, Derème, Couchoud) during 1908–12 for such journals as *New Age* and *Poetry Review* and thereby "promoting the Japanese *tanka* and *haiku*" (Wilhelm [1990], 34). This discursive zigzag, across the Channel and back, eventuates from twelfth-century Japan.

Renga, or linked poetry, was an elaborately regulated aristocratic genre in which poets "linked" their ornate texts into a 100-poem chain. In each linked text the first stanza was the three-line *hokku* in patterns of 5–7–5 syllables, the second the *waki*, and so forth. By the seventeenth century, the first stanza had become a separate genre, popularized by the poet Matsunaga and the poet-novelist Saikaku, who were often writing for city audiences of moderate education and townspeople under repressive governments (Miner et al [1985], 168, 195), using plebian vocabulary about common things and emotions. The poet Bashō, who called himself half layman and half (Zen) priest, further simplified the haiku in lexicon and affect, invoking time, death, and suffering, also humor, always with images of simple things from nature or objects of daily life. Esteemed poets of the next generation included his followers Buson and Kikaku. The haiku was written vertically as a 17-syllable monostiche in three segments (it resembles a tercet in Western horizontal lineation). In three lines, haiku poets used few verbs, few pronouns evident to Westerners, no rhymes, and no titles; they included one word to suggest a season of the year, and one indicator of a pause or break: thence the three traits most startling in the West—brevity, simplicity, suggestiveness. For poetic texts of such extremely elliptic brevity, early translators' solutions were various, to say the least.

One of Bashō's most straightforward texts is a haiku on a cicada (*semi*):

yagate | shinu | keshiki | wa | miezu | semi | no | koe  
before long die indication [topic marker] does not show cicada | 's | cry

Ueda (1992) conjoins three best-selling British versions of this text from the 1890s:

Nothing in the cicada's voice  
Gives token of a speedy death. (Chamberlain, cited in Ueda [1992], 10)

The cry of the cicada  
Gives no sign  
That presently it will die. (William Aston, cited in Ueda [1992], 10)

Never an intimation in all those voices of sémi  
How quickly the hush will come — how speedily all must die. (Lafcadio Hearn, cited in Ueda [1992], 10)

To which we can add Couchoud's translation of 1906:

La mort tout prochaine,	[Death quite close,
Rien ne l'annonce	Nothing announces it
Dans le chant de la cigale.	In the song of the cicada.]
(Couchoud [1923], 124)	

The three leading interpreters of Japanese literature in English invert the syntax. By scrambling the affective structure, placing the focal conclusion (cicada's sound) at the beginning, they make it impossible for the English texts to function as haiku. Chamberlain and Hearn reduce the form to two lines. Only Aston approximates the syllabic patterning. None of these residually Victorian translators can relinquish dominant voice, narrative or logical development, unity or ascending complication, nor a faintly didactic tone. By contrast, Couchoud's French reader confronted a new kind of poetic text, a strangely diffident, elliptic tonal mix of fear and empathy, swiftly and surprisingly resolved in, of all things, an insect's sound.

Paul-Louis Couchoud, like many young men of his generation, admired the "modern" poetry of Verlaine and Mallarmé, and shared contemporary enthusiasms for Japanese graphic arts. He took the unusual step of spending a year in Japan and, upon his return in 1905, tried his hand at haiku in French, along with his friends Albert Poncin and André Faure (Vocance [1937], 7). Their privately published collection of haiku *Au Fil de l'eau* (Drifting downstream) apparently went unnoticed in 1905, unlike Couchoud's extraordinarily perspicacious essay on haiku in *Les Lettres* in 1906. Particularly when he reprinted it in his book *Sages et poètes d'Asie* in 1916, amplifying it to 156 haiku translations plus a new section on contemporary French-language haiku of war, this text gave Western poetry new sources and directions.

Couchoud's optic is admiring and crystalline: "Kyoto is the equal of Athens and Florence" (Couchoud [1923], 4).<sup>3</sup> European poetry is still oratorical, he says, but Japanese poetry provides examples of discontinuity: a haiku is a poem in three lines of three small sentence fragments ("petits membres de phrase") that works at the source of flashing sensation, instantaneous and prior to thought, and resolves into "la sensation pure" (8). The obstacle to this aim is words, that is, word-sequencing that immediately introduces order, so the text is pared to 17 syllables, "l'essence de la poésie" (9). Though he takes his title "*Les Épigrammes lyriques du Japon*" from Chamberlain's standard of the time, he insists that the haiku is not an epigram (54, 106): visually, it is a small scene



(“tableautin”) in three brush strokes (54), but more accurately it is a perception, a glance, “un coup d’oeil” (107), that does not surpass “la vision pure et simple” because there is never an idea interposed between the eye and the object perceived—seen or heard (107). It is a swift impression made of indicators recording and evoking instantaneous sense perception. In a passage often quoted, and heavily underlined in Rilke’s copy (Meyer [1980], 149), Couchoud explained that the intellect is absent: “The abstract is eliminated. The syntax is excessively elliptic. With three brief notations it is a matter of composing a landscape or a small scene. The entire effort of the poet goes to the choice of the three suggestive sensations that will summon others in their wake” (54).<sup>4</sup> While noting that Chamberlain was right to stress brevity and suggestion (53), Couchoud counters that the haiku is more essentially revelatory of mind. Not only does it “move into emotion and dream. It discloses their intimate nature and most inveterate habit: concentration” (55).<sup>5</sup> This is quite different cognitive terrain from the British “pretty vignette.” Before showing how all this works in specific haiku texts, Couchoud makes a final historical point that was perhaps almost as significant in the Continental reception of haiku as his critical reflections on the poetics.

Couchoud draws a dramatic political distinction between classical court poetry, which corresponds in time to Kano court painting, he says, and populist haiku, whose golden age of 1600–1800 corresponds instead to the plebeian artists of the wood-block prints. Like the wood-blocks (which had recently revolutionized European painting), the haiku finds no object or person too banal, bizarre, vulgar, or grotesque, since this is poetry “for those who do not wear the two swords,” being neither noble nor samurai (Couchoud [1923], 57). Tacitly he aligns this “belle époque” of haiku with comparably heterodox, politically and artistically innovative French counterparts, through an unmistakably republican lexicon. Haiku was practiced by “révolutionnaires”, painters like Buson (suggesting Manet or Monet), “mystiques”, priests like Bash (Mallarmé), and “naturalistes” novelists like Saikaku (surely Zola, the Dreyfusard who had recently died). And it remains such a living form, he says, that even in the recent Russo-Japanese war, soldiers wrote hundreds of haiku (57). Upper-crust Japanese snobs do not like the genre, he adds, but we Europeans can admire this “art réaliste.” His final, startling coda reads: “It is a vision addressed directly to our eye, a vivid impression that can awaken in us some impression still asleep” (58).<sup>6</sup>

Today we can scarcely read such words without thinking of Bergson, Proust, and Breton, but even in 1916, Couchoud seems almost deliberately to hint at but immediately sidestep such prominent contemporary issues as intuition, unconscious memory, non-rational faculties. He trains his focus steadily on sensation, perception, and impression, that is, the affective referents of the French *japoniste* discourse of Impressionism and Post-Impressionism. In this way he positions haiku to serve literature exactly as the wood-blocks served painting. The greatest utility of Couchoud’s book was undoubtedly the haiku that he translated and lightly glossed. It is in his section on poems of animal life that appears his famous exclamation “A brief astonishment! That is the very definition of haiku” (Couchoud [1923], 62).<sup>7</sup>

Un pétale tombé	[A fallen petal
Remonte à sa branche:	Returns to its branch:
Ah! c’est un papillon!	Ah! it’s a butterfly! ]
(Couchoud [1923], 62)	

Un temple de montagne.	[A mountain temple.
La cloche, au point du jour,	The bell, at break of day,
Disperse les corbeaux!	Disperses the crows!]
(Couchoud [1923], 63)	

Une libellule	[A dragonfly
Essayant en vain de se poser	Trying in vain to land
Sur une tige d'herbe ...	On a blade of grass ...]
(Couchoud [1923], 60)	

In these texts, Couchoud explains, “[w]ithout any symbol at all, the unexpected apparition [...] moves us. [...] That is the entire art of the haiku. It is a brief shake given to our senses, a well plucked note whose harmonics expire slowly within us” (72).<sup>8</sup> Wisely, Couchoud refrains from any conventional exegesis of the three segments and stresses instead that they build into a single instant of astonished—and astonishingly affective—perception, and that is all. In another celebrated passage, implicitly countering Chamberlain again, he points out that therefore, “[t]heir brevity is more on the scale of the immense than the miniature. They are comparable to a vibration which no other [vibration] limits and which widens of itself indefinitely [...] The word ‘painting’ is not at all suitable” (73).<sup>9</sup>

In Buddhist compassion for the life of all things, Couchoud points out, haiku can be spiritual in its effects, but it is not an operation of thought: the poet does not make reflections on things, he sees them (Couchoud [1923], 80). Still the poet selects the detail to note, and renders the instant and the “émotion” that animates it (81). This is a particular way of seeing (81), but in haiku it is habitual. It can open dimensions of mystery in objects (83), and express elusively fugitive and poignant sensations (“des sensations fugitives et poignantes,” 87):

Pleine lune.	[Full moon.
Sur les nattes,	On the mats,
L'ombre nette du pin.	The clear shadow of the pine.]
(Couchoud [1923], 83)	

Commencement de l'automne.	[Beginning of autumn.
Une lanterne s'allume au loin.	A lantern flares in the distance.
Crépuscule.	Twilight.]
(Couchoud [1923], 87)	

Un cimetière.	[A cemetery.
Et les lucioles de l'automne,	And the fireflies of autumn,
Deux ou trois.	Two or three. ]
(Couchoud [1923], 87)	

Haiku thus note “the imperceptible stages” of life’s brevity, “the instantaneous impression of the flight of time” (Couchoud [1923], 88).<sup>10</sup> Seasons are the solid link between all haiku, as between all

creatures, and this is the texts' real order, Couchoud suggests, the inflexible order of time. It is thus that "their discontinuity conforms to the rhythm of the metamorphoses" of change in time (92). In almost Cubist terms, Couchoud explains that haiku poets capture "the slow rotation of phenomena" (Couchoud [1923], 113) in the swift apperception of detail. They work through juxtaposed details of nature, inns, workshops, cities and villages, peasants, courtesans, warriors, monks, kitchens, temples, mice, frogs:

Une vieille mare,	[An old pond,
Et, quand une grenouille plonge,	And, when a frog plunges,
Le bruit que fait l'eau...	The noise made by the water... ]
(Couchoud [1923], 123)	

Pluie d'automne.	[Autumn rain.
Une souris trotte	A mouse trots
Sur le koto.	On the koto.]
(Couchoud [1923], 90)	

For Couchoud, the strains of melancholy in haiku proceed from a refined consciousness of the swiftness of the moment and from the poet's ability to animate that awareness in the imperceptible stages that swiftly come to comprise an instantaneous perception. In Buson's text, the rain metamorphoses into the unheard music of the abandoned koto, syncopated perhaps with the small sound of the mouse trotting on the instrument and thus oblivious to mere human music. For Couchoud the text is a relational ground in which the three elements are equivalent pieces of a vast composition moving imperceptibly into (abstract because unstated) feeling, both a sympathetic joy in the moment and an awareness of its movement toward death. Thus the cicada's chirp seems like the plaint of the earth itself, exhaled in the night (Couchoud [1923], 66). Peasants and workers similarly struggle:

Elle enveloppe les gâteaux	[She wraps the cakes
Et de l'autre main arrange	And with her other hand arranges
Ses cheveux sur son front.	Her hair on her forehead.]
(Couchoud [1923], 103)	

Grosse de neuf mois,	[Pregnant nine months,
Le ventre en avant,	Belly forward,
Elle plante le riz.	She plants the rice. ]
(Couchoud [1923], 108)	

Épouvantement ...	[Terrifiedly ...
J'ai marché, dans la chambre,	I walked, in the bedroom,
Sur le peigne de ma femme morte.	On the comb of my dead wife.]
(Couchoud [1923], 108)	

The poet's engagement with the world, like the reader's response, is almost always one of sympathy, Couchoud emphasizes, and even in tones of sadness it is "an indefinite sympathy," which runs from benevolent curiosity to profound pity (Couchoud [1923], 107). It cannot be fixed because discontinuous poetry, in the absence of clear connectives, is also thereby an art of the incomplete ("l'inachevé," 113). This is partly because the poet brings himself to a point where all beings intermingle as one, so personal feeling is extraneous (114). Thus "incompletion is more than an expressive technique, it is the very image of the sensible world" (113).<sup>11</sup> The reader's response is crucial, because it alone completes the text, which has meaning ("sens") only in the depth of feeling ("sentiment") from which it arose and in the sensitivity ("sensibilité") of the ear or eye that receives it (115).

Feu sous la cendre.. [Fire under the ash.  
Maison sous la neige. House under the snow.  
Minuit. Midnight.]  
(Couchoud [1923], 88)

In introducing haiku to France, Couchoud could be remarkably radical, as in eliminating definite articles (above) for the barest possible juxtapositions. He tends to keep most French articles, however, and to smooth the syntactic leaps with occasional prepositions and a few conjunctions. For 1906 or for 1916, it hardly matters. The haiku texts were so startling in their radical brevity, and their affective open structure, that they did indeed serve his aims for European poetry. In his final comments in 1916, although the Futurists were rather muted by then, the Dadaists distant in Zurich, and the Surrealist manifestos still some years away, Couchoud sounded the call for an avant-garde writing that was not Art or Literature but rather, in his ironic formula, sheer "expression reduced to the supreme minimum," to a new kind of "essence" of direct expression of the instant of affective experience of the phenomenal world: "A haiku is a naked sensation," and no other form can "preserve entirely pure, entirely pulsing an acute minute of life," shorn of all but the barest minimum of words in rhythm (Couchoud [1923], 132).<sup>12</sup>

That is why, he concluded in 1916, Julien Vocance wrote haiku in the trenches. Haiku serves the *new* ("toute matière neuve"), so it perfectly serves that terrible experience. Reprinting seventeen of Vocance's texts, Couchoud's only analogy for these French haiku comes not from literature, of course, but from cinema (also a new experience). Four haiku about an enemy attack comprise "a cinematographer's assault in four short films," where the aesthetic is one of dissociation — natural in Japan, where writers dismantle a scene into a detail. The Western poet constructs, the Japanese poet deconstructs ("dissocie," Couchoud [1923], 136). Following the sections on Bash and Buson, the final section on Vocance's texts is equally powerful and artistically shocking. For Couchoud's readers in several languages, especially Spanish, it brought his account of classical haiku poetics right into the moment of urgent contemporary problems, both expressive and political.

Julien Vocance, like Guillaume Apollinaire, Jean Cocteau, Roland Dorgelès, André Breton, Giuseppe Ungaretti, Paul Éluard, and many others, was terrorized by the flames and mud of the trenches, the relentless shelling, the explosions of bodies and of the earth itself, the blood and rotting bandages, the boredom and the grief. Choosing not to work in familiar modes, such as the

novelistic frescoes of Cocteau and Dorgelès, Vocance turned to the haiku for another “vision” of the sights and sounds of the front:

Deux levées de terre,	[Two mounds of earth.
Deux réseaux de fil de fer :	Two networks of barbed wire :
Deux civilisations.	Two civilizations. ]
(Vocance [1916], 424)	
Cla, cla, cla, cla, cla...	[Cla, cla, cla, cla, cla...
Ton bruit sinistre, mitrailleuse,	Your sinister noise, machine-gun,
Squelette comptant ses doigts sur ses dents.	Skeleton counting its fingers on its teeth.]
(Vocance [1916], 431)	

Vocance has mastered the fluidly supercessive sequence of percepts (visual, auditory, tactile), in elliptic syntax and startling resolution. He was wounded:

Mon oreille inquiète analyse les sons	[My anxious ear analyzes the sounds
De nous... des Boches... 77... 120...	Of us... the Krauts... 77... 120...
A droite... en face... au dessus... Touché	To the left... opposite...above... Hit ]
(Vocance [1916], 432)	

Horror and humor intermingle, in deep fellow-feeling among the *poilus*, and in collective anger at visiting nuns, mayors, authorities:

Dans les vertèbres	[In the vertebrae
Du cheval mal enfoui	Of the badly buried horse
Mon pied fait : floche ...	My foot goes : plosh ... ]
(Vocance [1916], 429)	
Le teint fleuri,	[Blooming complexion,
Le ventre déboutonné :	Belly unbuttoned :
Cuisiniers des officiers.	Officers' cooks. ]
(Vocance [1916], 428)	

To Couchoud only the jerking images of early cinema from a swiftly moving impersonal camera seemed comparable to this modern, discontinuous poetry. The first publication of Vocance's *Cent visions de guerre*, in *La Grande Revue* (May 1916), like Couchoud's book of the same year, prompted admiring reviews in leading French journals, as well as in the German and Spanish literary press—one review was entitled “Eine neue französische Dichtkunst,” a new French poetic art (Schwartz [1927], 205).

Also in the trenches (wearing the Italian uniform), the bilingual poet Giuseppe Ungaretti began a diary in haiku and, eventually, haiku-like forms of his own invention. As a student in Paris before the war, and a friend of Apollinaire as well as of the Futurists Filippo Marinetti and Aldo Palazzeschi, Ungaretti undoubtedly knew Couchoud's book, as well as perhaps the other, rather more staid book on Japanese poetics circulating in these years, Michel Revon's *Anthologie de la littérature*

*japonaise* (Anthology of Japanese literature) from 1910. (In this first critical anthology in the West to cover all Japanese genres and periods, Revon's critical position is laudatory [the haiku is "une forme exquise," (Revon [1910], 449)] though his poetry translations and commentaries are stilted, sometimes recurring to the standard visualist reading but just as often citing Chamberlain only to disagree with him [Revon [1910], 177]; Revon seems deaf to formal and cognitive aspects of the genre, although he loosely follows Couchoud in characterizing it as "l'expression rapide de quelque intime émotion" [82] and as "les extrêmes limites de l'impressionnisme" [382].) Of his haiku, Ungaretti published some Italian versions in his collection *Il Porto Sepolto* (1916) and the French texts in his *La Guerre* (1919), thereafter reworking and reprinting them in Italian in *Vita d'un Uomo* (Life of a man, 1942). Japanese poetics were not unknown in Italian (Gabriele d'Annunzio had published his *Ota occidentale* [Occidental tanka] in 1886, based on Judith Gautier's *Poèmes de la libellule*), but the first Italian haiku were those by Ungaretti.

Ungaretti's understanding closely parallels Couchoud's. His apprentice three-line haiku ("Tramonto," "Stasera," "Dannazione," of 1916) are deft affective imitations, though still privileging theme, and designating rather than suggesting:

Balaustrata di brezza	[Balustrade in breezes
per appoggiare stasera	(on which) to lean this evening
la mia malinconia.	my melancholy.]

(Ungaretti [1969], 31)

Historically, they are now less significant than the radically foreshortened texts of 1917–18. There, as powerfully as Vocance, he suggests the bored dread of the soldiers:

SOLDATI	[SOLDIERS
Si sta come	They are like
d'autunno	of autumn
sugle alberi	on the trees
Le foglie.	the leaves. ]

(Ungaretti [1969], 87)

L'ILLUMINATA RUGIADA	[THE ILLUMINATED DEW
La terra tremola	The earth quivers
di piacere	with pleasure
sotto un sole	beneath a sun
di violenze	of gentle
gentili.	violence.]

(Ungaretti [1969], 376)

Ungaretti's compact column cuts the still conventional Italian lyric line in two, to construct a staccato sequence of fragments in breathtaking assault on reader expectations of the time. (In French he uses a horizontally splayed form that replicates the absence of connectives in haiku by making the eye literally leap blank spaces, in "Militaires" or Soldiers, and "La Rosée Illuminée" or The illumi-

nated dew.) “Soldati” moves into precisely the type of affective and cognitive swirl of Buson’s poem ending on the cicada sound, now on the leaf about to fall. Why? Soldiers and leaves fall. The poem is completed in each reader’s mind or sensibility. The wrenching impersonal indicative *Si sta* operates grammatically and perceptually quite like many opening nominatives in haiku, leading to its swift adumbration in the final line. Conversely, the dew is in no way anthropomorphized yet suggests the affective (and erotic) theater of human and natural violence done to the earth and its creatures.

Lest this recall Apollinaire and his *Calligrammes* (Calligrams, 1918), note that Ungaretti uses this same compact/splayed form non-mimetically for diverse images (street, night, fatigue, wanderer); it serves his effort to create a “poor art” or *arte povera*, stripped to essentials, rather than any synthesis of painting and language. The *haikaïstes* too were breaking down mimetic forms, but their impulse was opposite: where they sought the minimal, taking literature back to zero, Apollinaire expanded the possibilities of the text as synthesis of the arts, as he said in *L’Esprit nouveau et les poètes* (The new spirit and the poets) from 1917, combining music, painting, and literature. Apollinaire was right to drop his original title for *Calligrammes* (“Idéogrammes”), since his graphic model was not Bash but the Picasso of synthetic Cubism. To Couchoud, who put the haiku under the aegis of Mallarmé (Couchoud [1923], 7–8), as to Ungaretti, the closer model was Mallarmé’s *Un Coup de dés* (A Throw of the dice), that twenty-page amplification of an image where, to many *haikaïstes*, what mattered most were the half-pages of white space that seemed to swirl around fragments of stanzas.

It was through Couchoud’s impact in general, and Ungaretti’s war texts in particular, that this literary *haikaïsme* spread almost immediately to Italy. Ungaretti published several of these texts in the Neapolitan journal *Diana*, whose issue of 25 May 1916 is said to have “launched the vogue of the Japanese lyric in Italy” (Rebay [1962], 57).<sup>13</sup> In the following year the first book of Japanese translations, *Poesie Giapponesi* (Japanese poetry), also came out in Naples (reprinted in 1927 as *Lirici Giapponesi*). In his press articles on French poetry through the 1930s, including the essay “Haikaismo” in *L’Italia Letteraria* (21 May 1933), Ungaretti underscored the crucial role of the haiku in the formation of *modernismo* (see Rebay [1962], 57–9).

*Haikaïstes* radically stripped their verse, not in lapidary abbreviations of greater wholes but in intensive focalization on the percept, the minimal nuance of affective, pre-cognitive experience. On the broader canvas of modernism, the haiku tends to vanish into similar kinds of exploration of percepts and affects, which it shared and helped advance. On 1 September 1920 the “new” genre went public, with a special issue of *La Nouvelle Revue Française* dedicated to eight French-language *haikaïstes* and edited by Jean Paulhan (quoting Couchoud). Schwartz has found that between 1920 and 1925, French poets published more than ten books of haiku, journals and anthologies regularly included haiku (especially the *NRF*), dozens of special issues appeared, and there was even a bibliography of haiku in French (see Schwartz [1927], 210–20). A well-known text of these years is the following by René Maublanc:

Mes amis sont morts.	[My friends are dead.
Je m’en suis fait d’autres.	I have made others.
Pardon.	Sorry.]

(cited in Schwartz [1927], 213)

Just as Couchoud was their poetician, these writers' vanguard poet was Vocance. In a 1921 issue of *Connaissance* he published his haiku sequence entitled *Art Poétique*:

Le poète japonais	[The Japanese poet
Essuie son couteau;	Cleans his knife;
Cette fois l'éloquence est morte.	This time eloquence is dead. ]
...	
Rapide et musclé,	[Swift and muscled,
Que le mot colle à ta pensée	May the word stick to your thought
Comme au cou du buffle le jaguar.	Like to the buffalo's neck the jaguar.]

(Vocance [1937], 53)

The initial sequence spits in the face of rhetoric and ideation. It announces that the Japanese poet has a priori accomplished the aim of Verlaine (to take eloquence and wring its neck, in his own *Art Poétique* of 1882). The *haïkaïste* poet is disengaged from his own flesh, his own subjectivity, being nothing but a sort of brain-bone, discarnate but sentient: "Disengaged from the flesh/ Conserve only/ The medullary bone" (Vocance [1937], 53).<sup>14</sup> Turning to poetics, Vocance suggests that the wrung neck of eloquence is now almost animal, since poetic language should adhere to thought like predator to prey: the text should claw, with no intercession of idea (56). Positioning haiku in the lineage of Verlaine and Rimbaud (54–5), Vocance implies that it has the status of a murderous outlaw, in the image of the *japoniste* poet wiping his knife. (Evidently the rhetorical arabesques of Symbolism are too irrelevant to mention.)

In the preface to his late collection *Le Livre des haï-kaï* (The book of the haiku) from 1937, Vocance asked a significant, if sarcastic question about haiku: surrealism "maybe owes it a lot, right, Éluard?" (Vocance [1937], 10).<sup>15</sup> Vocance had often spoken with Éluard about Japanese poetry in the 1910s, and Paulhan advised him to read Couchoud's book (Vanoyeke [1995], 79). His own haiku, written at the front (Perche [1963], 37), were first published in the 1920 *NRF* issue as *Pour vivre ici: Onze Haïkaï*. The genre was never officially embraced by surrealist dogma, probably because one of Breton's arch-enemies was the irascible Paul Claudel, the Roman Catholic government "functionary" (ambassador to Japan) and author of high-modernist haiku himself (*Cent Phrases pour éventails* or One Hundred phrases for a fan, 1927). As Éluard became an eminent avant-garde poet, surrealist and communist, he never wrote or spoke in public about haiku, while quietly reprinting his apprentice texts in all major collections of his work. In the late 1930s he added titles to the texts, of which those most often anthologized are "Le Coeur" (The heart), "Ah!" and "Les Roues" (The wheels):

Roues des routes	[Wheels of the roads
Roues fil à fil déliées,	Wheels wire by wire undone,
Usées.	Worn out. ]

(Éluard [1971], 72)

Working in stark juxtaposition of images, like many of his contemporaries in the avant-garde



movement, Éluard used all three lines (or four in his later tanka quatrains) as equivalent elements leading rhythmically to the punctum of the final word(s). While expertly deploying the simplicity and suggestive appositions of the haiku, like Ungaretti he varies the line length, the meter, even the spacing to obtain an emotional effect that is in part produced by, but distinct from, the discrete images he uses. Comparatively, as in his later poetry, he works closer to the aesthetic of a serene and somewhat lonely harmony, especially for his working-class figures in their daily labors:

Femmes sans chanteur,	[Women without songster (pimp)
Vêtements noirs, maisons grises,	Black clothes, gray houses,
L'amour sort le soir.	Love goes out for the evening. ]
(Éluard [1971], 73)	

Scholars of modernism usually term this poetic practice, and this stylistic signature in later and longer poems, Éluard's art of "condensing." Critics at the time, however, even those ignorant of haiku, such as André Gide and Gabriel Bounoure, recognized that Éluard's text is less a matter of referential compression than elliptic imprecision, less denotative than suggestive. Reviewers of this now canonical poet noted the rupture that Éluard was thereby effecting, even though they could adduce no critical label for these texts. In the *NRF*, for instance, Gabriel Bounoure hailed his *Capitale de la douleur* (Capital of sorrow) from 1925 as at last a new poetry: neither Classic nor Romantic, he said, neither in imitation nor expression, Éluard is writing poetry beyond the known forms of poetry, and Bounoure detected "l'invention d'une nouvelle tristesse," the invention of a new sadness (Bounoure [1990], 662). In the 1920s and again on the eve of World War II, Gide praised the innovations, such as a surrealist tercet in Éluard's "Blason des fleurs et des fruits" (Blazon of the flowers and fruit), published in *NRF* (February 1941):

Rose pareille au parricide	[Rose identical to the parricide
Descend de la toile de fond	Descends from the (stage) backdrop
Et tout en flammes s'évapore.	And all in flames evaporates.]
(cited in Gide [1949], 49)	

Noting that it escapes cognition, Gide stressed the text's modernity as a function of the fact that each word achieves its effects only through the memory of the one that preceded it, "as though despite the signification of the words," while retaining verbal precision. Freed from the reasoning realm, the reader apprehends the text through sheer lyric evocation, through the senses, without intellectualizing it (Gide [1949], 49–50).<sup>16</sup> This is exact, though it erases the full poetics of the obvious model for *Onze Haïkai* and such later work.

Even modernists who were disdainful of violent ruptures and radical poverty of means also often experimented in *haïkai*, as the genre was known at the time. To most of them it entailed one more tool, rather than an alternative poetics. Claudel and André Suarès (*Haïkai d'Occident*, 1926) assimilated the form to their mature conception of the spiritualized poetic image. Similarly, even some fearless iconoclasts, such as Jean Cocteau, tried their hand at haiku (*Vocabulaire*, 1922), only to return to more amenable Greek and Christian figures of thought. A similar divide occurs in music: Claude Debussy set his impressions of Japanese woodblocks into tone poems but it was

Igor Stravinsky who strove to recreate the effects of haiku in music, as in *Three Japanese Lyrics* of 1912–13 and parts of *The Rite of Spring*, thereby bringing haiku poetics into musical modernism (see Watkins [1994], 54–60).

Among the less radical poets, after he discovered haiku in Paris, in the 1920 *NRF* issue, Rainer Maria Rilke immediately ordered a copy of Couchoud's book—the third printing of 1919—and continued to experiment with the genre until his death. As recently as the winter of 1920, Rilke had lamented that poetry cannot be only “a language of word-kernels, one that is not plucked from the top of the stalk but captures language's seeds” (cited in Meyer [1980], 142).<sup>17</sup> By autumn, recognizing that haiku fulfilled this aim, and struggling to complete the *Duineser Elegien* (Duino Elegies, 1923), he was working toward a poetic language that would not immediately lead away from the visible, as he explained in a letter to his editor—even as he was copying out 29 haiku for another correspondent and quoting Couchoud (Meyer [1980], 143). Haiku provided a solution to what Rilke saw as the poet's primal duty: “to ‘say’ the things” (“‘Sagen’ der Dinge”), in the here and now (recalling Éluard's title *Pour vivre ici* [To Live Here]). In his search for means to render the concrete without metaphoric context, he adopted in *Vergänglichkeit* (Ephemerality, 1924) and in his French *Quatrains Valaisins* (1924) and *Les roses* (The roses, 1924), a new elliptic syntax leading, through three different and almost separable elements or fragments, to swift surprise, in sudden recognition of how the foregoing relates in the haiku-like climactic moment. Rilke's new *art poétique* may be the poem “Nach so langer” (After So Long), concluding that now the object “has to speak itself” (cited in Meyer [1980], 146).<sup>18</sup> This striking devolution from early archetypal figures to objects themselves (concrete, unique, autonomous) notably entails the haiku ontic field of sheer perception and explains why the margins of Rilke's copy of *Sages et poètes* were so strewn with exclamation points. Although Rilke died before being able to elaborate his discoveries in a major German text, he clearly yoked the genre to his new goals for modern poetry (see Meyer's discussion of Rilke's French and German haiku: Meyer [1980], 157–64).

On the left as well as the right, one of the most contentious issues in 1910–39 was what might be called the politics of the expressive dilemma: the avant-gardists' frontal attacks on representational forms and canonical mimesis deliberately produced texts that departed so far from signifying conventions as to be almost unintelligible—when not insulting—to the very audiences they sought to enlist in oppositional discourses. The laboring classes could scarcely relate to automatic writing, free association, games with chance, coy illusionism. The political aims of non-referential art seemed incompatible with the works themselves, with the very effort to construct a non-mimetic yet signifying, gestural text without discernible form, style, beauty, craft, or authorial intent. In this fractious context, haiku served as model for a radical poetics, as an almost non-referential art form that was *not* thereby fated to be apolitical. Indeed the “voice” of the *haïkaïstes* was most often strikingly leftist, impersonal or even collective, iconoclastic without dogma and class-conscious without ideology.

This socio-political agenda of the “battlefield” genre in French became even more clear in Spanish. Spain's tame, still Parnassian and Symbolist movement known as *modernismo* received its injections of *vanguardismo* from Latin America. “The first vibrations of the European avant-garde in Mexico were picked up by the seismograph-like poet José Juan Tablada” (Wilson [1979], 10). In Japan in 1904 and France in 1911, Tablada was the first Hispanic writer to discover the resources of Japanese poetry and to publish original haiku in Spanish, in two books of haiku, *Un día...* (A day...,

1919) and *El jarro de flores* (The Jug of flowers, 1922). Like most young *modernistas*, in the close and dynamic literary relations between the Americas and Europe, Tablada and his compatriots Carlos Gutiérrez Cruz, Rafael Lozano, José Rubén Romero, Francisco Monterde, turned a blind eye to colonialist Spain, but they closely followed events in Paris. Tablada had met both Apollinaire and Couchoud in Paris, studied their works, and discussed haiku with them (Hadman [1987], 11). Tablada had written a few haiku in Japan (*Florilegio*, 1904) but it was after the Paris meetings that he produced the work that launched the “movimiento haikú” in Spanish in the 1920s, when *Un día...* was widely imitated in Mexico, Spain, and many parts of Latin America (Hadman [1987], 14–15). While the world was at war, Mexico was plunged into the political ferment of the Revolution. Such vectors of violent social change intersected with those of profound aesthetic shifts, as these poets openly broke with *modernismo* and turned to new subjects in a new genre.

González de Mendoza defines Tablada’s most radical artistic moves in Spanish as, first, his proposition of a non-subjective poetics (announcing, “el mundo exterior existe!”, “the exterior world exists!”) and, second, his role as herald of the European avant-garde’s seismic tremors, most importantly “los jaikais” or the haiku (González de Mendoza [1943], 8,9). Effects were immediate, as young Latin American poets shared and extended Tablada’s emphasis on “depuración verbal” or verbal purification, “la imagen nueva y sorprendente” or the new and surprising image (Jiménez [1988], 33), refusal of “la abstracción y el intelectualismo” or abstraction and intellectualism, so that, most importantly, the poet perceives the world directly in the instant in which he experiences it. And, Hadman stresses (echoing Couchoud), Tablada always leaves the texts open (“abiertos”) to permit a continuation of the haiku moment (“del momento haikú”) in his readers (Hadman [1987], 23).<sup>19</sup> In his history of modern Mexican poetry, the poet Octavio Paz notes that Spanish classical art was closed, baroque was hermetic, but the modern is open: “el moderno es abierto” (Paz [1966], 10). Paz too emphasizes that it was Tablada who initiated in Spanish “la tradición de la obra abierta” or the tradition of the open work (Paz [1966], 13). The Spanish *abierto* corresponds in poetic function to Couchoud’s French *inachevé*: syntactic ellipses and juxtapositions effecting incompleteness in the relationship between percept and affect:

Tierno saúz,	[Tender willow,
Casi oro, casi ámbar,	almost gold, almost amber,
Casi luz.....	almost light.... ]
Tablada [1919], 21)	(Paz [1985], trans. Samuel Beckett, 150)

In his prologue (in haiku) to *Un día...* Tablada suggested that the genre is like a simple sea snail that is invisible on the beach and yet contains the sounds of immensity, “sonoro de inmensidad” (Tablada [1919], 9).

Recorriendo su tela	[The brilliant moon
Esta luna clarísima	working through its web
Tiene a la araña en vela.	keeps the spider awake. ]
(Tablada [1919], 93)	(Paz [1985], trans. Samuel Beckett, 151)

*El jarro de flores* also included natural scenes but amplified the number of texts on city life:

Porfía la libélula  
por prender su cruz transparente  
en la rama desnuda y trémula...

(Tablada [1922] in

Mendoza [1943], 84)

[The dragonfly strives patiently  
to fasten its transparent cross  
to the bare and trembling bough. ]

(Paz [1985], trans. Samuel Beckett, 152)

Lágrimas que vertía

la prostituta negra,

blancas..., ¡como las mias... !

(Tablada [1922], cited in Hadman [1987], 31)

[Tears wept by

the black prostitute,

white ones..., like mine! ]

Such precision in common language, play of phonemes, strict metric structures (often 5/7/5 or 8/8/10) lead to what Hispanic critics often term an almost religious character of *apparition*, in “absolutely modern visions” of the object, that is, re-visioning the quotidian in new affective pluralities of reflections and allusions where the word dissolves in silent contemplation (Paz [1984], 112). High modernists in Spain would later experiment with haiku around 1925: Antonio Machado and Juan Ramón Jiménez (see Paz [1984], 112), perhaps even the young Lorca (Tinnell [1991]). They linked it to the short form of the *copla*, where its unique poetics diffused into the Spanish popular form. Earlier in Mexico, however, Tablada and his successors used haiku in a marked cultural turn: they invoked not Spanish forms and themes but *Mexico*, its rural life, sacred and domestic animals, creoles and mestizos, city fiestas and peasant cemeteries, or the native heritage and daily life of the people. They thereby also lent a certain *gravitas* to common language. In the breakup of colonial superstructures, as well as in their own overt break with *modernismo*, the *vanguardista* poets revealed “a concrete Mexico,” Paz says ([1985], 39), similar to the French *haïkaïstes*’ invocation of life in the trenches during the superpowers’ war.

Thus Carlos Gutiérrez Cruz published oppositional haiku in the journal *El Informador* (1919) and two books of haiku (1920, 1923):

Compañero minero,  
doblado por el peso de la tierra,  
tu mano yerra

cuando saca metal para el dinero.

Como tú no tienes nada,

tienes que matar a los ricos

con su propias armas.

(Gutiérrez Cruz [1920], cited in Hadman [1987], 33)

[Comrade miner,

bent by the weight of the earth,

your hand errs

when it takes metal for money. ]

[Since you have nothing,

you have to kill the rich

with their own weapons. ]

Rafael Lozano similarly, if more subtly, yoked the suggestive techniques of haiku to political suggestion:

Canción

de negras y guitarras.

Dolor, dolor, dolor.

(cited in Hadman [1987], 38)

[Song

of black women and guitars.

Pain, pain, pain. ]

The titles by José Rubén Romero include “El hospital,” (The Hospital) “El pueblo” (The People), “El ratón” (The Rat) (see Hadman [1987], 39–40). Just as French haiku poets could publish such short texts in a variety of political outlets, such as *L’Humanité* during 1920–21, so the Latin-American poets’ haiku appeared in such journals as *Repertorio americano* (1925) or *Letras de Mexico* (1937) or *Cauce* throughout the 1940s (see Brower [1972], 87–93).

To Paz, haiku introduced a new poetic sensibility, in a poetry of the consciousness of the fragility of existence and of human fraternity in suffering and impermanence, revealing *instants* of equilibrium between life and death. Tablada’s *Un día...*, Paz finds, was thus a “rupture with tradition” and, through its discoveries and explorations, a powerful new model whose effects reached all the countries of the Spanish language (Paz [1984], 99, 111).<sup>20</sup> Hadman credits Tablada for this “movimiento haikú” ([1987], 15) that spread outward from Mexico. Indeed, via Paris through Mexico City, haiku accompanies the tremors of *vanguardismo* in socio-political agitation southward to Argentina (Enrique Diez-Canedo’s *Epigrammas americanos*, 1928), Peru (Alberto Guillén’s *Cancionero*, 1934), Ecuador (Jorge Carrera Andrade’s *Microgrammas*, 1940), Guatemala (Flavio Herrera’s “Haikais,” 1947), and many other roiling artistic and social milieus of the twentieth century.

The posterity of Couchoud’s little book is incalculable. By so persuasively inserting the genre into the forms and the ethos of modernism and its avant-gardes, Couchoud lifted the haiku out of the nineteenth-century Anglo-American paternalistic contexts of Orientalism (as the tiny feminine Oriental miniature incapable of real content), and made it as transnational as its contemporaries Cubism and psychoanalysis — which, like the modernist haiku, are a *form* and a *method*, rather than canonical products of a particular national culture or shaping cultural tradition.

Couchoud is being erased, however, in Anglo-American critical accounts of the “Western” genre. In London, Ezra Pound’s theory of Imagism developed a reading of the haiku as a structure of “super-position,” “one idea set on top of another” (cited in Miner [1958], 114), as in Moritake’s butterfly being superposed on the petal, in a poetry of the image or, in Pound’s famous definition of the image, “an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time” (cited in Miner [1958] 114). We might say that the scholarly Pound’s “complex” differs in kind from the Continental and *vanguardista* poets’ “simplex” that sincerely seeks to shed the intellectual and to work at a level more basic than superposed ideas or even images. Why do such distinctions matter? Aside from the sheer utility of the haiku as prism for reviewing the modernist politics of aesthetics, the history of the genre suggests that there persists across the Western hemisphere two contemporaneous but conflicting traditions of haiku writings. Both must be kept in view when considering the work of a modernist haiku poet in any language, in order to articulate where he or she falls along the spectrum of modernist Western haiku poetics. Historically, Couchoud’s interpretation of haiku as a motion in the mind, a swift pre-cognitive astonishment with lingering affect, split the “Western” genre into two streams. The mainstream Anglo-American conceptions run counter to the multiply dissonant Continental and Latin-American ones. Today, such standard scholarly reference tools as the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (1993 edition) cut the French poets to a sentence and skew the rubric “Western poets” back to Anglo-America, to Pound and the Beats. Pound read Ernest Fenellosa’s courtly translations and the Beats read R. H. Blyth’s *Haiku* (1949–52), which heavily emphasized Zen spirituality. The other tradition, the populist genre of battlefields and revolutions, is sinking from view.

Like the poets, we too must be wary of what Cary Nelson calls “the ideological linkages between the discourses of literary history and the processes of canon formation and transmission” (Nelson

[1989], 38). Particularly in light of modernism's socio-political ramifications in time and cultural space, it is often not the current Anglo-American notion of the genre's "Zen discipline" that underlies even much English-language poetry but quite other conceptions. Thus such mainstream United States modernists as Wallace Stevens and William Carlos Williams incorporated haiku poetics into their larger designs for poetry (Lynch [2001], 122). But haiku emerges more directly as a poetico-political art form in the social margins, as in African-American Richard Wright's *Haiku: This Other World*, written to explore his *négritude* during his exile from U. S. Cold War politics in France in the 1950s:

I am nobody:	In the falling snow
A red sinking autumn sun	A laughing boy holds out his palms
Took my name away.	Until they are white.

(Wright [1998], 1, 8)

In discussing "his haiku as racial discourse" (Wright [1998], 300), Wright's editors unwittingly echo Couchoud on Vocance, and Paz on Tablada. All are highlighting the haiku as a dissident modernist form in conditions of rupture, artistic and political.

It is easy to overlook the nature and significance of this genre as a phenomenon of hemispheric, if not global modernism, partly because the modernist haiku is, like the inventions of Freud and Picasso, almost part of the aesthetic air we breathe, so universal that it is no longer even noticed in critical histories. At one time, however, when haiku was new in the West, it was a perceived way out of a felt crisis in Western aesthetics and lethal socio-cultural ideologies. To reinsert haiku in the *incipit* of diverse modernisms is to see how "modernism"—across linguistic and cultural confines—entails comparable artistic experiments in new modes of cognition no less than expression.

## Notes

1. "C'est le genre littéraire d'où la *littérature* est la plus complètement exclue" (Couchoud [1923], 131).
2. "Le poème prend à sa source la sensation lyrique jaillissante, instantanée, avant que le mouvement de la pensée ou de la passion l'ait orientée et utilisée" (Couchoud [1923], 8).
3. "Kyoto est l'égale d'Athènes et de Florence" (Couchoud [1923], 4).
4. "L'abstrait en est éliminé. La syntaxe est élliptique à l'excès. Avec trois notations brèves il s'agit de composer un paysage ou une petite scène. Tout l'effort poétique porte sur le choix des trois sensations suggestives qui appelleront le cortège des autres" (Couchoud [1923], 54).
5. "court jusque dans l'émotion, jusque dans le rêve. Elle en décèle la nature intime et l'habitude la plus invétérée: la concentration" (Couchoud [1923], 55).
6. "C'est une vision qui s'adresse directement à notre oeil, une impression vive qui peut éveiller en nous quelque impression endormie" (Couchoud [1923], 58).
7. "Un bref étonnement! C'est la définition même du haiku" (Couchoud [1923], 62).
8. "Sans aucun symbole, l'apparition inattendue [...] nous émeut. Voilà tout l'art du haïkaï. C'est une secousse brève donné à nos sens, une note bien pincée dont les harmoniques expirent lentement en nous" (Couchoud [1923], 72).
9. "Leur brièveté est plus à la mesure de l'immense que du minuscule. Ils sont semblables à une vibration qu'aucune autre ne limite et qui s'élargit d'elle-même indéfiniment [...] Le mot de tableau ne convient guère" (Couchoud [1923], 73).

10. “l’impression instantanée de la fuite du temps [...] la brièveté de la vie [...] les imperceptibles étapes” (Couchoud [1923], 88).
11. “L’inachevé est ici plus qu’un saisissant moyen d’expression, c’est l’image même du monde sensible” (Couchoud [1923], 113).
12. “Un haïkaï est une sensation nue [...] pour garder toute pure, toute palpitante une minute aiguë de la vie, il n’est peut-être de forme poétique supérieure au haïkaï” (Couchoud [1923], 132).
13. “di aver lanciato la voga della lirica giapponese in Italia” (Rebay [1962], 57).
14. “Dégagé de la chair/ Ne conserve/ Que l’os médullaire” (Vocance [1937], 53).
15. “Le surréalisme (qui lui doit, cependant, peut-être beaucoup, n’est-ce pas, Éluard?)” (Vocance [1937], 10).
16. “L’incantation [...] est obtenue en dehors, et comme en dépit des mots [...] Une telle ‘combinaison de sons’ échappe à la compréhension de l’intelligence, à la critique, au bon sens commun. Éluard ne retient des mots que leur pouvoir incantatoire; pouvoir qui, du reste, n’est dû, en plus de leur sonorité, qu’au souvenir de leur emploi précédent [...] Le lecteur n’a plus à précisément comprendre, mais à s’y prêter. Les sons rythmés évoqueront en lui je ne sais quel faisceau de sensations où la raison n’a rien à voir” (Gide [1949], 49–50).
17. “eine Sprache aus Wort-Kernen, eine Sprache, die nicht gepflückt ist, oben, auf Stengeln, sondern im Sprach-Samen erfasst” (cited in Meyer [1980], 142).
18. “Nach so langer Erfahrung sei “Haus”,/ “Baum” oder “Brücke” anders gewagt./ Immer dem Schicksal eingesagt,/ sag es sich endlich aus” (Rilke, quoted in Meyer [1980], 146).
19. “el poeta del haikú perciba directamente lo que sucede en el momento presente en el mundo”; “muchos de sus haikú acaban abiertos, fue un experto en dejar caer a sus lectores, permitiéndoles morar en un continuo del momento haikú” (Hadman [1987], 17, 23).
20. “c’est un volontaire inachèvement [...] conscience de la fragilité et de la précarité de l’existence [...] nous révèle ces instants — car ils ne durent qu’un instant — d’équilibre entre la vie et la mort”; “L’influence de Tablada fut immédiate et s’étendit à tous les pays de notre langue” (Paz [1984], 99, 111).

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## Modernist Africa as an Imaginary Foil

### From Pierre Loti's Implied Ethnologist to the Heterotopian Zone

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Peter Nicholls has argued in his *Modernisms* (1995) that a certain modernist aesthetic is grounded in an objectification of the other, especially the feminine. This is to say that the aesthetic form, by creating the illusion of some absolute otherness, may function as a necessary defence to “protect the poet’s self from the full recognition of identity with other people” (Nicholls [1995], 4). Likewise, Tzvetan Todorov’s study *Nous et les autres* (On Human Diversity, 1989) shows that the attitude towards foreigners in the tradition of Western writing since Montaigne and the Enlightenment has been deeply ambiguous, foreign cultures having often been glorified and denigrated at the same time. Even if the culturally other may be idealised—for instance in the noble savage discourse—the representatives of other cultures are usually not understood as full-fledged human beings. The illusion of some absolute otherness is required to protect the writer’s self from the full recognition of identity with other people or from challenging the foundations of his own world-view.

But how could aesthetic “ruptures” and experimentation relate to the depiction of cultural differences and, furthermore, contribute to the objectification of the other? The tradition in the critique of ethnocentrism from Diderot’s *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville* (1772–79) to later self-ironic portrayals of Western travellers, exotic others and cross-cultural encounters in the work of Victor Segalen, Henri Michaux and Michel Leiris, seems to complicate the question by asking what is the poet’s self or the recognition of identity in others in the first place. The modernist forms of ironic tonal playing and elaborate masks of identity may of course, as Nicholls also suggests, cultivate an essentially closed model of the self and obscure the author’s actual, and perhaps dubious, opinions. But could we not also see, in examples that often combine critical views with a complex aesthetic, an indication not of strategies of defence but of uncontrolled contradictions on the one hand and of more ethical or at least more imaginative ways of thinking cultural difference on the other hand?

The perception of the culturally other as an object—or the idea that representation may not only create knowledge of other people but perhaps the very reality that it describes—is dealt with head-on in critical modernist travelogues. For instance, in Michaux’s *Un Barbare en Asie* (A Barbarian in Asia) from 1945, with a first version written in the 1930s, the wish to objectify the other is a self-conscious source of inspiration for the author-narrator. The first motto in Michaux’s travelogue celebrates the observer’s freedom in the construction of identities: “In India there is nothing to see—everything to interpret” (Michaux [1986], 3).<sup>1</sup>

It may be impossible to find out where and when Michaux is serious when he discusses the various Oriental people he has met. It is equally difficult to claim that the “barbarian” interpreter’s point of view would be a camouflage for a wish to objectify the other. This may precisely be what the text aims to dramatise. Michaux’s journal emphasises the multiplicity of cultures and their respective values in a way that does not easily lend itself to a form of thinking that resorts to objectification. As he writes in the preface to the American edition of his book: “perhaps above everything I exulted in the great multiform, living challenge of the Asiatic peoples to our terrible Western monotony. Long live the last resistants!” (Michaux [1986], v). Michaux claims to make propaganda for the idea of an endless variety of civilisations. A further strategy in his travelogue are the blatant stereotypes, exaggerated comments that the writer makes about all possible nationalities and ethnicities on earth: “those who are born stupid become twice as stupid, and who is stupider than a stupid Hindu?” (Michaux [1986], 4).<sup>2</sup> The Hindus, we hear, are all constipated. But the European is in no way saved from the violent stereotyping. For Michaux, the Europeans possess the special quality of disrespect; in Asia the Westerners, in comparison with the nobility of all Arabs, Hindus, and the Pariahs, look like workmen or errand-boys; Western philosophies “make one’s hair fall out and shorten one’s life” (Michaux [1986], 9).<sup>3</sup>

The topic of this paper is to examine, by way of reading Pierre Loti’s colonialist novel *Le Roman d’un spahi* (1880), how the premodernist aesthetic form may interface with cross-cultural issues. My aim is to develop the argument that certain features of Loti’s novel which, while reaffirming the nature of the object of colonial discourse as a stereotype, also enable and even prompt one to trace self-transgressive points of resistance within the text. This is not to suggest that Loti’s oeuvre would belong to the same critical tradition of ethnocentrism that stems from Montaigne, Montesquieu and Diderot. From the outset it is clear that Loti’s work reflects late nineteenth-century colonialist culture or what Edward J. Hughes has called the “coercive and yet also curious” nature of colonialism, openly supremacist attitude that is “yet disturbed by the difference that the new colonial makes visible” (Hughes [2001], 24–5). Loti’s work is historically important in that it founds a form of colonialist novel that is later developed and modified in the work of Rudyard Kipling, H. Rider Haggard, Joseph Conrad, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Karen Blixen and Graham Greene.

The textual ruptures and traces of “disturbance” in the novel, however, concerning the culturally other, are worth another look. Such features include the ambivalence of the narrator’s descriptive mode of discourse, the dynamic between the narrator and the main character Jean Peyral, and Jean’s conflicted but profound emotional involvement with Africa. Furthermore, my premise is that Loti’s novel, in its treatment of Africa and the Africans, does not simply suggest that the process of ambivalence is central to the stereotype—as something that “vacillates between what is always ‘in place,’ already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated” (Bhabha [1994], 66)—but that it anticipates certain modernist engagements with primitivism and colonialism à la Michaux for which the question of cultural difference becomes a more self-conscious problem.

## Descriptive Impulse

*Le roman d’un spahi* is a narrative about a young French cavalryman, a Spahi, Jean Peyral from a small village in the Cévennes whom we find in a colonial country, Senegal, where he engages in

two love affairs and a war. His adventure ends tragically when the hero is helplessly caught and destroyed in the foreign land where he has forged his identity anew.

Description plays a major part in the novel, as many readers have remarked, and functions as an enhancement of exoticism. Clive Wake, for instance, has argued in *The Novels of Pierre Loti* that the various descriptive passages in the novel and the story of the Spahi are frequently kept apart by the chapter divisions. The result is that “the reader is constantly being switched from a novel to a travelogue” (Wake [1974], 92). One of the most striking examples of such exoticism is the long description of an African market, Guet-n’dar, where the Spahi is trying to recover his father’s silver watch, which his lover Fatou-gaye has stolen from him. For about three pages the text lists all the things, from lizards’ tails and salted fish to amulets and old annotated copies of the Koran, being sold at the market:

At Guet-n’dar, on the sand, a lot of noise, confusion of all kinds, the Babel of all the languages of Sudan—a great ongoing market was held there, crammed with people from all countries, where one sells everything: precious things and ridiculous items; useful and unnecessary goods; unlikely objects, gold and butter, meat and lotion, sheep and manuscripts, captives and soup, amulets and vegetables. (Loti [1992], 195–6, my translation)<sup>4</sup>

The tableau of the market is only loosely connected to the novel’s theme. It becomes apparent here how Africa stands for forces that make one “lose” oneself in the great multitude and confusion of languages and things—some of which are “unbelievable” (*invraisemblable*)—as well as death, decay and sexual intoxication. In such detailed descriptions, African landscape and African culture are given the status of a mythical other, a place where the European mind may disintegrate and regress to a primitive state.

In another descriptive passage, the dormant forces of Africa are portrayed through the somnambulist movements of the crabs and the caimans, and the chaotic (*fouillis*) obscurity of the great roots of a mangrove tree that cross over and descend all over the place:

Above all, there were the roots of the mangroves, roots and more roots, hanging everywhere like some coils of rope; they were all lengths, all sizes, twining and weaving all over the place. One might say they were like thousands of nerves, the elephant trunks, or grey arms, seeking to entwine and invade everything: such entwined roots covered vast areas of land. And in the mud, on all the roots, on all the caimans, there were busy families of giant crabs ceaselessly moving their one pair of pincers of black ivory as if trying to get hold of some imaginary game. And this somnambulist movement of all the crabs on the thick greenery was the only perceptible part of the swarming creation at rest. (Loti [1992], 188–9)<sup>5</sup>

The predominant feature in the portrayal of Africa is the haunting sensation of threat, disintegration and the loss of self. The roots of African trees embrace and invade everything; the black pincers of the semi-conscious crabs are ready to snatch any foolish victim that may come their way. One may easily recall, for instance, Ania Loomba’s argument with regard to Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899), that “the alien lands induce madness, they *are* madness itself” (Loomba [1998], 36). In Loti, as in Conrad, Africa is characterised by the depressing tranquillity of nature, of fatigue, heavy and dangerous dreaming, sleep, and the monotony of time. “O the sadness of that African land!” cries the narrator (Loti [1992], 48, my translation).<sup>6</sup> It seems as if Africa does not just have a *climat maudit* but could produce pure *maléfice*: including the blood of the black people and the

poisoned sap of the plants, the flowers that have dangerous smells and the animals that are swollen by gall, as well as the burning heat and the devouring sun, and the sadness of its wasteland.

The Africans in the novel are, for the most part—but with certain important exceptions—portrayed as inferior primitives displaying many of the same characteristics as the nature around them. They are childlike; their perseverance, agility and force “of a clown” are commented on; their dog-like devotion and adoration of fetishes is frowned upon. At frequent intervals the narrator relates their behaviour to that of monkeys. At the very beginning the African rowers—“admirable for their muscles”—are said to have gorillas’ faces (Loti [1992], 46). An intense and irresolvable repulsion-fascination with the assumed monkey-likeness of the Africans is carried on from the first page of the novel. Jean’s lover Fatou is often compared to a monkey: she has a clever head like that of a monkey; her monkey paws have a frightening aspect; she is “the little monkey girl” (Loti [1992], 146, my translation).<sup>7</sup>

The black color, or the mixture of black and white, is a source of horror and contradiction for the narrator and the hero. The novel dramatizes confusion about black-white relations. The question of racial purity and the feeling that impurity spreads to all races and creation are constantly evoked in the novel. The Spahi himself is of “pure white race” even though “the African sun had already seriously burned his face and chest” and he has a smile that—it seems important—reveals the rare whiteness of his teeth (Loti [1992], 49). Jean’s first African lover Cora does not just betray Jean with another man but is truly deceptive because of her white skin and elegant Parisian manners: “It was a mulatress, as one said, but so white, so white that one could have thought she was a Parisian” (Loti [1992], 69). Cora’s disturbing affinity with the European race is an important component in Jean’s gradually deepening regression; she is a sort of threshold figure who leads Jean to the real black woman, Fatou-gaye.

When the Spahi lies with Fatou for the first time, he feels a special horror as the blackness of her skin contrasts with the pure white cloth she is wearing, as if she has taken his color (see Wake [1974], 88). Fatou, the narrator relates, represents the kind of black person who in France is taken as the “generic model of the black race” (Loti [1992], 126). She is not deceptive in her betrayal of Jean like Cora but rather naive and transparent. She is also loyal like some faithful animal. Another indication of the horror of mixing white and black is evident in the narrator’s emphasis on the fact that Jean’s son, his child with Fatou, is fair-skinned (it sounds as if the whiteness of his skin adds to the sadness of his death).

At the same time, however, the contrast between the colors black and white—“varnished ebony, their smile of bright white teeth”—may be experienced as beautiful. The simian theme cannot be separated from the theme of the beauty of the Africans. And, in all fairness to Loti, not all “whiteness” in his novel equates to moral virtue: the moors of the Braknas tribe, the men of pure white race, are described as the worst of the Africans. It may of course be that the Braknas are dubious for the narrator precisely because, like Cora, they are an anomaly within the inferior people, a kind of whiteness dislocated. But this may also take the analysis of the discomfort with racial impurity too far. The narrator obviously treats physical characteristics as indicative of moral and intellectual traits (see also Hargreaves [1981], 35–7; 44–5) but black skin-color does not prevent Jean from detecting differences from the Africans over the course of time. In his involvement with Fatou, Jean comes to a point, as the narrator puts it, when he recognizes the same physiognomy in the black

women as in the white but, for some reason or another, finds it “less repugnant” (Loti [1992], 106). Here the African woman paradoxically affirms sameness between the races in a misogynist vision of the sexes.

### Disorienting Description

Description necessarily objectifies; for a description to be a description of something it has to have an object. Literary description, as Philippe Hamon has remarked, often concerns some knowledge base, *savoir stocké*; it resorts to a different “memory” and expects a different horizon of reading from the reader. In this way description challenges the reader’s competence in recognizing, classifying and actualizing stocks of lexical units (Hamon [1981], 44–5). In Loti’s novel, description turns Africa into an object of knowledge and a stock of vocabulary including, for instance, the items sold at the open-air market or the fauna in the wilderness. With regard to the Africans such knowledge utilizes a model of a different kind of psychology, a *mentalité primitive*. By this I mean that the “knowledge” created by description produces a primitive and savage mind, presenting the African as a pre-rational or childlike being determined by confusion, communal participation and the lack of individuality (see Rhodes [1994], 17). As in his two earlier novels, Loti’s narrator capitalizes on impressionistic tableaux and sentimental situations. Just as in *Aziyadé*, as Roland Barthes suggests, what is recounted is not an adventure but incidents, the description of daily insignificances (Barthes [1990], 108).

What complicates the matter, however, is that Loti’s novels foreground the process of observation in which the image of the foreign culture is created and organized. The narrator himself is the main source of these reflections and reactions. Yet, to some extent these reflections are presented to the reader in free indirect discourse, which complicates the ideological reading of the novel further: does the narrator, in *Le roman d’un spahi*, subscribe to Jean’s views? Does Jean share the narrator’s point of view? With regard to Jean, it is noteworthy that his attitudes are subject to change and that the text follows his changing moods vis-à-vis the other closely.

An essential part of the work are the protagonist’s observations of the two African women, Cora and Fatou, and of his own involvement with them. In particular, the fifteen-year-old Khassonké girl Fatou and her body are described in terms of the promise and the fear of the colonial land. Loti’s originality lies to a large extent, as Todorov argues, in the way “he makes exoticism coincide with eroticism” (Todorov [1993], 314).<sup>8</sup>

But Jean learns to see the Africans in a different way through his erotic involvement with Fatou. He discovers both beauty and ugliness in the African race; he finally sees in Fatou-gaye the “perfection of Antiquity” even though this does not prevent him from thinking of her as an inferior being. At some point Jean feels almost a sensation of love or at least pity and tenderness for Fatou. Later his feelings change again and he starts to beat her—once beating her senseless—as he finds out that she has stolen all his valuables (even though earlier he seemed to approve of her buying jewelry with his money without asking permission). Gradually Jean grows more and more indifferent toward or disgusted by Fatou—he even compares her to a gorilla he sees fleeing at a distance. Finally, as the reader enters Jean’s mind in free indirect discourse, we find out that she has become for him

“a mean and perverse creature, black by her appearance and in her soul, surrounded by amulets and sorcery” (Loti [1992], 199).

It is significant that at this very moment when we hear Jean’s most appalling thoughts concerning his lover, the narrator intervenes by showing us Fatou’s point of view. We hear that Fatou is indeed capable of feeling remorse and that she knows that she has done something wrong by stealing Jean’s treasured possessions: “She understood that, being pushed by the evil spirits and her great desire for adornment, she had been bad” (Loti [1992], 200). Jean might have pardoned her once more, claims the narrator, had he known what was going on in her mind. On other occasions as well, it is revealed that Jean does not always make the right judgment with regard to Fatou. For instance, when Jean refers to her as the little monkey girl, Fatou dislikes the comparison and refuses it since, as she says, she knows language but the monkeys do not. Jean does not really stand corrected by this but continues to tease. The narrator, however, shows that Jean acts childishly: “smiling the great smile of a child who is having fun” (Loti [1992], 146). Jean does not really represent a position of clear authority in the novel. In this he is different from the hero “Loti” of Loti’s two first novels.

Loti’s novel systematizes for the first time a colonialist adventurer’s vantage point vis-à-vis the colonial setting. In its descriptive scenes the text accentuates not just the “madness” of all things African but also the protagonist’s growing disorientation. The overall effect is that—in lieu of portraying Africa truthfully—the text concentrates on the foreign culture’s effect on the protagonist. What is emphasized are the observer’s impressions, his reflections on his own transformation, including his conception of his own acculturation and relationship with the foreign woman, and his melancholic rapport with the old world (his parents, the loved one in France).

This opens up the possibility of a critical perspective—the rethinking of the whole experience of “contact”—that is perhaps latent in the novel. If the description of the other and of the encounter—how things are seen—cannot be separated from what is described—the ethnological content—and the narrator is also defined in and through his description, then what is a contact with another culture? For some modernist artists like Gauguin the desired effect of the intercultural encounter was the fantasy of being seen by the other in a scene of two-way gazing or, romantically, to become the other of one’s self (to become a real Maori). For others like Michaux, Segalen and Raymond Roussel, to return to Nicholls’s statement with which I started, the question posed by the encounter, whether real or imagined, concerned the very limits in the poet’s self-conception and the meaning in recognizing identity in others.

However, even if Loti’s novel may reflect the colonialist interests of his times it is not simple to pin down the exact ideological emphasis of Jean’s or the narrator’s changing perceptions. The narrator projects elaborate masks of the self onto the protagonist as Jean is gradually immersed in the foreign culture. Therefore, while Loti’s aesthetic reproduces stereotypical knowledge of the Africans in terms of the *mentalité primitive*, as far as Jean Peyral’s character is concerned, it is in no way based in a direct or unambivalent objectification of the other—a situation that, as Nicholls suggests, might constitute a recurring problem for the later modernisms. Instead of simply dichotomizing the human continuum into we/they contrasts and essentializing the resultant “other,” the novel also suggests an ambivalent and sometimes anxious relation to its own authority with regard to the depiction of the colonial country. Loti’s Africa and Africans are experienced both as objects to be controlled because of their inferior, “primitive” nature and as subjects of difference that enable the Western

traveler to forge his self anew. The latter possibility also comprises the revelation of a kind of critical limit to the application of standard criteria of evaluation. In this regard, Loti's Africa suggests a sense of radical difference that may not simply pose a threat to the main character, but whose difference may be worth preserving (for the narrator, for the sake of description).

Several aspects in Jean and his life in Senegal reject the possibility or the very idea of objectifying the native people. Jean's long-lasting friendship with an African Spahi Nyaor and Jean's alternating feelings towards Fatou—even though he never admits that she is truly equivalent to him—speak to the contrary. The narrator's ambivalent descriptions of certain African features like the desert also complicate the reading of Loti's novel in terms of who or what is the true object of its knowledge and subjection. In effect, even though one may find many features of the novel simplifying and confused—and the association between the Africans and monkeys is certainly racist—or rather pathetic, like Jean's relationship with his parents for instance, the depiction of Jean's emotional involvement with "Africa" is multifaceted in a way that in itself makes the novel a challenging read.

### Primitive Abstraction, Absolute Difference

*Le roman d'un spahi* both contributes to and questions the creation of absolute otherness that could protect a closed model of the self. The chapter-long "ethnographic" description of the griots, entitled "digression pédantesque sur la musique et sur une catégorie de gens appelés griots" ("A pedantic digression concerning the music and the people called the griots," part II, chapter IV), is a case in point. The griots, it is said, are a special caste of men from Sudan, traveling musicians and composers of heroic songs who inherit the task from their fathers. The griots are also an outcast group, being excluded, for instance, from certain religious ceremonies and thus comparable to courtesans or gypsies in the West. What is significant is that in the narrator's description of the *griots* the text nearly surpasses the sentiment of alterity between cultural forms and practices to an understanding that anticipates the (modernist) discovery of "negro art" at the beginning of the twentieth century. The inferiority of this art is rather a question than a certainty:

The persistent counter rhythm of the accompanists, and the unexpected syncopation, perfectly understood and observed by all the participants, were the most distinct characteristics of this art—inferior, perhaps, but assuredly very different from ours—that our European arrangements do not allow us fully comprehend. (Loti [1992], 135–6, my translation)<sup>9</sup>

The narrator does see the music of the griots as "inferior" to ours. Further, it may also add to exoticism and racism to point out that some things are "indescribable" because they are so different from ours. At the same time, however, a potentially disconcerting sense of pure difference enters the discourse in the same passage. The description of the griot offers a sense of disparity that could not be comprehended with regard to any criteria that the novel's Western narrator is familiar with. Furthermore, the treatment of the griots and their art points to an assumption that all cultures can only be evaluated on their own terms.

The same passage thus foregrounds a type of primitivism in the novel that makes a critique of the Western perspective and the sense of its moral authority possible. Such self-criticism, however,



always remains within the same realm of authority that it questions. As Rhodes argues, the Modernist primitivists questioned the validity of the assumption that the Western viewpoint is superior to the primitive:

This emphasizes the profoundly equivocal issue that lies at the heart of Primitivism—although artists might entreat the primitive as support and justification for projected cultural or social change, this alteration is always expected to come from within the West. (Rhodes [1994], 13)

The interest in the primitive, Rhodes argues, was to reinvigorate Western society by confronting it with its deepest memories—seeking for the creativity and pleasure in the simplicity of life and expression. This included the intuitive and procreative urge, or a kind of sensibility that was obliterated by education, mechanical work, the modern living environment, and the like. It did not, however, necessarily mean that African works of art, like the music or the storytelling of the griots, functioned as a direct source of sensation. The “primitive” art that was a model for so many modernist artists from Gauguin and Picasso to André Breton became rather a kind of psycho-cultural *aide-mémoire* of the things repressed in the West (see Rhodes [1994], 14).

As James Clifford has so well argued in his study *The Predicament of Culture* (1988), the very aestheticisation of “primitive” artifacts in Modernism from cubism to surrealism meant removing them from their original context including functional, ritual, and other use, and appreciating them in their abstract form. In Picasso’s *Les Femmes d’Alger* (1907), for instance, the mask-like faces of the two women are almost entirely dehumanized. In Man Ray’s photograph *Kiki* (1926), Kiki and the African mask that she holds in her hand share the same oval shape. In Loti, the beauty of the black and the music of the *griots* take on an abstract aesthetic quality. This is inseparable from the threat which the foreign culture may pose to the observer and the form of debased sexuality that abstracted beauty, as in Picasso’s painting, insinuate to the Western spectator.

A similar sense of an absolute frontier, of a difference that cannot be surpassed, can also be found in the novel’s description of the African desert. There is a powerful fascination in the text with a sensation of a void for which the desert is the utmost symbol. For instance, the description of the rich multitude of things being sold at the market ends with a remark on the “platitude” of the desert as the final horizon for the multitude: “And always, always, the desert as the horizon, the infinite platitude of the desert” (Loti [1992], 198).<sup>10</sup> This is not very different from Loti’s later text *Le Désert* (1895), where the desert is seen as the void that is too full of things. Here, as in *Le Roman d’un spahi*, the desert stands for a space that has been erased: a space in between “two mirrors that reflect each other without end” (Loti [1992], 174).<sup>11</sup> The void of the desert is a locus of various motivations and emotions in conflict; it is a source of inspiration and a limit of experience against which a person can come into one’s own. While suggesting a horizon behind everything—for things to be seen—the desert also means the state of being in a void or in a place without a horizon.

In the griots’ tableau and the symbolic force of the desert, the other culture attains a form of absolute impenetrability. Such a situation creates an object at the limit of objectification, a kind of *faux bond* between the observer and the observed that can be related to the Derridean notion of the “wholly other” (someone who is literally unnamable and unimaginable). The confrontation with the “wholly other” mystifies the object but also prompts questions about the self’s position vis-à-vis the other and the limits of his knowledge.

### Jean Peyral's Predicament: Tourist, Resident, and Ethnologist

The aesthetic distance between the narrator and the protagonist in *Le roman d'un spahi* reiterates the problem of how one perceives the other. In this respect the novel is an example in self-transgression, to borrow a notion from Shoshana Felman ([1993], 6), since the text can be read as a challenge to the conscious ideologies of colonialism and orientalism that inform it. Such a reading, however, was clearly not easily available at the time of the novel's publication. For most of his readers, Loti's work functioned, as most of today's critics would agree, as a sort of manual of how to embark on colonial service (Hughes [2001], 11) and as an encouragement to entertain "illusions of power and adulation in overseas lands" (Hargreaves [1981], 82).

Furthermore, the possibility of self-transgressive reading does not stem from a modernist unreliable observer or a self-ironic tonal play. Yet, contradictions arise. Jean's perspective becomes a challenge to the text's ideology because he lacks will power and because the narrator, on various occasions, stresses Jean's changing attitudes, miscalculation and misjudgment, or shows pity for him. Jean cannot "prevent himself from succumbing to temptation", as Clive Wake puts it ([1974], 82); he cannot control his most base desires. The narrator frequently depicts Jean's weaknesses and evaluates him in ways that make the reader share the protagonist's uncertainty vis-à-vis the foreign culture, without systematically downplaying Jean's character. The desired effect of this dynamic may be to raise a sense of sympathy, pity, wonder or horror (or all of these together) in the reader. In any case, the effect is also, as some postcolonial theories have it, that Loti's novel manifests the idea that cultural otherness is produced by a continual discursive process of "repetition and displacement" that instigates an ambivalence at the very site of imperial authority (see, for instance, Bhabha [1994], 97, 110). In its dynamic between the narrator and the main character, *Le roman d'un spahi* dramatises the fragility of the seam between ethnographic authority and the emotional response to the primitive.

The protagonist's contradictory attitude towards the colonized land and people reflects the conflicts in his predicament. In *Le roman d'un spahi* there are at least five different kinds of roles that Jean approximates in his rapport with Africa—in which the African people and the African environment are to a large degree mutually interchangeable—but none of which he truly fulfils. He is 1) the implied ethnologist; 2) what Todorov calls the impressionist or the highly perfected tourist; 3) he actualises and dramatises the coloniser's disintegrating self (thus anticipating characters like Conrad's Kurz or Céline's Robinson who refashion themselves in the heart of Africa); 4) he is a man performing a rite of passage; and finally 5) he is like the other of the other: he is like a griot, or the griots are Jean in a kind of distorting mirror. All of these roles anticipate and make way for later processes of characterization in modernist fiction.

An important notion to be explored in this respect is that Jean's identity seems to be defined by the other's gaze and judgment. Jean is not just the narrator's focaliser or an object of his observation. Jean does not just want the other (Cora, Fatou) to desire him, but he would like to desire like the other. At one point, he eavesdrops on Cora and her new lover who talk about him. In the scene Jean is "seen through" by the other characters. He is devastated by what he hears, since it becomes obvious that for Cora Jean is merely an (exchangeable) object of desire—Cora says she loves "both

Jeans.” This throws Jean off balance. He faints and is then found on the ground by Fatou. It is also significant that as Jean recovers from his unfortunate affair with Cora he is much affected by the novels he reads. He devours a great number of books, the models of which help him to assimilate the unhealthy habits of drinking, fighting and womanizing: “He had devoured novels in which everything was new to his imagination, and he had appropriated from them unhealthy forms of extravagance” (Loti [1992], 90).<sup>12</sup> Recalling René Girard’s notion of “mimetic desire,” Jean finds the model of his desire in the other’s desire.

It is after this period of debauchery, violence and reading, during the African spring, that Jean is passed from Cora to Fatou; he passes from the deceptive appearance of a “mulatto” to pure blackness. At the juncture of the crossing gazes, Jean Peyral’s character reveals many splits within. From the outset it becomes clear that he is not someone whose mind is only on his career or the advantages of his commission. He takes the calculated risk of making his own promotion impossible and complicates his return to his loved ones in France. He throws himself unreservedly into a relationship with Cora; his decision to live with Fatou is not accepted by the military. Jean finally does reform himself in this respect by rejecting Fatou. But all this comes too late—and it is worth asking, as Clive Wake does, whether the hero really wants to reform (Wake [1974], 89).

It is suggested from the beginning that Jean’s engagement with Africa is fatal and final. For instance, the narrator points out that not only may Fatou have used some charm on Jean but also that Jean himself makes a fatal contract, a kind of pact with death, as he accepts Fatou’s love. Or even more, Jean agrees to the disastrous pact with the whole black race and the land of Africa because he desires to do so. Jean, it is said, loved his Senegal, to which he was tied in so many mysterious ways:

He loved his Senegal, the miserable; he perceived himself clearly now; he was fixated to this land by a multitude of intimate and mysterious ties. He was maddened by the prospect of a return;—but caught in the land of the sand, stuck to the house of Samba-Hamet, even to all that horrible misery, even to the excess of heat and light. (Loti [1992], 163, my translation)<sup>13</sup>

The foreign land, in its excess of heat and light, promises Jean a “vast tomb” (Loti [1992], 222),<sup>14</sup> a certain death. Jean, nevertheless, melts into the environment and no longer is able to control himself. Jean loves his own death as the image of Africa.

In his essay on Loti’s *Aziyadé*, Barthes suggests that Loti was familiar with the three gradual moments of alienation that, “transposed into modern terms,” are the journey, the sojourn, and naturalisation (Barthes [1990], 117). In *Aziyadé* the protagonist is successively a tourist, a resident and a national. The intermediary position of the resident, however, is the one that lasts. A resident, as Barthes defines him, is not yet a national or a local nor is he a tourist: a resident in the Lotian sense is a tourist who “repeats his desire to remain” and for whom “a fine knowledge of sites, manners, and language allows him to satisfy every desire without fear” (Barthes [1990], 117–18).<sup>15</sup> In *Le roman d’un spahi*, the process of becoming other involves the conflicting emotions of desire and fear. The protagonist fears the absolute difference that he confronts but, regardless, desires Fatou and does not wish to be a mere visitor in a foreign land. Jean repeats his desire to remain even if he becomes estranged from his own life: “And Jean felt that the negro spring was burning his blood and that it ran like a hungry poison in his veins [...] the renewal of all that life unnerved him—because that life was not his” (Loti [1992], 110).<sup>16</sup>

As he is deeply engaged in the daily life of Senegal, Jean is closer to the native people than any regular legionnaire, let alone a tourist. He wants to be involved in the local way of life and for that reason his knowledge is not entirely defined by the "exteriority" of his Western point of view. He is not on a tour, not passing through a place even though his parents and fiancée in France would like to think so; neither is he, as he is not an intellectual nor an artist, yet another proponent of the late nineteenth century modernist cult of "the going away."

However, it is significant that his life is constantly enveloped in and framed by a Western knowledge concerning the local culture. First of all, Jean is an implied ethnologist in that he is someone who experiences everything that he sees and who is concerned about his relationship with the place and culture in which he lives. But secondly, Jean becomes a kind of implied ethnologist through the narrator who poses himself as a true source of authority; in the narrator's description, Jean is affected by the ethnologist's role and expectations. Jean's point of view is constantly tainted with—and literally so in the passages related in free indirect discourse—the narrator's knowledge and authority concerning Africa and Africans.

The narrator's ethnologic knowledge is revealed in the descriptive passages and by the vocabulary he uses. His interest in the language shows up, for instance, in the use of various African words. The African terms and the names of the people and the places reflect the great diversity of the people in the region: Yolof (Wolof), Soninké, Peuhl, Bambara. The strange power of the foreign lexicon is demonstrated on various occasions even if not all of these words and terms are real (the name of the leader El-Hadj's son Boubakar-Ségou is, for instance, invented). The name of the hippopotamus is mentioned in local diction, *ngabou*, when the animal refers to a curse put on Fatou's family. When Jean asks Fatou what she has done with his old watch she answers "Ram!" ("I do not know"), and the foreign expression seems to add to Jean's rage. Besides music and language, the narrator's ethnographic knowledge includes African literature as well, although this, like the music of the griots, is tied to a sense of seduction and feverish excitement. After the "pedantic digression" concerning the *griots* the narrator mentions the "posthumous echo" of the poetess of the epic of El-Hadj. The bamboula dance festivity of the Yolof women and the *griot* musicians evokes, in the narrator's mind, the grandeur of the past days of glory during the regime of El-Hadj Omar. The power of the female poetess in this scene further enhances the mysteriously enticing quality of the colonial women Cora and Fatou.

While description often accentuates the effect of reality in fiction it does not, even in realist fiction, have to be wholly convincing in terms of truth, that is, merely to follow the principle of truthfulness to reality. The refrain "Anamalis fobil! [...] Faramata hi!" which the griots repeat during their frenzied dance, and which the narrator appropriates for his own discourse, is never directly translated since, the narrator explains, the translation would "burn the pages." The refrain's pagan, sexual call to love dominates Loti's description of the Spahi's first experience of African sexuality that lasts over four chapters. Yet, at the same time, the narrator's ethnological knowledge is interrupted by desire: the words do not really exist; the "feverish chant of desire" is wholly Loti's own invention, since there are no such words in Yolof.

Here the ethnological description does not find its justification in anthropological or linguistic knowledge but in being motivated, as exoticism, in regard to the fictional world it organizes. The words "Anamalis fobil!" play an important part in the novel structurally since the narrator repeats the phrase several times at a strategic turning point in the narrative, after the fashion of the chanting

griots whom he (and Jean) had heard earlier. In the first part of the novel, the last three chapters start with these words and rise to a kind of crescendo. The exclamation of desire frames the description of “negro spring,” the baobab trees and the *gourous* and accentuates Jean’s fate. Most importantly, it is here that Jean finally crosses the “fatal threshold” of desire and accepts, albeit in a kind of horror of himself, his lust for Fatou and their “strange marriage.” The same words end the first part of the novel.

Tzvetan Todorov sees Loti’s novels as presenting to full view the impressionist or the highly perfected tourist (Todorov [1993], 309–10). Those of Loti’s novels that always display a lively interest in foreign cultures become, as Todorov says, “the guided tour to his collection” of sensations that the foreign country makes possible (Todorov [1993], 310).<sup>17</sup> In *Le Roman d’un spahi*, likewise, “the foreign country really exists, and it serves as a catalyst for the book; but it does not figure in the work itself”; the text, rather, proposes to describe the *effect* produced by the country on the narrator’s mind and soul (Todorov [1993], 310).<sup>18</sup> Loti’s work builds on the awareness that the effects of the country are never the country itself.

### Translating Impressions, Enacting Hybridity

In his early novels Loti systematized the description of the impressions of foreign culture. The early novels also stage a form of openly egocentric voyage that had important critics in the likes of Segalen—who thought that Loti was reselling cheap impressions (Segalen [1978], 35)—and numerous modernist heirs, for instance, in Michaux’s *Asia*, Antonin Artaud’s *Bali and Mexico*, Louis-Ferdinand Céline’s violent and irrational Africa in *Voyage au bout de la nuit* (Journey To the End of the Night) from 1932, Camus’s *La peste* (The Plague) from 1947, or Barthes’s “empire of the signs” in Japan.

Roussel’s Africa in *Impressions d’Afrique* (Impressions of Africa) from 1910, follows up on Loti’s oeuvre as it radicalizes the translation of impressions into language and the subsequent reduction of the plot to the minimum. Roussel’s *Impressions*, although it lacks any explicit dialogue with colonialism, takes the problem of image making much further than Loti’s novels or *Heart of Darkness*. In *Impressions*, Roussel turns Loti’s ethnologist narrators and perfected tourists into a kind of parody of themselves. Here, the foreign culture needs to be understood as an arbitrary construction, as is suggested, for instance, by Emperor Talu’s costume, which is decorated with a great map of Africa that has grossly exaggerated the size of his nation.

Roussel insisted on the purely linguistic status of his fictional inventions. Nothing in his works, he claimed, came from outside reality; everything came from inside the text, from the words, their relationships, their interplay. One effect of Roussel’s novel on “impressions” is that his Africa becomes an imaginary foil for imaging a possible world that follows a logic different from anything known before. In this respect Brian McHale’s reading of Roussel’s “Africa” as a kind of imaginary *zone* is highly suggestive. With regard to *Impressions*, McHale refers to the postmodern strategy of the interpolation of space, by which he means the introduction of “an alien space within a familiar space, or between two adjacent areas of space where no such ‘between’ exists” (McHale [1987], 46). Such an interpolation, along with other strategies for constructing or deconstructing space, produces an effect of the “heterotopian” zone, which has no single perceiving subject organizing its area (McHale [1987], 45–6).

Roussel's "Africa" explores ontological propositions by exploiting the indeterminacy of real African frontiers. At the same time, *Impressions* leaves no doubt that the exotic African milieu it describes is a mere invention and that, therefore, a reclassification of such familiar cultural categories like "Africa" could perhaps be easily undertaken. The radically new in Roussel in this sense does not lie in any conception of a distant place, since no such place can be truly understood (in the world of this novel at any rate)—in other words, there is no exotic "alternative" to the West—but rather in the way the novel portrays the distances and ruptures, and the exhilarating possibilities of play with cultural stereotypes. The nature of Roussel's Africa as a possible world lies not in the sense of being an alternative to the West but in a sense of a domain of "pure" possibility where various performances follow each other without temporal structure, a plot or clear frame of meaning. Africa in Roussel is another possible code in the repertoire of our culture that takes part in the composition of the actual world as well as other possible realities. As such, "Africa" is susceptible to inventive recombination with numerous other artifacts (see Mikkonen [2001], 246–53; Clifford [1988], 129).

With surrealists, who loved Roussel but despised Loti—André Breton called Loti an idiot in his "Refus d'inhumer" (Refusal to bury) in 1924—the non-European cultures came into view as serious human alternatives. Modern cultural relativism became possible. Modern Surrealism and surrealist ethnography, as Clifford argues, began with a reality deeply in question, thus imposing a vision of cultural rupture, different from earlier exoticism and the search for "a temporary *frisson*, a circumscribed experience of the bizarre" (Clifford [1988], 120).

Victor Segalen's redefinition of "exoticism" as an "aesthetic of the diverse"—as an appreciation of difference—outlined in "Essai sur l'exotisme" at the turn of the century (first version dated 1904 and developed in 1908–14 and 1916–18), and Michaux's *Un Barbare en Asie* (A Barbarian in Asia) belong to the same "semiotic" tradition where the abstraction of foreign cultural signs and symbols is taken to its self-transgressive limit. Segalen positioned himself, in many ways, in direct opposition to Loti. For Segalen, traditional travel writing was too focused on the traveler's own reactions and not sufficiently interested in the reaction of the environment to the observer (Segalen [1978], 36). Loti's voyeuristic exotic and excited horror vis-à-vis the cultural other is, at first sight, far removed from Segalen's emphasis on the enjoyment in difference and his critique of the subject of knowledge as the narrative centre of experience. In Michaux's travelogue in Asia the travel in the real world explores a certain fantasy space replete with cultural stereotypes. The post-innocent observer in the book's preface claims that

I was innocent enough to believe that I could give my impressions, and perhaps above everything I exulted in the great multiform, living challenge of the Asiatic peoples to our terrible Western monotony. Long live the last resisters! (Michaux [1986], v)

For Michaux, to give or to live one's impressions is not enough. He wishes to propagandize for an endless variety of ethnicities. Later, the author-narrator provocatively uses any stereotype that comes his way and plays the role of the brute, the barbarian observer.

In contrast to Roussel, Michaux and Segalen, it is worth recalling the social location of Pierre Loti, alias Julien Viaud. Loti, who became a member of the Académie Française in 1891, winning the vote against Emile Zola, only retired as an officer of the French navy in 1910. Spending most of his life sailing the seas Loti, if anyone, represented the expansion of French power overseas. At home, his novels framed colonialist exploitation in the pattern of adventure narrative.

Loti's first three novels share the same colonialist infatuation with the exotic, a curious mixture of prejudice, sense of supremacy, and a Romantic pattern of the innocent vision represented both by the protagonist and the primitive women. The novels also further the idea of a certain threatening beauty in the foreign culture and nature. A reiterated aspect of this experience of terrifying beauty is that the value of the female is freely substituted for the value of the primitive. But there is also a constant circularity between the two categories, the primitive and the native woman (see also Torgovnik, who makes a similar point in regard to Conrad: Torgovnik [1990], 156). In all of these novels the main male character is to become the other while the memory of his mother (or parents) makes him turn inside, to live by himself. Exoticism, as Bruno Vercier suggests, threatens to shake him toward a fusion with the object that he finds fascinating, especially if this object is the woman he loves (Aziyadé, Rarahu, Cora/Fatou-gaye, and later Madame Chrysanthemum) (see Loti [1992], 26). All of these texts also conclude with the moral failure and death of the hero recalling thus the novelist's brother's early death in Polynesia.

However, despite their parodies, modernists like Roussel and Michaux were also greatly indebted to Loti's imaginary worlds and lyrical impressionism. It is significant that Loti's romantic exoticism also opens out towards a certain "aesthetic of the diverse" (and not only in the sense of the "Proxénètes de la Sensation du Divers" as Segalen would have it; see Segalen [1978], 54). In relation to the first two novels, *Le Roman d'un spahi* displays a more heightened sense of authorial play with masks of identity. With this novel the author no longer remained anonymous; Loti's pseudonym was, for the first time, printed on the book cover. It is only here, and not with *Aziyadé* as Barthes claims ([1990], 107), that Loti truly gives himself the name of his hero as author. In the earlier novels, as Barthes also points out, the character Loti was never the same as the writer Loti (a name which itself was fabricated). In *Aziyadé*, for instance, the hero Loti is a British naval officer who dies young. In *Le roman d'un spahi* Loti for the first time becomes "Loti" and the hero in his text does not share his name.

Loti's Africa is not exactly a heterotopian zone in the sense that McHale gives to the term. However, the conception of the desert as a form of infinite platitude, characterized by the sense of being in between two mirrors that endlessly reflect each other, suggests an experience of juxtaposed spaces and relates to the protagonist's cultural hybridity. Further, Loti's novel is organized by two perceiving subjects, Jean and the narrator, instead of one; the "fatal" woman of the novel is also multiplied and displaced, several women sharing her characteristics. The novel is a tragedy with three women; it is structured around them and the phases of Jean's life are symbolized by the different colors of these women. Jean's mother and his French *bien-aimée* Jeanne Méry represent his innocent origin; Cora, his first lover, is a sophisticated woman who looks just like a European; while Fatou-gaye represents "pure" Africa. Most of the narrative describes Jean and Fatou's relationship, which temporally frames the affair with Cora who stands on the threshold of Jean's corruption and debauchery (and discovery of sexuality). The interlude with Cora represents the recent past in the novel's present but Jeanne Méry in France is always present as well, as the melancholic object of the ideal woman and as the unapproachable outer frame in Jean's life.

We must recall that the writer reproduced the Orient at his family house in Rochefort including a would-be mosque with the tomb of his Turkish lover Aziyadé, a Chinese and an Arabic room, a Japanese pagoda, and a library called the room of the mummies. Loti was also happy to

pose in his Oriental attire. He assumed various ethnic identities as a Muslim man, a Bedouin or a Turk for the fun of it. Even though Loti had much respect for the cultures he visited (the design of his family home is further proof of this), one can detect a sense of the triumph of form over “bodily” content in Loti’s collection of impressions, his eclectic use of Oriental collectibles. The multiplicity of styles and decoration is not just manifest between the various rooms of his home, representing different Oriental cultures, but is obvious in each room. In the personal mosque on the second floor of his house, Loti freely mixed objects from a great variety of Arabic cultures and periods.

Loti’s house is an epitome of the Orientalist’s or primitivist’s need to remove his favored artifacts from their usual context so as to create a new aesthetic. But how is this related to an illusion of absolute otherness that, to follow Nicholls’s idea, could protect the integrity of his self and, in Loti’s case, therefore, settle the split between officer and writer; national/provincial and world citizenship; Western and Oriental; heterosexual and bisexual? It seems rather that Loti also wanted to appropriate otherness in himself so as, in a sense, to become other—or, at least, so as to make of himself a living example of Orientalist and ethnographic material. In seeking to access the “poet’s self,” we need to interpret even the most personal space as heterotopic expressions. Loti made of his home a domain of make-believe where any one ethnic existence could be added to any other. His photo portraits suggest an ironic tonal play and elaborate masking of the self.

Loti’s aesthetics anticipate a kind of modernist double bind: a revolt against the artistic traditions of the nineteenth century combined with a rejection of modern Western society. No account of the history of Modernism, as Martin Jay has argued, can ignore the impact of a revaluation of primitivism that rested on the removal of the artwork from the milieu in which it was created. The aestheticisation of “primitive” artifacts, as Jay further points out, often drew on an older, Romantic belief in the power of “innocent” vision (Jay [1993], 140–1) that sought the plastic representation of the Idea. To this one might add that both Loti’s home and his literary work explore the Romantic wish to freely and “innocently” transform oneself. This transformation includes the need to refashion one’s cultural identity (à la Lord Byron) and reality according to one’s will. The refashioning is made possible especially through the experience of the exotic that produces strange sensations and inspiring mysteries, thus unsettling the habitual ways of perception. Loti’s ethnic transvestism ridicules stereotypes in the sense that they are used as comfortable buffers against the complexities of the world and the instabilities of our perception of it (on Loti’s “compulsive transvestism” see also Hughes [2001], 16–17). At the same time his novels and the design of his home reaffirm the stereotype as a simple object of desire and as an extension of the self.

Loti’s Africa, like Roussel’s, functions as an imaginary foil for the projection of a possible world. Yet, unlike in Roussel, Loti’s African novel does not and cannot explore ontological propositions (the focus is on immoral, infantile and bestial propositions as later, albeit in a very different context, is the case with Céline’s Africa). Loti’s Africa is a place for dramatizing one’s passage from childhood to adulthood, and the discovery of sexuality; it is also an imaginary space for testing impressions, effects, the catastrophe of distance from home and family and the defamiliarisation of the cultural signs of one’s home. Loti’s African novel is also an exploration of the predicament in which violent stereotypes arise and proliferate when the integration of the



self is threatened. In Loti's novels and home, the cross-cultural experience of travel and exogamy functions as a kind of theatre of conflict, fantastic impressions, cultural difference and violent projections. The traveling self is remade through these projections.

Jean's story is a reversed rite of passage, portraying a process of corruption and a gradual moral decline. Jean's passage from youth to manhood contains, as Clive Wake has remarked ([1974], 81), the three ingredients of intense sexual intoxication, disgust, and a sense of guilt. Jean always remains ashamed by his discovery of an intense and corrupting sexuality. Senegal, as Wake also points out, can be seen as the symbol of the adult world (temptations, sexuality, corruption) (Wake [1974], 83). The whole notion of a process or gradual movement that is necessitated by the idea of a passage, however, is itself stalled if not erased in the text. The novel starts with the remark that Jean had passed through several moral phases: the environment, the climate, and nature had had its enervating impact on his brain. In Africa, Jean soon loses his virginity and the paradise of his childhood. First he is "pure like a small child," then sex disgusts him and soon he is fascinated by the "novelty of the consuming attraction" (Loti [1992], 62).<sup>19</sup> In Africa Jean becomes a man. But he also remains the child. When he bathes by the sea playing with the great waves, the narrator explains that he acts like the child "who he still is" (Loti [1992], 65).<sup>20</sup> At the end of the novel the narrator relates that, regardless of what has happened, he has remained a child, the mature outlook having invested him with a misleading "sense of maturity and seriousness of purpose" (Loti [1992], 241).<sup>21</sup>

Jean is excited by the idea of a return and ashamed of what he has become. Still, he clings to his place and life in Senegal. He loves Senegal, his African costume and his African son:

It was underneath the red costume that he had learned to live; it was on the African soil that he had become a man; and, the more he believed that idea the more he loved all that: he loved his Arabian fez, his sabre, his horse — the dreadful land of his, the desert. (Loti [1992], 216, my translation)<sup>22</sup>

In his description, Loti's narrator is again fixated on difference, otherness, transformation, and hybridity. One can assume, even if it is never directly expressed in the novel, that in France nothing awaits him but monotonous ennui. Africa enables Jean to look at things through enchanted prisms. Like Goethe's observation of nature in his *Italian Journey* or the Finnish Brücke artist Akseli Gallen-Kallela's description of a certain morning in eastern Africa in his *Afriikka-kirja* (African Journal) from 1931, after which he could happily die, Africa for Jean elicits an awareness of all forms in nature, the possibility of learning to look at things with clear, fresh eyes as if for the first time. The "primitive" is a way to regain the spiritual harmony with nature and the creative power that was lost in the development of modern Western society.

Jean's predicament also points backward to the prehistory of Modernism. Besides the critical work of Michaux, Roussel and Segalen, Jean's demise, despite its naiveté, is comparable to Charles Baudelaire's proto-modernist situation in his tortured disunity (the trauma of division and separation within oneself). Jean himself is the target of his violence. But if for Baudelaire the metropolis functioned as the theatre of violent collisions, then for Jean Peyral and Loti the theatre of his self-fashioning is the exotic foreign culture (its language, customs, women) and its eroticized nature. If we accept, as Wake has suggested ([1974], 93), that the hero of this novel is more than just an outsider, an *abandonné* — and the responsibility for his failure is thrown back on his fellow man — then we may also see how he resembles the outcast griots. Jean is allowed to and in some sense he allows himself to both grow into a man in Africa and to disintegrate. Jean's art, or what makes him and his

way of “residing” in the foreign land different from the other Westerners, is perhaps the intensity of his desire for the exotic other and the stylish loss of control over himself. From his perspective, the subject of the self and the object of the other lose their configurations, and perhaps their distinctions as well.

## Notes

1. “Aux Indes, rien à voir, tout à interpréter” (Michaux [1948], 15).
2. “celui qui était né bête, devenant deux fois plus bête et qui est plus bête que l’Hindou bête?” (Michaux [1948], 15).
3. “Les philosophies occidentales font perdre les cheveux, écourtent la vie” (Michaux [1948], 20).
4. “À Guet-n’dar, sur le sable, tapage, confusion de tous les types, babel de toutes les langues du Soudan. — Là se tient perpétuellement le grand marché, plein de gens de tous les pays, où l’on vend de tout, des choses précieuses et des choses saugrenues, — des denrées utiles et des denrées extravagantes, — des objets invraisemblables, — de l’or et du beurre, — de la viande et des onguents, — des moutons sur pied et des manuscrits, — des captifs et de la bouillie, — des amulettes et des légumes” (Loti [1992], 195–6).
5. “Il y avait surtout des racines de palétuviers, des racines et des racines, pendant partout comme des gerbes de filaments; il y en avait de toutes les longueurs, de tous les calibres, s’enchevêtrant et descendant de partout, on eût dit de milliers de nerfs, de trompes, de bras gris, voulant tout enlacer et tout envahir: d’immenses étendues de pays étaient couvertes de ces enchevêtrements de racines. Et sur toutes les vases, sur toutes les racines, sur tous les caïmans, il y avait des familles pressées de gros crabes gris qui agitaient perpétuellement leur unique pince d’un blanc d’ivoire, comme cherchant à saisir en rêve des proies imaginaires. Et le mouvement somnambule de tous ces crabes était, sous l’épaisse verdure, le seul grouillement perceptible de toute cette création au repos” (Loti [1992], 188–9).
6. “Ô tristesse de cette terre d’Afrique!” (Loti [1992], 48).
7. “petite fille singe” (Loti [1992], 146).
8. “L’invention de Loti consiste à avoir fait coïncider exotisme et érotisme: la femme est exotique, l’étranger est érotique” (Todorov [1989], 347).
9. “Un contretemps perpétuel des accompagnateurs, et des syncopes inattendues, parfaitement comprises et observées par tous les exécutants, sont les traits les plus caractéristiques de cet art — inférieur peut-être, mais assurément très différent du nôtre, — que nos organisations européennes ne nous permettent pas de parfaitement comprendre” (Loti [1992], 135–6).
10. “Et toujours, et toujours, pour horizon le désert; la platitude infinie du désert” (Loti [1992], 198).
11. “On dirait qu’on est entre deux miroirs qui se regardent, et se reflètent l’un l’autre sans fin” (Loti [1992], 174).
12. “Il avait dévoré des romans où tout était nouveau pour son imagination, et il s’en était assimilé les extravagances malsaines” (Loti [1992], 90).
13. “Il aimait son Sénégal, le malheureux; il s’en apercevait bien maintenant; il y était attaché par une foule de liens intimes et mystérieux. Il était comme fou de joie à l’idée de ce retour; — mais il tenait au pays de sable, à la maison de Samba-Hamet. — même à toute cette grande tristesse morne; — même à ces excès de chaleur et de lumière” (Loti [1992], 163).
14. “Ce pays lui faisait tout à coup l’effet d’un vaste tombeau” (Loti [1992], 222).
15. “Le résident est en somme un touriste qui *répète* son désir de rester [...] ivresse du résident, auquel une bonne connaissance des lieux, des moeurs, de la langue permet de satisfaire sans peur tout désir” (Barthes [1972], 183).

16. "Et Jean sentait que ce printemps nègre lui brûlait le sang, qu'il courait comme un poison dévorant dans ses veines... Le renouveau de toute cette vie l'énervait, lui, — parce que cette vie n'était pas la sienne" (Loti [1992], 110).
17. "les romans de Pierre Loti deviennent la visite guidée de cette collection d'impressions" (Todorov [1989], 342–3).
18. "le pays étranger est bien là, qui provoque l'apparition du livre; mais il n'entre pas dans le livre lui-même: on n'a affaire qu'à l'effet, qu'à l'impression, qu'à la réaction subjective" (Todorov [1989], 343).
19. "quand ses vingt ans vinrent à sonner et qu'il fallut entrer au service, Jean était aussi pur et presque aussi ignorant des choses de la vie qu'un tout petit enfant" [...] "La surprise, le dégoût, — et aussi l'attrait dévorant de cette nouveauté qui venait de lui être révélée" (Loti [1992], 62).
20. "Il se baignait dans les grands brisants de la côte d'Afrique, s'amusant, comme un enfant qu'il était encore" (Loti [1992], 65).
21. "Il était resté bien enfant, le pauvre Jean, comme cela arrive presque toujours aux jeunes hommes qui ont mené la vie rude, et auxquels un développement physique précoce a donné de bonne heure l'air mûr et très sérieux" (Loti [1992], 241).
22. "c'était sous le costume rouge qu'il avait appris la vie, c'était sur le sol d'Afrique qu'il s'était fait homme, et, plus qu'il ne le croyait; il aimait tout cela: il aimait son fez arabe, son sabre, son cheval, — son grand pays maudit, son désert" (Loti [1992], 216).

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## Exile and Literary Modernism

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Modernist literature in Europe takes place in an era of intense mobility across national and linguistic borders generated mainly by new transportation systems and a growing cosmopolitan awareness. It also takes place in the midst of wars and persecution and massive involuntary migration. Both voluntary and enforced exile have had an enormous effect on the fate of literature from the first half of the twentieth century onwards. Exilic experience is of course nothing new and has always had great impact on literature. Dante's *Divine Comedy* is, to take one example, both in its origin and in its grand, idiosyncratic vision of ultimate justice, a work of exile. But the dimensions and effects of exile have never been so massive as in the modern era. Edward W. Said has claimed that "modern Western culture is in large part the work of exiles" and has even coined our time "the age of the refugee, the displaced person, mass immigration" (Said [2000], 173–4).

One should note that the word "exile" in a more restricted sense means, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "banishment" and "the state of being barred from one's native country." This is in conformity with its etymological roots in Latin "exilium" and, as far as classical literature goes, with the expulsion of Ovid to the Black Sea or of Dante to Ravenna.

My aim in this essay is to view this issue in a historical context, treating exile as a real and non-metaphorical loss of origins. I will thus not discuss "the self-imposed exile" (Nicholls [1995], 13) in an alienating society, which one can observe already in the first generation of modernists in France after 1830. Internal exile pervades all of modernism, rising to stark expression in writers like the Russian poet Osip Mandelstam or the Swedish poet Gunnar Ekelöf. But it is questionable if one can make a clear distinction between internal and external exile in the West, since the typical internal exile of the modernist writer in a bourgeois society already in the nineteenth century transgresses national borders and makes this transgression aesthetically productive (Nerval). The external exile, on the other hand, is always an internal exile in the country where he happens to live.

Even so, one can make important distinctions between external exiles in the strong and age-old signification of banishment, in the sense of modern refugees requiring international assistance or in the sense of voluntary expatriates or émigrés living in an alien country. For our purpose, the decisive distinction is between enforced and voluntary exile. Thus, Ernest Hemingway and Scott Fitzgerald were not forced to live outside the US, whereas Joseph Brodsky was banished from his country.

Exile is always painful, but often strangely productive. Albert Camus, for example, seems to view exile as a necessary part of literary initiation. As Isabelle Cielens has shown, initiation is in fact one of the chief functions of exile in his work (Cielens [1985]). It is in Paris that Camus, with a new sense of liberty, will write *L'Étranger* (The Stranger) in 1940, the year of his arrival. He needs solitude for writing, in the novel turning absence of origins into the classical indifference of Mersault's

opening statement about the time of his mother's death. But just as important is his choice of destination: Paris being the metropolis of modern literature and of the philosophy of the absurd that he had already, while still in Algiers, encountered in Sartre's *La Nausée* (Nausea).

Exile was for Camus the true condition, since even Algeria was in a certain sense foreign territory. His father was in fact exiled three times, born in Alsace, fugitive after the German occupation, then moving from France to Algeria and finally dying on the Western Front; his mother was also a foreigner in Algeria, descended from Minorcan immigrants. Not surprisingly, Camus never leaves the problematic of exile.

Camus's generalization of the loss of roots to a gnostic sense of alienation is a recurring feature in the texts of many other modern writers. Joseph Brodsky, expelled from Stalinist Soviet Union, even claims that in order not to "ossify into an uncomprehending victim" the exile must view his fate as "a metaphysical condition" (Brodsky [2001], 25–6). Brodsky is an exile in the strong literal sense, but one notes both in him and in Camus the positive ring of the word in their active appropriation of the term. It is exactly this re-appropriation that makes them into the writers we have come to know. But in the same essay Brodsky makes a strong case for the intrinsic connection between exile and language, not so evident in Camus but present in many other modernist writers. One may question, in fact, if Camus is a modernist at all in a technical sense. Roland Barthes has in *Le degré zéro de l'écriture* (Writing Degree Zero) stressed the legacy of Flaubert and the absence of style in modernist prose in general and for Camus in particular. In Camus it is exemplified by Grand's final decision in *La peste* (The Plague) to eliminate all adjectives from his single, endlessly worked out sentence. This purist endeavor certainly runs counter to the kind of radical disruption of literary conventions that one finds in Futurist or Dadaist experimentalism, but seems to represent a more "classical" striving for autonomy in modernism typical not only of Flaubert but also of Mallarmé.

Brodsky develops his poetic voice bilingually in close connection with John Donne and W. H. Auden. For him exile is emphatically a "linguistic event," the banished writer both retreating into his mother tongue and, in the process of disconnection, infinitely transforming it. Language becomes — to use his metaphors — "a shield," "a capsule," ultimately "a fate" (Brodsky [2001], 32). This dwelling in language, where Brodsky in his own writing is in constant dialogue with the poetic tradition, has led David Bethea to memorably read him as a "great Postmodernist" (Bethea [1994], 251). Language as the fate of the writer is, however, not restricted to postmodernism. On the contrary, it seems typical of exile writing as such and in particular of the complex modernist one. Exile literary modernism can often be described as a transgradient movement between languages, opening up the problem of translatability and differentiation in a way that makes it resemble a precarious *shibboleth*.

Camus, Brodsky and many modern exile writers make use of the myth of the stranger lacking pre-given bonds. It has roots in the romantic era, when the writer disconnects his relations with the state and achieves his independence as a free artist. At the same time, a global awareness of literature as *Weltliteratur* develops, making it natural for writers to see "exile" as a forming spiritual journey, a *Bildungsreise*, and as part of their career. The exile of spirit is a necessary detour for the establishment of truth in the reflection of Schelling or Hegel, and this constitutive, dialectical estrangement of the mind continues to nourish the myth of exile in modern letters. During the late nineteenth century a cosmopolitan ideology comes forth in the West, that extends the romantic conception of *Weltliteratur*. The rise of nationalism and imperialism makes inevitable a conflict with liberal val-

ues that is reflected in many works of the period. Voluntary exile is a precondition for paramodern masterpieces such as Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*, Strindberg's *Inferno* or Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*. As it was for the romantics, the journey for these writers is circular and teleological in character. They have an idea of homecoming, far from the absolute exile of Camus or Brodsky. Exile is not yet truth, it is only the means of coming back, though deeply changed, to maternal soil.

Radicalized modernism around and after 1900 seems to change these matters in two respects. A modernist national literature now appears to be a contradiction in terms, even though both Italian and Russian Futurism ambivalently express strong, even aggressively nationalist claims. But, in general, modernism presents literature as a global phenomenon unrestricted by cultural or linguistic barriers, and in this sense radicalizes the liberal spirit in the era of Strindberg or Ibsen. This is a provocation of morally and politically conservative values, and ignites the lust for exile. Malcolm Bradbury has insisted that "modernism is a metropolitan art" (Bradbury [1991], 101), and one can only agree that in both social and literary terms it is a cosmopolitan and urban phenomenon, having its centres in London, Berlin, Vienna, Zurich and, most important, Paris. In many respects it is even founded in a situation of exile. The American Gertrude Stein settles in Paris in 1903 to develop her highly original anti-mimetic writing and the Americans Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot go to London to proclaim Imagism and Vorticism. The Romanian Tristan Tzara goes to Zurich to found Dadaism together with the Germans Hugo Ball and Rikard Huelsenbeck, and then moves on to Paris to release Surrealism together with André Breton. The magnetic force of metropolitan activity leads to voluntary exile as a migration from stagnating provinces, like Algiers, Dublin, Stockholm or Alexandria. Exile is thus ritualized as an initiation to modernism.

Second, due to World War I and the increasing political pressures in Europe and in Russia during the 1920s and 1930s, exile becomes an effect of escape and brutal expulsion. This does not, of course, diminish its significance for the development of modernism, but drastically underlines the literal meaning of exile as "banishment." This change implies a linking of exile modernism to witness literature, but one has to be careful not to identify exile with a moral or thematic category. In writers like James Joyce, Samuel Beckett or Paul Celan, exile is not the main thematic issue but is transformed into a linguistic force and a new literary perspective. This transformation makes the universalist ambitions of programmatic modernism deeply problematic, since these writers speak in idiomatic tongues producing aporias and barriers of understanding.

Thus, I will throughout this article make the distinction between voluntary and enforced exile, though this differentiation is at times difficult to maintain. Duchamp and Picabia left Paris for New York in 1915 because of the war. Likewise, Huelsenbeck and Ball left Berlin for Zurich soon after that for the same reason, founding Dada as an anti-war movement. Voluntary and enforced exile are also deeply connected on a psychological level. The voluntary exile has a tendency to build a myth around himself as brutally expelled, while, conversely, the enforced exile needs to affirm his fate as a writer in order to create without resentment. In this redoubled dialectic I will focus on the connection between exile and modernist writing. Voluntary exile motivated by deeply felt restraints and literary ambitions, as evident in the case of Camus, will be discussed in relation to Joyce, Beckett and Giuseppe Ungaretti. Then I will move to enforced exile in the writings of Nelly Sachs and Paul Celan. Their poetry gives rise to the question of how modernist exile writing relates to witness literature, so central in the development of twentieth century narrative, and also addresses the status of language not only in terms of a lack but also of a deprivation of origins.



## Exile as a Voluntary Modernist Initiation

### Joyce

Many modernists have enthusiastically responded to the spirit of revolt in Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, adopting the motto "Non serviam" as a protest against the restraints of family, nation and church, and making his threefold strategy—"silence, exile and cunning"—their own. Exile is thus, significantly, one of the modernist's means of turning banishment into resource. It becomes a myth, speaking with the enticing voices that Stephen hears at the end of the book: "Away! Away! The spell of arms and voices: the white arms of roads, their promise of close embraces and the black arms of tall ships that stand against the moon, their tale of distant nations" (Joyce [1945], 287). Already in 1903 Joyce leaves Dublin and will return only reluctantly three times. It was Trieste—except for a period in Zurich—that became his productive milieu of writing from 1904–1920; there he wrote most of *Dubliners*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *Exiles*, substantial parts of *Ulysses* and made preparations for *Finnegans Wake*. Almost everything Joyce produced he wrote in exile, though all he wrote is about Dublin. In a letter to Stanislaus from Pola on 28 February 1905 he interprets his condition abroad as "a voluntary exile" (Ellmann [1982], 194), a view that he will confirm in his late correspondence. One can safely conclude that Joyce was not exiled—he "exiled" himself. But what motives did he have for breaking away?

Two political events are essential for understanding the background of Joyce's decision. The death of the nationalist Irish politician Charles Stewart Parnell in 1891 and the rejection of Parnell's Home Rule Bill by the House of Lords in 1893 symbolize the ultimate failure of Ireland's attempt to gain by constitutional means the right to political independence from Victorian England. This failure, however, gives rise to a national renaissance, characterized by Catholic religion, Gaelic myth and glorification of Ireland's past; one effect of this was The Irish Literary Revival (Yeats, Hyde, Lady George) that swept over the country. For Joyce all of this was unacceptable.

As *A Portrait* shows, the very activity of writing is at stake. "Non serviam" is not only to be understood as an act of civil disobedience, but as an artistic credo and a resistance to the voices of Others. In the dialogue with the Englishman, the dean in chapter five, that deals with their clashing understanding of the words "funnel" and "tundish," Stephen says: "His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech. I have not made or accepted its words. My voice holds them at bay. My soul frets in the shadow of his language" (Joyce [1945], 215). This is a remarkable passage, expressing Stephen's claim to be the sovereign maker of spoken language. As we saw, silence also becomes for Stephen a weapon effectuating a withdrawal from the tyranny of narrow morality, religion and nationalism. In short, exile signals freedom in the name of writing. Evidently, then, exile plays an extraordinary role in releasing the powers of Joyce's writing, and Hélène Cixous, who has penetrated in depth the link between life and letters as far as exile is concerned, goes as far as to state that "the repetition of the causes of departure is the essential motor of Joycean imagination" (Cixous [1968], 586).<sup>1</sup> In what way does it affect his published work?

Exile is the very form of the consciousness of Stephen in *A Portrait*, of Bloom in *Ulysses* and even of H.C.E. in *Finnegans Wake*, but the issue can be specified in many different ways. First, in the general continental and multicultural perspective that Joyce introduces into paralytic Dublin life, evident in the cosmopolitan and endlessly complex character of Bloom in *Ulysses*. Second, in

the construction of hybrid characters like Bloom, the Hungarian Jew, and Molly, who is just as much a Mediterranean Jewess as she is Irish. Third, in the thematic detail and characterization, involving Bloom's diet of inner organs, burgundy or gorgonzola or the description of Molly as "the oriental pearl of Dublin." Fourth, in the erotic code, the rich use of olives, oranges or melons in the sexual imagery. Fifth, in the language itself, a plurality including a wide variety of speech forms culminating in the self-generative text-machine of *Finnegans Wake*.

John McCourt has traced several of these traits to Joyce's Triestine exile, concluding: "For much of the Oriental, Jewish and Greek elements of *Ulysses*, for much of the multilingual chaos of "Circe" and *Finnegans Wake*, Trieste was his principal source, his 'città immediata'" (McCourt [2000], 5). The city was important to Joyce because it gave room for ethnic and linguistic diversity, and its strong Greek and Jewish elements balanced Catholic dominance and guaranteed religious tolerance. The city provided the generously multicultural perspective lacking in Dublin and also gave impulses to a specifically modernist writing. There, Marinetti in 1909 launched his manifesto *Trieste: la nostra bella polveriera* (Trieste: Our Beautiful Tinderbox) and Joyce adopted a variety of literary techniques in *Ulysses* that are evocative of Marinetti's *Parole in Libertà* (Free Words): the compressed, ungrammatical text devoid of linking words and interpunction, onomatopoeia, two-word phrases, partition of words, expressive orthography and the use of musical symbols. Joyce renewed his interest in Futurism in *Finnegans Wake*, explicit in this description of H.C.E.: "though his heart, soul and spirit turn to pharaoph times, his love, faith and hope stick to futuerism" (Joyce [1971], 129–30). Joyce's sympathies were, necessarily, of more stylistic than philosophical nature, since his Vico-inspired mythological thinking was—as the misspelling "futuerism" shows—at odds with the aggressive belief in cultural and technological progress of the futurists.

However, the real significance of Trieste appears on a more general, linguistic level. Joyce quickly absorbed the local lingua franca, the dialect Triestino, spoken with thousands of different inflections and one of the most composite languages the world has known. This language, in sharp contrast to standard Italian, is regarded by John McCourt as the matrix of Joyce's constructed language in *Finnegans Wake*, "an exaggerated, exploded version of Triestino" (McCourt [2000], 52–3). Joyce's heteroglossia is, of course, rooted in English but is also informed by an abundance of identifiable or non-identifiable tongues. In Joyce's "international portmanteau language" no clear self-identity can be established. It is a language that is many languages, the meaning of which, if there is one, being the uncertain product of a capricious exchange between text and reader. Joyce himself has left a note, where he says that he has intentionally programmed over forty different languages in his babeling anti-epic. But one can just as well say that the number of languages involved is endless since every reader construes the text in his or her way. The infinite, "chaosmic" quality of the text is utopian in nature, since it systematically transcends language barriers by its punning activity.

The book, called "wake" or the "funferal" (Joyce [1971], 120), crosses, however, manifestly two semantic fields including an opposite register of death and expulsion. The necessarily unassimilable language of *Finnegans Wake* is a provocation against any consensus, a testimony of the modernist exile perilously balancing between recognition and banishment, semi-divine ambition and madness. Joyce has inscribed this double meaning all through the work, continuing the theme of the expelled artist, the pharmakos, in *Ulysses*. Exile and the double nature of the writer's decision to stand outside of any given system of shared values complicates the utopian reading. Joyce, who often compared his fate to Dante's, seems to be a voluntary exile in need of involuntary condemnation.

"To part from Devlin is hard" (Joyce [1971], 24) is a phrase in *Finnegans Wake*, and one can ask if Joyce ever succeeds in his departure. The Jewgreek strivings of Joyce leads to the split canonicity in *Ulysses*, the usage of Homer's *Odyssevs* and the *Hebrew Bible* as the two paradigmatic Western narratives of exile. In *Finnegans Wake* the mythic horizon has turned Irish, but in a porous way that allows for an endless multiplication of other references. Even so, there is a deep homology between the exilic errings of the heroes of these novels and the concluding position of the waiting Penelope, disguised as Molly or Anna Livia. Joyce has an inclination toward cultural nostalgia, and particularly the *Wake* seems like an ark salvaging the fragments of human culture on top of the waves of the deluge.

However, his practice as a writer rather speaks of breaking the vessels, the active part taken in the sacrificial process of exile. Joyce needs the aggressive community that he leaves behind in order to give his enterprise legitimacy, and he expresses guilt on the part of Schem the Penman in *Finnegans Wake*. His "Belsyabbabel" has an uncanny side, since it actively reminds us of the violence of cultural differences. Turning established stereotypes upside down, he writes "So help her goat and kiss the bouc" (Joyce [1971], 94), suddenly making us see the victim in the comic epic.

The revolutionary aspect of *Finnegans Wake* seems not to be primarily the disruption of grammar, but of the difference of languages and of the semantic field of the lexicon. Only exilic consciousness can make this possible. Joyce's work is hilariously self-sufficient only to the extent that it exposes its own wounds. In his massive use of punning repetition of sound patterns on a micro level (letters, syllables, words and phrases), pleasure is the effect of crossing high and low, sacred and profane, different mythological and cultural systems, and not least the rules of normative language, with a maddening use of formal mistakes and misspellings. The defects are turned into resources, but they always recall the test of the *shibboleth* in the Old Testament, where the difference in pronunciation for the Ephraimites meant life or death. Dangerously, Joyce produces his own password beyond any group affiliation in a language that is a monstrous plurality: "So mag this sybilette be our shibboleth that we may syllable her well!" (Joyce [1971], 267). This is sacrificial and dadaistic discourse at one and the same time.

The most extreme and unreadable monument of modernist prose is thus perhaps the richest store of cultural anti-memory. In so far as culture remembers, it represses violently. Joyce makes us take part in this repression by way of laughter that remembers things you have never experienced in your own life. You never laugh alone.

### *Beckett*

Samuel Beckett develops his uniquely bilingual career as a writer entirely in exile, and just as in Joyce's case it is a voluntary move to a climate of greater liberty and universality than the Irish context could offer. Beckett's early avowed modernism appears as a necessary, antithetic move, and in the brilliant essays on Joyce and Proust in the beginning of the 1930s he is committed to modernism as a revolt against codes and conventions governing ordinary signification. Form and content constitute a unit, literature being a discourse vigilantly separated from social reality and characterized by self-referentiality and epistemological concerns. Beckett's stance is autonomous and oppositional at the same time, and the first decade of his writing can be described as an intense fight for literary independence, first fully acquired after World War II.

Part of Beckett's problem must be sought in his initiation to modernism with Joyce as a heroic model. When Beckett met Joyce in 1928 he was still a teacher, appointed as "lecteur d'anglais"

in Paris and with no intention to become a writer. He had read Joyce's works with great admiration, and at twenty-two years of age he helped the master with research for *Finnegans Wake*. Sometimes Joyce dictated passages for him and it was at Joyce's suggestion that Beckett wrote the essay "Dante...Bruno. Vico. Joyce." Exile for Beckett is voluntary with a first impulse of literary activity in 1929, and already in his first specimen of prose, "Assumption," he displaces traditional plot and dialogue by the use of metaphor and paradox and hints at his mature poetics of silence. It took a decade for Beckett to free himself from Joyce, and it is in the negative vision and in the striving beyond the aesthetic ideology of modernism that Beckett will deviate from his master. Beckett seeks the incomplete, characterized by essential failure, and he resists the revelation of hidden or repressed patterns of knowledge. His modernism is darker and more uncompromising. In the fight for independence the purely linguistic issue is significant. He starts to write in French in 1938, because in that language, he said, "it is easier to write without style" (Cockerham [1975], 156).<sup>2</sup> One can of course claim that this effect, making conscious manipulation possible, can arise from any second, acquired language. What is important, however, is the artistic and emotional significance this has for Beckett himself. He felt distracted "by the ornamentation English proffered" (Campbell [1995], 44). And this distraction had not only to do with Joyce, but with the ensnaring native bonds.

Beckett never set foot in Ireland without considerable misgivings, and when his mother died in 1950 he was freed from all obligations to return. This issue is drastically reflected in the circular structure of the novel *Molloy*, starting in the room of the protagonist's dead mother and evolving around the bewildered search for the place of the mother. Molloy himself is not sure of his own name, or his mother's name, or of any cultural legitimacy. The only order recognized by Molloy is the absent mother, whom he has to, but cannot, find until it is too late.

Beckett's career is determined by unceasing efforts to disassociate himself from the place of his birth, including the mother tongue as the ultimate bond for a writer. In the extremely prolific years between 1945 to 1951, when Beckett in French produced his famous trilogy (*Molloy*; *Malone meurt*, Malone dies; *L'innommable*, The Unnamable) and the play *En attendant Godot* (Waiting for Godot) he wrote only one poem and one review in English. Exile is in his case crucially a linguistic phenomenon, where he uses French as a means to conquer a plain idiom in line with his reductive vision.

In what way then does exile affect Beckett's work? Not primarily on a thematic level, although the protagonist in *Murphy* (1938) is an exile in London exhibiting a tragicomic unwillingness to adjust to modern city life. Exile is not the basic theme, the intrigue being a wild hunt for nonexisting meaning where the strangely deluded group of people in search for Murphy ends up finding him dead in a madhouse. Murphy in his turn is in search of the big Nothing that he finds in playing chess with a patient called Endon. Exile exposes the dead end of all aspirations. Murphy, a bizarre occasionalist of sorts, likes to tie his body to his rocking chair in a physical version of apatheia that brutally separates body and soul. The asylum of exile is visualized as confined space.

This imprisonment in contingent bodies is one of the keys to Beckett's mature writing. Another one is the invention of subjective speech in the writings of the 1940s, where the voice is disconnected from the body and makes intrigue obsolete. Narrator and narrated are equated. The novel *Molloy* combines these techniques in a soliloquy, basically circular but just as wildly meandering as the reported journey. Molloy is crippled and thus captivated in his body, just as is Moran, the

incomplete double of Molloy. The physical limitation hilariously contrasts with their energetically pursued mission. They are exiles in a transfigured, elementary sense.

Beckett's inventions soon, however, take new turns. The narrative voice in *Malone meurt* does not refer to itself as the same, lacking the rudimentary self-identity that Molloy's voice still possesses. The voice of soliloquy is radically adrift from the chained body of the dying subject and until the end nourished by ever new identities.

The erring voice, endlessly murmuring and disconnected from a body captivated in space seems to be the core of Beckett's mature discourse. It means that the interiority of voice replaces the dialogue in *Murphy* or *Watt*. Beckett's new French narration is more purified, less connotative and witty than the earlier prose, a fact that makes it possible to claim that he loses something in order to gain something else. Exile is inverted into claustrophobic asylum or generalized in the existentially uprooted and searching nomads. Man himself—by the very fact of having been born—is an exile. "I gave up before birth," the title of a late prose text in *For to end yet again*, is a phrase that makes resignation even more drastic than in Beckett's philosophical precursor Schopenhauer, making it precede rather than end the ruthless life span. But Beckett's voice never gives up, because it never knows if it ever, or when, entered the life of men. Therefore, the true meaning of exile in his work is a redoubled literary invention, where the body is confined in space to let the voice start ever again its movements away from the maternal origins.

### *Ungaretti*

A clear-cut example of voluntary exile as an initiation to modernism can be found in the life and work of the Italian poet Giuseppe Ungaretti, born and raised in Alexandria at the end of the nineteenth century. His Italian born parents had left the Italian city of Lucca in 1880, the father being engaged in building the Suez Canal. Ungaretti grew up as an Italian citizen near the desert and Arabic culture and, furthermore, he soon learned French at Alexandria's respected École Suisse Jacot. Early on he was engaged in literary activities, reading Baudelaire, Mallarmé and Nietzsche, and in 1906 he went to Paris to follow courses by Bergson and Lanson and get into contact with modernist writers and painters. By this time he was bilingual and wrote freely in both French and Italian. But except for Leopardi, the Italian tradition did not matter to him; it was the French line of modernism that he considered significant. His first poems, published in the Futurist journal *Lacerba*, are characterized by free verse, abolition of punctuation, laconic hardboiled speech and contingent detail in the vein of Blaise Cendrars.

When reading *L'Allegria* (The Joy), covering the first period (1914–1924) of his work, one is struck by the extreme reduction of verse, a formal negation of the demands of both contemporary and classical Italian poetry. Furthermore, Ungaretti has radically reworked his French modernist position during World War I and wiped away all mannerism and ironic journalism. What remains of the Futurist experiments is the liberation of the word, freed from syntactic or other formal patterns.

Ungaretti volunteers on the Italian side against Austria, and many of his most significant poems are written in the trenches at Carso, establishing a direct and unsentimental reference to his war experiences. Date and place are attributed to all thirty-three poems in the first collection *Il porto sepolto* (The Buried Harbour), all totally lacking the glorification of the war not uncommon among the Futurists. Both in terms of form and subject matter, his poetry is revolutionary in an Italian

context. The mimetic references often have a de-automatizing effect, where a single word denoting death or despair breaks up the expectations of poetic convention. A question is asked: “To what regiment do you belong / brothers?” And the poem answers with reductive and emotionally charged metaphors:

Word trembling  
in the night  
Leaf scarcely born  
In the pain of the air  
an involuntary revolt  
of man present to his  
fragility  
Brothers.

(Ungaretti [1969], 39)<sup>3</sup>

This is a good example of Ungaretti’s poetics of the word—*poetica della parola*—, minimalist (not seldom one word per line), referential and vibrant with compassion. The address makes brothers and readers of the poem participate at the same level of acute experience. It has been suggested that Ungaretti’s trend is always ascetic, suppressing whatever seems anecdotal or documentary, thus moving from contingency to essence. This would account for his blend of African and European impulses, the desert of the trembling word resembling Mallarmé’s white page. But the power of Ungaretti’s early poetry originates precisely from its unwillingness to eliminate the traces of exterior events. His reduction is not phenomenological in its turn to essence, it rather lays free the tension between the finite and the infinite. It is this tension become resonance that we experience in the poem “Fratelli.”

The exile experience never leaves Ungaretti. His discovery of his Patria in the midst of war can never eradicate his longing for another, deeper and hidden home envisaged in the “buried harbor” of Alexandria, or in his striving for the *Terra promessa* (The promised land), the title of his collection from 1950. But in an original way he stresses the irony of his unceasing search. Once he formulated his search for an innocent land as his credo. But in the middle of one of his first war poems, “Pellegrinaggio” (Pilgrimage), with the subtitle “Valloncello dell’Albero Isolato il 16 agosto 1916”, a sudden ironic light is cast on the nomad’s search by way of self-address.

Ungaretti  
miserable wretch  
an illusion suffices  
to give you courage  
A searchlight  
out there  
puts a sea  
into the fog

(Ungaretti [1969], 46)<sup>4</sup>

One can observe the intricate alliteration and symmetry of the two parts, “Un riflettori” (A search-light) mirroring “Ungaretti” in the first one. The beginning of the poem laconically describes how the subject drags his carcass in the mud, hour after hour. But the poem rejects the pathos of self-pity and instead chooses ruthless disillusion of self in the manner of Ungaretti’s important pessimistic precursor Giacomo Leopardi. But in Ungaretti mud and misery are a physical reality, making the resistance to self a much harder undertaking. Ungaretti will be faithful to this double perspective on vision coming from his desert paradigm. On his poetic peregrinations he is enticed by mirages, but they remain constantly in need of disillusionment.

### Exile as the Result of Totalitarian Terror and Persecution

No doubt, the effects of totalitarianism on modernist exile literature are different in nature than the voluntary kinds we have encountered so far. The previously mentioned poet Joseph Brodsky was tried and sentenced on charges of “social parasitism” in 1964, isolated for twenty months in internal exile in the Arkhangelsk province of Northern Russia and forced to leave the Soviet Union in 1972. Osip Mandelshtam was arrested and deported to Voronezh in Siberia in 1934, arrested again for “counter-revolutionary activity” in 1938 and deported to a transit camp close to Vladivostok where he probably died in the same year. Brodsky and Mandelshtam are traditionally oriented high modernists, who protest their banished condition and express their independence in words that have been silenced and exiled. Much the same could be said about the Chinese exile poet Bei Dao, who has developed his metaphorically dense modernist idiom in protest against ideological writing under communist dictatorship. In this sense, these writers do not differ from voluntary exiles. It is rather in the traumatic effect and in the urgency of the need to testify, that the involuntary exile strikes another note. This is revealed with innovative genius by the Jewish poets Nelly Sachs and Paul Celan, victims of Nazi persecution with its incomparably brutal anti-Semitic dimension. One peculiarity of Nazi anti-Semitism is that the victims were attacked for being shrewd, cosmopolitan and modernist. In this way, violent expulsion actively contributed to forming and defining modernist discourse.

#### *Nelly Sachs*

The effects of exile on the career of the poet Nelly Sachs are dramatic. A Jewish writer living in Berlin, Sachs was miraculously saved from annihilation by taking the last plane leaving Tempelhof for Stockholm in May 1940. At the beginning of the same month she had received an order to go to a labor camp. Exile not only saved her life, it radically changed her writing and made her not only into a poet, but a modernist one. It was in Swedish exile that she started to reflect upon herself as a writer with a Jewish identity. Inspired by the new wave of modernist poetry produced in Sweden during the 1940s, which she immediately started to translate, she developed a writing altogether different from the romantic legends and fairy tales that she had produced in her native country (*Legenden und Erzählungen*, *Legends and Stories*, 1921). Her development as a writer was all the more astounding in view of her age. Born in 1891, she was 55 when she published her first collection of poetry, *In den Wohnungen des Todes* (*In the Lodgings of Death*).

One could say that the Holocaust is the only theme in Sachs's poetry and that nothing is retrospective in her dealing with it. The subject is transformed into rich imagery and mythical and biblical allusions, such as the metaphor of "sand" that recurs in all of her works. Sand is the biblical sign pointing out the barren state of exile as the condition of the wandering Jews. The subject of the poems is embedded in sand, it paints, writes and even eats sand. Sand quivers volcanically and can be a trope designating the body of the beloved, suggesting that death is predominant and part of life, so much so that one can speak of "the synchronicity of life and death" (Moran [1997], 243).

In her first collections, the high strung rhetoric is still very romantic, characterized by repetitive apostrophy and evocations of biblical figures such as David, Saul and the prophets. Here, Sachs lends her poetic voice to the victims of persecution and of the Jewish fate of diaspora. Her figuration is closely linked to air, and to voices of smoke and oblivion. But her lyrical perspective eventually undergoes a change.

First in the collection from 1957, *Und niemand weiss weiter* (And Nobody knows any further), she confronts her central motif captured in the word "Flucht" (flight, escape). She has in a more direct diction become a poet of exile, using words like "Flüchtling" (refugee) and "Asyl" (asylum) in her imagery. The vocabulary is associated with language itself, and in the first poem the constellation of flight is born under the foot of the poet, and a fire is simultaneously thrown into the mouth of the speaking subject. The sun of love is brought by the poet's hands into her captivated state, "in the asylum of my breath" (Sachs [1988], 157).<sup>5</sup> Poetic voice is shown to be the true dwelling place. In other poems Sachs speaks about the "asylum of the wound of the world" (Sachs [1988], 319)<sup>6</sup> or about how everything "seeks asylum" in God, in him who grows in the direction called eternity (Sachs [1988], 351).

In Nelly Sachs's work poetic space is made symbolical, into a never resting "sand space." This means that she, as a poet, envisions existence as never ending migration. "Rest" is "after all only a dead word of oasis" (Sachs [1988], 318).<sup>7</sup> There is in life no way out of exilic suffering, only movement itself can bring relief. In one of her poems she asks with a touch of self-irony if a wandering universe has been created by the language of breath in the delusion of smoke. This movement is thematic in her work, changing sand into fire and wandering into dance. There is no easy humanism in her credo: "Replacing home / I assume the changes of the world—" (Sachs [1988], 262).<sup>8</sup> The speaking I has, in this utterance, her feet deep in "the prayer of sand."

This movement in exilic space also makes time burst into epiphanic moments that recall or anticipate states in the past and future. Nelly Sachs's poetry has a prophetic dimension, a messianic promise that suddenly comes forth in the strange nightlight of her writing scene. This is part of her late, constructed Jewish identity, that takes a universalist and cosmic turn. Time has become "the planet hour of refugees" (Sachs [1988], 160),<sup>9</sup> and space is the globe measured by networks of meridians. In the grand poem "Gebogen durch Jahrtausende" (Bent through Millennia), the space-time of flight is furiously summed up in a cosmogonic vision:

Flight, flight, flight,  
meridians of flight connected  
With God-longing-lines —  
(Sachs [1988], 164)<sup>10</sup>



Flight is a push of grace, that always bursts the path of resting blood. But where does it take us? The poem underlines the dramatic and bewildering shift of direction without end, where grace and madness are neighbors.

Sachs is a dialogical poet, always addressing or searching for another human being. Paul Celan came — as we know — to use the “meridian” as the guiding trope of his oeuvre in his Büchner prize speech delivered in 1960. This can be read as a response to her line “Between Paris and Stockholm runs the meridian of pain and consolation” addressed to him in a letter from 1959 (Celan and Sachs [1993], 25).<sup>11</sup> The condition of flight is part of her poetic language, with its elliptic and often abruptly cut off syntax, its brave associative shifts and sudden passages marked by a dash (-). We can sense this in the first poem included in the Sachs-Celan correspondence, dated 1 September 1958. The poem starts by stretching out the meridian:

Line  
as living hair  
drawn  
deathnightobscured  
from you  
to me.

It ends with a dramatic and liberating exchange of images, where death and love clash.

The evening  
casts the springboard  
of night over the red  
prolongs your landtongue  
and hesitating I put my foot  
on the quivering string of death,  
already begun.

But such is love —  
(Sachs [1988], 308)<sup>12</sup>

There is an intersection of opposites in these images that inevitably makes death an ally, a power that reinforces the ultimate nature of the land of the addressee and makes it coincide with the place of speech. There is the coming of evening that changes the scene of the encounter, followed by the hesitating step onto the scene of deadly love. The movement of the foot is prolonged by emotion in the quivering of death’s love-board. A springboard and a string of an instrument can both transport such movements of feeling. Therefore, there is no break in the transition of images. But death has “already begun,” which signifies another and more fateful movement. Nelly Sachs doesn’t need many words to present this complex drama, but then the poem takes one more turn, marked by a blank, before the miraculously consoling ending. “But such is love —.” The simplicity achieved in this line has the lightness of a sudden smile.

Nelly Sachs has dealt with the exile condition in more representative terms, as in the stanza:

A stranger always carries  
 his native country in his bosom  
 like an orphan  
 for whom he might seek  
 nothing else  
 than a grave  
 (Sachs [1988], 301)<sup>13</sup>

But such poems are hardly typical of her, much less for her last collections during the 1960s: *Noch feiert Tod das Leben*, 1961 (Still Death Praises Life), *Glühende Rätsel I-IV*, 1964–1968 (Glowing Enigmas) and the posthumous *Teile dich Nacht* (Night Split Apart). The link between exile and modernism is in Sachs's case language become fate and complexity of tropes, the tropes themselves carrying suffering: "My metaphors are my wounds" is an often quoted statement (Sachs [1977], 311).<sup>14</sup> But her poetry becomes more and more barren language beyond tropes, reduced to a graphic, simple lining. Exile is not so much expressed in terms of invocation or furious movement as in elliptic and silent writing with a new directness, pointing to the scene of writing. It is in the late poems that she most poignantly formulates her poetics in terms of exile: "All words are fugitives" (Celan and Sachs [1993], 87).<sup>15</sup> And since the words are vehicles and the only possible habitation, she can—in *Glühende Rätsel I*—speak of the letters in which the poetic subject travels.

### Paul Celan

The view that language is the vehicle and only place of survival could easily have been subscribed to by Sachs's friend Paul Celan. The great difference of age—she was born in 1891, he in 1920—plays a surprisingly negligible role when they get in touch with each other in the late, crucial period of their writing at the end of the 1950s. In their correspondence they address one another as "brother" and "sister," establishing the meridian between Stockholm and Paris across the experience of traumatic loss and poetic recreation.

Celan's path of exile had its own twisted course. Born in Czernowitz in the Bukovina, which was part of the former Austrian empire, he experienced the deportation of Jews by Soviet troops in June 1941, followed by the deportation of Jews by the Nazi occupants a few weeks later. His parents were brought to concentration camps in Transnistria and murdered by the Nazis, while Paul himself was able to survive in labor camps. But after the Soviets had taken over the regime, the anti-Semitic terror remained. And since refugees from the Bukovina did not receive any travel documents, Celan unlawfully and riskily managed to escape in 1945, to Bucharest, where he had literary contacts. In December 1947, just before the Communists gained power in Romania, he crossed the Romanian border and headed for Vienna and finally, half a year later, managed to settle in Paris.

Paul Celan was already a modernist poet when he arrived in Paris, and he would hardly have chosen the city as his destination if he had not associated it with Rilke and the modernist poetry he adored. His going to Paris cannot be described as an initiation—as for Beckett or Ungaretti—but rather—as for Joyce—a confirmation of his modernist stance. Celan's relation to language was

altogether different from Beckett's to the extent that his mother language remained German, despite his linguistic geniality and early knowledge of Russian, Hebrew, Romanian, French and English. He wrote a handful of poems in Romanian during his exile in Bucharest, but these were never included in his published work. Early on, Celan protested against any bilingual writing. "Only in the mother tongue can one speak one's own truth. In a foreign tongue the poet lies" (cited in Felstiner [1995], 46). He took this view even though German was the language of the executioners of his parents.

The first poem Celan writes in Bucharest is an exile poem, "Ein Lied in der Wüste" (A Song in the Wilderness) that commences *Mohn und Gedächtnis* (Poppy and Memory). The first poem written in Paris is another exile poem in the same collection, "In Ägypten" (In Egypt). Both of them transfigure Celan's position as a fugitive in a historical setting, the latter choosing the biblical Exodus as a model of self-interpretation confronting "die Fremden" (the strangers). The poem evokes the water of the eyes of women as the element making communication possible. The biblical masking seems to intensify erotic experience, the allure of strangeness running through all of his poetry. The imperative in the anaphorically insistent poem is to sleep with the women as an allegiance to exilic experience, adorning them with "Wolkenhaar der Fremden," with the strangers' hair of clouds or cloudlike hair.

In his early poetry, erotic communication has the power to transform the world and make survival possible, but only through eyes become wounds and wells of sorrow, thus achieving witness function. This is most present in "Engführung" (Stretto) in *Sprachgitter* (Speech-grille) with its imperative "Go to the eye, to the moist one" (Celan [1983], vol. I, 200).<sup>16</sup> The erotic thematic is corroborated by shared testimony, bodies in abysmal communion, reinforced by the use of the verb "trinken" (drink)—a key word in Celan. It signifies desperate physical interiorization of both water and ashes, life and death, good and evil. Although the drinking of ashes in "Ein Lied in der Wüste" or of the primordial black milk in "Todesfuge" (Deathfuge) is there day and night, the verb often employed as imperative, has a strong liberating connotation. The experience of love brings helping "straws of the night" (Celan [1983], vol. I, 70).<sup>17</sup> The very positive evaluation of water, darkness and shadow in the early poetry changes, however, in the "Lichtzwang" (Compulsion of light), that takes over in the late writings.

Central to Celan's poetry of exile is the trope of sand, referring to the urns of the dead or the passing of time, but not least to the desert wandering in diaspora. Like Nelly Sachs, Celan activates the code of Jewish symbolism, but with increasing polemical twists. In *Sprachgitter* the poem "Oben, geräuschlos" (Above, soundless) (Celan [1983], vol. I, 188–9) speaks of a collective of ten figures, "das Sandvolk" (The sand people), living below the menacing powers of the sky. It is noteworthy that the speaking persona is part of the collective, self-referentially pointing out the barren place with the adverb "here". There are two parentheses in the poem, which activate the mentioned witness function. The first one bids for testimony, and the second one repeats the request, likewise associating testimony with refreshing water in the midst of desert. One phrase is reiterated: "Water: what / a word" (Celan [1983], vol. I, 188).<sup>18</sup> To count and to tell, "zählen" and "erzählen", are in the poem connected by the same sacred root, since one can only count to ten, "bis zehn und nicht weiter," this also being the number of das Sandvolk. This reminds one of the holy figure ten in cabalistic mysticism, but even more of the "minian," the group of ten men necessary for collective prayer

in traditional Judaism. The main person in the poem is the stranger-witness, appearing between the parentheses with his clothes and his eye dripping with the evoked water and full of night. Still, this witness activity on the ground is framed by the anonymous, silent travellers—the vulture and the star up there—at the beginning and the end of the poem. These celestial forces, both menacing and distancing, remain uncannily soundless.

The parenthesis in Celan sometimes has a note of confession, as if the marginal insertion made it possible for truth to enter the dissimulating rhetoric of his poetry. In the poem “Sprachgitter” (Speech-grille) the searching voice of the subject is suddenly heard among dissociated anatomical fragments:

Were I like you. Were you like me.  
Did we not stand  
under *one* trade wind?  
We are strangers.  
(Celan [1983], vol. I, 167)<sup>19</sup>

“Oben, geräuschlos” seems emblematic of Celan’s early exile position, which still maintains a strong relation to the exclusive Jewish community and tradition.

How this changes in his later work can be seen in the poem “Keine Sandkunst mehr” (No more sand art), in *Atemwende* (Breathturn), which has been interpreted as a negation of a magical, geomantic kind of poetry but can just as well be seen as a reversal of the previous, messianic poetry of the diaspora. The reduction in the poem from sand to the burial of screaming vowels in snow, manifested wittily by the elimination of consonants in the repeated, compressed sequence “Tiefimschnee,” marks a thematic shift in Celan’s writing. John Felstiner translates it: “Deepinsnow./ Eeepinnow./ E—i—o” (Celan [2001], 251). The poet of sand becomes the poet of snow in an increasingly contracted and traumatic idiom, unlike Nelly Sachs who remains a poet of sand and snow, the two elements being central all through her work.

“Keine Sandkunst mehr” can revealingly be read as a response to “Oben, geräuschlos” with its menaced but exclusive community, holy and testifying. Number ten, with its spiritual associations, is replaced by the monstrous “siebenzehn” (seventeen), which in its incompleteness cannot reach the “living” number eighteen, in Jewish liturgy identical with the central eighteenth prayer. Moreover, the numerical value (gematria) of eighteen is identical to the letters constituting the word Chai, life. In the poem, one has to note the unusually apodictic denial of any spiritual message. The line “Your question—your answer” assumingly means that there is no more truth or poetical knowledge to be given. Poetry and song is indissolubly linked to snow as the element of death and expulsion.

In Celan’s work, poetry stands under the sign of the stranger’s password of life and death, always waiting for the verdict of the community:

Cry out the shibboleth  
into the strangeness of homeland:  
February. No pasaran.  
(Celan [1983], vol. I, 131)<sup>20</sup>

This insistent manner of speech, so typical of Celan, integrates the foreign words into its own proclaimed discourse of exile.

Celan's *shibboleth* gradually becomes more and more codified and just as in Joyce, it is marked by unreadability. The word is silenced but can also fight violence and oblivion, "the tooth of poison" that has penetrated the letters in every word and shape. This death process of language is part of Celan's own development as a poet of the isolated, burning syllable. Poetic language reduced to stammering is itself exiled in the furious vision "Die Silbe Schmerz" (The Syllable Pain) in *Die Niemandrose* (The no-one's-rose). There is both a strange affinity and a decisive difference between Celan's poetry of the wandering syllable and Joyce's late syllabable. The isolation of the syllable in their writing is the product of rebellious dislocation, but Joyce does not allow for pain and he refuses to witness. In Celan the dissociated syllable can still become a crucial password of nomads, as is evidenced from the dialogue with Petrarca or Mandelshtam in *Die Niemandrose*, where the word of the tents becomes free in making free. It is essentially a word in flight with roots in the air, full of terrestrial loss.

When reading Celan from an exile perspective, one should observe the significant use of orientation marks. Exile is inscribed in a poem like "Solve" (Celan [1983], vol. II, 82) by the first epithetic word "Entosteter" (Dis-easted) referring to the victimized tree of the grave, taken asunder and in fragments of language floated on the waters westwards. The tree of life become the grave tree has been spliced to pieces like the words in the poem. Writing itself, being one with the floated tree, is finally concealed or salvaged, the spliced word "ge-/ borgen" meaning both. This signifies a very peculiar dynamic of loss and imperative responsibility as in the phrase from the same collection: "The world is gone / I have to carry you" (Celan [1983], vol. II, 97).<sup>21</sup> Or in a typically chiasmic moment in *Fadensonnen* (Threadsuns): "spread from the east, to be salvaged in the west" (Celan [1983], vol. II, 196).<sup>22</sup>

Exile poetry is an act of recalling that can temporarily have—at least before *Fadensonnen*—a healing effect, as long as depression is kept at bay and erotic experience has the power of transformation. But there is also linguistic transformation beyond healing, and Celan does not stop finding the new. His language is many languages, a testimony of the stranger that establishes a middle ground in the passage.

With you  
on the vocal cord bridge, in  
the Great Inbetween,  
all night long  
(Celan [1983], vol. II, 98)<sup>23</sup>

This is utopian, still before *Fadensonnen*, in the night zone of erotic dialogue. After that he is writing "in a dis-nighted place" (Celan [1983], vol. II, 153),<sup>24</sup> depriving this place of everything that kept resistance alive and in a certain sense naïve. The eyes, previously filled with the waters of regeneration, are now—like the words—hollowed out. Nothing is more characteristic of the late poetry than privative prefixes in constructions like "entwohnt" (dis-used), "veratmet" (breathed out) or "verwunscht" (desired to the end of desire), and the predominant, sarcastic tone. More than ever language is in exile, taking another more destructive step beyond itself in the wilderness of uprooted meaning:

Talk to the impasses  
 about the opposite,  
 about its  
 expatriated  
 meaning — :  
 chew  
 this bread, with  
 writing teeth.

(Celan [1983], vol. II, 358)<sup>25</sup>

### Exile Literature as Experimental Testimony

Witness literature coming forth in the twentieth century as a significant trend in modern fiction is often associated with realist writing, but enforced exile brings to literature, regardless of mode or genre, the obligation to testify. Camus's oeuvre can, both in its acute ethical dimension and in its total vision, be read as a testimony of exile existence, but more typical for radical modernist literature of exile is a combination of experiment and testimony. Even in the voluntary exiles there is a clear relation to testimony, though less urgent. Joyce is a rather unwilling witness to contemporary events, but he feels obliged to return to the departure that made him into a writer. In Ungaretti, who voluntarily goes to war, the connection between poetry and testimony is acute in his first phase, writing in the face of death in the trenches. Written in the present tense, his poems from this period are explicitly testimonial, all thirty-three poems in *Il porto sepolto* (The buried harbor) having been given date and place. In Sachs, the witness is identified with language under threat, the words themselves being called refugees. It is primarily in the poetry after *Und niemand weiss weiter* (And Nobody knows any further) that she dismantles the rhetoric of collective remembrance and confronts her own exile fate in a singular way. She never experienced Auschwitz or any other camp herself, but writing close to her exile existence, she makes her writing recall and become a powerful testimony of past events. In Celan the relation to direct reference is negative, and he is only reluctantly alluding to the Holocaust. Presumably, he found the events of terror in themselves inexpressible, and this anti-mimetic stance was reinforced by his early surrealist inspiration in Romania. There is, nevertheless, a strong testimonial urge in Celan, and the poem as such has witness function:

a breath crystal,  
 your unannullable  
 testimony

(Celan [1983], vol. II, 31)<sup>26</sup>

Every poem is a singular event that is dated and made into a crossing space of the stranger's shibboleth.

Exile seems to radicalize the modernist tendency to make language itself the ultimate bond of the writer. One would assume that this centripetal tendency should rather weaken the referential link, necessary for meaningful testimony. But not much is needed to refer, and conversely, narrative and

other referential modes of expression themselves create infinite problems in dealing with the atrocities of the century. Ungaretti, Celan and Sachs show how modernist poetry can innovatively push literary testimony beyond narrative, and even beyond the fable of the "Sandvolk." The resonant, isolated word testifies to death and brotherhood in Ungaretti. Silence, fragmentation and the dissociated syllable speak in Celan and Sachs of the Jewish catastrophe.

As a conclusion, one could say that just as effective witness literature needs distance in time and space, exile can help writers create. It is a disruption that also makes speech possible. The space of rupture is in many ways extreme, showing a deep affinity between the end and the beginning of things. The desert as nomadic space has been a recurrent theme in Camus, Ungaretti, Sachs and also in Celan. Desert appears as the oxymoronic space of the excluded and homeless in search of new territory. Even Beckett's space is deserted and barren, when not shrunk to a claustrophobic cell or asylum. Desert space is full of dramatic tensions and lends itself to the antithetic imagery characteristic of modernist discourse, coming forth in Baudelaire.

However, exile literature shows us a space that is indistinguishable from the liminal experience of language. The modernist writing practices of Joyce, Beckett, Ungaretti or Sachs are developed in exilic loss of origins, and this is true of so many others: of Gertrude Stein, T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound or of Gunnar Ekelöf. Exile makes language itself the only home possible in homelessness. The exile of Joyce is turned into infinite semiosis, meandering in time and space. In both Joyce and Celan language itself is in exile, a shibboleth ever resisting easy appropriation and never sure of a safe homecoming.

On a more general level one can point out four, often interconnected aspects, that seem important for exile's role in the development of modernist writing practices. First, the intense experimental activity and mimetic exchange taking place in the attracting literary metropolises at the beginning of the twentieth century. Second, the exposure to language as something alien, making free, experimental play possible. Third, the experience of language as many languages, close to the simultaneous, "contrapuntal" vision of many cultural perspectives that Edward W. Said has praised (Said [2000], 186). And fourth, the distance in space and time that alleviates literary testimony. The hard won lesson of modernist exile seems to run: You have to go abroad, voluntarily or involuntarily, in order to see language as a play-mate, create anew and, eventually, make testimony possible.

## Notes

1. "La répétition des causes de départ est l'essentiel moteur de l'imagination joycienne" (Cixous [1968], 586).
2. "Parce qu'en français il est plus facile d'écrire sans style" (Cockerham [1975], 156).
3. "Di che reggimento siete / fratelli? // Parola tremante / nella notte // Foglia appena nata // Nell'aria spasmante / involontaria rivolta / dell'uomo presente alla sua / fragilità // Fratelli" (Ungaretti [1969], 39).
4. "Ungaretti / uomo di pena / ti basta un'illusione / per farti coraggio // Un riflettore / di là / mette un mare / nella nebbia" (Ungaretti [1969], 46).
5. "ins Asyl meiner Atemzüge" (Sachs [1988], 157).
6. "ins Asyl der Weltenwunde" (Sachs [1988], 319).
7. "ein totes Oasenwort" (Sachs [1988], 318).

8. "An Stelle von Heimat / halte ich die Verwandlungen der Welt —" (Sachs [1988], 262).
9. "Das ist der Flüchtlinge Planetenstunde" (Sachs [1988], 160).
10. "Flucht, Flucht, Flucht, / Fluchtmeridiane verbunden / mit Gott-Sehnsuchts-Strichen —" (Sachs [1988], 164).
11. "Zwischen Paris und Stockholm läuft der Meridian des Schmerzes und des Trostes" (Celan and Sachs [1993], 25).
12. "Linie wie / lebendiges Haar / gezogen / todnachtgedunkelt / von dir / zu mir."  
"Der Abend / wirft das Sprungbrett / der Nacht über das Rot / verlängert deine Landzunge / und ich setze meinen Fuss zagend / auf die zitternde Saite /des schon begonnenen Todes.// Aber so ist die Liebe —" (Sachs [1988], 308).
13. "Ein Fremder hat immer / seine Heimat im Arm / wie eine Waise / für die er vielleicht nichts / als ein Grab sucht" (Sachs [1988], 301).
14. "meine Metaphern sind meine Wunden" (Sachs [1977], 311).
15. "Alle Worte Flüchtlinge" (Celan and Sachs [1993], 87).
16. "Zum Aug geh, zum feuchten —" (Celan [1983], vol. I, 199–200).
17. "Ihr Halme der Nacht" (Celan [1983], vol. I, 70).
18. "Wasser: welch / ein Wort" (Celan [1983], vol. I, 188).
19. "Wär ich wie du. Wärest du wie ich./ Standen wir nicht / unter *einem* Passat? / Wir sind Fremde" (Celan [1983], vol. I, 167).
20. "Ruf's, das Schibboleth, hinaus / in die Fremde der Heimat: / Februar. No pasaran" (Celan [1983], vol. I, 131).
21. "Die Welt ist fort / ich muss dich tragen" (Celan [1983], vol. II, 97).
22. "vom Osten gestreut, einzubringen im Westen" (Celan [1983], vol. II, 196).
23. "Mit dir / auf der Stimmbänderbrücke, im / Grossen Dazwischen,/ nachtüber" (Celan [1983], vol. II, 98).
24. "Am / entnachteten / Ort" (Celan [1983], vol. II, 153).
25. "Mit den Sackgassen sprechen / vom Gegenüber, / von seiner / expatriierten / Bedeutung —: // dieses / Brot kauen, mit / Schreibzähnen" (Celan [1983], vol. II, 358).
26. "ein Atemkristall, / dein unumstössliches / Zeugnis" (Celan [1983], vol. II, 31).

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## Chapter 11

### Locations: Case Studies

This final—and largest—section of the book takes the reader far and wide. Viewed as a whole, it may seem to push the concept of modernism to, if not beyond, its limits. Can modernism really mean or “be” all these different aspects of culture and writing and still be a reasonably coherent historical and aesthetic term? Each reader will have his or her ideas of modernism tested when moving among these case studies in the international landscape of modernism. Yet, through the multilayered dialogue of all these different critical voices, one may discover reorientations that, together with insights garnered from previous sections, raise valuable questions. In the process the concept of modernism may become *both* a broader *and* a sharper critical tool.

The advent of modernism in the 1920s was a landmark in Brazilian literary history. The country’s literary tradition had always been deeply dependent on European models. However, while the emergence of modernism owes an important debt to Europe, **Eduardo de Faria Coutinho** shows that its local adaptation involved a highly critical view of some aspects of European modernism. Brazilian modernism chose certain aspects of international modernism and blended them into a new movement that developed an original, uniquely Brazilian profile. Brazilian modernists thereby set a basic nationalistic tone for their movement, marking their position both as citizens of the world and as voices for a culture that was perhaps for the first time reading the world with its own eyes.

Recent studies of “colonial” intellectual and cultural projects have shown that modernism in the “outposts of empire” cannot be characterized in terms of an urban-European aesthetic approach imposed from outside. Examining modernism in Australia, **Tanya Dalziel** finds that both gender and race operated as crucial categories affecting the ways in which local cultural productions were articulated and contested. She argues that a full understanding of the emergence of modernism in such “outposts” far removed from Europe requires a shift in current disciplinary frameworks through which both colonialism and modernism are read.

The sheer variety of intellectual and artistic options associated with the *modernisme* that appeared in Catalonia in the latter decades of the nineteenth century challenges the classificatory bent of literary history. **Brad Epps** writes that *modernisme* is not modernism of the type that has been codified in Anglo-American culture by way of Pound, Joyce, and Eliot. Properly understood, the *modernisme* of Catalonia is modernism construed in a more ample sense in which modernity, renovation, and innovation hold sway. In Catalonia it served as an international framework within which the region’s beleaguered projection as an autonomous, national culture could take place.

The term “modernism” is not often applied to literature in France for designating a literary period, genre or movement. To use the term in a French context, **Kimberley Healey** writes, it is necessary to distinguish it from the modernism associated with Anglo-American literature with its emphasis on the new, progressive, or revolutionary. An examination of texts, many of them travel narratives, by writers ranging from the Comte de Lautréamont to Marguerite Duras, shows that French literary modernists do not seek the modern above all, but are rather interested in the encounter of old and new. Keeping an eye on the past ultimately results in an interrogation of the act of writing itself, a primary mode of traveling between past and present. This movement between a present moment in the text and a French mythical, literary, particularly Parisian past is finally the most telling characteristic of French literary modernism.

Spanish-American *modernismo* rose primarily from a wish to make the region a contemporary of North-America and Europe and most especially of Paris, the artistic and intellectual center of the Western world. **Cathy L. Jrade** shows, however, that the vision of the *modernistas* was riddled with ambivalence. They embraced the benefits and possibilities of modernity while simultaneously critiquing the socio-political and cultural problems it engendered. Deploing the growing emphasis on materialism, pragmatism, and progress, the *modernistas* affirmed the beautiful, the artistic, the anti-utilitarian, the erotic, the irrational, and the spiritual. Their tendency to combine literary and political concerns is the most important feature and legacy of the *modernistas* who were once believed to be concerned solely with the creation of innovative poetic images and forms.

“Borders of Modernism in the Nordic World” is a “collage” of articles by a group of Nordic scholars — (in order of appearance) **Astradur Eysteinnsson, Mats Jansson, H. K. Riikonen, Steen Klitgård Povlsen, Jakob Lothe, Bjørn Tysdahl** and **Turið Sigurðardóttir** — who have organized a sequence of conferences in recent years, focusing on the reception and local manifestations of modernism in the Nordic countries, from Finland to Iceland, including Sweden, Norway, Denmark and the Faroe Islands. Here they look at several of the key signs, figures and historical milestones of Nordic modernism, observing the cultural borders within and around this part of the world.

In the West, Symbolism was only one area of the “modernization project” — an individual aesthetic concern and an answer to particular questions posed by history, but rarely confused with social or political modernization. **Péter Krasztev** shows that in Russia and other countries of Eastern Europe, however, this same poetry — and the radical theories coursing alongside it — attempted to create an ideological framework by which mankind might radically transform itself. Deeply convinced that the search for individual, inner redemption was inseparable from the search for national and communal redemption, the modernist poets of Eastern Europe adopted Symbolism as a kind of “philosophy of life” that presented challenges at every level to “public” thought and “general conditions.”

Acknowledging the impossibility of defining Russian modernism as a “homogenous, uniformed empirical phenomenon,” and despite the absence of a representative manifesto, **Edward Mozejko** proposes instead to think of Russian modernism as a theoretical model having various guises, which nonetheless share as a common denominator the radical break with a nineteenth-century Russian mimetic tradition. Discerning often radically different aesthetic positions, Mozejko distinguishes from the cluster of wildly experimenting and innovative literary groupings, two major currents: a classical and an avant-garde one. He hereby offers the heretofore missing overview of the plethora of creative and aesthetically diverse minds that have shaped this diverse period in Russia’s literature

and reveals the philosophical undercurrent and experimental spirit of Russian writers' specific modernist response.

Italian literary and cultural production in the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries was closely entangled with the political events of the *Risorgimento*, the process of national unification. **Luca Somigli** shows that this period in Italy produced not one modernism but a number of modernisms that arbitrated between social and cultural trends prevalent in Europe and rapidly developing Italian realities. Consequently, the Italian situation may be seen as a blueprint for the constellation of experiences mediating between trans-European dispositions and poetics on the one hand and local traditions on the other.

There has been little effort by critics to align Spanish writing of the early decades of the twentieth century to modernism in any of its well-known European varieties. **C. Christopher Soufas Jr.** claims, however, that the tremendous flowering of writing in Spain from 1898 to 1936—that is, precisely during the height of modernism in Europe—needs to be re-examined and approached as part of a multi-dimensional, multi-national phenomenon. Spanish writing of this period typically presents a pattern of dialectical response to contemporary European positions, and the failure of Spanish criticism to make a case for a “Spanish modernism” is symptomatic of a failure to recognize that Spanish literature has consistently responded to the discourses of modernity from the outset.

In the development of the Spanish-American novel, the body of work most appropriately labeled “modernist” begins to emerge in the 1940s, after the decline of European modernism. The experimental qualities associated with modernism had previously appeared in Spanish-America, but it is only at this point, particularly with the emergence of the “boom” writers that gained international attention in the 1960s, that a broad and significant transformation of the Spanish-American novel along modernist lines occurred. Writing of this transformation, **Maarten van Delden** discusses eight Spanish-American novels, including Gabriel García Márquez’s *Cien años de soledad* (One Hundred Years of Solitude). While these texts show important affinities with modernist aesthetics, including an inward turn of narrative, each is a profoundly original work that gives inherited models a new turn.

Although there is a broad consensus in Dutch literary studies regarding the need to delineate a period coinciding with what is generally called modernism, there is little agreement about what modernism exactly encompasses, how it should be understood, and when and where it manifested itself in Dutch literature. **Hubert F. van den Berg** and **Gillis J. Dorleijn** show that Dutch literary studies encompass a number of ‘modernisms’ that partly intermingle, yet partly exclude one another. Of these, the most important is the notion of modernism as “literature of modernity.” But the term also serves as a synonym for the historical avant-garde and as the name given to a specific development in Dutch literature during the 1920s and 1930s that set itself in opposition to the avant-garde.

Modernism had a belated arrival in Greece, appearing in the 1930s through the introduction of a new set of literary practices and formal innovations. In recent critical discussions of this literature, social and political perspectives have often overshadowed aesthetic ones. **Evi Voyiatzaki** shifts her focus instead to the artistic nature of Greek modernism. Assessing the contributions of a number of writers, she maintains that a key tendency of Greek modernism involves the pursuit of the inner-orientated or introverted art, which includes the transcendence of realism, the exploration of the processes of subjectivity, the experimental treatment of time, and the manifestation of an alert aesthetic consciousness.



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## Brazilian Modernism

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Brazilian literary production was already highly significant at the turn of the twentieth century, both in the number and quality of its authors, some of whom, like Machado de Assis, could easily be placed side by side with the great figures of Western literature. However, the country's literary tradition was so much dependent on European models, particularly French, that Brazilian literary movements usually did not go beyond a mere adaptation of the basic principles of European movements to the new cultural milieu. This is what happened with Romanticism in the first half of the nineteenth century, and also with Realism, Naturalism, Symbolism and Impressionism later on. But the situation changed substantially with the advent of Modernism in the 1920s, which must be seen as a landmark in Brazilian literary history. There is no doubt that the European Vanguards of the early twentieth century, as well as Anglo-Saxon Modernism, played an important role in the construction of Brazilian Modernism, but the character of adaptation involved a highly critical view, which chose certain aspects of international Modernism and blended them into a new movement which, though similar to those that influenced it, developed an original, uniquely Brazilian profile.

This critical view of imported approaches was not only responsible for the special position that Modernism holds within the framework of Brazilian Literature, but it has also granted the movement a wider perspective that projects it beyond the frontiers of literature. One observer put it this way: "[M]ore than a simple literary *school*, or even a period in our intellectual life, Modernism [...] was a whole *epoch* of Brazilian life inscribed within a wide social and historical process, the source and result of transformations which far overflowed their aesthetic frontiers" (Martins [1970], 7). Brazilian modernism, therefore, can be seen in terms of two projects that have guided the country's cultural life in the early twentieth century — an aesthetic project based on an eagerness on the part of Brazilian *intelligentsia* to participate in the process of modernization that dominated the Western world, and a political, ideological project, aimed at defining the country's literary identity. And although these two projects are apparently contradictory — the former is directed towards an international aim and the latter toward the construction of the country's national identity — they are in fact intimately articulated and closely complement each other. By assimilating the principles of the European Vanguards and then transforming them critically, Brazilian modernists set the basic nationalistic tone for the movement. They imported European strategies and techniques in order to exploit Brazilian realities and, by so doing, they conferred on the movement its unique dimension.

The term "Modernism" in Brazilian literature is usually applied to the period that started in 1922 with the episode of the Modern Art Week, in São Paulo, and extends to the middle of the twentieth century. However, the foundations for the movement had been laid in advance. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Brazilian literature had plunged into a phase of transition and syncretism, in

which elements of Parnassianism, Symbolism and Impressionism were blended. A general state of conformity, stagnation and apathy reigned, but one could see stirrings of a desire for renewal in certain avant-garde and non-conformist circles that generated an environment receptive to Modernism. A growing number of writers and artists in general were sowing the seeds of revolt or non-conformity against the taboos and postulates of tradition. There were book publications, art exhibitions, conferences and public pronouncements of sympathy with the new trends coming from Europe. Afrânio Coutinho, in his *Introduction to Literature in Brazil*, sums up the ferment of the years preceding 1922 by saying that “two currents could be discerned in Brazilian literature and arts: that of the archaics, the prisoners of the magic spell of the past, faithful to the consecrated canons, and that of the forerunners, who announced and prepared for change” (Coutinho [1969], 216). The Modern Art Week of 1922 was, therefore, a coronation, more than a starting point; it was a result, a point of convergence of forces that had been struggling to manifest themselves.

The reaction to the Modern Art Week in São Paulo was dramatic. With the literary climate long prepared for a radical renovation, various vanguard intellectuals gathered together and laid plans for a real assault on the bastions of tradition. It is still a question of controversy whether the initiative for the movement came from São Paulo or Rio de Janeiro. The latter city, like São Paulo, had been following the line of renovation for some time, and various people came from Rio to São Paulo to participate in the Week. The atmosphere for the outbreak of the movement was perhaps more intense in the literary field in Rio, whereas in São Paulo it was more vigorous in the artistic field. In any case, the final impulse came from São Paulo, where writers like Mário de Andrade, Oswald de Andrade and Menotti del Picchia unleashed a press campaign that spread information about the artistic changes that were taking place in Europe and called upon intellectuals for their realization in Brazil.

But, if there was a certain grouping of participants around the Week and a common aim, based on the idea of putting tradition into check, the movement never had the homogeneity and unity of a doctrine. The central idea of the Week was that of destruction, of making scandals, and its main direction was critical. “We do not know how to define what we want, but we can discern what we do not want,” was the phrase of Aníbal Machado (Cited by Coutinho, [1969], 222) that could have been the modernists’ platform, and everything that made up the patrimony of Brazilian literature was rejected: oratorical emphasis, eloquence, Parnassian hieraticism, the cult of rich rhymes, perfect and conventional meters, classicizing language. Mário de Andrade, one of the main figures of the movement, outlined, twenty years later, what he thought its initial directions had been: the break with academic domination, the destruction of the conservative and conformist spirit, the demolition of taboos and prejudices, and the permanent adherence to three fundamental principles: the right to aesthetic investigation, the up-dating of Brazilian artistic intelligence, and the stabilization of a national creative consciousness (Andrade [1942]). And if we look at the literary production that came to form the canon of Brazilian literature after 1922, we see that the objectives envisioned by the modernists were attained. The aesthetic revolution had taken place and its consequences would be deep and broad in the Brazilian artistic and literary mentality.

After the Week, Modernism began to be redefined by different groups and divergent currents. The relatively united front that had commanded the outbreak of the movement disappeared and the new territory was occupied by distinct groups that, though still sharing many objectives, disagreed on some aesthetic principles and preferred to follow a path of their own. New groups appeared.

Some of the most important of these were the Dynamists, in Rio de Janeiro, whose major thesis was the cult of movement and velocity, of material progress and technical greatness; the Primitivists, in São Paulo, that sought renovation by seeking inspiration in the primitive motifs of the Brazilian land and people; and the Nationalists, also in São Paulo, that defended the “nationalization” of literature, by placing an emphasis upon indigenous, folkloric and native motives, as opposed to the inspiration of European themes. The Spiritualists, in Rio de Janeiro, gathered around the review *Festa* that defended tradition and mystery, blending past and future; and the *Desvairista* (Hallucinationists), inaugurated and inspired by Mário de Andrade, fought for the freedom of aesthetic investigation, for the renovation of poetry and for the creation of a national language. Along with these, and sometimes inspired by them, existed simultaneous or subsequent groups in other states. In Minas Gerais, there were the Verde and Revista groups; in Bahia, a group connected with the review *Arco e Flecha* (Bow and arrow); in Ceará, a group formed around the review *Maracajá*; in Pará, the Flamináçu; and in Rio Grande do Sul, the Madrugada group.

These regionalist groups, in addition to the importance they had for the development of Modernism, reveal two significant tendencies of the movement: its decentralizing character, in that the spring of innovative cultural activities was no longer restricted to Rio and São Paulo, and its positive recognition of regional elements. Although there already existed a strong regionalist movement in Brazil that began in the Romantic period and continued throughout Realism and Naturalism it was greatly intensified with the arrival of Modernism, broadening its dimensions and reach. Despite the view of some critics that Modernism has been averse to all types of traditionalism and all forms of regionalism, there was a clear tendency in Brazil to conciliate Modernism with regionalism, partly because an acceptance of regional elements was a complement to the movement’s nationalist vein. In the Northeast, the arrival of Gilberto Freyre after having spent five years abroad, brought about, with his inspiration and direction, an intensive movement that led to the founding of the Regionalist Center of the Northeast in 1924 and the meeting of the First Regionalist Congress of Recife in 1926. The ideas spread by this movement were presented by Freyre at this Congress in the form of a Manifesto and had strong repercussions in several forms of cultural activity, particularly poetry (Jorge de Lima and Ascensão Ferreira), prose writing (José Lins do Rego and José Américo de Almeida) and painting (Cícero Dias and Luís Jardim). It might be argued, in fact, that one of the highest expressions of the Modernist movement as a whole appeared in the form of the so-called Northeastern novel of the 1930s.

Despite the absence of a marked philosophical preoccupation, which might have given a certain cohesion to the Modernist movement, there were several texts in which the leaders or groups tried to defend their particular orientation. They are manifestos, program-articles, and prefaces, all of which are real declarations of principle. Although we will not discuss these texts here, students of Brazilian Modernism should be aware that a number of them had considerable influence: the lectures of Graça Aranha (1922–24), the Preface to the book *Paulicéia desvairada* (1922) by Mário de Andrade, the *Manifesto da Poesia Pau-Brasil* (Manifesto to Brazil-Wood Poetry, 1924) by Oswald de Andrade, the review *Estética*, with program-articles by Prudente de Moraes Neto and Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, the book *A escrava que não é Isaura* (The Slave Who Is Not Isaura, 1925) by Mário de Andrade, the movement’s ars poetica, the *Manifesto Regionalista do Recife* (The Recife Regionalist Manifesto, 1926) by Gilberto Freyre, the *Manifesto Verde-Amarelo* (The Green and Yellow Manifesto, 1927), signed by Plínio Salgado, Cassiano Ricardo, Cândido Mota Filho and



Menotti del Picchia, the *Manifesto Antropófago* (Anthropophagous Manifesto, 1928), signed by Oswald de Andrade, Antônio de Alcântara Machado, Raul Bopp and Osvaldo Costa, and the *Verde* (Green) manifesto of Cataguases (1928). Generally, however, Modernist groups tried to present their ideas and divulge the production of the new art in vanguard reviews, of which the following were most influential: *Klaxon* (São Paulo, 1922), *Estética* (Rio de Janeiro, 1924), *Terra Roxa e Outras Terras* (São Paulo, 1926), *Revista de Antropofagia* (São Paulo, 1928), *Revista do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro, 1925–26), *Festa* (Rio de Janeiro, 1927–29, 1934), *A Revista* (Belo Horizonte, 1925), *Verde* (Cataguases, 1928), *Arco e Flecha* (Salvador, 1928), *Maracajá* (Fortaleza, 1929), and *Madrugada* (Porto Alegre, 1929).

These many texts and reviews all belong to the initial phase of the movement, its heroic phase as it has been called; yet Modernism was not restricted to this period. Rather, it has lasted for several decades and, in studying its evolution, one can distinguish a succession of phases, marked by different attitudes toward life and art. Most critics seem to agree that the movement was made up of three phases, marked by successive generations, those of 1922, 1930 and 1945. The first phase, from 1922 to 1930, was one of rupture, of destruction of the old order; the second, from 1930 to 1945, was, on the contrary, marked by a constructive intent, by an impulse to configure or delineate the new aesthetic order; and the third phase, which started in 1945 and lasted until the 1960s and 1970s, when Postmodernism began to hold the scene, was a period of maturation, marked by a purification of form and an effort at disciplinary recuperation and emotional containment.

The first phase of the Modernist movement was generated by the writers and artists who took part in the Modern Art Week and by those who formed the various groups into which the movement was divided right after its birth in 1922. It was a revolutionary generation, both in art and in politics, whose objective was the demolition of a traditional order that was still marked by colonial vices, and of a type of art and literature produced by imitation of foreign models and unconnected with the national reality. This was a generation that rebelled against all sorts of “past-isms” in the name of interests of the present and aspirations for the future. It was a critical, anarchistic and combative generation, whose weapons were, according to Afrânio Coutinho, “the wisecrack, ridicule, scandal, agitation, and clowning” (Coutinho [1969], 230). It is not surprising that this approach stirred up a reaction of insults, catcalls, jeers and invective. It was indeed a heroic phase, adventurous, polemical and destructive, with a powerful urge for aesthetic investigation and creative liberty, especially in poetry, that opened the way for the second phase.

The second phase replaced the destructive character of the first one with a constructive effort to recompose values and configure the new aesthetic order. The mocking and anarchistic tone of the first generation gave way to a gravity of spirit. Poetry followed the task of purification of means and forms that had been initiated earlier, broadening its themes in the direction of philosophical and religious unrest with figures like Vinícius de Moraes, Jorge de Lima, Augusto Frederico Schmidt, Murilo Mendes and Carlos Drummond de Andrade. And at the same time prose broadened its area of interest to include new preoccupations of a political, social, economic, human and spiritual sort. In fact, this second generation made its greatest achievements in prose. The “decade of the Modernist novel” began in 1928 with the publication of *A bagaceira* (The Bagass Dump), by José Américo de Almeida, and *Macunaíma* by Mário de Andrade, and saw the appearance of a cluster of artists endowed with an incredible creative power, among whom two lines could be discerned. The first, made up of regionalists and social neo-naturalists, placed the land ahead of everything else (José

Lins do Rego, Graciliano Ramos, Jorge Amado, Raquel de Queirós and Amando Fontes); the second focused on psychological investigation (Cornélio Pena, Otávio de Faria, Lúcio Cardoso, Ciro dos Anjos, Érico Veríssimo).

Brazilian Modernism's third wave began around 1945, and could be called the "aesthetic" phase of the movement. In poetry, it emphasized great precision in purification of form, an effort at disciplinary recuperation, emotional containment and severity of language, producing a group of authors of which João Cabral de Melo Neto was the most notable. In fiction, the great event was the appearance of João Guimarães Rosa and Clarice Lispector, and there was also an attempt to revitalize the short story by means of new experiments on the level of language, with psychological investigation and the use of expressionist techniques. Another significant contribution to this phase was in the field of criticism, in which the old impressionistic methods were abandoned and a debate was established, mainly with Afrânio Coutinho, over the new criticism of an aesthetic cast. A number of reviews played an important role in this phase: *Clã* (Fortaleza), *Edifício* (Belo Horizonte), *Joaquim* (Curitiba), *Orfeu* (Rio de Janeiro), *Revista Branca* (Rio de Janeiro), *Sul* (Florianópolis) and *Planalto* (São Paulo).

As a movement of integration, not limited to the literary and artistic field, but rather including all forms of cultural activity, Modernism not only radically renovated literature and the arts in Brazil, but also affected all sectors of the country's life, unleashing considerable social and intellectual change. Among the affected areas was education, with the new education movement of Fernando de Azevedo, Anísio Teixeira and Lourenço Filho. Historical, anthropological and sociological studies were also transformed by figures such as Gilberto Freyre, Roquette-Pinto, Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, Artur Ramos and Caio Prado Jr. Economic and political studies adopted a new scientific and technical mentality in looking at government and public administration. Urban studies established a new way of approaching the formation, reform and beautification of Brazilian cities and led to the creation of the Service of National Historical and Artistic Patrimony in the Ministry of Education and Culture. This third phase also saw the establishment of the great collections of Brazilian Studies as well as the first Superior Schools of Philosophy and Letters, which would have a decisive influence in the formation of new intellectual groups. In sum, Brazilian civilization went through a process of spiritual, moral and intellectual restlessness, of cultural turmoil in search of solutions for problems brought on by the new stage that it had reached. This crisis was manifest in politics, in social life, and in the arts, and led to the adoption of Modernism as the new way to face and express the Brazilian attitude in arts and letters, life and culture.

The critical conscience that Brazil's Modernism developed was undoubtedly one of the movement's major contributions to Brazilian cultural life. On the one hand, it helped bridge the time gap between Brazil and the rest of the Western world, therefore putting an end to the mental colonialism still existing. On the other hand, it encouraged the country's intellectuals to find their own way of reacting, of thinking, of formulating problems and solutions, without subservience to foreign models and recipes. It was in great part thanks to the modernists' efforts that Brazilian intellectual life came of age, without denying of course foreign intellectual nutrition. Actually, it was by importing European aesthetic weapons that Brazilian intellectuals were able to make their own revolution, which resulted in a grasp of their culture that had never existed before. Having arisen under the sign of a national consciousness, Modernism continued in this direction and produced a true rediscovery of Brazil, creating a powerful awareness of the country's particularities. Former-

ly, Brazilian intellectuals had lived with their eyes turned towards Europe. With Modernism, this mentality changed, turning artists to experience their native land and give it artistic representation by means of its own special material. Brazilian intellectuals finally took possession of themselves and their country, rooting themselves in the land, and, as a consequence, moving toward a more active participation in national life as they focused on the social, political, and economic problems of the country.

This attention to Brazilian land and environment, this movement of “national introspection,” to employ Peregrino Júnior’s term (Peregrino Jr. [1954]), brought a new preoccupation with regionalism, traditionalism and folklore. Indian and African traditions, regional legends and popular language with Indian and African contributions quickly became common in literature, both in poetry and fiction. There was also a deep investigation into Brazil and the Brazilian person, his past, his formation, his way of life, not only in literature, but also in historical, social, ethnographic and linguistic studies. Brazilian music and plastic arts were given special value, for example, as can be seen from the recognition of contributions such as those by Aleijadinho (a famous eighteenth-century Brazilian sculptor), or by the discovery of colonial baroque architecture, and by the use of a great number of folkloric materials in the music of Villa Lobos, Camargo Guarnieri and Francisco Mignone, as well as of popular and historical motives in the painting of Portinari, Pancetti and Guignard. Additionally, as we saw earlier, this rediscovery of the land and of regionalism led to a decentralization of Brazilian intellectual life and new value was given to the provinces. With Modernism, the spell of the center was broken, and since then, the various provinces have been continually consolidating their positions as regional centers possessed of their own rich intellectual life.

But one of the most significant consequences of Modernism is its emphasis on what has been called “a Brazilian language,” as opposed to peninsular Portuguese, and to a Brazilian style as a legitimate instrument for the literature produced in the country. Although the Portuguese spoken in Brazil had become quite distinct from peninsular Portuguese in every aspect—phonology, morphology, lexicon and syntax—the Portuguese norm had continued to rule in schools and in any formal institution, and writers had continued to produce their works in a language out of touch with the object they wanted to present. This archaic aesthetic in language was one of the elements of “past-ism” most violently attacked by modernist writers. Mário de Andrade even considered creating a “little grammar of Brazilian language,” and Oswald de Andrade claimed in his *Manifesto da Poesia Pau-Brasil*: “We want a language with no archaisms or erudition. A natural and neological type of language. With the contribution of a million errors of all sorts” (cited in Teles [1977], 267). This emphasis placed by Modernist authors on the idea of expressing themselves in a Brazilian language released them from subordination to the classic canons of Portugal and gave way to a style that was freer, looser, more natural and colloquial, and open to regional and popular inspiration. This style came to stay as Brazilian writers set aside the norms of peninsular Portuguese and devoted themselves to writing in a manner closer to their spoken tongue.

In the specific field of poetics, particularly concerning literary forms, the modernist legacy was considerable. If we look at the history of Brazilian poetry, we can observe that the Romantics freed language from classical and neoclassical stiffness and exploited several types of rhythm and themes so far unknown, while the Parnassians devoted themselves to the purification of the vocabulary and produced a poetical language with structural value and architectural sense, and the Sym-

bolists developed a high sense of rhythm and a plasticity of verse, and broadened the musical resonance of the word. Yet, it was with the modernists that Brazilian poetry reached perhaps its highest expression. Modernist poetry at first disdained genres, thus putting value on the free association of ideas, everyday themes, colloquial and familiar expressions and logical disorder. Later, however, it deepened the formal purification, returning to certain disciplines that had been broken by the revolt of 1922, restoring the dignity and severity of language and themes, policing the emotions, with an effort at objectivism and intellectualism, and reestablishing certain fixed genres, such as the sonnet and the ode. And although this greater preoccupation with form was commonplace in the generation of 1945, it can also be seen among important figures of the previous generation, such as Carlos Drummond de Andrade, Jorge de Lima and Cassiano Ricardo.

In fiction, Brazilian literature has attained with Modernism a well-defined physiognomy that places it perhaps at the summit of the field in the Americas. Born in Romanticism and consolidated in Realism, the Brazilian novel reached in Modernism a stage of maturity in every aspect: portrayal of characters and environments, story-telling and construction of the narrative, selection and development of themes, structural planning and stylistic characterization. And although there were diverse currents, some prolonging previous tendencies and others influenced by the establishment of new forms in Western fiction, two major currents stand out. As previously mentioned, these are the national and regional current and a subjectivist and introspective or psychological one. The former, with its predominantly social concerns, found a fertile ground in the Brazilian intellectual milieu and reached perhaps its highest expression in the social regionalist novel, usually classified by cycles—the cycles of the drought, of the backlands, of banditry, of sugar cane, of cacao, of coffee—and involving figures like Raquel de Queirós, José Lins do Rego, Jorge Amado, Graciliano Ramos, and others. The second current, of an introspective nature, also had great repercussions in the country's intellectual cadre and found its most significant expressions in the predominantly psychological novels of Cornélio Pena, Otávio de Faria, Lúcio Cardoso, Murilo Rubião and Autran Dourado, and in the philosophical line of Clarice Lispector. It is also important to mention João Guimarães Rosa, of the 1945 generation, who combined in his fiction the basic principles of both these major trends.

The short story also underwent considerable transformations in the Modernist period and achieved, especially with the 1945 generation, a high stage of public recognition and aesthetic excellence. To the naturalist and exterior view derived from Maupassant as well as to the psychological aesthetic, the modernists brought new dimensions, with a thematic enrichment from regionalism and a transformation of structure, which abandoned the movement of beginning, middle and end. A continuous and objective telling of stories gave way to simple evocation, to snapshots, to episodes rich in suggestion, to intensely poetical slices of atmosphere. This transformation began with Adelino Magalhães, continued with Antônio de Alcântara Machado, Mário de Andrade, and João Alphonsus, and reached its peak with the short-story writers of the last phase of the movement: Clarice Lispector, Autran Dourado, Lígia Fagundes Teles, Osman Lins, Samuel Rawet, Dalton Trevisan and João Guimarães Rosa.

In addition to the short story, the chronicle, a specific type of essay writing which had a solid tradition in Brazil, also went through a considerable development in the Modernist period, reaching a point of refinement that granted it a high literary status in the middle of the twentieth century. Formerly a journalistic genre in the sense that it was published in newspapers and based on episodes of

everyday life, the chronicle gradually lost its journalistic approach and developed a strong lyricism, thus becoming a highly personal genre, an individual and intimate reaction to the spectacle of life, things, and beings. Unlike for the historian or the journalist, for the writer of chronicles facts only have value insofar as they can be used, in the words of Afrânio Coutinho, “as a means or pretext from which he may draw the maximum advantage for the virtuosity of his style, his spirit, his wit, his inventive faculties” (Coutinho [1969], 250). This type of chronicle, which has often been compared with the English informal, familiar and colloquial essay, is characterized exactly by its ambiguity, according to which it often oscillates between the short story, the essay and the prose poem. And if we follow its historical development, from Romanticism on, we can see it turning into a new genre with Machado de Assis, Lima Barreto and João do Rio, and later achieving its full consolidation with Carlos Drummond de Andrade, Rubem Braga, and Fernando Sabino, among others, in the Modernist period.

As might be expected, theater in Brazil also underwent a significant transformation in the Modernist period. Having found a reasonable expression in the Romantic, and later in the realist and naturalist periods, dramatic literature was somewhat stagnant in Brazil at the beginning of the twentieth century, oscillating between the old comedies of errors, based on everyday facts and events, and the importation and adaptation of European plays. With the first generation of Modernists a few isolated playwrights appeared, such as Oswald de Andrade, and a respected theater critic, Antônio de Alcântara Machado, but it was only in the following generations that the revolution in the field of dramatic arts was really accomplished. A series of experimentations was fostered by the spirit of modernist renovation, and a new theater appeared, updated with the European innovations, but also imbued with themes and motives extracted from Brazilian contexts. The appearance of Nelson Rodrigues was a landmark, but there were also other successful playwrights who strongly contributed to the consolidation of Brazilian dramatic production: Dias Gomes, Gianfrancesco Guarnieri, Augusto Boal, Ariano Suassuna and Jorge Andrade, and others.

Another area deeply affected by Modernism in Brazil was literary criticism. Traditionally tied to journalism, Brazilian criticism, when not incorporated into the historiographical schemes of a Sílvia Romero, with its scientific and philosophical pretensions, was either under the sway of Impressionism or based on a sociological or psychological orientation. In reaction to this, a movement of aesthetic criticism developed with Modernism. Though influenced by some foreign currents of a similar nature, like Slavic Formalism, German-Swiss and Spanish Stylistics, and Anglo-American New Criticism, this aesthetic criticism differed from them in an important sense: while privileging the intrinsic elements of the literary work, it never completely abandoned the study of its extrinsic elements. This movement of a scholarly and scientific nature put an end to the amateurism and improvisation in critical commentary, and replaced it with criticism derived from university training.

The plastic arts in Brazil not only were profoundly affected by Modernism, but can be said to have found their way under the influence of this movement. Certainly, some of the more notable events that preceded the Modern Art Week, and that are usually described as antecedents of the Modernist movement, occurred in the field of plastic arts. Such was the case of the painting exhibition, which Anita Malfatti set up in São Paulo in 1917 and which raised a violent reaction on the part of critics, to the point of inhibiting her and of keeping her off the scene for a long time. Victor Brecheret's sculpture exhibition in 1920 was also an important step. Brazilian plastic arts at

the beginning of the twentieth century were essentially subordinated to the academic principles of the preceding century and the innovations brought about by those artists who had had contact with the European Vanguards caused a tremendous impact. These artists incorporated techniques and methods from their European colleagues, but the major accent of their work was the exploitation of Brazilian themes and motives, as can be seen, for example, in Tarsila do Amaral, Di Cavalcanti, Portinari, Pancetti, Guignard, Segall, Goeldi, Rego Monteiro, Ismael Nery, Cícero Dias, and so many others, who granted Brazilian painting an excellence never attained before. Additionally, they replaced the nineteenth-century isolation of Brazilian artists with an active participation in the country's social and political problems, and reflected those issues in their art. In architecture, as well as in painting and sculpture, Brazilian Modernism created an entirely new style that has given the country's cities a new and original look, exemplified by the Mairinque Station, in São Paulo, the building of the Ministry of Education, in Rio de Janeiro, and the Pampulha complex, in Belo Horizonte. Perhaps the most outstanding expression of the new style was the construction of Brasília, by Lúcio Costa and Oscar Niemeyer in the 1950s, which stands out as the symbol of an epoch.

The incorporation of European methods and techniques and the exploitation of Brazilian motives and themes by Modernism gave such an impulse to Brazilian music that it reached its consolidation at that time as a solid and well-established form of expression. Until the beginning of the twentieth century Brazilian music had produced some important works, particularly in the baroque and the romantic periods, but it was only in Modernism that it would find its way and affirm its difference. In the Modern Art Week, the participation of Heitor Villa-Lobos was of vital importance because he achieved excellence in great part through his use of the popular elements of Brazilian culture and through the transfiguration he effected in rhythms and melodies of foreign contribution. After Villa-Lobos, there were figures like Camargo Guarnieri and Francisco Mignone, but the most significant event of the time was the development of the samba, which came to be known internationally as the greatest expression of Brazilian popular music.

Overall, therefore, Modernism was perhaps the greatest intellectual movement to take place in Brazil, and its principles have affected not only all areas of cultural activity, but also other fields of knowledge, as well as the very structure of Brazilian social life. In spite of the iconoclastic banner it assumed at the beginning, mostly in its heroic phase, Modernism was ultimately a constructive movement, and the major trait of its constructive character was the consciousness it developed of Brazilian differences and particular Brazilian issues within the framework of Western civilization. It is true that the movement started out with Brazilian *intelligentsia* wishing to be up to date with European thought and artistic innovation, but these elements were approached with a critical gaze and were carefully selected rather than blindly imported as before. Furthermore, these European elements were not the only ones appropriated by the movement. Brazil's modernist writers also looked back at their nation's literary tradition with a similar critical filter. Hence we have the image of "anthropophagy," which stands out as an emblem of the movement. By taking the aspect of the Tupi Indian culture that most horrified Europeans and by using it as a metaphor of the modernists' attitude towards both the European Vanguards and Brazilian literary movements in the past, the writers of this period marked their position both as citizens of the world and as voices for a culture that was perhaps for the first time reading the world with its own eyes.

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## Belated Arrivals

### Gender, Colonialism and Modernism in Australia

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In their thought-provoking book on modernist women artists and writers, Bridget Elliott and Jo-Ann Wallace write that: “supplementary work examining the specificity of women’s cultural (im)positionings at various ‘outposts of empire’ is needed” (Elliott and Wallace [1994], 156). This article responds to such a call by considering modernism in relation to a particular “outpost of empire,” Australia. Specifically, the interest lies with how modernism was made in Australia, how modernism made Australia, and the ways in which gender, as well as race, operated as crucial categories through which these processes were articulated and contested.

The decision to focus on modernism in Australia is not an arbitrary one. To date, analyses of modernism have paid little attention to “outposts of empire,” not least because of the pervasive assumption, to quote Malcolm Bradbury, that “the Modernist tendency has its roots deep in the culture-capitals of Europe” (Bradbury [1976], 97). Increasingly, though, postcolonial positions are interrogating this assertion and in so doing, are pointing out hitherto unrecognized relations between modernism, European imperialism and “outposts of empire.”

Patrick Williams, for example, has noted that: “for numbers of post-colonial critics [modernism] is a problem because it is seen as deeply complicit with, or at the very least parasitic upon, the power of empire” (Williams [2000], 16). This particular position acquires its persuasive power from at least two contexts. The first involves those modernist works that invested in a form of enlightened primitivism by cannibalising colonized cultures, and the second turns around canonical modernism and how it was imposed on cultures in the service of producing consent to European values and aesthetics. Alongside these postcolonial readings of modernism, furthermore, is another position which suggests that: “[i]nstead of modernism as a metropolitan imposition or cultural domination by the colonizers, there is the possibility that modernism as a collective resistance of the colonized, anti-colonial insurgency at the level of culture” (Williams [2000], 26). Each of these readings successfully intervenes in the idea that modernism was a strictly urban-European phenomenon, and opens up the debate on the relations between modernism and imperialism.

However, such recent work poses a problem for thinking about modernism in relation to Australia, and this difficulty stems from the transference of postcolonial frameworks to readings of modernism. Within the field of postcolonial studies, the binary between colonizer and colonized continues to enjoy disciplinary and institutional authority, and it is onto these terms that the key



postcolonial tropes of complicity and resistance are routinely mapped respectively. It is these tropes that inform recent readings of modernism, including those outlined by Williams.

However, when a settler colony such as Australia is considered in relation to the imperialist desires and resistances of modernism that postcolonial theorists have identified, the perceived cultural work of modernism becomes more complicated. After all, Australia may be thought of as what Anne McClintock has identified as a “break-away” settler colony; those colonies that are “distinguished by their formal independence from the founding metropolitan country, along with continued control over the appropriated colony,” with the result that “they have not undergone decolonization” (McClintock, [1992], 89). Insofar as they are neither Europe nor its others, break-away settler colonies such as Australia both accommodate and resist colonial discourses and practices, and hence they complicate the binaries around which many postcolonial readings of modernism turn.

What I propose to do is to take seriously the insights postcolonial interpretations of modernism have produced, while refusing to emulate their frameworks or conclusions uncritically. In particular, this article declines to reinforce extant arguments that understand modernism in terms of its use value, that is, its capacity for resistance to, and complicity with, imperialism. The assumption is not that there is something (universally) known as modernist that appears in Australian cultural productions; that this “modernism” is a pre-fabricated and “knowable” aesthetic category which may, or even must, be “imposed” or “found” in cultural productions at outposts of empire. Instead, the strategy will be to turn the tropes, as it were, that contributed to the making of a gendered modernism in Australia, and indeed to the making of Australia.

In other words, the issues raised here are positioned with regard to recent postcolonial work on modernism in the spirit of Jacques Derrida’s idea of “supplementarity” (Derrida [1974]), which Elliott and Wallace implicitly signpost in their petition. With the introduction of such supplementary work, the removal of “Europe” from its position of privilege in discussions of modernist productions such as Bradbury’s is promised; the dislodging of certain postcolonial frameworks that express particular understandings of modernism and empire becomes possible; and the functions of these would-be fixed structures can begin to be interrogated to produce other narratives about modernism and empire. Also, with an emphasis on women’s cultural productions, and the ways in which gender has been activated as a category by which modernism may be articulated and disavowed, this “ancillary” emphasis will also work to dismantle the so-called “radical (masculine) nationalist tradition” which has been commonly understood to dominate and determine the intellectual and cultural projects in Australia during the first half of the twentieth century.

In conventional historiographies, the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century mark the “subjunctive mood”—to use Terry Eagleton’s phrase (Eagleton [1990], 25)—of apparently white masculine nationalist appeals against British rule in the colonies in Australia. In 1901, following approximately 120 years of British colonization, Australia was legally recognized as a federated nation. The “radical nationalist tradition,” a largely retrospective and nostalgic cluster of late nineteenth and early twentieth century artists, writers and cultural works, which continued to enjoy a cultural currency well into the 1960s that many would argue has by no means concluded, is thought to have performed a significant part in the nation-building process this political shift signaled.

It was predominantly the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century realist works of “radical nationalist” writers such as Henry Lawson that were imagined to unveil, in the best mimetic man-

ner, what cultural critic, Nettie Palmer, called in her important overview of this tradition, *Modern Australian Literature 1900–1923*: “the most intimate revelation of our life in prose” (Palmer [1924], 57). Indeed, the “essence” of such prose for Palmer and her compeers was far removed from the formal and thematic concerns of late nineteenth-century writers such as Rolf Boldrewood and Rosa Campbell Praed. These particular authors, as well as many others, were concerned more with writing romances, in the broadest sense of the genre, for readers at the center of the British empire than for an “Australian” audience that needed to be constructed as well as instructed in the (uncertain) values of the new nation.

In this context, it is important to recognize that “the modern” to which the title of Palmer’s text refers, signals cultural productions which sought to cast off those colonial trappings that not only positioned Australia on the periphery of the British empire, but rendered Australia, its non-Aboriginal inhabitants and its cultural productions, as inferior, as not-quite contemporaries of the inhabitants and innovations at the imperial “center.” Yet Palmer’s nationalist idea of the modern was not only antithetical to earlier “imperial” romance writings (although the case could be made that many realist productions were by no means as far removed from the formal and thematic interests of their contemporaries, as many commentators might have wished), it was also increasingly seen from the 1920s onwards, the time in which Palmer was writing, as hostile to modernism; or, rather, certain notions of modernism that were themselves beginning to accrue specific, if controversial, significations.

During the period between the two world wars, the Australian market saw an unprecedented rise in consumption. At this time, Australia primarily functioned as both the source of raw materials for goods made in Britain and as a market for these commodities. Consequently, during the 1920s, middle-class consumption in Australia was increasingly addressed through the emergent profession of advertising, which responded to the mass production of ready-made goods, relied on technical improvements in reproductive processes in art and drew on the new science of psychology to market the modern. Consumption in Australia was undergoing modernization, and it was the modern that was to be consumed.

The forms of this “modern” were diverse. Margaret Preston, an artist who would come to be closely identified with “the modern,” suggested as much when she wrote in 1927 that:

She [white, middle-class woman] feels this is a mechanical age—a scientific one—highly civilised and unaesthetic. She knows that the time has come to express her surroundings in her work. All around her in the simple domestic life is machinery—patent ice chests that need no ice, machinery does it; irons heated by invisible heat; washing-up machines; electric sweepers, and so on. They all surround her and influence her mind. (Preston [1927], 16)

“The modern” could range from tangible goods, to “lifestyles” that exceeded the use-values of the commodities with which they were linked, to ideologies that “influence the mind.” Indeed, while modern appliances such as “irons heated by invisible heat” were understood to relieve women, who could afford them, of the drudgery of domestic tasks, new pressures confronted white women with regard to their domestic responsibilities. In Australia, these “duties” came progressively more under the domain of scientific and technological discourses, which emphasized women’s role in keeping their families “clean” and “healthy” to improve the “nation’s race.” In addition, they enforced the idea that the proper place for white, middle-class women was either in the home or in the department store.

In Australia, department stores such as David Jones were important sites for the selling of the modern. The following suggests as much:

Modernism in decoration has come to Sydney, and the man [sic] in the street may see it in the display by David Jones's windows, arranged by Mr. H. W. Bindoff [...] 'How do Sydney people react to this new decorative style?' Mr. Bindoff was asked. 'Curiously enough, in spite of their isolation from European centers, they seem to be ready for it [...] It is most encouraging to find that it appeals to Australians, and makes me feel that we are not so much in a backwater as some people would have us think. The modernist movement in decoration is certain to reach these shores, and it is a hopeful sign that people are not antagonistic to it, but somewhat prepared to accept and follow it. (Modern Art Display at David Jones [1929], 54–5)

Notwithstanding for the moment the notion of belatedness that underpins this account of the "arrival" of modernism in Australia, it is significant to recognize that those department stores, which increasingly featured modernist design in all its guises, also played a part in the gendering of this new decorative style. The predominant presence of women as both workers and consumers on the shop floors of Australia since the early years of the twentieth century encouraged the popular and explicit gendering of consumerism and commercialism as feminine (Reekie [1993]). Furthermore, women's magazines such as *The Home*, in which department stores placed their advertisements, actively encouraged their white, middle-class feminine readership to participate in the commodity culture these stores supported through the presentation of new images of modern commodities and lifestyles. Published in Australia from 1920 to 1942, *The Home* was dedicated, by its editor's account, "to the cult of dress, and the best illustrations which art can compass"; it also promised to keep "readers in touch with the trend of fashion and the last requirements of feminine adornment" (Ure Smith [1920], 1). Later commentators have accurately suggested that this publication "considered itself the mouthpiece of modernism in Australia insofar as it pertained to architecture, graphic design, interior decoration and a certain fashionable lifestyle" (Holden [1995], 149).

Artists such as Hera Roberts, Margaret Preston and Thea Proctor were at the forefront of these developments in visual representation, and they were also acclaimed as the arbiters of the new modern style, and lifestyle, that their artworks promoted. The June 1922 volume of *The Home*, for example, features an interview with Proctor in which she urges Australian women to develop "taste" for the modern aesthetic (Lister [1922], 37), and in a later issue, Preston's work is included among the fabrics, architecture and furnishings photographed by Harold Cazneaux, which are collectively presented as the epitome of desired modern domestic décor and design (Cazneaux [1929], 33).

The cover art these women produced for *The Home* was particularly important in the fabrication and selling of a modern lifestyle and its commodities to (newly identified) female consumers. With a reliance on technological developments in the graphic arts, photography and typography, these works employed bright blocks of color and stylized images to arrest the movement of angular, elongated and almost androgynous "flapper" bodies clothed in fashionable sheaths; they also emphasized geometric feminine facial features colored by mass-produced cosmetics that were emerging as signs of modern femininity in commercial discourses. There was a heightened sense of surface, performance and artifice associated with modern feminine bodies in these representations, and it is fair to say that in Australia in the 1920s, these cultural productions were shaping the notion of white, middle-class modern femininity (as well as the domestic middle-class female consumer), at

the same time that they themselves came to be viewed as modernist, feminine, popular, commercial and decorative (MacDonald [1929]). This view was not simply a consequence of the gender of their primary cultural producers and of their equation with the commercial arts, it was also because capitalist consumerism, with which the commercial arts were closely linked, was increasingly perceived as an explicitly feminine activity. Furthermore, to the degree that notions of cultural value turned around any distinction between high and low art, or more precisely, that debates in Australia about modernism and nationalism contributed to the construction of such a hierarchical value system, feminine, popular modernism was perceived on such bases to be inferior to masculine nationalist productions whose claims to cultural authority could be partially enforced around these terms and their attributed meanings.

Such an apprehension of modernism as antithetical to a national culture might be further gleaned from the following text that served as an advertisement for *The Home* in the prestigious art journal, *Art in Australia*:

MODERNISM has reached AUSTRALIA. The wave of modernism which has flooded the intellectual centres of civilised countries has penetrated Australia. It is already perceptible in its art, its music, its architecture, its household furniture and decoration, its literature, its photography and its landscape gardening (Advertisement [1929], n.p.)

The sentiment of this advertisement is representative of *The Home*'s enthusiastic understanding of modernism as a fashionable and popular import. However, what is of equal interest is the effect of its activation of spatialized tropes of time, namely, arrival and belatedness, which also find repeated expression in colonial discourses. In this advertisement, modernism is rendered both the desired, immanent object of Australia (as a becoming "civilized" nation) and the marker of a denied coevalness that renders Australia not quite contemporary with the centers of cultural innovation that are established as such through this organization of space and time. There is no *necessary* reason why such a model should shape understandings of modernism in Australia. What might it mean that such popular accounts of modernism recycle and rely on colonial tropes?

Structurally, the neo-colonial capitalist economy was organized in such a way that many "modern" products were produced in Britain and transported to markets in Australia. However, the colonial tropes in this advertisement also engender a sense of eager anticipation for "the modern," and hence an uncritical acceptance of capitalism and its imperialist need to create markets across the globe. In short, such imaginings of modernism performed operations of ideological displacement to the extent that they smuggled in the ongoing power of colonial tropes which arranged the world spatially, ideologically and economically in the face of increasingly atrophying colonial administrations and "break-away colonies" to support neo-colonial capitalist projects. Modernism was not so much an aesthetic imposition as an economic relation that rehearsed colonial structures of power.

For the "radical national tradition," the idea that Australia might be a recipient outpost of imported aesthetics as well as goods, was inimical to its goals of an "indigenous culture" that would register the nation's supposed "postcolonial maturity." For another contemporaneous collective of artists and writers, however, which gathered around the short-lived little magazine, *Vision* (1923–1924), modernism deserved the utmost contempt. Norman Lindsay, a controversial participant in Australian cultural and political life in the 1920s who oversaw *Vision*, was a particularly fierce opponent of modernism. He and many "members" of the *Vision* group (including Lindsay's son Jack, and the

poets Hugh McCrae, R. D. Fitzgerald and Kenneth Slessor), saw modernism as a disease that had infected and rendered effeminate the literature and art of Europe that Jewish art dealers peddled (Walker [1987]).

It was as a consequence of this anti-Semitic interpretation of modernism, as well as a new twist on colonial tropes, that Lindsay and others came to imagine Australia as a heterotopic site for an apparently much needed literary and artistic renaissance. In contrast to modernist-plagued Europe, Australia possessed “Youth” and “Vision” [Norman Lindsay [1923a], 3]. In other words, rather than perceiving Australia’s apparent geographical and cultural “distance” from the imperial center as a disadvantage, as colonial discourses would have it, or declaring this value-laden spatial arrangement defunct in the manner of the radical national tradition, Australia was made through discourses of modernism, or rather anti-modernism, as the only place in the world in which a pre-modern(ist) renaissance could be revitalized and realized.

Importantly, though, this claim, with its seemingly nationalist resonance, sought to transcend what Jack Lindsay called the “kindergarten of art,” namely “a national basis in expression” (Jack Lindsay [1923], 30). Instead, *Vision*’s preference was for an art and literature that would “see beyond the actual thing to its imaginative analogy in a higher condition of sense” (Norman Lindsay [1923a], 3). Yet this somewhat recondite “sight” was seemingly available to white men only: the Australian renaissance Norman Lindsay advocated was represented in his visual texts by female nudes variously posed as wood nymphs and Greek goddesses whose sexual availability facilitated explicitly masculine libidinal and cultural liberation (Tsokhas [1996]).

If the *Vision* group sought to transcend both the modern and the national, others were negotiating and complicating these two categories. As the following quotation from an editorial published in *Art in Australia* asserts, the visual works of Margaret Preston in particular were seen to synthesize appropriated Aboriginal art forms with “modern techniques” to produce an indigenous national art:

Much interest has been displayed in Mrs. Margaret Preston’s brilliantly successful application of Australian aboriginal [sic] art to modern designing. She is the first artist to make the art of the Australian aboriginal [sic] a serious study, and already her knowledge and enthusiasm have seriously infected designers who have been struggling unsuccessfully to develop a distinctive national type of design (Ure Smith and Gellert [1925], n.p.).

Many of Preston’s visual and written texts predated the so-called “Jindyworobak” movement with which Preston shared some concerns, and which briefly emerged during the late 1930s to promote an extreme cultural nationalism. Indeed, Preston occasionally contributed illustrations and essays to the Jindyworobak publications. The Jindyworobaks appealed to Australian poets to sever their ties with England and reject foreign influences, including modernism, which were understood to impoverish Australian aesthetic life: it was the appropriation of Aboriginal arts by non-Aboriginal poets that was to advance the emergence of a poetry expressive of authentic Australian culture. Significantly, the Jindyworobak project refused to recognize the cultural contexts that made this art meaningful for the indigenous peoples. It was the poetry of non-Aborigines that was understood to express a supposed indigenous (read non-Aboriginal) culture found in the “art and song” of Aboriginal cultures.

Preston’s work and writings suggest similar preoccupations for “modern art.” In her essay, “Art for Crafts—Aboriginal Art Artfully Applied,” published in *The Home* in 1924, Preston wrote

"Australia must honestly confess to having no designs of her [sic] own." To remedy this supposed deficiency she recommended a "study of our own aboriginal art [...] Many designs for curtains, floorings etc., are inspired from such sources" (Preston [1924], 30). "Modern art," which drew possessively on what was understood to be indigenous art, was the means to construct a national identity and aesthetic for middle-class Australians while Aborigines themselves were denied the articulation of their productions and histories, and subjected to destructive neo-colonial policies whose effects continue to be felt today.

With the demise of *The Home* in 1942, women modernist artists in Australia found that there were fewer means by which they could circulate their works. This coincided with a reimagining of modernism in Australia in the 1940s, which culminated, infamously, with the so-called Ern Malley "experiment" associated with the journal, *Angry Penguins*. First published in 1940, *Angry Penguins* was initially affiliated with the Adelaide University Arts Association, and was edited primarily by Max Harris, D. B. Kerr and later, John Reed. Contributors to the magazine came to include artists such as John Perceval, Sidney Nolan, Albert Tucker and Danila Vasilieff. Identified at various times as modernist, expressionist, symbolist, surrealist and avant-garde, and despite the differences evident in both their political expressions and artistic productions, these men are now regarded as the leading producers of modernist art in Australia. Peter Cowan, Alister Kershaw, Elisabeth Lambert, Geoffrey Dutton, Hal Porter and Max Harris, among others, wrote poetry and prose that was published in various issues, and the work of overseas writers such as Harry Roskolenko, Dylan Thomas and Karl Shapiro was also featured in the journal. The inclusion of these latter three writers suggests the editors' efforts to promote links between Australian-based cultural producers and participants in various modernist movements "elsewhere" in part because of their dissatisfaction with what one editorial identified as the "growing insistence" by various nationalist movements in Australia on certain aesthetic forms and content (Harris [1943], 2).

In other words, this journal was associated with, and seen to endorse and encourage, modernist cultural productions in the sense that modernism signified "experimentation" and "internationalism," or at least a rejection of realist forms and nationalism. And in June 1944, *Angry Penguins* published a "commemorative number" to a hitherto "unknown mechanic and insurance peddler," Ern Malley, who was, Harris wrote in his introductory preface, "one of the most outstanding poets that we have produced here" (Harris [1944], 2). It was a belief he would continue to defend well after it was revealed that he had been the victim of a hoax.

"Ern Malley" and his poems turned out to be an "experiment" undertaken by two Australian poets, James McAuley and Harold Stewart. They later claimed they pieced together the poems in an afternoon, picking at random lines from various texts, which they attributed to the deceased Malley in order to find out whether, in their words: "those who write, and those who praise so lavishly this kind of writing"—by which they meant "modernist"—could distinguish "the real product from consciously and deliberately concocted nonsense" (Heyward [1993], 138). "Nonsense" was not the only feature that modernism in Australia was felt to entertain at this time by its detractors. In the context of wider political and aesthetic debates over the rise of fascism in Europe, the causes and effects of yet another world war, and the role of communism and nationalism in political and cultural agendas in Australia, modernism was variously seen as irrational, obscure, elitist, nihilistic, fashionable, anti-democratic, pessimistic, fragmented, subjective, fascist, escapist, transformative and revolutionary. It was amidst this sense of exigency that the Ern Malley hoax, according to cultural

critic, Don Anderson, struck the “great blow against any possibility of the modernist enterprise in Australia.” Furthermore, Anderson argues:

It seems to me that one could without exaggeration say that the Ern Malley hoax was the greatest catastrophe to our [Australian] letters [... It] took, for example, until 1985–86 [...] for the anti-conservative camp to recover from the Ern Malley hoax. (Anderson [1988], 91–2)

While Anderson’s view is suggestive, it is difficult to accept outright his proposition that this incident alone suppressed or dissuaded literary and artistic modernism in Australia until at least the 1980s. After all, during the late 1950s and early 1960s a “tradition of the modern” was increasingly sought in Australian academies as a commendatory marker of cultural progress and maturity in a way that recalled, recycled and reinforced colonial organizations of space and cultural value. For instance, cultural critic Vincent Buckley wrote in 1957 that: “We are not quite modern, as other literatures understand modernity. Yet we are on our way to being mature (Buckley [1957], 25). It was a goal encouraged by the canonization of “high” cultural modernism in universities in the United States; fostered by the concurrent appearance of New Criticism as the ideal (if not actual) critical orthodoxy of those institutions; and underpinned by a neo-colonial concern that Australia, as a “break-away colony,” was not yet culturally modern in comparison to European centers. The realization of a (potentially oxymoronic) tradition of the modern would signal Australia’s coming of age.

It is as a partial consequence of this imperative to establish a “modern tradition” that the texts of Christina Stead, Eleanor Dark and Patrick White, among others, are now identified and celebrated as modernist. For example, Michael Wilding has hailed the Nobel Prize winning White as “the great Australian modernist” (Wilding [1995], 24), arguing that

[c]onfronting socialist realism with its focus on the representatively human, on the socially progressive, on the readily intelligible, modernism chose to privilege the alienated, the outsider, the decadent, the deviant, celebrating human isolation and non-cooperation, expressing despair rather than hope. White works firmly within these assumptions. (Wilding [1995], 25)

Not unlike the *Angry Penguins*, White was determined, in his own words, “to prove that the Australian novel is not necessarily the dreary, dun-coloured offspring of journalistic realism” (White [1958], 39). In this self-proclaimed effort to contest the hegemonic claim of “journalistic realism,” White’s novels entertain competing epistemological and representational economies. Thematically and formally, they are preoccupied with the internal lives of visionary figures whose individual quests for transcendental truth (*The Aunt’s Story*) and being (*The Vivisector*) are represented through non-mimetic narratives. Such quests, though, often take place in realist settings (*The Tree of Man*), which render Australia a site for both mystical epiphany and banality (*Riders in the Charriot*, *The Solid Mandala*, *The Season at Sarsaparilla*).

The works of White’s contemporary, Christina Stead, are now also heralded as modernist (as well as Marxist, postmodernist and feminist—against Stead’s disregard for organized feminist movements), in part because of their “fascination with narrative itself” and their preoccupations with the inner lives of their protagonists that take precedent over plot (*Seven Poor Men of Sydney*, *The Man Who Loved Children*), which link Stead “with such near contemporaries as Joyce and Lawrence” (Gribble [1994], 3). Interestingly, Wilding chooses to place Stead’s work in what he calls a

“committed, left-wing realist mode”; “democratic” and “egalitarian” in its causality and motivation, “precise and laconic in its verbal manner,” namely everything he imagines White’s modernist work to oppose (Wilding [1995], 26), hence pointing to the slipperiness and ongoing politicization of modernism in Australia.

Eleanor Dark is perhaps the least well-known “Australian modernist” out of the three mentioned here. She published short stories in *The Home* (Dark [1935, 1937]), yet her trilogy of European settlement in Australia from 1788–1814, *The Timeless Land*, is arguably her most famous work. More recent analyses of some of her other texts, including *Prelude to Christopher*, *Sun Across the Sky* and *Waterway*, have pointed to her “modernist” use of interior monologue to explore the psychology of her characters.

What largely informs these identifications and celebrations of Australian modernist texts is the idea that modernism is a set of (universal) themes and forms that must be “found” in Australian cultural productions for them to be recognized as modernist: the possibility that their supposed universalism may entail historically and geographically specific systems of value, is left largely unquestioned. Yet the effects of this idea are crucial for thinking further about the relations between modernism and empire.

Consider the conclusion of Wilding’s essay on White. It not only repeats Buckley’s conjoining of modernism with national maturity; it carries somewhat troubling assumptions and assertions about “the West,” Australia, and their relations with modernism. Wilding writes, with regard to White: “At least we can say that Australia stands with other western cultures in having an uncompromising modernist as its privileged literary icon. We are certainly part of the modern world in that” (Wilding [1995], 33). Here, the implicit assertion is that “the West” entertains modernist literature, and that the existence of a modernist literature in Australia is the marker of its successful claim to “the West,” with all the privileges this trope is accorded in colonial discourse. Hence, for Australia to become modern and Western, two qualities that are seen as desirable, it must have a modernist tradition of which White is installed as the apparent apogee.

Admittedly, recent analyses of Dark and Stead’s respective cultural productions are producing important “supplementary accounts” of women’s modernist work in Australia, to return to the quotation that introduced this article. However, rather than rehearsing them here, it is useful to conclude by looking again at the much discussed Ern Malley affair to examine the role gender plays in constructions of modernism in Australia.

Harris received Ern Malley’s poems in October 1943 by post. Accompanying them was a letter from “Ethel Malley,” which announced her brother’s untimely death at the Keatsian age of twenty-five years and four months, and petitioned the editors’ opinions on the texts. Ethel’s ensuing letters to Harris sketched out the rather meager details of her brother’s life and illness around which the figure of Ern Malley and “his” poems have been subsequently fabricated and discussed.

Yet no notice has been given to the fabrication of “Ethel” or the way in which issues of gender inform the imaginings of modernism in this context. True, there is little material with which to work, but here is an extract from her first letter to Harris: “It would be a kindness if you could let me know whether you think there is anything in them. I am not a literary person myself and I do not feel I understand what he wrote, but I feel I ought to do something about them” (Heyward [1993], 55). Harris’s private assessment of Ethel, which he shared in a letter to his friend and fellow *Angry Penguin*’s editor, John Reed, was that she was “an almost illiterate woman, who said they [the poems]



were found in the papers of her brother [...She] didn't understand them and thought they were the product of her brother's illness and its effect on his mind" (Heyward [1993], 58). To put it very simply, Ethel is excluded from both recognizing great modernist art *and* from the intellectual exercise of the hoax.

For Harris, Ethel is "almost illiterate" and hence unable to recognize sophisticated, crafted "modernist" poetry when she reads it, although for McAuley and Stewart, Ethel's claim to non-understanding mocks what they saw as the *Angry Penguin's* false avowal of modernist cultural production as "real production," or "genuine literature." However, Ethel's non-comprehension is also a consequence of those gender orders on which the letter draws to construct her: she is aligned with those "feminine" qualities of emotion and instinct—she *feels* she does not understand and she *feels* she should "do something" about the poems—that preclude her participation. Debates over modernism in the 1940s were, it would seem, of the intellect, and masculine affairs only.

This might seem like an apocryphal point to make. However, the creation and subsequent reading of "Ethel" in the Ern Malley hoax registers the dominant gender orders around which modernism was made across disciplines in Australia in the 1930s and 1940s, and has been understood subsequently. For example, Richard Haese, an art scholar with an interest in Australian modernism, has argued that during the 1930s art schools were crowded with

young girls waiting for their debutante ball or middle-aged women concerned as much with permanent waves as with art. Among this crowd could be found embattled groups of young [male] intellectuals in search of a communion of the intellect and the spirit. (Haese [1988], 19)

Haese's account suggests not only an insensitivity to the social roles women were expected to fulfill in the 1930s and 1940s, but also highlights, uncritically, the idea that modernism was increasingly seen as "high art" of the intellect, a domain distinct from the "feminine" concerns of fashion and decoration that were, still, supposedly the province of women. During this time, modernism was detached from decoration and transferred to the serious art that men produced. In thinking about the shift in the gendering of modernism from the 1920s to the late 1930s and 1940s, Jeanette Hoorn has argued that: "once modernism was recognized as a dominant discourse it became the province of men" (Hoorn [1994], 27). Conversely, it could be argued that it was only when modernism was understood as the domain of men that it was considered culturally powerful in Australia.

The issue of modernism in Australia sets in motion a number of questions. What, if any, are the relations between modernism and imperialism? How does the raising of the issue of a very specific form of colonialism—settler capitalism—effect current understandings of modernism, as diverse as these are? How might an analysis of modernism in relation to a settler society and its cultural productions unsettle, contribute to or indeed confirm prevailing narratives about that culture? In what ways does an emphasis on issues of gender refigure narratives of modernism and settler colonialism, and how might modernism and settler colonialism call on certain constructions of gender, under what conditions, and with what effects? The purpose of this discussion has been to provide a framework for these questions and to outline potential responses to them. It has sought to demonstrate that an emphasis on the relations between modernism and "outposts of empire" such as Australia requires a shift in current disciplinary frameworks through which both colonialism and modernism are read. This attests to the conclusion that in its multiple forms, modernism was, and is, a politically charged and culturally complex phenomenon.

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## Modernisme in Catalonia

BRAD EPPS

*Harvard University*

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*For my friend, Jordi Castellanos*

### Places and People

In 1888, Narcís Oller, the premier realist-naturalist novelist of late nineteenth-century Catalonia was amazed by what he saw. The expanse of technological innovations, the diverse national pavilions, the ornate brick-laden *Arc de Triomf*, the rush of people, all set Oller's observant intelligence on fire: "The hubbub, the feverish pace of work never before seen, the titanic effort that gave such hardy proof of our hidden energies and our thirst for progress, ignited my imagination, my Catalanism, my faith in the Catalan people, my hope for better days" (Oller [1962], 105).<sup>1</sup> The World's Fair, or *Exposició Universal*, that was the source of Oller's admiration was the first of its kind in Spain. Built on the site of a military citadel that had once served to launch attacks by Bourbon forces centered in Madrid on a restless and industrious population, the Exposition was at once a symbolic victory and a financial calamity. Amid slapdash constructions and fly-by-night corporations, accusations of fiscal incompetence and civic irresponsibility, strikes and other signs of working class unrest, the Exposition managed to garner one far from negligible success. Simply put, the Exposition put Barcelona on the map of modernity and became a much-debated signpost of *Modernisme*, itself a much-debated cognate of Modernism. What is perhaps less debatable is that Barcelona, as the capital of what an increasing number of Catalans understood as a nation without a state, prepared to eclipse Madrid and to shine in the reflected glory of Paris.

A few years later, in September 1893, in the then tranquil seaside village of Sitges just south of Barcelona, another celebration took place. The *Festa Modernista*, or Modernist Festival, lacked the heady grandeur and massive expenditure of the Exposition, but it left, nonetheless, an indelible mark on modern Catalan culture. The Festival brought together some of the most creative individuals working in Catalonia: among others, the novelist and critic Raimon Casellas, the poet and essayist Joan Maragall, the musician Enric Morera, and the artist and writer Santiago Rusiñol. The centerpiece of the festival was the performance of Maurice Maeterlinck's *L'intruse* (The Intruder, 1890), a symbolist work in which blindness and insight, truth and death, are suggestively brought to the foreground. Translated into Catalan by Pompeu Fabra, the linguist who would be instrumental in the normalization of the language, and performed by Casellas, Rusiñol, and others, Maeterlinck's play had virtually nothing in common with the positivist protocols of realist-naturalist writers like Oller. The progressive critic Jaume Brossa wrote that everything in *L'intruse* was "vaporous" and

vague (Brossa [1984], 139),<sup>2</sup> terms that many would later apply to Catalan *Modernisme* per se. Rusiñol, who was crucial to the organization of the Festival, had stimulated interest in local arts and crafts as well. He had seen how foreign travelers to Spain, though often enthralled to a stereotypical exoticism, appreciated art works and artists, most notably El Greco, that Spaniards themselves had largely discounted. Rusiñol created a small museum, *El Cau Ferrat* (The Iron Lair), that showcased a variety of objects, particularly wrought iron, glass, and ceramics, and that served as a more permanent counterpart to the performative and programmatic ethos that marked the Modernist Festivals. Rusiñol and his colleagues (Ramon Casas, Alexandre de Riquer, Miquel Utrillo, and others) believed in the ability of art to reveal and transform reality, and they strove to refine and disseminate their beliefs as critical to a truly modern society, open and relatively progressive. In this, they shared a number of the suppositions that underlay the Universal Expositions, most importantly the interrelation of the arts, the trust in progress, and the cultivation of international cooperation and cosmopolitanism as a driving force of Catalanism.

That an international movement would bolster national, even nationalist, feelings was certainly not exclusive to Catalonia, but it played there in an especially acute manner. Catalonia, after all, was not a sovereign nation state, but, at best, an aspirant nation state, and its place in international movements was vexed, to say the least. The Catalan language, whose official suppression dates from the War of Spanish Succession, continued to be a cause of contention, with centralist forces interested in maintaining the primacy of Castilian. By 1880, Valentí Almirall, a prominent figure of progressive Catalanism, calls for Spain to act as a sister rather than a stepmother to Catalonia (Almirall [1984], 58) and in 1886, in *Lo catalanisme*, rails against the imposition of Castilian as the language of the Spanish state. Years later, in *La nacionalitat catalana* (Catalan Nationality, 1906), the more conservative and ultimately more influential Enric Prat de la Riba impugns the system by which Castilian hegemony is “disguised” (disfressat) under the name of Spanish (Prat [1978], 66–7). Both Almirall and Prat, for all their differences, contend that language and national identity are intimately intertwined; the modernization of the nation entails, that is, the recuperation of the language.

The recuperations, awakenings, and revivals remit, in part, to the romantically inspired *Renaixença*, retroactively dated as beginning in 1833 with the publication, in Catalan, of Bonaventura Carles Aribau’s poem “La pàtria” (The Fatherland). Composed in Madrid, Aribau’s poem makes nostalgic reference not to Catalan but to Limousin, which constituted, according to August Rafanell, “a stable, uniform, and elegant foil to a deteriorated Catalan-Valencian-Balearic bereft of a national dimension, a dimension already occupied by Spanish” (Rafanell [1991], 9). Limousin, in other words, served to counter “the progressive breakdown of the cohesion of the Catalan territories and the accompanying conscience of difference (especially among Valencians and Balearics)” (Rafanell [1991], 9).<sup>3</sup> The tendency to look beyond the peninsula, and hence beyond the Spanish state, and in so doing to forge a more unified understanding of the Catalan language characterizes an array of cultural endeavors in Catalonia, the first and most industrialized part of Spain. Industrialization, conspicuous in the Basque Country as well, effectively set Catalonia apart from the rest of Spain and stimulated, or at least dovetailed, the vindication of Catalan language and culture, their *modernization*. The upsurge in economic prosperity, the advent of more mechanized means of transportation and communication (the first railroad in Spain ran between Barcelona and Mataró), the demographic shifts and spectacular growth of urban areas, primarily Barcelona, all contributed to a new appreciation of nature and nation. This new appreciation was accompanied, at first, by a renewed apprecia-

tion of the past, when the state of nations and the significance of nationality were quite different. If Aribau conjures up an image of his homeland by appealing to Limoges, others after him appeal to a growing roster of places that augurs something cosmopolitan, international, or universal.

Jacint Verdaguer, the major poet of the *Renaixença*, underscores Catalan ties with Provence and Provençal in his correspondence with Frédéric Mistral, driving force of the *Félibrige* (arguably the first concerted cultural effort at decentralization and “regional” linguistic rehabilitation in France) and recipient of the Nobel Prize in 1904. More generally, the *Jocs Florals* (literally, “Floral Games”), poetic competitions founded in 1393 and revived in 1859, are informed by a medievalizing romanticism with an emphasis on *Fides, Patria, Amor* that harks back to Occitania and troubadour lyric. The troubadour is the paradigmatic figure of the *Jocs*, and references to the gay science abound. While the *Jocs Florals* provided, as Josep Yxart wrote in 1885, a way out of “the insipid academicism, all puffed up and powdered, of the eighteenth century” and a “return to the true inspiration of fields and streets” (Yxart [1980], 28),<sup>4</sup> they also gave way to some rather soppy poetry. Some very fine poetry nevertheless did find a forum in the *Jocs*, and Verdaguer’s was at the forefront. Verdaguer’s *L’Atlàntida* (1878) offers an allegory of the fall of Atlantis, the rise of Spain, and the projected “discovery” of America, but *Canigó* (1886), his other great epic poem, is at once more personal and more focused on Catalonia, in particular the Pyrenees, site of the mountain Canigó. Verdaguer’s religiously inflected mythification of the mountains has a profoundly national dimension that Angel Guimerà extends and revises in *Terra baixa* (Low Country, 1896), an emotionally charged and immensely popular play in which the low country with its cities and ports serves as the degraded counterpart to the mountains. Verdaguer and Guimerà, both of whom received prizes in the *Jocs Florals* of 1877, confront the decadence of Catalonia by way of a revalorization of folklore, the natural landscape, and, in the case of the priest Verdaguer, the Catholic tradition. For his part, the more secular Guimerà, wavering between romanticism and realism, enjoyed considerable success outside of Catalonia and assumed an active role in the increasing politicization of the otherwise culturalist *Renaixença*.

The politicization of the *Renaixença* entails, tellingly enough, its dissolution, and it is with the imbrication of politics and aesthetics, even in the anti-political guise of art for art’s sake, that *Modernisme* can be said to come into its own. Guimerà, an ambivalent precursor of *Modernisme*, was the first president of the Barcelona Athenaeum to deliver his inaugural address in Catalan, an act that caused a veritable furor. Guimerà’s political activities, including his participation in such episodes of Catalanist reaffirmation as the “Memorial de Greuges” or Record of Grievances (1885), along with Verdaguer, and the “Bases de Manresa” or Bases for a Catalan Regional Constitution drawn up in Manresa (1892) are consonant with the rise of the public intellectual. Verdaguer likewise assumes—or suffers—a public persona and attempts to earn money with his craft, making him something of a professional writer (Castellanos [1997], 25). On the heels of Zola’s intervention in the Dreyfus Affair (*J’accuse*, 1898), professional, public, and politicized intellectuals become increasingly common. The tensions between political engagement, financial gain, public recognition, and aesthetic autonomy are, of course, notoriously complex. If the *Renaixença* falls prey to a kind of folkloric inconsequentiality that many *modernistes* locate in the *Jocs Florals*, both Verdaguer and Guimerà evince a concern for the poor and the oppressed that is hardly inconsequential. This is not to say that such concern is a required feature of modern aesthetic production in Catalonia. Although *Modernisme* constitutes a loosely programmatic attempt to alter contemporary reality, it

also takes, by way of Rusiñol, Adrià Gual, Josep Roviralta, and others, a more refined, impressionistic, and anti-materialist path. Such lyrical plays as Rusiñol's *L'alegria que passa* (Happiness Goes By, 1898) and *Cigales i formigues* (Grasshoppers and Ants, 1901) present a poetically sensitive artist, or group of artists, heroically at odds with a prosaically insensitive society.

The theater, entailing as it does a public presence, is especially significant in the circulation of new attitudes and ideas. Maeterlinck's suggestiveness, showcased in Sitges and extended throughout Catalonia, does not saturate the public stage, for Henrik Ibsen's more socially engaged theater also leaves its mark. Joan Puig i Ferrer's *Aigües encantades* (Enchanted Waters, 1908) is a case in point, with dramatic tension concentrated in the friction between obscurantist forces of superstition and oligarchy and forward-thinking forces of science and technology. Puig's regenerationist criticism of anti-intellectual traditionalism does not lead him to abandon, however, a romantically laced veneration of nature shared by many *modernistes*. The element of sociopolitical critique, also appreciable in Puig's *La dama enamorada* (The Lady in Love, 1908), is even more pronounced in Ignasi Iglésias's early works, such as *El cor del poble* (The Heart of the People, 1902) and *Les garses* (The Magpies, 1905). The latter piece criticizes the corrupting influence of money gained without effort, and reasserts the value of individual work, talent, and thought. Accordingly, *Les garses* has been read as an apology of bourgeois moderation and productivity (Marfany [1990], 227). A man of fairly modest origins, Iglésias did indeed eventually accommodate himself, as with *Foc nou* (New Fire, 1909), to the bourgeois appropriation of *Modernisme*. Now, if even the most politically progressive theater can valorize collectivity by way of individuality, more resolutely symbolist theater, placing a premium on the sense and sensibility of the "chosen" and the "select," seems considerably less ambivalent—despite its celebration of ambiguity and innuendo. In fact, the more self-consciously select propositions of a relatively small group of artists, poets, and playwrights, have often been taken, rightly or wrongly, as the *ne plus ultra* of *modernista* production in Catalonia.

Adrià Gual is the best-known proponent of an aesthetically centered theater. In 1898, Gual founds the *Teatre Íntim* (Intimate Theater), which provides a space for Greek classics, Shakespeare, Goethe, *Commedia dell'arte*, and symbolist works. Though Ibsen is also represented, such titles as *Nocturn* (Nocturne, 1896) and *Silenci* (Silence, 1897) give a measure of what is ever so delicately at stake. Rusiñol, with whom Gual is often linked, pens works with similar titles such as *El pati blau* (The Blue Patio, 1903) and *El místic* (The Mystic, 1904), the latter reportedly based on the figure of Verdaguer. Interestingly, despite its spiritually tinged title, *El místic* appears less sure than *L'alegria que passa* that art is the surrogate of religion and gestures, albeit weakly, to a sort of social functionality. Still, a highly aesthetic impression obtains. Delicate, heady, even precious, these plays, and others like them, quickly become the butt of jokes. Decried by Joan Pérez-Jorba, Pere Coromines, Josep Pijoan, Alexandre Cortada, and Joan Maragall, to name but a few, Gual falls out of favor with his more socially oriented contemporaries. And yet, Gual's *Misteri de dolor* (Mystery of Pain, 1904) and *Els pobres menestrals* (The Poor Artisans, 1908) do not, despite the title of the first, fit effortlessly within established symbolist parameters. Similarly, Rusiñol's *Llibertat!* (Liberty!, 1901) and *L'hèroe* (The Hero, 1903), the first confronting racism and the second the deleterious effects of the colonial war in Cuba and the Philippines, though complicit with bourgeois notions of measure and control, are certainly not indifferent to sociopolitical reality (Marfany [1990], 227). Be that as it may, much of the literature produced at the turn of the century circulated

among relatively small numbers of people who could, for that reason, wax sad or indignant or proud about being so gifted and so misunderstood (Castellanos [1997], 31).

There thus arises what Montserrat Corretger calls a “vicious circle,” for even as many *modernistes* style themselves in quasi-messianic terms and complain of the public’s lack of aesthetic sensitivity, intellectual rigor, and/or progressive political consciousness, they also participate in the aforementioned professionalization — and commercialization — of art and ideas (Corretger [1998], 265). Many of the *modernistes*, and certainly Rusiñol, are partial deserters of their class; they are, that is, bourgeois subjects against the bourgeoisie, privileged rebels, or members of what Joaquim Molas and others have called a “golden Bohemia” (Molas [1970], 49; Corretger [1998], 256). Even as these golden or rosy Bohemians criticize war, poverty, and racism, they cultivate a compensatory aristocracy of arts and letters with which they assail the (bourgeois) public for its supposedly prosaic misunderstanding of life. Many of their works, pictorial and literary, are replete with abandoned gardens, luminous patios, graceful ruins, languid women, and impressionable, misunderstood men. This is the *Modernisme* that most closely resembles the best known *Modernismo* of the Nicaraguan Rubén Darío, undisputed leader of the movement in the Spanish-speaking world, whose melancholy princesses and lissome swans, widely disseminated and imitated, became objects of veneration but also of parody. To be sure, not all *modernistes* cultivate a golden Bohemia, and some, such as Josep Aladern (pseudonym of Cosme Vidal) and Antoni Isern, relatively minor figures from Reus, are denizens of a more somber Bohemia, a *bohèmia tràgica* (Molas [1970], 49) or *bohèmia negra* (Corretger [1998], 256). In the pictorial arts, Isidre Nonell is the artist who most unflinchingly probes and portrays the misery that haunts luxury. Eschewing the exuberant decorativism that characterizes many of the façades and interiors of the upper bourgeoisie (with furnishings designed by Joan Busquets and Gaspar Homar), Nonell’s paintings of “cretins,” gypsies, and downcast women attest to the highly uneven distribution of wealth in times of much-trumpeted prosperity and progress. Although overshadowed by Pablo Picasso, who frequented the hub of bohemian encounters in Barcelona, *Els Quatre Gats* (literally, The Four Cats; figuratively, No One), when he lived in the city, Nonell produced a number of powerful and disturbing images.

The glittering and the gloomy are extremes, of course, and reality, even the reality of imaginative creations, is rarely just one or the other. The two Bohemian modalities, one gilded and the other grimy, are necessarily insufficient, for Joan Maragall, a family man whose middle-class conservatism was infused with a strongly humanist sense of justice, can hardly be described as pertaining to either. Other extremes or oppositions, though perhaps unavoidable, are also questionable. For Catalan *Modernisme* is presented, over and again, as lying between the nostalgic rural idealism of the *Renaixença* and the modern-day urban idealism of *Noucentisme*, many of whose leading exponents (most notably the critic and cultural arbiter Eugeni d’Ors) once rubbed elbows with more die-hard *modernistes*. However framed, *Modernisme* continues to be the subject of critical controversy, with critics and historians compelled to acknowledge significant internal differences even as they vie for the authority to declare when one mode ends and another begins. Corretger, following others, signals four phases, three of which are associated with a specific journal or review: 1) regenerationism, with *L’Avenç* (retitled *L’Avenç* in the flurry of linguistic normalization), 1881–1884 and 1889–1893; 2) decadentism, 1894–1897; 3) vitalism, with *Catalònia*, 1898–1900; and 4) Catalanism, with *Juventut*, 1900–1906. 1906 sees the creation of *Solidaritat Catalana*, or Catalan Solidarity, a political group comprising diverse ideological positions, and the consolidation of the ultimately more powerful *Lliga Region-*



*alista*, or Regionalist League, under Prat de la Riba (Cacho Viu [1984], xxvii). “Catalanism” is, then as now, a misleading term, for it is not a monolithic enterprise bereft of variants. In fact, all of the terms and categories deployed—from regenerationism to decadentism to vitalism—yield, under scrutiny, a less than uniform picture. The time frame is also in dispute, with various critics setting the dates for *Modernisme* from as early as 1888 to as late as 1912, when Josep Pous i Pagès’s novel *La vida i la mort d’en Jordi Fraginals* (The Life and Death of Jordi Fraginals) is published.

The sheer variety of intellectual and artistic options associated with *Modernisme* has constituted, in short, a challenge to the classificatory bent of literary history. The very word “*Modernisme*” has been variously rendered as *Art Nouveau*, Modern Style, *Sezessionstil*, *Stile Liberty*, and *Jugendstil*, and the movement has been likened to Parnassianism, Pre-Raphaelitism, Symbolism, Naturalism, and even Romanticism. A brilliant example of a “false friend,” *Modernisme* is not Modernism, at least as the latter has been codified in Anglo-American culture by way of Ezra Pound, James Joyce, and T. S. Eliot. And yet, *Modernisme* is Modernism in a more ample, international sense in which modernity, renovation, and innovation hold sway. The latter, international sense of Modernism, shot through with all sorts of local and national meanings, might serve as a tonic to the former, hegemonic sense, which is, as a matter of fact, already rocked by varying codifications from *within* the Anglo-American tradition. Sharing a common root and a common sense of “what is just now passing,” *Modernisme*, *Modernismo*, Modernism, and so on are located in ways that make any attempt at an omni-comprehensive overview as problematic as it is necessary. Understandably, the upshot of so many similarities and differences is not an easy principle of identity, but rather a compelling critical problem of translatability and transculturation. As Mireia Freixa suggests, the welter of words signifies a *general* confusion that is the effect of insistent *particularities* (Freixa [1986], 11).

Joan Lluís Marfany has contested the confusion that saddles *Modernisme* as attitude, movement, and period, and has argued that the confusion is of the critics’ making. Citing Hispanist criticism on Spanish- and Latin-American *Modernismo* and on the so-called Generation of 1898 (the date of a major Spanish military defeat) as a culprit, Marfany asserts that critics have projected their own confusion onto their designated object of study (Marfany [1990], 13). Such an assertion might lead one to believe that there is an underlying coherence that has been disavowed, distorted, or ignored, but Marfany is hard pressed to produce it. That said, Marfany makes a convincing case, not just in relation to Hispanist criticism (which has typically disregarded production in Catalan), but also in relation to *Noucentisme* and its concerted program of clarity, reason, order, and arbitration. Although *Noucentisme* itself is shot through with differences, its followers, prominent politicians included, impugned *Modernisme* for what they saw as its penchant for chaotic, contradictory, and even anarchic formulations. The charge of anarchy was especially grave, and an intense bout of direct action—most glaringly, the bombing of the *Liceu* or Barcelona Opera House during a performance of Rossini’s *Guillaume Tell* in November of 1893—entailed, among many more momentous things, the suspension of the premier modernist publication, *L’Avenç*. That *Modernisme* was *not* anarchism and that anarchism itself was not *so* confusing may be critically sound assessments today, but in the commotion of the events, opponents of *Modernisme*, anarchism, or both often succumbed to, and even promoted, a sense of confusion in the name of an order that they would call their own. Clearly, *Modernisme* has been the subject of disagreement, precisely because it is a “wide-reaching politico-cultural movement that materializes in many diverse positions” (Castellanos [1995], 6).<sup>5</sup>

The political and cultural implications of aesthetic propositions are as varied as they are insistent. Zola's impact on modern Catalan culture is undeniably important, but it is outstripped, by the time that *Modernisme* gains currency in the early 1890s, by that of Nietzsche, whose vitalist and irrationalist thought poses a challenge to the positivist rationality of naturalism. The figure of the *Übermensch*, promptly vulgarized, casts its shadow over a wide range of endeavors, including the would-be transformation of society. Maragall is the first to translate Nietzsche into Catalan and Castilian, and Maragall's role as translator (of Goethe and Novalis as well) and cultural commentator inflects his role as poet and public intellectual. Writing regularly for the *Diario de Barcelona* (The Barcelona Daily) and taking on everything from Anarchist disturbances to the Spanish-American War to revolutionary insurrections in Barcelona, Maragall became one of the most influential figures of Catalan—and Spanish—culture of his time. His essay, "La ciutat del perdó" (The City of Forgiveness), constitutes an impassioned, though ineffective, plea to spare the life of Francesc Ferrer i Guàrdia (often called "the Spanish Dreyfus") and other people condemned to death for their participation in the anti-war disturbances of July 1909, the *Setmana Tràgica* (Tragic Week). A public intellectual, Maragall nonetheless seemed to write from a site of sensitivity quite removed from the "superhuman" position of the German philosopher that he once championed. Truth be told, Maragall did not so much imitate Nietzsche as introduce, with significant modifications, the German philosopher's ideas to a culture hungry, as Oller had noted, for energetic and enterprising propositions. Maragall's modifications of Nietzsche's thought (not unlike Emilia Pardo Bazán's earlier modifications of Zola's naturalist thought) include his understanding of vitalism as *humbly* popular and as consistent with Catholic morality and humanism. And yet, Maragall, despite some initial vacillations, does not endorse the Superman, but exalts instead the "living word," which he, a man of the city, professes to find in the supposedly simple people of the countryside. Maragall's lexical register is, in fact, fairly limited and is marked more by the language of Barcelona than anywhere else, but the emotional impact of his generally unadorned, straightforward poetry is undeniable.

The simplicity of Maragall's language contrasts with the more elaborate decorativism of many writers, artists, architects, and designers of the same period. It also contrasts, as intimated, with the more sardonic turns of Nietzsche. Maragall's celebration of poetry, the people, and the word in three encomiastic essays known as the *Elogis* (1903, 1907), published after the high point of Maragall's interest in Nietzsche, evince a romantically laden appreciation of the grandeur of the little things of life. Increasingly disenchanted with Nietzsche, and never really fond of Zola, Maragall traces his own path, a profoundly Catalan one, and in a manner reminiscent of Verdaguer, brings together poetry, religion, and politics in a way that is neither neatly conventional nor unconventional. For all the differences between the leading figures of the *Renaixença* and of *Modernisme*, both Verdaguer and Maragall turn inward to Catalan traditions, people, and places, even as they turn outward to other traditions and innovations. Others do likewise. If Rusiñol is interested in local arts and crafts, playwright Ignasi Iglésias, particularly in *La barca nova* (The New Boat, 1907), along with novelists Raimon Casellas, Víctor Català (pseudonym for Caterina Albert), and Prudenci Bertrana, demonstrate a fascination with various rural modes of the Catalan language. Eschewing academic conventions, epico-lyrical formations, and the preoccupation with normalization and standardization, the novelists prove themselves to be especially adept at representing the rich heterogeneity of the language. Bertrana, an avid hunter, reportedly goes "hunting" for words, and Català at times incorporates several linguistic registers in her works. Engaged in a literary task with ethnographic

overtones, the novelists largely manage to avoid the “costumisme”—the depiction of customs, mores, and manners—that pervades much Romantic and realist literature alike. What is more, if the lyric subjectivity of their texts echoes Maragall’s emphasis on sincerity and spontaneity, the predilection for coarse and violent situations and for a supposedly direct and unpolished language points in a different direction, one far removed from Maragall’s idealistic portrayals. Turning inward to Catalonia, and taking a hard if linguistically appreciative look at rural reality, these *modernistes* nonetheless manifest an awareness of literary techniques such as interior monologue, free indirect style, and other more psychologically complex formulas.

The appeals to places beyond Spain, evident in the *Renaixença*, are deepened and expanded in *Modernisme*. Zola and Nietzsche swirl alongside Schopenhauer, Bergson, Baudelaire, Puvis de Chavannes, Moreau, Debussy, Maeterlinck, Verhaeren, Ibsen, Wagner, Ruskin, D’Annunzio, and Satie (a friend of Utrillo, Rusiñol, and Casas) as so many signs of a cosmopolitan modernity centered decisively in Europe (though Poe, Whistler, and Whitman, all from the United States, also figure prominently). At the risk of generalization, what brings proponents of naturalism, vitalism, decadence, symbolism, pre-Raphaelitism, and post-Romanticism together in Catalonia, and what separates them from proponents of the *Renaixença*, is an ardent interest in the present *and* the future, in innovation, not just a retrospectively oriented revival and recuperation. It is with an eye to progress, bedmate of modernity, that many *modernistes* ridicule, as previously noted, the *Jocs Florals* and other related “archaeological” endeavors. This does not mean that the past, whose weight Jaume Brosa lampoons in “Viure del passat” (To Live from the Past, 1892), merely fades away, but rather that it is recast in a different light. Cristina and Eduardo Mendoza discuss the interplay of past and present by way of the *Liceu* and operatic culture, particularly that of Wagner. According to them, Wagner’s “primitive and heroic epics, allied to a fiercely avant-garde form of music, gave certain Catalans the magic formula that permitted them to weld their legendary past to their pursuit of progress: an authentic mythology of modernity” (Mendoza [1989], 42–3).<sup>6</sup> The passion for Wagner assumes some quasi-religious forms, and followers include Alexandre Cortada, Isabel Llorach, and the critic and poet Jeroni Zanné, a major force in the *Associació Wagneriana* (Wagner Association) who incorporated his enthusiasm for opera into such literary works as “Bianca Maria degli Angeli.” Writers such as Gabriel Alomar, whose speech “El futurisme” at the Athenaeum in 1904 was an expression of a progressive modernity, and Miquel dels Sants Oliver, associated with the classically oriented *Escola Mallorquina*, or Mallorcan School, dedicate poems to Wagner. The fusion of medieval legends and modern sensitivities in a “total” work of art also marks Pre-Raphaelitism and the Arts and Crafts movement, which are embraced by an array of Catalans, from Joan Pijoan in poetry to Alexandre de Riquer in literature and the decorative arts.

The late nineteenth century is, in many respects, an age of local affirmations on an international scale. In Catalonia, the *sardana*, a dance in which people lock hands and move in placid circles, gains popularity as a manifestation of cultural unity; Maragall’s poem in praise of the dance wins the *Englantina d’Or* (Golden Medal, literally Golden Wild Rose) at the *Jocs Florals* of 1894. The *senyera*, an emblem and flag of four blood-red strips on a golden yellow background, is likewise the object of renewed veneration. Fluttering between history and legend, the *senyera* appears in Lluís Domènech i Montaner’s building *Palau de la Música Catalana* or Palace of Catalan Music (1906–09), in the newspaper *La Veu de Catalunya* (Voice of Catalonia), and in poems by Verdaguer, Víctor Balaguer, and Maragall, whose “Cant de la senyera” is adapted to music by Lluís Millet. The leg-

endary figure of Count Arnau also becomes an object of attention, most importantly for Maragall. St. George, or *Sant Jordi*, famous for slaying the dragon, is enshrined as the country's patron saint. References to St. George and the dragon assume material form in paintings, posters, sculptures, and buildings, including many designed by Josep Puig i Cadafalch and Antoni Gaudí, the messianic, experimental architect whose name has become virtually synonymous with Catalan *Modernisme*. Inasmuch as Verdaguer and *La Veu de Catalunya* (under Prat de la Riba) deployed them, the symbols here adduced were *not* limited to *Modernisme*, for the simple reason that there was nothing intrinsically *modernista* about them. Rather, what the *modernistes* did was to *style* the symbols in ways that allowed for their incorporation into a movement in which international modernization and experimentation were decisive.

Gaudí, ever the experimenter or visionary, was particularly fond of the legend of St. Jordi (or St. George). Testimony to it may be found in a mosaic sculpture of a dragon at the entrance to the gloriously whimsical Güell Park high up on the hills of Barcelona, in a wrought-iron dragon on a gate to the Finca Güell (a country house), and, most spectacularly, in the Casa Batlló (Batlló House, 1904–06) in the center of modernized Barcelona. A building with a glittering façade and a tiled roof that resembles a dragon's back impaled by a cruciform sword, the Batlló House is surely one of Gaudí's most symbolic works. Situated on the fashionable Passeig de Gràcia, the Casa Batlló is adjacent to the Casa Amatller (Amatller House, 1898–1900), designed by Puig i Cadafalch, and the Casa Lleó Morera (Lleó Morera House, 1902–06), designed by Domènech i Montaner. Together, the three buildings constituted—before the latter was partially destroyed for renovations—a “block of discord” and attested to a competitive atmosphere played out in furniture, fashion, and the fine arts as well. All three buildings are stops on the *ruta modernista* (Modernist Route), a contemporary tourist trail that includes Domènech's spa-like Hospital de Sant Pau (Saint Paul's Hospital, 1901–30), Puig i Cadafalch's Nordic-inspired Casa Terrades or Casa de les Punxes (House of Pointed Spires, 1903–05), and Gaudí's supple Casa Milà (Milà House, 1906–10). One of the most visited buildings in the city, the Casa Milà, which eschews right angles, has been likened to a petrified wavy sea, a hangar for dirigibles, and, most lastingly, a quarry—hence its popular name, *La Pedrera*. The fervor for decoration, florid and biomorphic, is evident in metro entrances, street lamps, and public benches as well. Gaudí, Domènech i Montaner, and Puig i Cadafalch were all fervid Catalanists, with the latter two holding important political positions. These eminently Catalan architects, even as they drew on local traditions and even as they advocated a national architecture, looked to Germany, Holland, and Scandinavia, among other places, for architectural motivation.

In the pictorial arts, Rusiñol, Casas, and the sculptor Enric Clarasó set their sights on the diffuse light of northern Europe, enjoyed extended stays together in Paris, and adopted, in painting, various semi-impressionist techniques. Rusiñol, who did not have the formal pictorial training of Casas, also traveled to Italy, where he claimed to have been enchanted by the pre-Renaissance tradition. But Rusiñol and his companions were also captivated by the Catalan countryside, its customs, costumes, and turns of speech. In 1888, the year of the Universal Exposition, Rusiñol (who at the time had not yet fully engaged *Modernisme*) celebrated his first individual showing as a painter, with works whose rural naturalism attests to the influence of Joaquim Vayreda, among others. Rusiñol's trajectory, from industrialist by inheritance to artist by practice, is engagingly chronicled, and duly masked, in *L'auca del senyor Esteve* (The Praises of Mr. Esteve, 1907), a work that captures the tensions between commerce and art, *seny* (common sense) and *rauxa* (passion, excessive emotion).

Both a novel and a play, *L'auca* centers on “el senyor Esteve,” the emblem of a conservative shop-owning class that desires nothing so much as anonymity, neutrality, stability, and modest savings. Rusiñol’s involvement in various forms of aesthetic production is by no means unique, for many a writer painted and many a painter wrote, so much so that disciplinary contours fritter and fade: *Modernisme*, in literature, is simply incomprehensible without attending to other forms of artistic expression and production. The notion of a total art that appealed to all the senses was so extensive that artist and critic Joaquim Torres-Garcia, in “El literat i l’artista” (The Writer and the Artist, 1908), came to argue for the separation of painting from literature. Torres-Garcia’s defense of a purely plastic art, without literary or philosophical pretensions, paralleled defenses of aesthetic autonomy (i.e. the painterliness of painting) that would later flourish in the twentieth century. Whatever the interplays of art, architecture, literature, and music, whatever the claims to autonomy, specificity, and purity, *Modernisme* was arguably more inclined, even when it laid claim to art for art’s sake, to the promotion of something *universal* by way of an accretion of localities.

The 1888 Barcelona Exposition that so impressed Oller did not have the audacious novelty of the 1851 London Exposition, famous for Joseph Paxton’s Crystal Palace and Prince Albert’s enthusiasm for free trade. Nor did it quite have the glamour of the Expositions in Paris or Vienna, but it did signify, as noted, that Barcelona had attained a place of visibility in the modern world. The visibility that attended the Exposition was more than figurative, for a portion of the city was electrically illuminated for the first time. And yet, the dazzle of technology that would lead to a second Universal Exposition in Barcelona in 1929, and to futurism and other avant-garde modalities, did *not* characterize *Modernisme*, despite the occasional poster championing machines and electricity. Rather, as the 1893 Modernist Festival made clear, the modernity of the *modernistes* generally assumed, or was made to assume, a more genteel guise, one in which mercantilism, industrialism, and speculation—in a word, capitalism—might be acknowledged, but might also, and more likely, be disavowed. The proliferation of ceramics, stained glass, wrought iron, masonry, wood carvings, jewelry, high fashion, operas, symphonies, gardens, chapels, and mansions gives *Modernisme* a distinctly bourgeois tonality, only fitfully gainsaid by Nonell’s dark canvases, some of Iglésias’s plays, Brossa’s writings, and Joaquim Mir’s painting of beggars in front of Gaudí’s (still) unfinished Sagrada Família, a looming, intricately designed Expiatory Temple that would come to be Barcelona’s answer to London’s Big Ben and Paris’s Eiffel Tower. Rusiñol’s own jabs at the bourgeoisie, whether in the patrician *El jardí abandonat* (The Abandoned Garden, 1900) or the more socially engaged *Llibertat!*, likewise do little to annul the dominance of a particular class, the bourgeoisie, in the propagation of Modernist sensibilities. The anti-bourgeois origins of *Modernisme* are, in fact, promptly contradicted by its implication in a regenerationist project that finds its most forceful, if ambivalent, expression in the bourgeoisie (Carbonell et al. [1979], 325). If Iglésias, Brossa and Pere Coromines engage a rebelliousness that foreshadows revolution, the rebelliousness is not long-lived, in part because “the Catalan bourgeoisie limited the leftism of its intellectuals” (Marfany [1990], 26),<sup>7</sup> and in part because the violence of revolutionary activity outstripped the work of art. Direct action, class strife, and various modes of nationalist ideology and international interaction, came to render art, for its own sake, rather inconsequential indeed. There may have been no magic formulas, but the mythology of modernity, drawing on the past in order to impel itself into the future, unquestionably required an international frame. Whether the future would be brilliant or bloody, no one would know with certainty until it had folded, indeed quite bloodily, into the past.

## Language and Literature

The Universal Exposition and the Modernist Festivals, different as one is from the other, advance both an appreciation of Catalan language and culture in particular and an appreciation of language and culture in general. The renewal and recuperation of Catalan, full of pride in the past and hope for the future, is part and parcel of complex philological and sociological developments that include some innovative propositions regarding national identifications and international communications. For even as individuals, groups, and nations come together, they continue to be confronted with problems of communication, with the so-called legacy of Babel. The hope of Esperanto — a hybrid language invented by Ludwik Lazar Zamenhof and made public in 1887, a year before the Exposition in Barcelona — involves a leveling of Babel. Zamenhof's proposal for what he called an artificial, neutral, and international language ("Esperanto," meaning "he who hopes," was Zamenhof's pseudonym), like Johann Martin Schleyer's less successful proposal for Volapük in 1879, was intended to complement rather than replace existing languages. At least in theory, these artificial international languages would allow minor or minoritized languages to hold out against the encroachment of others, which almost always had (and have) the support of a powerful nation state apparatus. If Limousin provided a means of overcoming internal divisions within the Catalan-speaking countries, Volapük and Esperanto went even further, promising to overcome divisions the world over. From another, decidedly less artificial perspective, however, the hope for universal communication involved a restructuring of Babel, a more equitable and harmonious distribution of localities, if not necessarily of wealth. In the words of Maragall, "the only universal expression will be that which is as variegated as the variety of lands and people" (Maragall [1978], 38).<sup>8</sup> Universalism dovetails not just Catalanism, of course, but any number of other national projects. Rejecting the notion that keeping a language, any language, alive is rebellious, sterile, or regressive, Maragall celebrates "popular language," the language of the people (Maragall [1978], 39). From Maragall's perspective, what is universal is a *lack* of easy, self-evident universality, the incontrovertible fact of linguistic and cultural difference, the heterogeneous existence of poetry and song, the diversity of local customs.

Maragall's linguistic idealism, his commitment to tolerance, has to contend with political reality. Catalan as a language, let alone Catalanism as a movement, is buckled by internal tensions between Catalonia, the Balearic Islands, and, most acutely, Valencia. Catalan *Modernisme* is typically presented as a thing made and unmade in Catalonia, with Barcelona vying for influence, not only with the rural interior, but also with smaller cities and towns such as Girona, Reus, Sitges, Olot, Terrassa, Sant Feliu de Guíxols, and Vic. While many people in Barcelona perceived Madrid as a rival and Paris as a model, many people in Valencia perceived Barcelona as a rival. Things were different on the Islands, with Mallorca at the center, and a vibrant assembly of Mallorcans, including Joan Alcover, Miquel Costa i Llobera, Gabriel Alomar, and Miquel dels Sants Oliver, maintained, to differing degrees, fertile interactions with Maragall, the *noucentista* Josep Carner, and others. Miquel dels Sants Oliver, who studied with the Romantic poet Josep Lluís Pons i Gallarza (as did Alcover and Costa), and who was influenced by Almirall, published *La cuestión regional* (The regional question) in 1899, often considered the first theoretically informed treatise on the Mallorcan revival. Baffled and bothered by linguistic antagonisms *with* the Castilian-speaking regions of Spain and *within* the Catalan sphere, Oliver combined the two languages, and their internal variants, in a number of

texts such as *L'hostal de la Bolla* (The Hostel of the Buoy, 1903). For their part, Costa i Llobera, with *Horacianes* (Horatian Poems, 1906), and Alcover, with *Cap al tard* (Twilight, 1909) and *Poemes bíblics* (Biblical Poems, 1919), cultivated a classical poetry and concentrated on the Mediterranean landscape, more in line with the incipient *noucentista* movement. Alcover's and Costa's affiliation with *Modernisme*, tenuous though it often appears, is evident in their will to recuperate a classical tradition within a contemporary framework, to extol the sincerity of sentiment, and to make a place for Mallorca and its language in the world.

A state apparatus centered in Madrid may foment regional, or national, differences between Catalonia, the Balearic Islands, and Valencia, but these differences are also the fruit of longstanding geopolitical rivalries. Any discussion of modernity and nationality with respect to Catalan literature and language must therefore take into account the differences within the so-called Catalan countries, *els Països Catalans*. It must also keep in mind the force of Castilian, promoted then as now as the official language of Spain and as a *lingua franca*, indeed a "universal" language. Many of the writers here under consideration cultivated, to varying degrees and with varying success, both Catalan and Castilian. Maria Antònia Perelló, for instance, writes of Joan Alcover's "vacil·lació lingüística," or linguistic vacillation (Perelló [2000], 8), while Carme Arnau, in the introduction to *Horacianes*, claims that Costa i Llobera wrote in Castilian to please his father (Costa [1982], 8)—a claim that, given the general cultural power of Castilian, may well be overstated. In a speech titled "Humanització de l'art" (Humanization of Art, 1904), Alcover actually valorizes "oscillations" and a "continual fluctuation" as necessary to "equilibrium," "plenitude," and "harmony" (Alcover [2000a], 121).<sup>9</sup> Yet Alcover does not oscillate forever, and he crystallizes his commitment to Catalan in "La llengua pàtria" (The National Language), a poem in which he regrets having given his "best years" to the Castilian muse even as he was "deeply in love with" another (Alcover [2000b], 86).<sup>10</sup> The other muse is, of course, Catalan, and Alcover pays it a long overdue tribute. Costa, in his ode to Horace, "A Horaci," likewise champions his "hard" mother tongue by way of its Latin heritage: "my country/is a daughter of Rome" (Costa [1982], 19).<sup>11</sup> The previously noted appeal to places beyond Spain is here invested with a profoundly Mediterranean dimension that goes back to Rome and, secondarily, to Greece in a search for dignity, elegance, and autonomy.

Other situations of linguistic and cultural autonomy through particular forms of linguistic and cultural dependency (on Rome, Greece, Provence, or Limoges) abound. The tensions between Catalan and Castilian are quite common. Even Maragall, whose "Oda a Espanya" (Ode to Spain, 1898) remains one of the most wrenching testimonies to the role of language in the articulation of a nation, wrote and published extensively in Castilian. And yet, in this ode, written shortly before the Spanish defeat of 1898, Maragall confronts the significance of the signifying process itself, the language in which the proverbial problem of Spain is posed, the solution sought—or not. "Listen, Spain, to the voice of a son who speaks to you in a language that is not Castilian. I speak in the language that this rough land has given me. In this language, few have spoken to you; in the other, too many" (Maragall [1984b], vol. II, 163).<sup>12</sup> Necessarily untranslatable (at least to Spanish), Maragall's "Oda a Espanya," with its call for a Spanish understanding of Catalan, is nonetheless translated by none other than Miguel de Unamuno, a writer who, born in the Basque Country, was a passionate defender of Spain. Unamuno's dismissive remarks regarding the Basque language do not extend, at least not with the same vehemence, to Catalan. In an extraordinary series of letters, Maragall and Unamuno exchange ideas, in Castilian, about the fate of the languages of the peninsula. Maragall eventually

proposes, and Unamuno endorses, the creation of an Iberian review written in Spanish, Portuguese, and Catalan in order to promote mutual linguistic and cultural understanding. Maragall's death ensured that the project would never be realized, but the attempt to rethink Spain (and by problematic extension Portugal), was a constant in Maragall's, if not in Unamuno's, production. At other times, however, as in "La independència de Catalunya" (The Independence of Catalonia), written in 1897 but not published until after his death, Maragall's interest in rethinking Spain entailed leaving it behind altogether. Declaring that Spanish thought was dead, Maragall urged Catalans "to get rid quickly of any and all ties with a dead thing" (Maragall [1988b], 33).<sup>13</sup> And for many Catalans, Spain was indeed a *thing* that reeked of death—and by no means just symbolically.

Amid all the elaborate creations, expositions, and festivals, Spain hobbled along as an imperial power, intent on maintaining its last colonial possessions. A series of armed conflicts in Cuba and other colonies, culminating in defeat to the United States in 1898, sparked an inward, melancholy, Castilian-centric turn, codified, as previously noted, as the Generation of 1898. In Catalonia, the "disaster"—as the defeat was called—did not have quite the same somber hue. In fact, the defeat invigorated various Catalanist proposals, including autonomy and independence. While acknowledging the efficacy of Spanish patriotic rhetoric during the war (many Catalans did indeed rally around the Spanish flag), Josep Benet presents the Catalan reaction to the defeat as one of excitement and hope (Benet [1963], 16). Benet's rendition of the Catalan reaction may be too rosy, but it is right in its recognition of significantly different reactions *within* Spain. Among those who recorded said differences was the previously mentioned Rubén Darío, author of a series of chronicles on Spain shortly after the Spanish-American War. In one of the most important chronicles, Darío locates *Modernismo* exclusively in Catalonia and contrasts it to *españolismo* (Castilian-Spanish nationalism), with its center apparently in Madrid. Claiming that it is only in Catalonia that he finds a "brotherhood" that can be called modernist, Darío underscores some telling ties between Catalonia and Latin America, namely autonomy, even independence, *vis-à-vis* the putative mother country (Darío [1987], 254).

Like Oller, Darío is dazzled by the energy of the Catalan capital, its thirst for innovation and its faith in progress. He takes note of the movement of Catalonia beyond Spain and towards Europe, "the proclamation of unity, independence, and sovereignty of Catalonia, no longer within Spain but outside of Spain" (Darío [1987], 36).<sup>14</sup> For Darío, Rusiñol occupies the center of a movement that is not restricted to "chosen spirits" but that has "industrial applications which go to the people, which objectively instruct the masses" (Darío [1987], 38).<sup>15</sup> Darío's presentation suffers from what Adolfo Sotelo Vázquez has called an "optimismo luminoso," a "luminous optimism" (Sotelo [1996], 48), for Rusiñol's work, like Darío's, is rife with references to the religion of art, the grandeur of fallen aristocracy, and the exquisite sensitivity of the select. Despite its literary trappings, Darío's interest in Rusiñol may be more pictorial than literary, as the reference to industrial applications suggests. *Modernisme* in Catalonia is, after all, most stunningly manifested in painting, sculpture, architecture, and the decorative arts and, as such, it has a material presence in the public sphere that overshadows that of literature. The linguistic question nonetheless imposes itself, and Darío—chastised by Leopoldo Alas (Clarín) for writing Spanish as if it were French—shows himself to be sensitive to it. Despite his professed linguistic limitations, Darío reproduces, in Catalan, a flyer by Pere Romeu, the athletic Bohemian in charge of *Els Quatre Gats*, and later claims to have learned some Catalan in order to read Rusiñol. The most famous *modernista* in the Spanish language, Darío is not



the only one to bridge the Atlantic and to move between languages. Ramon Perés, born in Cuba to Catalan parents, is arguably the first to deploy the term “*modernista*,” at least in a positive manner, in an article titled “Nostre programa” (Our Program) published in *L’Avens* in 1884. (As John Butt has noted, a pejorative use of “*modernismo*” appears in the late eighteenth century in José Cadalso’s *Cartas marruecas* or Moroccan Letters). The term then quickly makes its way to Castilian, entering the dictionary of the *Real Academia* (Royal Academy) in 1899. The timeline—first in Catalan, then in Castilian—has political implications, for terminological and conceptual priority is often a badge of honor in nationally inflected works of literary history. Regardless, when Perés advocates, in Catalan, “the cultivation in our country of an essentially *modernist* literature, science and art,” the country, or “*pàtria*,” appears to be Catalonia (Perés [1984], 15).<sup>16</sup>

The cultivation of literature obviously entails the cultivation of language, and it is in this respect that the linguistic work of Pompeu Fabra is fundamental. According to Gabriel Bibiloni, “Fabra’s objective as codifier was to achieve a national language endowed, as are all national languages, with two essential characteristics: internal unity and authenticity” (Bibiloni [1997], 115).<sup>17</sup> As debatable as “internal unity” and “authenticity” may be, it is undeniable that *modernistes* were intensely interested, as already indicated, in building on the work of the *Renaixença* even when they derided it and of deepening and expanding knowledge of the Catalan language. The *Jocs Florals* and, more broadly, the cultivation of poetry were important, as was theater, but many Catalans came to see the novel as a critical genre, one that could provide a more comprehensive relation of reality and a more effective consolidation of national culture. If the poetry of the *Renaixença* presented an idealized vision of the countryside, and if a good portion of *modernista* poetry presented an arguably no less idealized vision of art, the novel appeared more open to mixing the high and the low, art and reality. Such mixing was at variance with the *noucentista* project of linguistic, cultural, and political depuration that was coming to the fore, but it was also at variance with the highly aestheticized poetry of Zanné, Riquer, and Guillem Tell i Lafont, let alone that of the *Escola Mallorquina*. There are, to be sure, some gracefully rendered novels, such as Miquel de Palol’s *Camí de llum* (Path of Light, 1909), in which a father’s obsession with his dying daughter acquires some delicately decadent tones. The death of a beautiful woman, so dear to Edgar Allan Poe, is also crucial to Joaquim Ruyra’s “Jacobé” (1909), a tale of exquisitely rendered violence. Though often associated with *Modernisme*, Ruyra cultivates, as in his collection of short stories *Marines i boscatges* (Seascapes and Woodlands, 1903), a style of prose that, for all its dialectical nods, finds favor with Carner and others. Although published before the Institute of Catalan Studies approved Pompeu Fabra’s orthographic norms in 1912, the aforementioned works by Palol and Ruyra do not present as many differences with the process of linguistic normalization as other *modernista* novels. Indeed, in these other novels, it is not just the ever so figurative life of the language, but death, real, physical death, which is figured differently.

Death, in its ugliest and most violent mode, looms large in Casellas’s *Els sots feréstecs* (The Wild Depths, 1901), Català’s *Solitud* (Solitude, 1905), Bertrana’s *Josafat* (1906), and Pous i Pagès’s *La vida i la mort d’en Jordi Fraginals* (The Life and Death of Jordi Fraginals, 1912), four of the novels most frequently cited in relation to *Modernisme*. The last of these, by Pous i Pagès, is perhaps the most conventional, and is related to a narrative current that grappled with *pairalisme*, a rural, land-owning traditionalism with antecedents in Josep Pin i Soler’s *La família dels Garrigas* (The Garrigas Family, 1887) and Carles Bosch de la Trinxeria’s *L’Hereu Noradell* (The Noradell Heir, 1889).

Like *Jordi Friginals*, both *Els sots feréstecs* and *Solitud* are located in a rural environment riddled with ignorance, violence, and death, while *Josafat* is located in a small provincial capital based on the author's native Girona. At first glance, such locations seem to contradict the cosmopolitanism that is one of the hallmarks of *Modernisme*. And yet, the focus on an individual in conflict with his or her surroundings—in Català's case, a young married woman named Mila and in Casellas's, a priest named Llätzer—recalls the representation of artists and intellectuals as agents of social and spiritual transformation. True, Llätzer (Lazarus), as a member of the clergy, is more assimilable to existing social and spiritual structures than Mila, and his troubles with a church establishment that banishes him to the wild ravines of the mountains are reminiscent of Verdaguer. Another reason that Casellas's protagonist is more assimilable to existing social and spiritual structures is, quite simply, that he is a man. And men, as should now be clear, dominated Catalan cultural and political life, whether during the *Renaixença*, *Modernisme*, or *Noucentisme*. Although the situation in Catalonia is similar to that of other European countries, literary histories, usually inattentive to gender, risk "naturalizing" culture as a product and process of men. With respect to Catalan arts and letters, few women had access, at least as producers, to the festivals, expositions, journals, workshops, travels, and debates that so occupied the men. Rusiñol, in a viciously comic play titled *La intellectual* (The Intellectual Woman, 1909), lambastes women for writing anything more than children's stories. It is not that women are absent from Catalan culture at the turn of the century; it is just that they tend to be its objects, pretexts, and muses, and that the interplay of life and death, degeneration and regeneration, so important to *Modernisme* rings differently for them.

Though minor in the political sphere, women nevertheless populate paintings, drawings, and sculptures, *Ex Libris* by Riquer, jewels by the Masiera family, and vases by Dionís Renart, inlaid woodworks by Homar, posters for electricity by Joan Llaverias, and advertisements for syphilis treatments by Casas. They waver from the bourgeois reader in Rusiñol's painting *Novella romàntica* (Romantic Novel, 1894) and the marble figure of Josep Llimona's *Desconsol* (Despair, 1907) to the baggy-eyed loner in Casas's *Madeleine* (1892) and the bed-ridden addict in Rusiñol's *La morfina* (Morphine, 1894). Lluïsa Vidal is one of the few women painters associated with *Modernisme*, but women are much more likely to be represented than to be agents of representation. Angels of the house and demons of the street, *femmes fatales* and discreet homebodies, women are similarly represented in literature. In both *Els sots feréstecs* and *Josafat*, the principal female character is a prostitute, and an especially degraded and willing one at that. In *Solitud*, one of the characters, the murderous Ànima (literally, "Soul"), tries to buy a defiant Mila before raping her. Unlike most of her male-authored counterparts, Català's female character here and in such works as "Carnestoltes" (Carnival)—first published in *Juventut* (1905) and brought together with other stories in *Caires vius* (Sharp Angles, 1907)—and *La infanticida* (1898) are quite psychologically complex. The latter work, about a young woman who kills her child born out of wedlock, provoked such a scandal that Albert took a name that evokes a victorious Catalan and that is "unmistakably" male. Though unquestionably the most famous, Català was not the only woman in Catalonia to use another name. Carme Karr, who signed her contributions to *Juventut* as L. Escardot, and Palmira Ventós, who signed her novel *La caiguda* (The Fallen Woman, 1907) as Felip Palma, also intervened in the cultural sphere by way of a nominal mask. Karr used the female marked pseudonym *Xènia* in her polemics with *Xènius*, otherwise known as Eugeni d'Ors, who was instrumental in the liquidation of *Modernisme* despite his own early affiliations with it. Feminism was still in its infancy in Catalo-

nia, and many who espoused it, most notably Dolors Monserdà, author of *Estudi feminista* (1909), were often as not well-to-do Catholics with a patronizing interest in working class women. Català, who did not author a feminist study, nonetheless managed to disrupt long-established notions about gender and cultural production.

Català did not shy away from unsavory subjects and violent scenes, far from it. If Bertrana's language has been designated as "català mascle" (male or even *macho* Catalan) for its roughness and directness, so has Català's, the difference being that the term is generally positive for him and negative for her. Català was aware of this double standard, and in the preface to a collection of short stories, *Drames rurals* (Rural Dramas, 1902), "apologizes" to her female readers whose life in the city has left them ill-equipped for the hard realities of rural life (Català [1982], 15). Català parodies the *modernista* topic of the sad, elegant, anemic young woman without cultivating the contrary topic of the vamp. She also disabuses her readers of the notion of nature as kind and gentle, despite the mystery and sublime beauty of many of the descriptions of the landscape in *Solitud*. Her reference to overly refined city girls notwithstanding, Català does not represent the city as free from problems either: the one story in *Drames rurals* that is located in the city centers on terrorism. Casellas also presents a rather bleak picture of the countryside in *Els sots feréstecs* and of the city in *Les multituds* (The Crowd, 1906). For his part, Bertrana, who never had it easy in Barcelona, also tends to accentuate the negative in *Nàufrags* (The Shipwrecked, 1907) and, long after the heyday of *Modernisme*, *Jo! Memòries d'un metge filòsof* (I! Memories of a Doctor Philosopher, 1925). His most famous work, *Josafat*, is a reworking of Hugo's *Notre-Dame de Paris*, with the main character playing a lustful and fanatical Quasimodo to Fineta's slatternly Esmeralda. Bertrana's characters, though far from the ethereal creatures of Rusiñol and Gual, are even further from the classically grounded creature of Eugeni d'Ors's *La ben plantada* (The Well Grounded Woman, 1911), which has often been read as a manifesto of *noucentista* civic order.

D'Ors, Josep Carner, Pompeu Fabra, and Prat de la Riba, all instrumental in the imposition of standardized, normalized, institutionalized, and quasi-imperial models of culture looked askance at the varieties of *Modernisme*, whether symbolist or naturalist, metaphysical or physical, aesthetized or politicized. Advocates of a putatively middle road of moderation and control that took the modern city and the classical Mediterranean tradition as its signposts, the *noucentistes* were more inclined to look favorably upon Alcover, Costa i Llobera, and Ruyra than, say, Gual, Iglésias, Brossa, Català, Bertrana, Casellas, Maragall, and Rusiñol. Committed to a program of linguistic and national consolidation, they criticized the grammatical inconsistencies, occasional Castilianisms, rural dialects, and urban idioms that pepper *modernista* writing and they replaced Maragall's cult of spontaneity, sincerity, subjectivity, and the "living word" with a creed of "arbitration," of judgment. If the bourgeoisie diluted the progressive and radical gestures of *Modernisme* by appropriating it for largely decorative effects, it soon grew weary with, and wary of, the ideological ramifications of effusiveness, openness, and experimentation. By the second decade of the twentieth century, if not indeed earlier, *Modernisme* appears to have run its course, "diluted in an expanded nationalism," but by no means defeated (Cacho Viu [1984], xxxvii).<sup>18</sup> For *Modernisme* did entail the modernization of Catalonia and its beleaguered projection as an autonomous, national culture within an international frame that bears the name "Modernism." Diluted but not defeated, *Modernisme* would continue, at another turn of the century, in a sort of touristic half-life, beckoning visitors to a country that is not officially a country, but that can give, then as now, the sense of being one.

## Notes

1. “Tot aquell traït, tota aquella febre de treball mai vista aquí, tot aquell esforç titànic que donava tan brava mostra de les nostres ocultes energies i de la nostra set de progrés, encenien la meva imaginació, el meu catalanisme, la fe posada en aquest poble, l’esperança en dies millors” (Oller [1962], 105).
2. “Tot és vaporós, intangible, quasi immaterial” (Brossa [1984], 139).
3. “El progressiu trencament de la cohesió del territoris catalans i la consegüent consciència de diferenciabilitat d’aquests (en major grau, dels balears i els valencians) va potenciar el llemosí com a punt de contrastació estable, uniforme i elegant enfront d’un *català-valencià-balear* deteriorat i mancat d’una dimensió *nacional*, dimensió que ja era ocupada per l’espanyol” (Rafanell [1991], 9).
4. “lo renaixement de la poesia lírica entre els pobles del Migdia, no en sé trobar un altre, com lo nostre, que, al sortir de la insípida Acadèmia del segle [sic] XVIII, tota emperrucada, per a retornar a la verdadera inspiració dels camps i dels carrers, hi torni més lliure, més espontàniament i amb menys ressabís de convencionalisme” (Yxart [1980], 28).
5. “el Modernisme no és un moviment estètic o literari, sinó un moviment polític-cultural d’ampli abast que es concreta en moltes i diverses posicions” (Castellanos [1995], 6).
6. “Aquellas gestas primitivas y heroicas unidas a aquella música rabiosamente vanguardista proporcionaron a los catalanes la fórmula mágica que les permitía aunar su pasado legendario con su vocación de progreso: una auténtica mitología de la modernidad” (Mendoza [1989], 42–3).
7. “La burgesia catalana posava un límit a l’esquerranisme dels seus intel·lectuals” (Marfany [1990], 26).
8. “l’única expressió universal serà, doncs, aquella tan variada com la varietat mateixa de les terres i llurs gentes” (Maragall [1978], 38).
9. “oscil·lacions que confirmen la tendència constant a l’equilibri, o, en altres termes, a la plenitud i a l’harmonia” (Alcover [2000a], 121).
10. “A la musa castellana/ mos anys millors he donat,/ d’una altra musa germana/ fonament enamorat” (Alcover [2000b], 86).
11. “Aspra i ferrenya sonarà en ses cordes/ fines la llengua de ma pàtria dura;/ mes, també noble hi sonarà: ma pàtria/ filla és de Roma” (Costa [1982], 19).
12. “Escolta, Espanya, —/ la veu d’un fill / que et parla en llengua —no castellana; / parlo en la llengua —que m’ha donat / la terra aspra: / en’questa llengua —pocs t’han parlat; / en l’altra, massa” (Maragall [1984b], vol. II, 163).
13. “El pensament espanyol és mort;” “hem de desfer-nos ben de pressa de tota mena de lligam amb una cosa morta” (Maragall [1988b], 33).
14. “la proclamación de la unidad, independencia y soberanía de Cataluña, no ya en España sino fuera de España” (Darío [1987], 36).
15. “los espíritus escogidos;” “aplicaciones industriales, que van al pueblo, que enseñan objetivamente a la muchedumbre” (Darío [1987], 38).
16. “lo conreu en nostra pàtria d’una literatura, d’una ciència i d’un art essencialment *modernistes*” (Perés [1984], 15).
17. “l’objectiu del codificador [Fabra] era aconseguir una llengua nacional dotada, com tota llengua nacional, de dues característiques essencials: la unitat interior i la genuïnitat, la màxima cohesió de portes endins i la màxima diferenciació de portes enfora” (Bibiloni [1997], 115).
18. “La fi del modernisme, diluït en un nacionalisme eixamplat (Marfany), no equival simplement a un fracàs” (Cacho Viu [1984], xxxvii).

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## French Literary Modernism

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### Introduction

French literary modernism *per se* does not exist. In fact, the term “modernism” has never really been applied to literature in France to designate a literary period, genre or movement. In France the word *modernisme* does appear during the twentieth century but generally refers to painting, the Catholic Church’s crisis of 1907, tourist amenities that are not completely primitive, or British or American writers like James Joyce and William Faulkner. In France, the term *post-modernisme* is used widely to refer to social trends, to Jean-François Lyotard’s work and ways of looking at history. This postmodernism places itself after modernity rather than after modernism, thus leaving the category of *modernisme* open to definition. The problem in describing French literary modernism is twofold: first, the conventional strategies that define literary modernism by including certain attributes or delimiting a certain time period do not work in the French context. Secondly, the term itself does not connote the same relationship to newness or contemporaneity in a French context. This paper provides a model of a particularly French literary modernism revealed by a dynamic that exists within the text rather than on the enumeration of key characteristics. This dynamic is affected by both content and form in French literature. By underlining some of the concerns that appear in modernist texts, I will present a model that both defines and opens up the category of French literary modernism.

### What is Modernism?

Most twentieth-century studies on modernism, although focused on the international momentum of the field or genre, are primarily Anglocentric and generally only include references to a few French poets or Marcel Proust. The particular situation of a French literary modernism is rarely examined at length. Modernism in general is an enormous and shifting category. This is apparent both in this book’s subject of inquiry and in a definition by Richard Sheppard, who grouped together as many key features of modernism as he could find described in other sources. He writes and cites that

these have included an ‘uncompromising intellectuality,’ a preoccupation with ‘Nihilism,’ a ‘discontinuity,’ an attraction to the Dionysiac, a ‘formalism,’ an ‘attitude of detachment,’ the use of myth ‘as an arbitrary means of ordering art,’ and a ‘reflexivism,’ an ‘anti-democratic’ cast of mind, an ‘emphasis on subjectivity,’ a ‘feeling of alienation and loneliness’, [...] a particular form of irony which derives from the ‘rift between self and world’, [...] and a commitment to metaphor as ‘the very essence of poetry itself’. (Sheppard [1993], 2)



These characteristics are both too many and too limited to discretely define a modernist canon. Although these features are not false or misleading, they are not terribly useful in defining a particular sort of French literature. A definition of French literary modernism is itself even more problematic than this enumeration of possible characteristics.

In addition, French literature does not easily lend itself to being defined by certain time periods. In the French context, a literary period can be defined by a century that begins or ends years before or after the numerical date—for example, the nineteenth century can start as late as 1830 or as early as 1789 and go until World War I, whereas the seventeenth can be as short as the period from 1634 to 1680. These definitions become even more problematic for scholars interested in modernist or modern literary gestures. The common dates used to delimit modernism, 1890–1930 (Bradbury and McFarlane [1976]) or the 1920s or the 1930s would exclude important French works or neglect landmark dates. One could also opt for a very specific time period; for example, literature between the wars or literature at the turn of the century. Yet here again the larger literary impact and influences of modernism would be too limited.

Within French studies a literary taxonomy can also be based on a particular school or group, often defined by biography and social relationships, such as the surrealists or the decadents. Another means is to isolate a category: for example, exiled writers, traveling writers, non-Parisian writers or writers who worked with visual artists. French literature thus presents few assumed or distinct categories. Nonetheless, from the Comte de Lautréamont (Isidore Ducasse) to the OULIPO writers (*Ouvroir de la Littérature Potentielle*, a group of experimental writers including Georges Perec, Raymond Queneau, Marcel Bénabou and others) to Marguerite Duras, there exists a corpus of literature within France whose inquiries into writing display a distinctly modernist yet peculiarly French view of literature. These writers can be grouped together because they knew each other, were influenced by the same philosophers, or because they defined themselves as belonging together.

### The French Uses of the Term ‘Modern’

An additional dilemma in the definition of French literary modernism is the difficulty in finding new French terms whose etymology is connected with *le moderne*, a term bandied about to mean many different things in France since the seventeenth century. If we trace the appearance of the term in France and its relatively recent etymology, this constant paradox becomes apparent. In 1868 *modernité* was signaled as a neologism in the Littré dictionary (the most important French language dictionary of the nineteenth century, which appeared from 1863 to 1877) and could be applied to the following fields: history, painting, geometry and architecture. *Moderne* meant more or less since the Renaissance for all of these fields, except painting, which was modern if created in the last few years. For example, writers like Michel de Montaigne or La Rochefoucauld are modern writers in the French context yet would not be considered modernist. In architecture, Littré mentions the verb *moderniser*, later supplanted by *moderniser*, which signified bringing an older building up to modern standards of taste. To *moderniser* something was not to create it anew but rather to superficially alter its existing structures in order to bring it up to date. In 1873, Littré uses the term *moderniste* to refer to persons who value modern times over antiquity. The term *modernism(e)* does not appear in Littré.

Despite this problem of terminology, I here wish to present one possible way of understanding a group of authors whose textual innovations, thematic concerns, and styles I define as both explicitly modernist and French. Throughout the twentieth century most canonical French literature has been shaped by a modernist mode yet not in the same way that British or American literature or flush toilets represent *modernisme* as new, progressive or revolutionary. French literature from Lautréamont to Duras is modernist but does not entirely valorize the new. Rather, French literary modernism as I see it is characterized by a great deal of attention paid to the past.

By writing about the past and the present, French authors negotiate a modernist moment in their writing. This mode of being or writing between past and present is the key to understand the particular and peculiar nature of French literary modernism. French literary modernism reveals a desire for the new tempered or constrained by a simultaneous movement toward a mythic or literary past. The analogy of travel aids in understanding this stylistic and thematic conundrum. French modernist texts are like the modern traveler who in his or her inability to clearly articulate the new and unknown destination turns rather to a minute investigation of his or her mode of transport.

One of France's best-known early twentieth-century travel writers, Paul Morand, wrote as much about what went on inside train compartments, ships' berths, cockpits and telephone booths as he did about his exotic destinations. The literary texts I am interested in are specific examples of efforts to write something new while keeping an eye on the past, which ultimately results in an interrogation of the act of writing itself. The act of writing itself is, after all, a primary mode of travel between past and present. I hope to do two things in exploring the modernist text as a presumed mode of mobility caught between progression and regression. For those unfamiliar with French literature, I will present a limited selection of characteristic and important works. For those already familiar with the French canon, I hope to suggest a new mode of envisioning literary modernism. I do not wish to offer the reader a vast series of lists but rather to provide a framework in which to consider the concept of French literary modernism and present a few of the more intriguing examples.

Modernist texts constantly question their own veracity, existence and genre, and thus the fact that French literary modernism does not really exist or cannot be easily defined is itself a modernist situation. From the 1860s to the present, French literature has increasingly interrogated the text and the act of writing, its own identity so to speak. This can be seen at the beginning of the twentieth century as French writing took on a new valence, rejecting the novel and increasingly turning to autobiographical narratives. Many texts were actually investigations into portrayals of the self and the act of writing only slightly disguised as novels, poetry or narratives (*récits*). New notions of otherness, speed, geographical and textual space, and the physicality of writing appear in these modernist texts primarily as new ways to understand the creation of the literary self and only secondarily as means to portray the world.

Throughout these investigations into aspects of the production of the text itself, revolutionary gestures gradually became literary norms. Ironically, by the end of the twentieth century, French literature's infatuation with the metatextual and preference for self-conscious narratives has led to a certain cataleptic state. The subversive act of breaking through the text to address the reader and draw attention to the act of writing has become a literary habit in France. From a very active negotiation with the past and the present, I will show, French literature has moved to a minute oscillation that almost resembles stasis.

## Baudelaire and Modernity

To trace a short history of how the French literary world perceived and defined modernism, one must begin with France's best-known poet. Charles Baudelaire's art criticism, rather than his poetry, and more specifically his *Peintre de la vie moderne* (The Painter of Modern Life) presents the best-known and most often cited definition of the modern. Baudelaire posits a combination of the eternal and the fleeting which makes particular sense in the context of literature, although his definition referred specifically to painting. This text was first published in 1863 in the newspaper *Le Figaro* with an apologia from the editor for the unusual nature of the text. Baudelaire writes: "Modernity is the transient, the fleeting, the contingent; it is one half of art, the other being the eternal and the immovable" (Baudelaire [1972], 403).<sup>1</sup> In this essay, on the painter Constantin Guys, whom he describes as a great traveler and cosmopolitan, Baudelaire is primarily concerned with visual representations of modernity. His definition of the modern works well in a literary context, but like many definitions of the modern in France, was originally meant only to explain how painters could work within and against artistic traditions and norms. Like the architectural use of the term modernisation, Baudelaire's "modern" does not entail the razing and destruction of the past. French modernism is not a phoenix rising from the ashes of history. As Baudelaire explains about the modern painter, "the aim for him is to extract from fashion the poetry that resides in its historical envelope, to distil the eternal from the transitory" (Baudelaire [1972], 402).<sup>2</sup> By carefully negotiating between the past and the present, the modern painter can gain access to a greater aesthetic truth rather than merely depicting the new.

Baudelaire posits the replacement of religion by these notions of eternal beauty, but at the beginning of the twentieth century, the eternal may in turn be replaced by concepts of the self. So, the eternal to be sought through the fleeting and transitory may be the artist's or writer's self. According to Baudelaire, the image of what the modern painter sees must pass through his own individual self. The particular is distilled from the huge picture of the world and then placed into the artwork, where the viewer can then look at this particular opening out to the larger world in his mind. As Baudelaire says, the viewer then becomes the translator of a translation. Baudelaire is fascinated with the paintings of Constantin Guys because through all the effects of transitoriness, rapidity and fleeting moments — both in the subject matter and in the means of execution — the works still allow for an extraction of the eternal. Guys's paintings represent motion. By capturing a fleeting moment in time they can, for Baudelaire, present a lens through which to see the eternal. Thus the new is only a means to gain access to the old.

## French Approaches to the New

As Baudelaire puts it, through the new we can gain a greater awareness of the past or at least have a glimpse of something eternal. By the end of the twentieth century, modernism in France still implied a superficial interest in the new to better understand the more important past. This reluctance to valorize the new at the expense of the past continued to appear in the French use of the term *modernisme*. In 1995, the Petit Larousse defined *modernisme* as "1. Taste or search for that which

is modern. 2. Hispano-American literary movement of the late nineteenth century which underwent the influence of the Parnassians" (*Petit Larousse* [1995], 645).<sup>3</sup> The Robert dictionary from 1992 traces the use of the term *modernisme* to an isolated mention by Huysmans around 1879 and defines it as "1. Taste for that which is modern or current. Modernism occasionally refers to painting with a pejorative nuance. Excessive taste for that which is modern at any price" (*Petit Robert* [1992], 1212).<sup>4</sup> Modernism's fame or acclaim is thus persistently tinged with a sentiment of neophobia.

The French writers whom I consider modernist accordingly refused to indulge a taste for the modern at any price. Few well-known literary writers could be categorized as merely interested in the new. Thus the term *modernisme* in its pejorative sense as defined by the Robert dictionary does not truly explain what I am referring to as the modernist gestures of French writers. For rather than seeking the modern above all, they are interested in the juxtaposition or encounter of old and new. Literary modernism for the French canon can best be figured as a vehicle or mode in which to move from the old to the new. This modernism or mode of examination of what is in fashion thus does not represent the completely new but rather, in a very self-conscious manner, underlines the shifts between old and new.

## Travel and Modernism

Returning to the allegory of travel, we can see the closed dynamism inherent to this sort of journey that seeks some aspects of the new only to return to the past. This modernism is more an examination of the mode of moving from old to new and the modalities of the text rather than a reflection of the ultimate, idealized notions of newness that would stand in for the journey's destination. It then comes as no surprise that many modernist investigations in literature are littered with references to travel: from Baudelaire's own poems and prose poetry on the voyage to Stéphane Mallarmé's "Jamais un coup de dés n'abolira le hasard" (A Throw of the Dice Never Will Abolish Chance) to Cendrars's "Prose du Transsibérien et de la petite Jehanne de France" (The Prose of the Trans-Siberian and of Little Jeanne of France), André Gide's travel narratives and Michel Leiris's pseudo-ethnographies. In *La Littérature française du XXe siècle*, Henri Mitterand writes: "Next to the last symbolist a veritable new spirit arises, that of Apollinaire, Cendrars, Jacob, Reverdy, Salmon, Larbaud, Segalen, Saint-John Perse" (Mitterand [1996], 12).<sup>5</sup> Over half of those contributing to this new force in literature were inveterate travelers.

The actual experience of travel and the authors' subsequent attempts to depict their international movements in the text contribute vastly to new forms and questions about French literature in the early twentieth century. For French writers during this period, the only spaces left to explore and conquer, apart from a few inhospitable oases and Himalayan peaks, are narratives about the act of writing travel narratives or examinations of the self. It is revealing that in 1996 Mitterand sees little need to distinguish Cendrars, Larbaud, Segalen and Saint-John Perse as travelers. Their new ideas about poetic form and fragments are simply seen as a wave of inspiration sweeping the French capital in the banner year of 1913, this being the publication year for *Alcools* by Apollinaire, *La Prose du Transsibérien* by Cendrars, *Le Grand Meaulnes* (Lost Domain) by Alain-Fournier, *A. O. Barnabooth* by Valéry Larbaud, *Du Côté de chez Swann* (Swann's way) by Proust, *Stèles* by Segalen and the year that Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* premiered.

Although the French writer most often labelled modernist, Proust, could be posited as not writing about travel at all and certainly remaining rather fixed in space, his project *A la recherche du temps perdu* (In Search of Lost Time) is precisely about how one moves or negotiates between then and now, between the old and the new. The many volumes are a reflection on the process of moving between old and new rather than a straightforward embrace of either. In this work he seeks to capture the fleeting and transient qualities of memory and experience.

### Conceptualizing the New in French Literature

The question remains whether this contrast between old and new can be characterized as opposition or as collaboration. Can something be both old and new, and does the transitory truly reveal an eternal? When the surrealists came to New York, some Americans were astounded that they were not interested in the purely new but rather always had an eye turned to some sort of mythic past. Robert Motherwell would contrast their art with the American efforts: “Consciously abandoning the past is the essentially American creative act” (Motherwell [1992], 48). As we will see in a few literary examples, consciously negotiating with the past is the essential French modernist act. This study presents as examples well-known literary works by the Comte de Lautréamont, Stéphane Mallarmé, Blaise Cendrars, Victor Segalen and other important travelling writers, Michel Proust, Nathalie Sarraute, Alain Robbe-Grillet and Marguerite Duras in roughly chronological order.

The writers discussed here all represented new voices at the time their works were published, yet have in common an intense and often conflicted desire to write both against and within the French literary tradition. By being constantly aware of their positions as writers within the text they bring a distinctly modernist feel to much twentieth-century literature. As Alan Wilde has observed in *Horizons of Assent: Modernism, Postmodernism, and the Ironic Imagination*, “modernists were heirs to a tradition they revolted against [...] modernism is more a transitional phenomenon than a period or a movement” (Wilde [1987], 4). Thus it is that I present texts from almost a hundred years of French literary history as all being transitional in their own manner.

### Some Examples: Lautréamont

The Comte de Lautréamont’s *Chants de Maldoror* (Songs of Maldoror), first published in 1869, is one of the earlier French modernist texts. Throughout these songs, which are like prose poems, the narrator brings the reader’s attention to the act of literary creation as well as to many other modernist dilemmas. These include a new examination of the self and a certain discomfort with the modern world. What most renders these texts modernist is their simultaneous call for something new as well as a desire to preserve or reexamine the old. The first lines of the first song address and warn the reader, thus immediately drawing attention to the metatextual. The narrator commands the reader not to move forward. He writes, “retrace your steps, do not advance. Hear my words well: retrace your steps do not advance” (Ducasse [1970], 1).<sup>6</sup> This desire to look back or to stay back in order to move forward is repeated throughout the text as the narrator addresses the old

ocean and repeatedly refers to the eternal. Lautréamont's writing is, however, not a call to return to the past but rather a singular and new appeal to reexamine humanity and the act of writing.

By directly addressing the reader, referring to himself in the third person and using a slippery and sinuous rhetoric, Lautréamont explores the act of writing in a distinctly self-conscious manner. As Jean-Luc Steinmetz writes in the preface to the French edition, "he creates another pleasure, a more intellectual pleasure, more insidious, that of participating in the making of the text, in the possible multiples that it suggests" (Ducas [1990], 9).<sup>7</sup> This text is thus specifically modern in a French mode as it signals the advent of new ways of writing all the while warning the reader to pay careful attention to what lies behind us in the past.

As Lautréamont's narrator gazes out to sea in the seventh section of the fourth song, watching an evolution of mankind that he says may only be described in posthumous texts, he pulls the reader along with him towards a future infinity and then back to a primordial universe. This constant textual movement, which never actually progresses, since the narrator is trapped on the shore watching motion, evokes the ocean's waves against the sandy beach. The narrator's temporal references from infinity to a very short moment on a particular summer's eve draw the reader's attention to the impossibility and inevitability of progress. The sentences are very long and filled with interpellations, rendering the actual chronological development of the text difficult to discern. In drawing the reader's attention to the act of creating textual time, Lautréamont is writing in a modernist mode yet refusing to leave the past behind.

## Mallarmé

Thirty years later Mallarmé would publish his important poem, "Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard" (A Throw of the Dice Never Will Abolish Chance), which would be lauded as something completely innovative. This free verse poem is arranged across the page in varying sizes of type, adding to the text's implied motion. The reader's eye moves up and down, left and right and from large to small print. The visual qualities of the text as well as its theme are kinetic. The poem's vocabulary hints at a descending momentum that only barely acknowledges the possibility of moving up into the universe. The images of a sinking shipwreck from which one attempts to throw a die or of the abyss into which the ship sinks draw the reader further and further down in space. However, the verbs "soaring", "careening", "tossed", "surging", "flowing", "hurl", "plummet" and "hover" contrast strongly with the images of sinking into the depths.

At every point where the abyss seems about to swallow up the text, small motions upward move the text forward away from the past. These small motions are symbolized by a "solitary plume", thus drawing the reader's attention to the act of writing, or the tufts of an egret or a constellation. Thus the poem is looking back while endeavoring to look forward or upward and finally draws more attention to its own moment of existence on the page. The new that the narrator seems to be seeking is engulfed by the old and only now and then does a gust or slight collision bring attention to the possibility of something new. The new sought by the narrator is also something eternal and maybe even immutable in its unattainability as we see in the symbols of constellations, clouds, the horizon, a rock, or in the words "ancestrally", "legacy" and "infinity".

Although the words of the text move across the page, up and down like waves or steps or wind

they too are tied to the stasis of the printed page. Although this experimental page layout is a new gesture on behalf of the poet to visually represent the motion of the poem, the traditional movement from left to right and from top to bottom ultimately dominates. Through this spatialization of time, Mallarmé attempts to create a simultaneous text on the page. The constant movements of the text's images and words on the page represent repeated efforts to access an eternal past, to either attain or abolish chance. The reader is aware of the way the text is constructed yet is also pulled into the poem and must work to find any way out. The journey to the depths of the abyss or to the infinity of constellations ultimately halts and does not proceed to a brave new world where chance can be vanquished. As Mallarmé himself writes in the preface, "[t]he literary advantage [...] of this copied distance which mentally separates groups of words or words among themselves, seems to accelerate and slow down the movement, scanning it, even intimating it according to a simultaneous view of the page" (Mallarmé [1956], 2). The text is about movement and speed, about oscillations between word and image, and as such seeks to be simultaneous in its negotiation with the eternal Poetry and the new page.

### Cendrars

This desire to be simultaneous reveals a particularly French modernist concern and is one way of being within both the past and the present. Blaise Cendrars is another important modernist writer in French who endeavored to create a simultaneous text. He traveled extensively and wrote poems in free verse as well as novels and essays. His most modern piece was undoubtedly the collaboration with Sonia Delaunay in their first simultaneous book, the poem "La Prose du Transsibérien et de la petite Jeanne de France" of 1913. This long poem was published alongside a Delaunay painting in a two-meter long accordion fold book. Delaunay and Cendrars hoped the reader could then in a sense surmount time by visually experiencing the entire work simultaneously without the temporal restriction of page turning. The poem does, however, recount a linear event, a long train journey across the nascent Soviet Union. This is a train that never seems to arrive at its destination but rather is stuck in a world that "stretches out, elongates and snaps back like an accordion in the hands of a raging sadist" (Cendrars [1992], 21).<sup>8</sup> Through its actual historical placement and narrative techniques, the poem only begins to approach the new which always lies somewhere beyond what the narrator is experiencing.

The poem begins with the lines: "Back then I was still young, I was barely sixteen but my childhood memories were gone" (Cendrars [1992], 15).<sup>9</sup> Thus the narrator is jaded yet terribly young, just as the country through which he travels is torn between a heavy imperial past lacking innocence, and a bleak future. The text itself pulls the reader forward and backward through time and space. Throughout the poem the voice of Jeanne repeatedly asks whether they are far from Montmartre. This refrain draws the reader's attention to the supposed motion of the text as the train moves farther from Paris, never, however, actually leaving Paris completely in the past. Although supposedly racing through Siberia on a train, the narrator constantly looks back in time to Paris. By the end of the poem the narrator is back in Paris, going out to drink alone and wishing he had never traveled. Thus the forward motion of a journey is merely a pretext for a return to the examination of the Parisian self.

Cendrars's poetry was revolutionary and very modern yet ultimately concerned with the movement of poetry and history between the old world and the new. This can also be seen in his 1912 poem *Pâques à New York* (Easter in New York), where the narrator in the new world repeatedly interrogates a god of the old world. In both of these poems by Cendrars, Jeanne's question of where we are and the questions for God draw the reader's attention to the construction of the text and the process of writing. The poet asks and asks where he is temporally, geographically and spiritually and we must also ask where the poem is and how it came to be. These self-conscious moments within the text are not without humor as Cendrars writes: "Still, I was a really bad poet" (Cendrars [1992], 15); "Me, the bad poet who wanted to go nowhere" (Cendrars [1992], 16); and "So many associations, images I can't get into my poem because I'm still such a really bad poet" (Cendrars [1992], 26). Nonetheless, the poet does move slowly into a newer world portrayed in his associations and images.

### Traveling Writers

The relationship between travel and literary modernism is not merely metaphorical. From Victor Segalen to Claude Lévi-Strauss, French writers and thinkers of the twentieth century traveled to experience a displacement of the inner self and the physical body while writing against and within literary traditions. The more interesting and modernist travel texts minutely examined the impossibility of ever escaping the old self to become or experience the completely new. Writers like Segalen, Saint-John Perse, Henri Michaux, Paul Nizan and Valéry Larbaud spent more time writing about the process of moving from past to present than about their actual destinations. Thus their texts which are purportedly travelogues often become instead modernist interrogations of the act of writing and the creation of a writing self. Henri Michaux in his *Un Barbare en Asie* writes:

Some will be astonished that having lived in a European country more than thirty years, I never wrote about it. I come to India, open my eyes and write a book. Those who are astonished astonish me. How can one not write about a country presented with an abundance of new things and in the joy of reliving. And how can one write about a country where one has lived thirty years of boredom, contradiction, trivial worries, defeats, daily routine and about which one no longer knows anything. (Michaux [1945], 95)<sup>10</sup>

However, most of Michaux's text is not about the new country he sees but about his old self in a new location.

While these authors claim to be writing something entirely new during their journeys they often look back to the French literary tradition. For example, Segalen begins his travelogue *Equipée* as follows: "I always thought narratives of this type were suspicious or illusory: tales of adventure, travelogues, gossip stories — stuffed with sincere words — about acts that one maintains having committed in precise places, during a series of catalogued days. This book, however, proposes exactly this kind of narrative, a tale of travel and adventures" (Segalen [1995], vol.II, 265).<sup>11</sup> Segalen thus refuses to create a conventional travel narrative while at the same time writing down the first words of what can only be a narrative. *Equipée* (written 1916, published 1929) is a novelistic account of the narrator's attempt to find true otherness while traversing China.



Although the title of the book means escapade or jaunt, less movement is literally described by Segalen than by the other authors examined thus far. Within a few sentences the narrator tells us that “all is immobile and suspended” (Segalen [1995], vol. II, 265) and that “one can voluntarily close this book and free oneself from all that follows” (265). Before even beginning the journey the narrator carefully examines the philosophical questions that come with the presumption of describing movement in a real world. Segalen explains that the book is ultimately less about a journey than about how human beings can possibly experience the confrontation between the real and the imaginary which occurs equally in the pages of a book as on the summits of Chinese mountains. Here we see negotiation with many pasts: China’s mythical past, the narrator’s youth, the semantic past of any word that could be used to describe something new, as well as the slow steps of the journey which are immediately left behind to the traveler’s past.

By the end of this modernist travelogue, the narrator has covered some distance which he persists in describing as elastic, relative, and fluctuating. He has attained his goal of seeing the imaginary other which ultimately reveals itself as a vision of a younger Segalen in worn beige clothing. Thus the desire to experience the shock of the new is supplanted by a realization that the narrator himself has not really changed after all these years. Segalen is literally traveling to the past as he encounters his own young self with whom it is impossible to speak. From Segalen to Michaux to Lévi-Strauss, twentieth-century French travelers both claim and refuse the generic category of travel narrative for their own texts. The French traveler is primarily a literary creature, and travel literature after Segalen is increasingly metatextual and thus modernist, more concerned with writing and portraying the experience of travel than with the mechanics of physical or psychological displacement. By focusing primarily on the self, travel narratives reveal the subject’s relation to the world and the process by which the experience of travel becomes a text.

## Proust

Although Proust’s narrator does not travel to China, he too is in search of his lost younger self, in search of his own personal past. In 1913, Proust published *Du côté de chez Swann* (Swann’s Way), the first volume of *In Search of Lost Time*. Perhaps more than any other French author, Proust is most automatically associated with literary modernism when the field is defined internationally. The modernist nature of his text, is not, however, clearly defined by any particular characteristic. He is variously cited as being modernist because his fiction is incomplete (Fletcher and Bradbury [1991], 405), because it deals thematically with the life of the artist (Fletcher and Bradbury [1991], 404), because consciousness is at its center (Stern [1991], 428), because it reveals a desire for pure form (Fletcher and Bradbury [1991], 407), because it is repetitive (Friedman [1991], 453), or because linear and temporal order is distorted within the text (Sheppard [2000], 44). None of these characteristics excludes any of the others and the work in question is very long. Most of these qualities can be associated with the analogy of the modern journey, which is repetitive, self-conscious, never complete and whose time is continuously distorted and rendered relative. The desire for pure form mentioned by Fletcher and Bradbury is, as they explain, ultimately a frustrated desire as the narrator realizes that he cannot write as he wishes (Fletcher and Bradbury [1991], 403).

Proust’s opus is primarily a negotiation with the past and an interrogation of the means of writing

this past. Additionally, this long examination of the self can also be characterized as a journey. As John Fletcher and Malcolm Bradbury write about *Remembrance of Things Past*: “The book is a voyage into the complexity of consciousness, instinctual and aesthetic [...] it is in fact a poetic, indeed a Symbolist, quest for the lost reality of the past, and a search for the artistic means for its recreation” (Fletcher and Bradbury [1991], 402). As such it is through journeying toward the past that the narrator emphasizes the artistic process in a particularly modernist sensibility. Although Proust’s obsessive attention to his personal past may be new, the book is about an old self in a slowly changing new world.

Here I will briefly discuss just one scene from the first volume, *Swann’s Way*. The scene where the narrator drinks some tea and tastes a madeleine is undoubtedly the best-known moment in all of Proust’s writing. Immediately preceding his description of involuntary memory, the narrator explains that we have little control over how or when we will be able to recapture our own past. Much like the passenger on a train, the narrator must await chance occurrences and cannot completely shape the direction of his experience. For many, it is during travel that one has the most frequent experiences of the *déjà vu* that Proust will go on to describe, because only then can sensations be completely unexpected and thus trigger involuntary associations. As the narrator describes his efforts to regain memory, the memory itself becomes the traveler. He writes, “what is thus palpitating in the depths of my being must be the image, the visual memory which, being linked to that taste, has tried to follow it into my conscious mind” (Proust [1970], 35).<sup>12</sup> The memory must move, or be propelled, in order for it to reach the narrator’s mind. The modernist dynamic of the text here appears linked to the text’s own aim, to remember or recapture the past. Proust continues: “Will it ultimately reach the clear surface of my consciousness, this memory, this old, dead moment which the magnetism of an identical moment has travelled so far to importune, to disturb, to rise up out of the very depths of my being?” (Proust [1970], 35).<sup>13</sup> The entire book is created as the narrator very carefully traces the temporal journey of this memory and attempts to measure the distances traversed by the memory. Thus as a particularly French modernist work, Proust’s opus is ultimately about the journey, the trajectory, that takes place between the past and the new. As the narrator minutely investigates the movements of memory, he also emphasizes the ways in which the act of writing itself problematizes this motion.

## Sarraute

The movements in Proust’s work take place quite slowly, the narratological rhythm at times is stretched out. As the twentieth century progresses, and particularly with the advent of the New Novel, we will see these motions between past and present not only slow down but become more restricted in their actual mobility. Although Proust’s memory cannot be directed, it does traverse a vast amount of time and textual space. Nathalie Sarraute’s short book of brief sections, *Tropismes*, reveals another, more restrained version of the modernist textual journey. Although Sarraute is widely lauded as beginning the New Novel movement in the 1950s, this text was originally published in 1939 and relatively ignored until it was republished in 1957. The reader may wonder at this jump from 1913 to 1939, which for many is the most important period of literary modernism. Although there are many writers from this era whose work could be considered modernist, I

am here consciously avoiding defining French literary modernism as linked with a specific time period. This period is of course very important for modernism in French painting but once again I would like to emphasize the point that French literary modernism is atypical in that it does not solely or primarily manifest itself in the interwar period.

Sarraute's book signals the advent of a new type of writing in France, the New Novel, yet once again we can observe the importance of kinetics in a literary effort to break new ground. Sarraute herself said "I thought that the novel, speaking as if with Flaubert, must always bring new forms and a new substance. And I believed that one should only write if one has felt things that other writers had not felt or expressed" (Belaval and Cranaki [1965], 213).<sup>14</sup> Thus as with Segalen or Proust we see a concurrent effort to both do something quite new and to remember or evoke the French literary canon, "as if with Flaubert." This in turn emphasizes the limitations of movements toward a future when rooted in the past. Tropisms are the slight, slow and involuntary movements of plants. Rooted permanently in the ground and for all purposes immobile, plants can shift with the sun or with other natural phenomena. As Sarraute explains in her 1962 preface to the English translation: "What I had tried to do was to show certain inner 'movements' by which I had long been attracted" (Sarraute [1963], 7). According to Sarraute, it is these movements that affect every aspect of human life. In these short texts Sarraute presents characters with little specific identity and events *in media res*, thus focusing primarily on the movement that is at the core of existence.

The first tropism begins with generic movement. Things or rather people are gushing from all over the place going nowhere, holding their hands out to small children who follow dutifully. Sarraute writes: "They seemed to spring up from nowhere [...] they flowed gently [...], they were seeping [...], they stretched out" (Sarraute [1963], 15). The narrator minutely and repeatedly describes motions that never reach their destination, movements that flow or stretch in a direction but never attain a desired goal. In the second tropism more active verbs appear, such as surge, shake, tear, and destroy—yet only in the conditional, for these are desired actions that are restricted by society and thus impossible. Thus, although the tropisms primarily describe motion, it is a motion of stasis or imprisonment or impossibility. The modern journey traced by this text is not one of an adventurer or an explorer but rather that of a commuter or a child skipping rope in a courtyard.

In the fourth tropism we may be reminded of Lautréamont's command to the reader, yet here the impossibility of ever returning or moving forward is emphasized. Sarraute writes an inner monologue in one of the character's minds: "Go ahead! Forwards! Ah, no, that's not it! Backwards! Backwards!" (Sarraute [1963], 20). By the next paragraph the exhausted response appears: "How exhausting is all this effort, this perpetual hopping and skipping about in his presence, backwards, forwards, forwards, forwards, and backwards again" (Sarraute [1963], 21). This is not a movement where one can even begin to retrace one's steps but rather a mad dance that ultimately goes nowhere. By the final tropisms, the people described are holding hands and moving only in very tight rings. Sarraute is not telling the reader a story but rather trying to get at the heart of writing narrative, reducing the elements of the fabula to focus on the motion that propels writing.

As the movement in Sarraute's book becomes increasingly contained, another new novelist would even more explicitly illustrate the link between tropism and travel. In 1957, when *Tropismes* was republished to greater acclaim than in 1939, Michel Butor published *La Modification* (A Change of Heart), a novel written entirely in the second person. Through this stylistic inno-

vation the narrator becomes the reader and as Michel Leiris would write in a postface the text becomes “your book.” This change of pronoun accentuates the position of the modernist reader.

From Lautréamont’s frequent interpellations we have moved to a novel whose entirety is an interpellation to the reader. Thematically this text reveals the same concerns of French literary modernism. The novel tells the story of a journey between Paris and Rome. Throughout the text the main character is in the train with flashbacks and flashforwards. The train continues to move toward its destination, yet the narrator pulls the reader back again and again. The love story within the book is that of a tugging or pulling between two loves. Like the shuttlecock or the sadist’s accordion this constant movement back and forth maintains a tension between old and new. By the end of this rather long novel the main character gets up to leave the train and does leave the compartment but what will be or come after is never revealed. The new life he may lead in Rome is actually a return to his own life in Paris. The entire story of his life is within the train compartment, in passage between two poles, two loves and two countries. The mobility of immobility (the character moves but cannot ultimately form his life) and the immobility of mobility (nothing much can take place inside a moving train) thematically underline the modernist dynamic of French literature.

## Duras

This movement between past and present that begins to approach stasis is crystallized in the minimalist prose of Marguerite Duras’s 1958 novel, *Moderato Cantabile*. Here again a classic of French modernism reveals stylistic innovations backgrounded by a theme of near immobility between past and present. In her cool and distanced tone, Duras repeats over and over again many elements of the story. Throughout this story of a young woman in the provinces, the verb tenses keep telling us that something will change, something must change, but finally nothing really changes in her life. The title refers to the opening scene in which the protagonist’s son practices during a music lesson. Over and over the teacher asks him what *moderato cantabile* means until she herself finally provides the answer. The rhythmic qualities of this repetition are enhanced by the sound of the sea outside the open window. All of the characters, particularly the child, repeat themselves drawing the reader’s attention to the artificiality and composed qualities of the text.

When the book was published critics lauded Duras for bringing newness to French literature, for opening new modes of inquiry. Claude Dumont wrote about her opening a new path in literature (see Duras [1958], 127), Claude Mauriac writes that this is a new literature not meant for the lazy reader (see Duras [1958], 131). From Lautréamont’s movements back and forth we have reached a text where the oscillations are as tiny and contained as those of a metronome. Although by 1958, literary modernism may have reached its peak in other cultures, we have in the example of Duras proof that French literature was continuing to explore the possibilities of a modernism that did not embrace the new but negotiated constantly and carefully with the past. In this novel in particular, that which is claimed as new is the work on the part of the reader to understand how the text operates when it seems to move nowhere.

## Conclusion

French literary modernism as an increasingly static negotiation between the new and the past, continues to dominate Parisian novelistic practices. In Francophone literature, in poetry and in literary theory, new voices can be located that either free themselves from the past or endeavor to negotiate with different pasts other than that of great French literature. That is to say that negotiating with the past of the Algerian War, or the oral past of Caribbean history, or the past where women had little access to literary expression is not the same dynamic as we have seen in these literary works.

The movement between a present moment in the text and a French mythical, literary, particularly Parisian past is finally the most telling and long lasting characteristic of French literary modernism. Stylistic and narrative innovations within the works presented here are tremendous and have had far-reaching effects on literature, internationally and within France. Yet literary modernism's original dynamic mode has been so refined and closely examined by the texts themselves, that the main characteristic of French literature by the end of the twentieth century would ultimately be a lack of dynamism. This is a modernism whose identity is not fixed to a specific decade, group of writers or genre, but rather one which is shaped by and has in turn formed the French literary establishment. This institution, which includes the Goncourt prizes, the French Academy, the French university system, the major publishing houses and the French National Library remains modernist in its efforts to remain French.

French literary modernism as I see it is alive and well and has been the predominant trend in twentieth-century French literature. As French theory and cultural studies begin to be more widely exported and studied than French literature, perhaps French literary modernism will finally be replaced by something new or merely postmodern. The scrutiny of the self and of the text that is encouraged by the modernist works presented here may ultimately lead to another means of understanding literature. And as the Académie Française prepares to recruit several new members (who with no irony are referred to as immortals), perhaps even the institutions that reflect literary canons and fashions will begin to change. Thus, as politics, institutions, literary genealogies, textual aesthetics and publishing practices change, so too may we begin to see a new French literary modernism. Whether this new or post-modernism can ever quit the shores of its literary eternal in order to journey out into the world remains to be seen.

## Notes

1. "La modernité, c'est le transitoire, le fugitif, le contingent, la moitié de l'art, dont l'autre moitié est l'éternel et l'immuable" (Baudelaire [1962], 467).
2. "Il s'agit, pour lui, de dégager de la mode ce qu'elle peut contenir de poétique dans l'historique, de tirer l'éternel du transitoire" (Baudelaire [1962], 466).
3. "1. Goût, recherche de ce qui est moderne. 2. Mouvement littéraire hispano-américain de la fin du XIXe siècle qui a subi l'influence du Parnasse et du symbolisme français" (*Petit Larousse* [1995], 645).
4. "1. Goût de ce qui est moderne, actuel. Modernisme en peinture quelquefois avec une nuance péjorative. Goût excessif de ce qui est moderne, recherche du moderne à tout prix" (*Petit Robert* [1992], 1212).
5. "À côté des derniers symbolistes [...] surgit le véritable 'esprit nouveau': celui d'Apollinaire, Cendrars,

Jacob, Reverdy, Salmon, Larbaud, Segalen, Saint-John Perse" (Mitterand [1996], 12).

6. "dirige tes talons en arrière et non en avant. Ecoute bien ce que je te dis: Dirige tes talons en arrière et non en avant" (Ducasse [1990], 69).

7. "il crée dès lors un autre plaisir, celui, plus intellectuel, plus insidieux, de participer à la fabrique du texte, aux multiples possibles qu'il suggère" (Ducasse [1990], 9).

8. "le monde s'étire s'allonge et se retire comme un harmonica qu'une main sadique tourmente" (Cendrars [1992], 240).

9. "En ce temps-là j'étais en mon adolescence, J'avais à peine seize ans et je ne me souvenais déjà plus de mon enfance" (Cendrars [1992], 15).

10. "Certains s'étonnent qu'ayant vécu en un pays d'Europe plus de trente ans, il ne me soit jamais arrivé d'en parler. J'arrive aux Indes, j'ouvre les yeux, et j'écris un livre. Ceux qui s'étonnent m'étonnent. Comment n'écirait-on pas sur un pays qui s'est présenté à vous avec l'abondance des choses nouvelles et dans la joie de revivre? Et comment écrirait-on sur un pays où l'on a vécu, trente ans, liés à l'ennui, à la contradiction, aux soucis étroits, aux défaites, au traintrain quotidien, et sur lequel on ne sait plus rien" (Michaux [1945], 95).

11. "J'ai toujours tenu pour suspects ou illusoirs des récits de ce genre: récits d'aventures, feuilles de route, racontars — joufflus de mots sincères — d'actes qu'on affirmait avoir commis dans des lieux bien précis, au long de jours catalogués. C'est pourtant un récit de ce genre, récit de voyage et d'aventures, que ce livre propose" (Segalen [1995], vol. II, 265).

12. "Certes, ce qui palpite ainsi au fond de moi, ce doit être l'image, le souvenir visuel, qui, lié à cette saveur, tente de la suivre jusqu'à moi" (Proust [1988], 45).

13. "Arrivera-t-il jusqu'à la surface de ma claire conscience, ce souvenir, l'instant ancien que l'attraction d'un instant identique est venue de si loin solliciter, émouvoir, soulever tout au fond de moi?" (Proust [1988], 46).

14. "Je croyais que le roman, pour parler avec Flaubert, doit toujours apporter de nouvelles formes et une nouvelle substance. Et je croyais que l'on ne doit écrire que si l'on éprouve quelque chose que d'autres écrivains n'ont pas déjà éprouvé et exprimé" (Belaval and Cranaki [1965], 213).

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## The Spanish-American Modernismo

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In 1888 Rubén Darío used the term *modernismo* to refer to the literary developments that were taking place across Spanish America. In selecting this label for the first Spanish language movement to originate in the Western Hemisphere, a movement that he would come to head, Darío opted to underscore the phenomenon that defined *modernismo*'s nature. He affirmed that he and his fellow writers were attempting to establish a mode of discourse commensurate to the era that they had entered. The chosen term highlights the conviction that this movement was born of and within the context of modernity and that it was addressing the most urgent issues of modern life. One of these pressing concerns revolved around the desire to be modern, that is, to make Spanish America a contemporary of North America and Europe and, most especially, of the artistic and intellectual center of the Western world, the city of Paris.

Spanish-American writers sought to shed—either through travel or imagination—their “anachronistic,” local realities, and their limited and limiting Spanish traditions. They aspired, instead, to establish for themselves a modern mode of discourse in which they could speak for the first time with their own voices. However, their vision was riddled with ambivalence. These writers embraced the benefits and possibilities of modernity at the same time that they critiqued the socio-political and cultural problems that it engendered. They criticized the mores of the bourgeoisie and ruling classes as they also aspired to become fully incorporated into the ranks of the privileged. They voiced, from the vantage point of the great urban centers of Spanish America and Europe, modern dilemmas and angst while the vast majority of their compatriots continued to lead pre-modern lives.

The distant beginnings of modernity may be found within the Renaissance, also considered the “early modern period.” The fundamental philosophic shift that took place, one that affected all later thinking and that is a key to understanding the tension between *modernismo* and modernity, is related to the grounding of knowledge. The central characteristics of modernity developed as intellectuals saw themselves cut off from divine guarantees of knowledge. There arose, as a result, struggles for dominance among different sectors of society, within which different narratives and principles of legitimacy prevailed. The most important of these conflicts was the one between worldly and spiritual values and aspirations.

During the second half of the eighteenth century, modernity's more specific features began to take shape. Throughout the Western world, scientific and technological advancement, industrialization, and the sweeping economic and social changes brought about by capitalism came to define modern life and contributed to its increasingly strong materialistic inclinations. Torn between the reigning faith in technology, progress, and empirical science and an enduring fascination with intangible realities and non-materialistic goals, writers and philosophers began to express their dissat-



isfaction with the changes that were occurring. The first major literary movement in the West to address the sense of loss and alienation that came to define modern life was European Romanticism. Its principal exponents sought to reestablish a sense of ethical and spiritual integrity that had been lost when the old guarantees of knowledge were challenged. As Wlad Godzich has pointed out, with this loss, a central feature of the advent of modernity, individuals began to feel threatened with personal meaninglessness and collective tyranny associated with the arbitrary exercise of power (Godzich [1992], 128).

It was the perception of the onset of this double threat of individual meaninglessness and possible political excess during the second half of the nineteenth century that led Spanish-American writers to aspire to offer an alternative to the predominant ideology of the day. Their search for answers led them to explore the European writers who had already begun to confront similar issues. Just as Romanticism challenged the hegemony of the scientific and economic in modern life, Spanish-American *modernismo* protested against the technological, materialistic, and conceptual impact of positivism that dominated Spanish America upon its entry into the world economy. The literary movements of the nineteenth century on both sides of the Atlantic sought to provide alternative views of existence that they hoped would be inclusive. The *modernistas* favored a vision that was primarily spiritualist, one that was predicated on changes in consciousness and values. They proposed a worldview that imagined the universe as a system of correspondences in which language is capable of revealing profound truths.

Using this approach, the *modernistas* responded to the established authorities who wielded power and controlled acceptability and participation in society through the creation of cultural models of behavior. The prevailing standards of acceptability were based on metaphors of health and virility. If modernization was the goal of the ruling classes, members of those classes were forced to consider how much of it they wanted and, if their countries were not achieving all that they desired, what the roots of that failure might be. The images used to discuss these issues developed during the Enlightenment and were taken from the biological sciences. As indicated by both Aronna and Giaudrone, success was defined in terms of maturity, rationality, vigor, and masculinity (Aronna [1999] and Giaudrone [2000]). Failure was linked to degeneration, decadence, and disease. Those excluded from participation in the political arena were labeled unfit or ill.

Within this framework, sexuality, passion, and femininity were associated with irrationality as well as with weakness and immaturity, aspects of human nature that were deemed in need of regulation if not eradication. They were considered threats to the well-being of the community, for they created distractions from the rational execution of the dominant national goals. Instead of rejecting these features, *modernismo* actively embraced them, creating a recognizable counterdiscourse that offered a linguistic space for those excluded from participation. In their critique of modernity and its emphasis on materialism, pragmatism, and progress, the *modernistas* affirmed the beautiful, the artistic, the anti-utilitarian, the erotic, the irrational, and the spiritual.

More than the critics that followed them, *modernista* writers were aware that theirs was a vision that aspired to give voice to values and perspectives excluded from the dominant project of modernization. In this effort *modernista* authors manifested, in addition to their "spiritualist" goals, a "realist" tendency, seeking to establish more directly political and worldly images of change, a goal that grew out of their acute awareness of their unique position. They saw themselves in a new role with regard to Spanish-American literary history and literature's complex relationship with emer-

ging national identities—the result of political consolidation following the wars of independence.

*Modernismo* became the first movement in Spanish America to, in the words of Julio Ramos, “authorize itself as an alternate and privileged mode to speak about politics. Opposed to the ‘technical’ ways of knowing and to the imported languages of official politics, literature presents itself as the only hermeneutics capable of resolving the enigmas of the Latin American identity” (Ramos [1989], 16).<sup>1</sup> This “privileging” of the literary voice in the cacophony that filled the political debates of the day was made possible because of two different but mutually supportive perspectives on language. One, which most directly influenced the creation of prose texts, saw a model in philology and its faith in language’s ability to recover the past and reveal what is hidden. Yet, as indicated by Aníbal González in his study of the *crónica modernista*, philology proved inadequate when confronted with the opacity of language. This confrontation opened a space that literature took upon itself to fill (González [1983], 12, 14, 16, 54–6). The other perspective was grounded in a much older, “truer” way of knowing, that of analogy. As Octavio Paz repeatedly underscored, the analogical use of language became the foundation of the *modernista* epistemology, its challenge to bourgeois values, and its poetics. The premise that nature reveals a divine and harmonious order toward which poets must be free to aspire became the *modernista*’s answer to the stultifying rules of Spanish poetics. More importantly, this vision supplied a satisfying response to the modern world, to facile assumptions about science, scientific knowledge, and to the indiscriminate positivist pursuit of progress. This belief in the power of language and beauty even offered an answer to North American hegemony, one in which the values of an enlightened democracy could be praised without resigning Spanish-American reality to a second class status.

One need only turn to *Ariel* by José Enrique Rodó to find an example of these diverse features. In this founding essay of the modern Spanish-American essayistic tradition, Rodó offered a statement of cultural goals that were tied to a political vision for Spanish America. He proposed to fight the pragmatism and materialism epitomized by the United States with a spiritualism and idealism made strong by venerated values and divinely inspired wisdom. He called for a culture based on the sense of the beautiful, which he regarded as the foundation of moral behavior and leadership.

Roberto González Echevarría perceptively recognizes that the key drama in *Ariel* is “the conflict between truth as a sharing spirit and as ideological imposition” (González Echevarría [1985], 26), which, as he points out, is played out in the opposing images of air and metal. This tension runs throughout *modernista* writings. It is most commonly represented as the struggle between the rigidity of form and the fluidity of expression capable of capturing the “soul” of the author Bas in Darío’s “La fuente” (The Spring) from *Prosas profanas* (Profane Hymns). *Modernista* authors were acutely aware that language controls thought and that verbal conventions lock both writer and reader within patterns of thought and perception. Expression and ideology were intimately linked, and *modernistas* wrestled constantly with the dangers of the imposition of poetic as well as political mandates.

Perhaps the earliest example of this basic *modernista* tendency to conceive of literary and political concerns as two sides of the same proverbial coin appears in Martí’s famous prologue to Juan Antonio Pérez Bonalde’s *El poema del Niágara* (Poem of Niagara), which was written in New York in 1882 (Martí [1980], 103–25). In this poem, Martí confronts the impact of modern life upon literary production and defends poetry despite its intrinsic insignificance within the capitalist scheme. He establishes an opposition between “ruines tiempos” (vile times) and the spirit of the poet. He also presents a sophisticated view of the emergence of selfhood within the socialization process

that is based on the dichotomies between culture and nature, between rigidity and fluidity, between bondage and freedom. According to Martí, from the earliest age, from the very first days of existence, one is molded, shaped, and, worse still, deformed by outside forces. These forces are represented as coercive (great and strong bindings) and conservative (parental passions). The aggressive and destructive nature of this process is further emphasized by the verbs chosen: “they tie him,” and “they girdle him.” Martí makes clear that possibilities and options are channeled along predetermined paths; the individual’s being, thinking, and behavior are restricted. The self is poured into previously established molds, made to conform, left with no choices.

The true self, nevertheless, eludes the absolute oppression of these outside forces by slipping invisibly beneath the surface, which Martí calls “la vida aparente” (the apparent life). What is authentic and real is, therefore, different from what appears on the surface. Martí goes on to compare the underlying current with the mysterious Guadiana River, which flows silently beneath Andalusian lands. Remarkably, for Martí the genuine self is not destroyed but finds freedom in a hidden, subterranean region. Martí thus affirms the everlasting ability of the self to assert its authentic nature, one that is portrayed as fluid and unconstrained but also as hidden, as unseen, as, perhaps, inaccessible within the daily routines.

The battle to achieve the freedom to be faithful to oneself poetically and politically dominated Martí’s life. It is emblematic of the *modernista* desire for a language that is dual in nature. One aspect is related to language as an instrument of vision and knowing, capable of revealing realities concealed by the inflexibility of scientific methods and the stultification of everyday concerns and values. The other is related to language as a tool of politics and power that plays an essential role in the formation of national cultures and identities. This second concern grows out of the first and derives its legitimacy from the movement’s faith in the superior epistemological power of literature. In short, *modernismo* asserts its ability to comment on and even alter the positivistic, materialistic, and pragmatic course adopted by the Spanish-American nations entering the modern age. Both aspects are derivative of the desire to use literature to influence the development of modernity. Both are grounded in the belief in the transformative capacity of art.

For the longest time, however, literary scholars and critics defined *modernismo* exclusively as a poetic movement distinguished by its rejection of the restrictive rules of Spanish versification. The movement was believed to be concerned solely with the creation of innovative poetic forms and images. The first major studies, such as those by Mapes and Faurie, sought to pinpoint French models for *modernista* works, focusing on the formal aspects of this influence. Scholars emphasized changes in meter and verse form, the introduction of new rhythm and rhyme schemes, and symbolic and thematic similarities with earlier French texts. Others, like Miller, chose to distinguish between the perfection of form and devotion to beauty attributed to the influence of Parnassian verse from the musical evocation and dream-like suggestion encouraged by symbolist poetry. By failing to link these formal changes with their philosophical and ideological underpinnings, these critics overlooked *modernismo*’s complex and abiding nature.

Even Max Henríquez Ureña’s comprehensive, insightful, and influential *Breve historia del modernismo* (Brief History of Modernismo) reflected the belief that the central concern of *modernista* authors was to break with “the excesses of romanticism” and “the narrow criterion of pseudoclassical rhetoric” (Henríquez Ureña [1954], 13–14). He held that, for this reason, they opted to transpose French innovations into a Spanish key, following the examples of such authors as Leconte de Lisle,

José María de Heredia, Alfred de Musset, Victor Hugo, Paul Verlaine, Catulle Mendès, Stéphane Mallarmé, Maurice de Guérin, Théophile Gautier, and Pierre Loti, among others.

This focus on “sources” and influences was not limited to France, for *modernismo* embraced a strong and wide-ranging cosmopolitan spirit. As Marasso and Fiore have shown, all European and even Middle-Eastern and Oriental art and culture captured the poetic imagination of *modernista* authors from time to time (Marasso [1954], Fiore [1963]). Occasionally the influence was direct, more often it came by way of Paris, filtered through Parisian imaginations and interpretations. Darío would write: “I love more than the Greece of the Greeks/ the Greece of France” (“Divagación” [Wandering], *Prosas profanas* [Profane hymns], Darío [1977], 184).<sup>2</sup> While this cosmopolitanism has been identified with escapism and flight from the immediate Spanish-American reality, it was actually a manifestation of a complex and profound search, a search that led *modernista* writers to embrace diverse aspects of high culture from all corners of the globe with a heady enthusiasm in the expectation of achieving, in apparent contradiction, a sense of identity that is clearly Spanish-American.

“Escapist literature” was actually, as noted by Octavio Paz in “Literatura de fundación” (Paz [1966], 11–19), a literature of exploration and return. *Modernista* writers moved freely between the most up-to-date European trends and native American heroes, poets, events, and images. They resurrected, through flights of fancy as much as through historical fact, a Spanish-American past that included ancient civilizations, indigenous peoples, and a Spanish-American consciousness. They understood their goals to be serious and far-reaching and their efforts to be simultaneously philosophic, aesthetic, and political. The balance among these three aspects became more overtly political as the socio-economic pressures that gave rise to *modernismo* exploded in crisis in 1898 with the Spanish-American War and later in 1903 with the United States’ intervention in Panama.

Most critics who have discussed the “political” nature of *modernista* discourse have focused on this later period and its more openly nationalistic agenda, but they have tended to disregard its more subtle origins in the writings before the turn of the century. The change from what was erroneously believed to be an apolitical perspective, as in the poetry of Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera and Darío’s early works, to more assertively Spanish-American concerns, as with key poems in Darío’s *Cantos de vida y esperanza* (Songs of Life and Hope) and *Alma América: Poemas indo-españoles* (Soul America: Indo-Spanish Poems) by José Santos Chocano, led early critics to posit two distinct stages in *modernismo*. The “second generation” of *modernistas* was considered more focused on achieving an artistic expression that would be genuinely American. This misleading division overlooks the fact that both “generations” dealt with the issues of Spanish America’s place in the modern world and the creation of a language and vision appropriate to that place. Perhaps more importantly, both “generations” address in their own way the social and political dislocations that radically altered the traditional, feudal-like social arrangements that had characterized Spanish America for centuries and that laid the foundation of life and thought in the twentieth century. The recognition of the centrality of these issues to the entire movement not only reveals *modernismo*’s essential unity but also explains why the patterns set within the *modernista* movement reappear in literary works throughout the following century.

*Modernismo*’s two central tendencies pertaining to epistemology and politics have surfaced and submerged at different points and with different authors throughout the nearly one hundred years since the movement’s end. The shift away from *modernismo*, however, brought changes that have

hindered the perception of this continuity. As *modernista* images, style, and tone became associated with affectation and effete elegance, it became progressively more difficult for readers to perceive *modernismo*'s critical response to Spanish America's incorporation into the world economy. In order to reclaim the power of the visionary stance taken by *modernismo*'s creative intellectuals, it is imperative that the contemporary reader look beyond late modern and postmodern prejudices, back to a time when grace and refinement evoked knowledge, wisdom, and truth rather than artifice, artificiality, and insincerity.

The socio-economic conditions that most directly affected the development of *modernismo* varied from country to country. There were, however, certain consistent factors that created a commonality of experience from one end of Spanish-speaking America to the other and that produced parallel cultural phenomena in diverse areas of the region that were often relatively isolated from one another. The most important of these were the strengthening of the national state and the accelerated integration of local economies with world markets. For the most part, the last decades of the nineteenth century saw a consolidation of state power which brought about a new degree of political stability despite the periodic resurgence of "caudillismo" and anarchistic tendencies. At the same time, economic reorganization and growth brought prosperity and affluence to the upper classes. In urban centers, wealth and international trade encouraged a perceptible Europeanization of life. As Roberto González Echevarría has expressed it, in exchange for its raw materials, Spanish America received culture, primarily in the form of manufactured products (González Echevarría [1980], 159). The turn-of-the-century flood of luxury items filled the homes of the old landed aristocracy, the *nouveaux riches*, and the aspiring bourgeoisie. It also created an image of life that left a lasting impression upon the poetic imagination of the writers of the time, an image that evoked the sense of well-being, ease, and fashionable excess characteristic of the Parisian *belle époque*, that is, of life in Paris during the three decades beginning with the 1880s.

Members of the ruling class allied themselves with foreign financiers and investors, and their primary ambition became the accumulation of capital at the expense of more traditional goals and obligations. The political philosophy of the day was the positivism of Comte and later that of Spencer. Society in Spanish America was to be organized upon a more rational basis than ever before, and scientists were believed to be the bearers of a demonstrable truth and the trustees of an infinitely superior future. In reality, however, the latent function of positivism was to provide the ruling classes with a new vocabulary to legitimate injustice; liberal ideology was gradually replaced by the belief in the survival of the fittest. Inequalities were no longer explained by race, inheritance, or religion but as the unfortunate yet requisite consequences of progress. The Mexican dictator Porfirio Díaz and his circle of "científicos" (scientific consultants), the oligarchy of the Argentine landowners, the Chilean nitrate barons, and, as recently explored by González Stephan, the "guzmanato" in Venezuela all epitomized the power holders who relied upon positivist ideology to justify their privileges.

Positivism generated a strongly ambivalent attitude in most *modernistas*. They maintained a respect for science, its breakthroughs, and its contributions to progress; they rejected it, however, as the ultimate measure of all things. Despite the promises made, it became clear that, far from becoming more understandable, life appeared more enigmatic, and the great inventions and discoveries had not provided answers to the fundamental questions of existence. The most obvious change was that traditional religious beliefs had been weakened by the assault of critical reason. In

addition, Spanish America's growing prosperity and its increasing involvement with the industrial capitals of the world brought about changes that heightened the sense of crisis among its writers. The new social context in which *modernista* art developed was marked by two essential elements: the disappearance of the old aristocracy, which had provided patronage of poetic production, and the transformation of all products of human enterprise—including art—into merchandise (Pérus [1976], 56, 66, 81). In this situation, poets had to earn their living producing a marketable commodity. Many supported themselves as journalists at the same time that they sought, through their well-crafted poetry, to assert themselves in a world where the items of highest esteem were luxurious, opulent, and usually imported, a phenomenon well-studied by Jitrik and Pacheco. Some poets, like Julián del Casal and Julio Herrera y Reissig, became marginalized, creating a bohemian response to the vulgarity and utilitarianism of bourgeois society. Others, like Darío in his famous “El rey burgués” (The Bourgeois King), scorned the materialism, mediocre conformity, and aesthetic insensitivity of the growing middle class. Still others, like Martí, put their faith in the superior individual, “el hombre magno,” who could see beyond the pressures of rapid urbanization and commercialization.

With these conditions, the full impact of modernity, as it is understood in Western culture, was felt in Spanish America. The literary response that it generated was similar to those of previous encounters with modern life, such as those within European Romanticism and French Symbolism. As Octavio Paz notes in *Los hijos del limo* (Children of the Mire), modern poetry has always represented a reaction against the modern era and its various manifestations, whether they be the Enlightenment, critical reason, liberalism, positivism, or Marxism (Paz [1974b], 10).

Matei Calinescu clarifies the nature of this antagonistic relationship between modernity and the literary reactions that it produces. He observes that “at some point during the first half of the nineteenth century an irreversible split occurred between modernity as a stage in the history of Western civilization [...] and modernity as an aesthetic concept” (Calinescu [1987], 41). On the one hand, what Calinescu calls the “bourgeois idea of modernity” picked up and continued the tradition dominant within earlier periods in the history of the modern idea, emphasizing the doctrine of progress, the cult of reason, the ideal of freedom, and confidence in the beneficial possibilities of science and technology. All these features were reinforced by an ever-stronger capitalist orientation toward pragmatism and by the cult of action and success held sacred by the middle class. On the other hand, “modernity as an aesthetic concept,” which begins with the romantics and continues through the avant-gardes, manifests radical antibourgeois attitudes. This other modernity turned against the middle-class hierarchy of values and expressed its disenchantment in many different ways, ranging from offensive effrontery to aristocratic self-exile.

These strategies took many forms, including art for art's sake, eccentricity, dandyism, and decadentism. The idea of “l'art pour l'art,” as conceived by the Parnassian Théophile Gautier, appealed to the poetic imaginations of the early *modernistas*. With this rallying call they summarized the artist's renunciation of vulgar utilitarianism. Utility was associated with ugliness. Similarly, for some, like the English Pre-Raphaelites, their disgust with contemporary changes led them to believe that beauty existed only in pre-industrial settings. The Pre-Raphaelite recourse to allegory and medievalism influenced those that sought to “épater le bourgeois” (shock the bourgeois). A more radical variation was developed by the decadents as represented by Joris Karl Huysmans, whose *A Rebours* (Against the grain) had a tremendous impact on a number of *modernistas*, most notably José Asun-

ción Silva, Julián del Casal, who corresponded with Huysmans in French, and Rubén Darío, who signed his “Mensajes de la tarde” (Afternoon messages) with the name of the novel’s protagonist, Des Esseintes. Calinescu claims, in short, that “what defines cultural modernity is its outright rejection of bourgeois modernity” (Calinescu [1987], 42). Consequently, cultural modernity actually operates as a type of “anti-modernity.”

Aspects of this struggle began to be seen during the early period of independence, but clearly the first full-fledged Spanish-American variation on the tug of war between the two “modernities” is *modernismo*. The *modernistas* were the first writers to experience and appreciate the all-encompassing alteration in the fabric of life in Spanish America brought by modernity. The *modernistas* were the first to witness the tragic face of science as it robbed legitimacy from the religious, magical, and animistic worldviews that had ruled the daily lives of most Americans since before the arrival of Columbus. The *modernistas* were the first to define the poet as both visionary and outcast, at odds with the dominant social values while striving to reveal those aspects of reality hidden by habit and convention. No longer protected by a privileged and patronized position in society, the *modernistas* were the first to struggle with the newly commercialized social arrangements that were taking hold. The *modernistas* were the first to live the perhaps irreconcilable tension between the search for a sense of national identity, on the one hand, and a longing to participate in the world arena, on the other.

While these features were common to *modernista* writing, the movement is also known for its acute sense of individuality and its insistence upon personal artistic freedom. Rubén Darío defined his Band, by implication, *modernista* aesthetics (estética) as “acrática,” that is, opposed to all authority (Darío, 1977, 179–81). He even wrote non-manifesto manifestos in which he asserted that a fundamental characteristic of the movement that he came to head was the need for writers not to pattern their writing on his, but rather that each author should follow his or her own path. This insistence upon nonconformity is a rejection of impositions, especially those of the dominant ideology, that seek to force everyone to think and use language in the same way. It is also a reflection of the fundamental belief that only by being able to capture freely the profound truths of existence could writers fulfill their essential obligations. The *modernista* movement is consequently anchored in the richness and complexity of diversity, a “striving for an individual style,” to use the phrase that Davison uses to capture this feature of the movement (Davison [1966]).

*Modernista* works were written in virtually all genres, in most Spanish-American countries, and, by the end of the movement, by members of both sexes. Even though *modernismo* has generally been regarded as a poetic movement, the majority of its literary output was in prose. In addition to the short story and prose poem, the chronicle, the essay, and the novel were major *modernista* prose vehicles, all of which have been examined in the various studies by Aníbal González. The short story and the prose poem complemented what was being done in verse. Taking their cues in part from North American (notably Poe) and French writers, *modernistas* found in the short story and the prose poem additional ways of breaking away from old stylistic rules and strictures, of creatively mixing established genres, and of asserting their own, anti-positivistic vision. They also turned to these forms to express anxieties and concerns with an assertiveness and directness that they deemed inappropriate to poetry.

*Modernista* chronicles (crónicas modernistas) were most often written for newspapers, for which the movement’s authors were compelled to work in order to support themselves and to fulfill their

desire to write. Even though they appeared in newspapers, these short pieces often blurred the distinction between journalism and fiction. They covered in creative and imaginative ways a wide range of topics, some of them news items and others commentary, travelogue, or art and literary reviews. The *modernista* essay was in large part an offshoot of the chronicle, often taking as its point of departure newsworthy events deemed deserving of additional reflection. In the essay these matters were generally addressed in a more serious manner than in the light-hearted chronicles, which were written with an eye toward immediate concerns. Some essays were much longer in extension and broader in perspective, and many addressed the issues outlined earlier in this article, including the future of Spanish America, the role of the intellectual, and the impact of artistic ideals, language, and literature. The works by José Enrique Rodó, including *Motivos de Proteo* (Proteus's Motives) and the already mentioned *Ariel*, are among the most noteworthy.

The *modernista* novel has received significantly less attention than it deserves. Though it drew inspiration from diverse models, it also reflected the uniquely Spanish-American endeavor to address the dual socio-political and aesthetic issues of the day. For this reason, the central figure of the *modernista* novel is often the artist-hero who tries to define his role within the new Spanish-American society of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The struggle that the hero faces and that is played out in the plot of the novels pits idealist aspirations against pragmatic concerns and pressures. The most recognized *modernista* novels include *Lucía Jerez* by José Martí, *De sobremesa* (After Dinner Conversation) by José Asunción Silva of Colombia, *Ídolos rotos* (Broken Idols) by Manuel Díaz Rodríguez of Venezuela, *La gloria de don Ramiro* (The Glory of Don Ramiro) by Enrique Larreta of Argentina, and *Alsino* by Pedro Prado of Chile.

*Modernista* verse, however, remains the key to the movement, especially to understanding the way these authors sought to address the personal as well as the political impact of modernity. Like the English and German romantics and the French symbolists, the Spanish-American *modernistas* traced the anxiety of their age to fragmentation: individuals were alienated from themselves, from their fellow humans, and from nature. Neither traditional religious beliefs, vitiated by liberal thought, nor the dry intellectualization of positivism provided satisfactory answers. Many longed for a sense of wholeness, for innocence, for the paradise from which they had been exiled by the positivist and bourgeois emphasis on utility, materialism, and progress. The hope for amelioration resided in integration and the resolution of conflict. The design that they elaborated for possible recovery drew on ancient images of reconciliation, recuperation, and unity, including the figure of the cosmic androgyne. Similarly, the language with which they confronted the limitations of modern rationalism is rooted in the ancient tradition of analogy.

Perhaps no other poem more completely embodies *modernismo*'s aspirations than Rubén Darío's "Coloquio de los centauros" (Colloquy Among the Centaurs), the great masterpiece published in *Prosas profanas*. It underscores the *modernista* striving for personal solace and transcendence in a world defined by rupture, loss, and self-serving cruelty. It also highlights the central role assigned to the poet in the quest for universal harmony. From these multiple perspectives, the centaurs are particularly poignant figures, for they are composite creatures that embody the polar elements of intelligence and brutishness. Not unlike the poet, they aspire toward the divine but are pulled toward the bestial. Their search both for the reconciliation of the tensions within themselves and for their reintegration into a harmonious and well-working universe provides the structuring mechanism through which Darío discusses the diverse issues confronted by the *modernista* movement.



The poem begins on the magical “Isla de Oro” (Isle of Gold), where the centaurs discover the hidden order of the cosmos. Within this spiritual haven, they sense the harmony of existence, which provides the basis for the resolution of all strife. Through the comprehension of the orderly workings of the universe, the centaurs begin to apprehend the proper role of woman, sexual desire, and mortality. They come to understand the fundamental accord of all existence, the essential unity of the bestial and the divine, good and evil, male and female, life and death, which is the key to the paradisiacal vision that they pursue. As a result, “Coloquio de los centauros” represents an idyllic interlude in the harried modern world in which traditional sources of spiritual guidance and peace have lost legitimacy. The poem presents an imaginative depiction of a utopian alternative to the crass reality of contemporary life, where transcendent visions have been weakened or ignored.

Quirón, the wisest of all centaurs, opens the colloquy with a discussion of the unity of all life and the unfading glory of the Muses. From the initial sections there arises a caldron of images in which harmony and art, creation and erotic passion, birth and death come together in a vision of supreme order in which the poet is guide and master: “the seer, the priest, usually hears the unknown / accent; at times the errant wind states / a mystery; and the foam or flower reveals / an initial; and words are heard in the foggy mist” (Darío [1977], 201).<sup>3</sup> The poet knows what others fail to perceive. He can “read” the gesture, the sign, or the puzzle of external forms; he understands the language of nature and comprehends the order of the universe. It becomes his responsibility to translate the text of the world, revealing harmony where others only see—or create—discord.

The anguish to which “Coloquio” responds surfaces throughout Darío’s works. He constantly struggled against the multiple fears of artistic failure, a dystopian existence, life without a sense of a divine presence, and death without salvation. Others faced, in their own way, similar burdens, which, with José Martí, included the battle for a free Cuba and, with Delmira Agustini, the struggle for women to write themselves into *modernista* discourse. All the poets sought to modernize Spanish-American thought and writing through the introduction into Spanish of the ideas and styles from around the globe and across the centuries. Each developed an individual way of addressing the many issues that arose as a result of Spanish America’s entry into the world economy and its participation on the world scene.

The movement clearly took shape and developed a sense of itself through the works of José Martí of Cuba, José Asunción Silva of Colombia, Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera of Mexico, Julián del Casal of Cuba, and Rubén Darío of Nicaragua. Gutiérrez Nájera and Casal were fascinated by the items, trends, and fashions arriving from Europe and distressed by the impact of their uneven and often disruptive incorporation into Spanish-American life. Silva was similarly torn between his Band, his family’s enthusiasm for cosmopolitan trends, and the conservative and provincial outlook of late nineteenth-century Bogota. By the same token, he was acutely aware of the failings of modernity. Martí’s life and works were dominated by his dedication to the cause of Cuban independence, which formed the political, moral, and philosophic backdrop to both his prose and poetry. Many of his pieces reflected his long years of exile in the United States and his firsthand observations of both the dramatic advances and the crippling devastation of modern urban life.

By 1896 the four earliest *modernista* poets were dead and Rubén Darío was left to head the movement. There is no adequate way to summarize the contributions made by Darío, who has

been recognized by writers and critics on both sides of the Atlantic as one of the greatest masters of Spanish poetry. His transformation of the short story, prose poem, and poetry reflect a profound revaluation of the role of the artist and of the responsibilities of art in the changing society of late nineteenth-century Spanish America. The influence of his work was felt by all his contemporaries as well as by those who followed in his wake.

Darío, his contemporaries, and his successors carried the movement forward in diverse ways, a diversity which on occasion has been misunderstood. For example, the work of Enrique González Martínez from Mexico was misleadingly linked with *postmodernismo* because of his criticism of the facile and superficial imitators of Darío's richly adorned and elaborate early verse. Nevertheless, his poetry constantly and consistently affirmed the movement's primary aspiration to reveal the hidden order of the universe. Amado Nervo, also from Mexico, was much more sensitive to the changing cultural scene, which exacerbated his personal doubts and anxieties. His poetry reverberated with the tensions he felt as he was pulled between the opposite poles of materiality and spirituality, sensuality and religious asceticism, and faith and despair. José María Eguren from Peru was among the most mysterious, evocative, and subtle of the *modernista* poets, whereas his compatriot José Santos Chocano was perhaps the most exuberant, bombastic, and chauvinistic. Leopoldo Lugones of Argentina and Julio Herrera y Reissig of Uruguay brought *modernismo* to the edge of the vanguard with their verbal and poetic experimentation, which underscored the movement's continuing critical perspective on society and on itself. This counterdiscursive stance was extended to issues of gender and sexuality in the writing of Delmira Agustini from Uruguay, who, as the first major female poet of Spanish America in the twentieth century, opened the way for younger female writers such as Alfonsina Storni, Gabriela Mistral, and Juana Ibarbourou.

The breadth and depth of *modernismo* should not distract either the reader or the critic from its essential nature as Spanish America's first literary response to the inroads of modernization. This fundamental characteristic is what links *modernismo* to the other artistic movements that arose in the Western world toward the end of the nineteenth century. It is also the reason why the basic issues confronted by *modernista* authors reappear throughout the literature of the twentieth century even as their language and imagery fell into disuse. The more fully understood Spanish-American *modernismo* is, the more contemporary concerns can be seen to resonate within its carefully crafted prose and poetry.

## Notes

1. "la literatura comienza a autorizarse como un modo alternativo y privilegiado para hablar sobre la política. Opuesta a los saberes 'técnicos' y a los lenguajes 'importados' de la política oficial la literatura se postula como la única hermenéutica capaz de resolver los enigmas de la identidad latinoamericana" (Ramos [1989], 16).
2. "Amo más que la Grecia de los griegos/ la Grecia de la Francia" (Darío [1977], 184).
3. "el vate, el sacerdote, suele oír el acento/ desconocido; a veces enuncia el vago viento/un misterio; y revela una inicial la espuma/o la flor; y se escuchan palabras de la bruma" (Darío [1977], 201).

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The Nordic Modernism Group  
**Borders of Modernism in the Nordic World**



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## I Introduction

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The Nordic part of the world extends from the borders separating Finland and Russia all the way to the west coast of Greenland (and thus geographically into North America), and from Denmark's border with Germany in the south, far into the polar region in the north—where its limits are ultimately hard to pinpoint.

Not everyone is familiar with this use of the word “Nordic” and some may in fact refer to this part of the world as “Scandinavia”. But in geographical as well as historical terms, “Scandinavia” refers primarily to three countries: Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, and not to Finland, the Faroe Islands, Iceland, and Greenland. This intra-Nordic difference is not clear-cut, however, for there are complicated historical and cultural ties between the various countries. Iceland, Greenland, and the Faroes were, like Norway, colonies of Denmark for centuries. Greenland and the Faroes are still under the Danish crown, although they are self-governing in internal affairs. Norway was also in a union with Sweden from 1814 to 1905. Finland was for a long time under the Swedish Crown (until 1809, and then up to 1917 an autonomous Grand Duchy in the Russian Empire). Part of the Finnish population has Swedish as a first language.

The above facts provide an indication of the rich and multifarious history of this region, and this is augmented by ethnic variety. Inuit native languages and cultures link the indigenous people of Greenland with the Inuits in Canada and Alaska, and to some extent in Russia, while the northernmost regions of Norway, Sweden and Finland (an area sometimes called Lapland) are in part populated by the Sami, with a culture that crosses national borders and also extends into Russia. The Sami languages belong to the Finno-Ugric language family, as does Finnish (and in fact Estonian and Hungarian). All these languages are quite different from the North-Germanic languages of the region (Icelandic, Faroese, Norwegian, Danish, and Swedish)—but within the latter languages there are also varieties and strong local characteristics.

This “collage” of articles on Nordic modernism cannot do justice to the cultural and literary scene of the whole Nordic region. Its six sub-articles focus on Swedish, Finnish, Danish, Norwegian, Icelandic, and Faroese modernism (in this order). We have not been able to discuss the oral and written literature of the Inuits and the Sami, but there certainly are important topics to be dealt with here, for instance the relations between literary modernity and the living folk traditions of these cultures. Just to mention an interesting connection: one of the leading modernists of Icelandic poetry, Einar Bragi, was an avid proponent and translator (into Icelandic) of both Inuit and Sami literature—including the works of the prominent Sami writer Nils-Aslak Valkeapää (1943–2001), who in 1991 received the Nordic Council's Literature Prize, the most important literary recognition in the region (apart from the Nobel Prize, of course).



The Nordic Council's annual literature prize is an example of several joint efforts and political alliances and unity that characterize the Nordic countries in spite of their cultural and historical differences. Some have predicted that the European Union will undermine this alliance. Denmark, Sweden and Finland belong to the EU, but Norway, Iceland, the Faroe Islands and Greenland hitherto do not. But it may also go the other way; these countries may find it propitious to strengthen their ties and maintain a Nordic stance in a conglomerating Europe.

The short articles below are written by a group of seven scholars who in recent years have, along with other colleagues, organized a series of conferences focusing primarily on modernist links between the Nordic region and other parts of the world (mainly European and Anglo-American). Two books have so far come out of this collaboration: *English and Nordic Modernisms* (edited by Bjørn Tysdahl, Mats Jansson, Jakob Lothe, and Steen Klitgård Povlsen, 2002) and *European and Nordic Modernisms* (edited by Mats Jansson, Jakob Lothe, and Hannu Riikonen, 2004).

Fully realizing that we were unable to present anything resembling a complete history of modernism in our countries, the group decided to attempt to write short historical accounts, which would seek to focus both on "native" modernisms and on the international interaction which is an inextricable part and motor of literary history, but one that tends to get left out of national literary histories. The most tangible aspect of this interaction is translation, but other evidence of local response to foreign literature, in this case modernist literature, is also important. It is a truism that modernism is an international movement/current/phenomenon—but much remains to be said about the way in which it has actually traversed cultures and travelled across borders. The articles contain numerous references to such routes, some of which have been studied, while others await future research. There seems to be little doubt, for instance, that T. S. Eliot has played a significant role in the Nordic modernist poetry scene, although his influence may have materialized in a number of different, even conflicting, ways. Similarly, in prose literature, Joyce and Kafka have obviously been significant presences in the North.

The international canonization of Kafka is notably to a large extent a post-World War II event, and as such coincides with the breakthrough of modernism in most Nordic countries. The one major Nordic modernist "movement" before the Second World War emerges in the Swedish poetry from Finland of the late 1910s and 1920s—although the Finnish-language Tulenkantajat group of the 1920s should also be mentioned in this context. There are, however, a number of individual works and writers who make their mark already early on, most notably Strindberg in Sweden, but also Pär Lagerkvist and Birger Sjöberg; in Denmark Johannes V. Jensen's *Digte* (Poems) in 1906 and later the novel *Hærværk* (Havoc) by Tom Kristensen; in Finland for instance the works of Volter Kilpi; in Norway the early Hamsun and arguably the late Ibsen, as well as the early poetry of Rolf Jacobsen; in Iceland the early experimental works of Þórbergur Þórðarson and Halldór Laxness, and in the Faroe Islands early indications of modernism can be detected in some of the poetry of Chr. Matras, Karsten Hoydal, and Regin Dahl. The Nordic countries have on the whole been at the receiving end in the international flow of modernist ideas and practices, but in the 1890s Ibsen as well as Hamsun contributed to the European debate about new literary forms, and so did Strindberg a little later.

By and large, Nordic modernism may seem mostly a "late" phenomenon, materializing in paradigmatic shifts after the dramatic disruption of the Second World War. In this regard, though, Sweden had a "separate fate". Remaining neutral through the war, Sweden became a haven of modernism at a time when most of Europe was in turmoil. The prosperity of modernism in Sweden

during the 1940s was one of the decisive factors in the development of modernism in the post-war Nordic world, when it finally made a decisive breakthrough—in varying stages depending on country and genre—from the late 1940s to the 70s.

“Late” may in fact be a misnomer here, stemming from inappropriate external criteria. Sweden in the 1940s was a place receptive to foreign influence but also active in its native inflection and invention of modernism. The same could be said of subsequent Nordic developments, working in a cultural environment where international modernism was both a (recent) tradition and the (possibly) new—that which was yet to be created.

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## II Swedish Modernism

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The multiple and often conflicting ways of defining and limiting the concept of modernism are well-known problems in the scholarly debate during the last century. Modernism can be, and indeed has been, variously treated as an aesthetic concept, an ideological conviction and political standpoint, a literary movement or even an historical period. Perhaps the use of the term “modernisms” reflects some of the diversity and even obscurity inherent in the concept. However, one common denominator in all of these varying attempts seems to be its truly international characteristics. No matter what one chooses to focus on, it has to be agreed, I think, that modernism knows no boundaries, geographical or linguistic. It involves the literatures of several countries, and I would in fact argue that this cross-fertilisation is a prerequisite for its very existence. The introduction and development of modernism in Swedish literature clearly illustrates this point.

As one of the leading writers of the “Modern Breakthrough” in Scandinavian literature in the 1880s—a concept launched by the Danish critic Georg Brandes—August Strindberg (1849–1912) adhered to a realist and naturalist aesthetics, exposing and criticising contemporary society and social conditions of the time. However, by the turn of the century Strindberg had become a modernist writer in the sense that he started to experiment radically with new literary forms, now for the stage. As an early modernist, Strindberg made crucial contributions to the development of modernism in the twentieth century, and his international impact was to stretch far beyond his native country. Strindberg’s most radical experiment, *Ett drömspel* (A Dream play) from 1902, was staged by Max Reinhardt in 1921, linking it with German expressionism, and in 1928 the modernist playwright and influential theoretician of the theatre Antonin Artaud produced *Ett drömspel* for the French scene. Strindberg was well aware that *Ett drömspel* and his chamber plays broke new dramatic ground, and his famous preface to *Ett drömspel* bears witness to this. Here Strindberg summarises the ideas behind his new dramatic form stating that “[t]ime and space do not exist,” thereby also disowning his previous naturalist aesthetics. The artistic imagination “weaves new patterns” according to Strindberg, and it leaves behind the old notion of consistent and stable identities: “The characters split, double, multiply, dissolve, thicken, fade away, coalesce” (Strindberg [1902], 7). In *Ett drömspel* Strindberg disowns dramatic conventions by once and for all putting aside traditional expectations about how drama should be designed. Instead he creates a new kind of dramatic logic where different spheres are woven together in kaleidoscopic scenes—sarcasm and pity, suffering and happiness, tragedy and comedy—without falling apart.

*Spökskonaten* (The Ghost sonata) from 1907 is the best-known of Strindberg’s chamber plays and perhaps the most extraordinary play he ever wrote. It continues the modernist experiment from *Ett drömspel*, letting personalities dissolve and blurring characters. Working with silent roles,

pantomimes, pauses, monologues and nonsense dialogues, Strindberg in *Spöksonaten* abandons conventional plot development for a symbolic and thematic progression, which takes absolutely unexpected turns. Indeed, the play foreshadows the theatre of the absurd that was to develop in the 1950s. *Spöksonaten* is Strindberg's last great achievement in international drama and together with *Ett drömspel* it confirms his position as a pioneer in the history of twentieth century modernism.

The First World War generated a cultural upheaval that shook the foundations of the old world view, opening up new literary means of expression. International modernism begins to develop around 1910 and the following two decades see the appearance of such influential –isms as futurism, dadaism, surrealism, imagism, expressionism. One of the first Swedish writers to perceive this was Pär Lagerkvist (1891–1974), who during a visit to Paris in 1913 became acquainted with continental modernist movements, in particular cubism, which he imported into his aesthetic program *Ordkonst och bildkonst* (Word art and pictorial art). In this short essay from 1913 he argues against realism and for the liberation of the artistic imagination. His most significant early work is the poetry collection *Ångest* (Anguish) from 1916, in which a new expressionist imagery is cultivated. The inner anguish of the poet is materialised in a hostile and deformed landscape, which mirrors the unseen, so to speak. Consequently, one finds in this collection and the following one, *Kaos* (1919), a renewal of form inspired by continental movements. Although a modernist in form and feeling Lagerkvist also retains traditional rudiments in rhyme, metre and syntax. His early achievements as a modernist are equally important when it comes to the theatre. He criticises naturalistic drama and its insistence on a realistic illusion. Instead he refers to Strindberg's later plays and German expressionist drama as models for a new art of the stage. Two of his early plays, *Sista människan* (The last man) from 1917 and *Himlens hemlighet* (Heaven's secret) from 1919, could be seen as attempting to launch a new anti-realistic drama capturing modern man's existence in a chaotic and hostile environment.

Lagerkvist was somewhat of a solitary modernist in Swedish literature during the 1910s. In the 1920s, modernism had its strongest hold and its most prominent spokespeople in the Swedish-speaking part of Finland. Here one can distinguish a modernist "movement" for the first time in the Nordic countries. Edith Södergran (1892–1923), Elmer Diktonius (1896–1961), Gunnar Björling (1887–1960) and Rabbe Enckell (1903–74) formed a modernist front from 1916, the year of Södergran's debut, until around 1930, when the group gradually disintegrated. Edith Södergran is definitely one of the most influential modernists in Swedish literature and her five poetry collections now stand as modernist cornerstones. Her poetry ranges from triumphant expressionism, first formulated in *Septemberlyran* (September lyre) from 1918, to cosmic mysticism in a highly charged and intense imagery. Her later collections are tuned in a lower key and also give voice to a religious view of life. In *Landet som icke är* (The land which is not), posthumously published in 1925, she expresses a longing for a world beyond this one.

Södergran's contemporary, Elmer Diktonius, also gives voice to an expressionist aesthetics, resulting in concrete, dense and fragmented imagery. The intricate question of literary modernism versus political awareness and engagement is illustrated in his poetry. Political revolution and literary revolt against traditional and hampering forms are pictured as complementary activities, which is made evident in one of his most famous poems, "Jaguaren" (The jaguar), in *Hårda sånger* (Hard songs) from 1922. Keeping our international perspective in mind, it has to be noted that Diktonius's aesthetics also had links with Anglo-American imagism. In 1924 he translated eight poems by Ezra

Pound, the first Pound poems in Swedish. And Diktonius's own poetry shows obvious affinities with the concentrated, concrete and complex imagery found within Anglo-American modernism. An even more radical revolt against literary tradition is found in Gunnar Björling's poetry. He strips down language to its bare essentials, leaving the reader with gaps to fill in order to create meaning. In Björling's radicalization of poetic language during the 1920s an influence from continental Dadaism is noticeable, which does not, however, derogate his highly original and consistent lyrical output for decades to come. An important factor in the establishment of lyrical modernism at this time were the modernist magazines *Ultra* (1922) and *Quosego* (1928–29). In the latter Rabbe Enckell emerged as an important modernist theoretician, arguing for an associative, sketchy and incoherent mode of writing.

All in all, the breakthrough of lyrical modernism in the Swedish-speaking part of Finland is a remarkable phenomenon. For a period of around a decade these poets and several others managed to turn the tide for a radically new and modernist way of writing. An important part of the explanation might be found in Finland's new independence as a nation and its liberation from Russian oppression. This paved the way for a new sense of freedom in the cultural area as well, and made writers perceptive to new impulses from continental Europe.

In 1922 the Swedish poet Birger Sjöberg (1885–1929) made his debut with a relatively conventional collection of verse. Four years later he published one of the most original poetry collections in the history of Swedish modernism, *Kriser and kransar* (Crises and wreaths). In this poetic milestone, Sjöberg creates a new, concrete and complex metaphorical language of immense importance for the further development of lyrical modernism in Sweden. He fuses the concrete with the abstract in a way reminiscent of Eliot's poetic technique and imagery, although Sjöberg's method is unique. The result is an enigmatic compression demanding a lot from the reader. The modernist language, including nonsense words, ordinary speech and elliptic syntax, is combined with a critical social agenda attacking traditional bourgeois values. Most of all, it was Sjöberg's innovative imagery that was to inspire subsequent generations. During the 1940s, the period of the general modernist breakthrough, its influence was seen in the verse of the leading poets of that time: Erik Lindegren and Karl Vennberg.

The years around 1930 saw the emergence of a new generation of modernist writers, notably Artur Lundkvist (1906–61), Harry Martinson (1904–78), Gunnar Ekelöf (1907–68) and the group of poets named "The Young Five." This was a time of cultural change and renewal, and the 1930s proved to be a turning point for modernism in Sweden, bringing about a collective modernist front. The new modernist aesthetics was launched and defended in journals such as *Fronten* (The Front, 1931–32), *Spektrum* (1931–33) and *Karavan* (1934–35). During this period modernism emerges as a truly international phenomenon. Karin Boye and Erik Mesterton's translation of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, published in *Spektrum* in 1932, has proven to be immensely important for the generations that followed, and together with Erik Mesterton's theoretical articles on "T. S. Eliots metod" and "Poesi och verklighet i modern engelsk lyrik" (Poetry and reality in modern English verse), they prepared the ground for a new modernist aesthetics. Eyvind Johnson wrote articles on Joyce, Proust and Gide and Artur Lundkvist translated William Faulkner. Lundkvist and in particular Gunnar Ekelöf introduced the French surrealists. And, not to forget, developments in psychoanalysis had a strong impact on the cultural debate of the time. The writings of Freud and Jung were used as analytical tools by the modernists generating a new and more complex way of portraying man.

In 1932 Gunnar Ekelöf published his first collection of verse, *sent på jorden* (late on earth). This was one of the most challenging and daring modernist experiments of the century. The critics' reaction was one of almost total rejection. Ekelöf, obviously, could not be understood within the given "horizon of expectation." Breaking with poetic tradition in a number of ways, omitting capital letters, deviating from conventional syntax and making inanimate objects animate, *sent på jorden* is a classic illustration of the introduction of a radically new work of art in a mainly traditional literary environment. From the beginning of the 1930s, Ekelöf remained a central force in Swedish modernism for decades. He became familiar with international modernism during a stay in Paris in 1929–30, and his strong ties with this movement are, among other things, indicated by the epigraph from Rimbaud that heads his second collection of verse, *Dedikation* (1934).

The question of influence from various modernist predecessors, notably T. S. Eliot and French surrealism, has been a controversial and much debated issue in Ekelöf scholarship. Ekelöf himself, perhaps anxious to retain his poetic integrity, claimed that he had never been influenced by Eliot, even though a work such as *En Mölna-Elegi* (A Mölna elegy) from 1960 could hardly have been composed without Eliot as a source of inspiration. And as regards surrealism and its influence on Ekelöf's poetry during the 1930s, one has to distinguish between a surrealist style and a surrealist ideology: the latter takes prominence in a poetry that is hardly surrealist in style or technique. So the problem of influence becomes complicated, and one has to underline the obvious fact that Ekelöf's poetry could not be treated as a conglomerate of influences without the risk of oversimplifying and reducing the richness of his poetic *œuvre*.

In 1941 he published *Färjesång* (Ferry song) which he regarded as his personal breakthrough. In the collections immediately preceding this one he had adopted a more traditional, romantically inspired poetic role. Now he lowers himself to a witness of human life and its conditions at a worldly level, regarding himself as an outsider in society. In this collection Ekelöf's strong interest in oriental mysticism is to be seen, and the mystical approach becomes an integrated part of his poetics as a whole. A striking factor in Ekelöf's writings is his constant desire for reorientation and newness, thereby illustrating the dictum that "the great writer never repeats himself." Consequently, another phase is represented by the three collections *Strountes* (Nonsense) from 1955, *Opus incertum* (1959), and *En natt i Otočac* (A night in Otočac) from 1961, with which Ekelöf turned toward an anti-aesthetic and anti-poetic, making use of the nonsensical, the absurd, the grotesque. Another trilogy makes up Ekelöf's last great poetic project: *Diwan över fursten av Emgión* (Diwan about the Prince of Emgión) from 1965, *Sagan om Fatumeh* (The tale of Fatumeh) from 1966 and *Vägvisare till underjorden* (Guide to the underworld) from 1967. This poetic sequence was inspired by Ekelöf's meeting with an icon, a Madonna, on a trip to Turkey. This chance meeting coincides with Ekelöf's long interest in the East and in oriental mysticism, out of which emanates Ekelöf's vision of the Virgin, who becomes a central symbol for Ekelöf's universal mysticism.

The writer who best epitomises modernism as a truly international phenomenon is Artur Lundkvist (1906–91). He did more than any writer during the last century to introduce international modernism into Swedish letters. As a poet, prose-writer and literary critic he was enormously productive during more than five decades. His early poetry and reading from the end of the 1920s indicates his international orientation: Carl Sandburg, Walt Whitman, D. H. Lawrence and Edgar Lee Masters. He purchased and read Joyce's *Ulysses* on a trip to Paris in 1930, and he wrote the first Swedish article on William Faulkner in the journal *Bonniers Litterära Magasin* in 1932. His

interest in surrealism developed in the mid 1930s and the journal *Karavan*, of which Lundkvist was a co-editor, became an important forum for the introduction of surrealist writing and ideas. In 1939 Lundkvist published a collection of essays called *Ikarus' flykt* (The flight of Icarus). This is undoubtedly the most influential critical work in the development of Swedish modernism. It contains separate essays on, for example, Eliot, *Ulysses*, Faulkner, surrealism, Picasso, St. John Perse. Together they give support to the statement made at the beginning of this article, namely that modernism is a genuinely international movement, transgressing boundaries, be they geographical, cultural or linguistic. Lundkvist's own poetry during the 1930s shows occasional streaks of surrealist writing, although a careful reading reveals that this is balanced by intellectually controlled and composed poetry. Lundkvist may be a strong supporter of surrealist writing in theory, but in practice he seems more moderate. One must not forget that his surrealist inclination is combined with a strong interest in Jungian archetypal psychology, thereby making the question of influences and "sources" more complex.

*Ikarus' flykt* was an important source of inspiration during the general breakthrough of modernism in the 1940s. Lundkvist was sceptical of the pessimistic, intellectual and analytical poetry of this new generation. His own antidote was to launch a "panic poetry," presented in an essay from 1947, which was to build on experiences of the convulsive and suggestive. In other words, a more immediate and spontaneous approach than the objective analytical writing found in the 1940s generation. During the 1950s, Lundkvist's writing took a more political direction, inspired by his many travels to Africa, India, the Soviet Union and China. In the climate of the cold war, Lundkvist was a strong supporter of the so called "third viewpoint" in the Swedish ideological debate, arguing for political independence from both superpowers and taking sides with colleagues such as Werner Aspenström and Karl Vennberg. The 1960s saw another turning-point in Lundkvist's writing, as he moved from a political engagement to an experiment in genre. In fact, Lundkvist's writing from the very beginning could be seen as a transgression of genres. The strong urge to free himself of generic conventions is constantly expressed in his experiments with poetic prose and prose-like poems. Although he also explored the historical novel, the prose poem is perhaps the genre that comes closest to Lundkvist's lifelong search to realize a "dynamic symphony" as he put it in 1930. And maybe this realisation comes true in his last published major work, a series of prose poems, by Lundkvist himself named a "prose symphony": *Sett i det strömmande vattnet* (Seen in the flowing water) from 1978, *Skrivet mot kvällen* (Written toward evening) from 1980, *Sinnesbilder* (Emblems) from 1982, and *Färdas i drömmen och föreställningen* (Journeys in dream and imagination) from 1984.

The general breakthrough of modernism in Sweden occurred during the 1940s. The outbreak of the Second World War and the discouraging historical events that led up to it left a deep impression on the generation of writers that were to take over the literary institution and profess a modernist aesthetics during this decade. In general terms the literature of the period has been described as esoteric, intellectual, pessimistic, analytical. It centres on existential questions and often has recourse to an ideology critique according to which there are no fixed value systems. Man is left to himself to find his way through existence. Poetry gradually becomes dominated by free verse, the imagery is complex and the poetic form can be fragmented. Literature and writing are held in high esteem and regarded as exceedingly serious activities. "[T]he urge to express oneself is greater than the need to communicate," as the leading poet Erik Lindegren put it in 1946 (Lindgren [1946], 465). In other



words, it is not the task of literature to communicate a clear-cut message to a reader, but rather to function as an analytical tool which enables the writer to formulate his views on a complicated and often horrific existence.

By the latter half of the decade, the literary institution was decidedly pro-modernist. One can note some sociological facts contributing to this development. The leading publishing house, *Bonniers*, had a benevolent view towards the new modernist writers. Several literary journals enabled the new generation of writers to formulate their aesthetics and publish their work, notably *Horisont* (1941–44), *40-tal* (1944–47), *Prisma* (1948–50) and *Utsikt* (View, 1948–50). A new generation of literary critics came to advance and propagate modernist literature, and definitely contributed to its general breakthrough. The translation of international modernist predecessors is another significant factor. 1942 saw the publication of T. S. Eliot's *Dikter* (Poems), a selection of poems from his entire oeuvre. Erik Lindegren's translation of William Faulkner's *Light in August* came out in 1944, and Karl Vennberg's of Kafka's *Der Prozeß* (The trial) in 1945. Thomas Warburton's translation of Joyce's *Ulysses* was published in 1946, and during 1945–46 French existentialism was introduced through translations and on the stage. These and other works were incorporated into the literary debate of the period, giving it a marked international profile. The paradox is then that during the war, when Sweden was cut off from cultural exchange with the rest of Europe, the great modernist works of European literature made a major impact.

The leading poets of this time were Erik Lindegren (1910–68) and Karl Vennberg (1910–95). In 1942 Lindegren published, privately, a remarkable collection, *mannen utan väg* (the man without a way), which came to be considered the most important poetry collection of the decade. It captures much of the despair and anguish of the time. The most innovative feature is its form. Lindegren contrasts a disciplined form with a provoking and difficult imagery — difficult due to its density and the way it combines the abstract and the concrete, and also fuses seemingly incompatible phenomena. In this collection Lindegren combines a surrealistic imagery with a mythical method reminiscent of T. S. Eliot, thereby reaching a productive tension between a disharmonious imagery and a controlled and elaborated form. The collection consists of forty so-called “exploded sonnets” which means that Lindegren uses the sonnet form but breaks it up into seven two-line strophes. His outspoken conviction is that a complex world requires a complex poetry. This way, form and content correspond to one another. When *mannen utan väg* was reprinted in 1946 it met with a charge of incomprehensibility from the leading conservative critic Sten Selander. The debate that followed can be seen as the last battle between the ancients and the moderns of this time, resulting in a modernist hegemony over the literary institution. Lindegren's *Sviter* (Suites) from 1947 marked a new stage in his poetic development, a movement away from the daring modernism of the previous collection towards a more accessible, musically structured and romantically oriented expression. Lindegren's final lyrical phase is represented by *Vinteroffer* (Winter sacrifice) from 1954 where themes of frozenness and petrification combine with a strong meta-poetic drive.

If Lindegren is considered the leading poet of the time, Karl Vennberg is no doubt the most influential critic of the modernist generation. He started writing for the syndicalist daily newspaper *Arbetaren* (The worker) in the beginning of the 1940s, moved on to *Afton-Tidningen* (The evening paper), an important critical forum for the new modernist generation, and also published influential criticism in the journals *40-tal* and *Utsikt*. Some of his most important critical essays are his introductions to Kafka in 1944 and 1945 and his analysis of “Den moderna pessimismen och dess

vedersakare” (Modern pessimism and its adversaries) in 1946. Vennberg was the leading authority on Kafka and via him the writings of Kafka came to influence the literary climate to a considerable degree. Likewise Vennberg’s discussion of “modern pessimism” is seminal, and the ensuing debate over the meaning and range of the concept of “pessimism” has been said to epitomise the whole decade. Vennberg’s breakthrough as a poet is the collection *Halmfackla* (Straw torch) from 1944. Compared to Lindegren’s his poetry is much more direct and immediately accessible. Vennberg uses ordinary language and reasons in a perfectly comprehensible way. His poetry gains its effect from an elaborate use of irony, which, in various forms, became Vennberg’s hallmark as a poet. A dominating theme in his criticism as well as in his poetry is his distrust of all beliefs and ideologies. Several poems in *Halmfackla* express, in ironic terms, a critique of established religious or philosophical ideas. *Tideräkning* (Reckoning of time) from 1945 continues the ironical, sceptical attitude from the previous collection. The characteristic pessimism of Vennberg’s generation is expressed in his view of the existential choice as one between “the indifferent and the impossible.” Vennberg’s final collection during this phase in his development is *Fiskefärd* (Fishing trip) from 1949, which also gives voice to a new tone and symbolism. Here Vennberg’s strong affinities with a negative religious mysticism become evident.

The high modernist tradition is continued and developed by Tomas Tranströmer (born in 1931), whose work shows affinities with the imagist and surrealist mainstream of modernism, although his rigorous imagery is unmistakably his own. The central poetic device in Tranströmer’s poetry is the metaphor, and his poetic language is distinguished by a high degree of concentration and it is generally exact and concrete. In his first collection from 1954, *17 dikter* (17 poems), Tranströmer’s poetic language is already fully mature. In his poetic universe one also recognizes elements from a mystical tradition. *Hemligheter på vägen* (Secrets along the way) from 1958 is infused with a mystical view of life and a wish to capture realities behind what is seen. Several poems in *Den halvfärdiga himlen* (The half-finished heaven) from 1962 bear witness to the fundamental importance of music and musical inspiration in Tranströmer’s *œuvre*. Tomas Tranströmer is a poet of international stature, and even though his lyrical output is relatively slim he has all the way through to his later collections of the 1980s and ‘90s remained one of the leading lyric modernists of his time.

During the 1950s and 60s modernism gradually became more diversified and specialized, with on the one hand an experimental “concrete” poetry, and on the other a striving towards a more immediately communicative “new simplicity.” Already in 1954 Öyvind Fahlström (1928–76) published a manifesto in the avant-garde journal *Odyssé* in which he argues for a new “concrete” poetics, derived from early modernist movements such as futurism and dadaism, but with a new emphasis on the material and visual character of poetry. But it was not until the 1960s that Fahlström’s ideas were more generally acknowledged and put into practice by a new generation of writers, among others Bengt Emil Johnson (born in 1936), who arranged his 1963 debut collection *Hyllningarna* (Homages) according to visual and musical principles.

When the first decades of the history of Swedish modernism drew to its end, modernism was more and more being treated as tradition, that is as something to revolt against, illustrated by the fact that the new avant-garde of the 1960s could deplore the “aristocratic” modernism of a previous generation as something to be overcome. Göran Palm (born in 1931), a leading critic and poet of a new generation, criticised the high modernist tradition from Eliot and the Swedish modernists of the 1940s for its lack of communicative qualities, its esoteric metaphorical imagery and anti-

democratic attitude. Instead Palm argued for a pragmatically oriented aesthetics giving the reader a role as co-creator in the aesthetic process. In his programmatic poem “Megafonen i poesiparken” (The megaphone in the poetry park), from his first collection *Hundens besök* (The dog’s visit, 1961), he satirizes the aesthetic qualities of high modernism and its fundamental disregard for the reader. Thus, Palm’s critique of the high modernist tradition and his advocacy of a “new simplicity” on a theoretical level come to illustrate the antagonism between neo-avant-garde and high modernism.

When considering the introduction of modernism in Swedish literature, a final remark has to be made with regard to genres. The development of modernism in prose was slower and not as radical as in the lyrical genre. During the 1920s and ‘30s the novel was, with few exceptions, dominated by the conventional realistic tradition. During the 1940s a bolder modernist renewal of the literary form can be noticed. Eyvind Johnson (1900–76) could be characterised as somewhat of a modernist forerunner; in his early novel *Kommentar till ett stjärnfall* (Commentary to a falling star) from 1929, he introduced Joyce’s stream-of-consciousness technique. Tage Aurell’s (1895–1976) short stories from the 1930s and ‘40s make use of a highly original and compressed narrative technique. During the 1940s, leading novelists Lars Ahlin (1915–97) and Stig Dagerman (1923–54) both made modernist experiments in form and style. Ahlin’s boldest is the 1946 novel *Om* (If), expressing also his highly personal aesthetics of communication, and in Dagerman’s most important novel during the period, *De dömdas ö* (Island of the condemned) from 1946, one meets with a style verging on modernist prose poetry. Gösta Oswald’s (1926–50) novel *En privatmans vedermödor* (A private individual’s hardship) from 1949 is probably the most exclusively modernist experiment to be found during the period, seeking to break up conventional genres and pointing towards a new form of prose.

The modernist prose writers of the 1940s paved the way for writers of the coming decades, who could follow in their paths, developing and refining new modernist techniques, as is manifested in the experimental prose of the 1960s. Torsten Ekbom (born in 1938), for example, takes his inspiration from the French *nouveau roman* in his disregard for conventional plot and his emphasis on sensory experiences. Due to the collage technique the reader is also given a prominent and active role as interpreter in Ekbom’s *Spelöppning* (Opening in the game) from 1964. In line with this break up of traditional narrative is Erik Beckman’s (1935–95) radical experiment with literary form in *Hertigens kartonger* (The duke’s cartons) from 1965. A polyphony of voices and textual fragments in which Beckman criticizes Eliot, in particular the ideology expressed in his later work, whereby Beckman, in a sense, takes sides with Palm in the conflict between neo-avant-garde and high modernism.

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### III Modernism in Finnish Literature

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In Finnish literary discussions the term modernism has been applied to at least six different movements and periods. They can be classified as follows, chronologically: 1) the modern writing and the interest in the new trends and phenomena in culture and life in the 1890s and at the turn of the twentieth century; 2) the Finland-Swedish Euterpe group at the turn of the century, with its interest especially in new French and Italian literature; 3) the Finland-Swedish poetry of the 1910s and '20s, as represented by Edith Södergran, Elmer Diktonius, Gunnar Björling and others (see Mats Jansson's contribution above); 4) the Tulenkantajat (Torch Bearers) group in the 1920s; 5) the leftist Kiila (Wedge) group in the 1930s and 1940s; and 6) the poetry and prose of the 1950s, as represented by Tuomas Anhava, Paavo Haavikko, Eeva-Liisa Manner, Veijo Meri and others. Of course, before the 1950s there were writers who, without belonging to any specific group, can be regarded as modernists — some of them, like Volter Kilpi (see below), solitary figures outside the mainstream.

Such a chronological classification into six “modernisms” does not, however, correspond to the common practice of presentations and handbooks of Finnish literary history. The literature of the 1890s and the first years of the twentieth century have usually been seen as symbolist, neoromantic or decadent, and were only recently labelled as a modernist current. The argument for the Kiila group as a missing link between the Tulenkantajat group and the modernists of the 1950s has not been generally accepted. While the Tulenkantajat group was interested in everything which was new, not only in literature and arts, but in culture and life in general, Finnish modernism *in stricto sensu* is situated in the 1950s and as such a very late phenomenon. In this outline the focus will be on literature written in Finnish. It should, however, be noted that the common practice of the Finnish literary historians nowadays is to discuss Finland-Swedish literature as an integral part of the literature of Finland, although a special history of Finland-Swedish literature was published in 1999–2000.

In spite of their great distance from European centers, and the language barrier — Finnish differing greatly from Indo-European languages — Finnish-speaking writers occasionally had productive contacts with new movements in literature and art as early as around the turn of the twentieth century. For example, the novelist and short-story writer Juhani Aho (1861–1921) visited Paris in 1889–90, and his works from that period, the novella *Yksin* (Alone) and the short story *Kosteikko, kukkula, saari* (Marsh, hill, isle) are the first Finnish examples of the impressionistic style. As Jyrki Nummi has pointed out, they are also experiments with form, with innovative representations of time and space, and provide a new perspective on the growth of ego and personality. As such they can be seen as threshold texts of early modernism in Finnish literature. It is also worth mentioning here that L. Onerva (Onerva Lehtinen, 1882–1972), whose early works like the novel *Mirdja* (1908)

and the short story *Yksinäiset* (Solitary people) have usually been regarded as decadent, was better acquainted with modern French writing than perhaps any other Finnish writer. She translated new French literature and Hippolyte Taine's *Philosophie de l'art* (Philosophy of art) into Finnish.

In the Finnish-speaking literary discussion, the terms modern, modernist, modernism ("modernismi") and Modern Age ("nykyaika") came into wider use, almost as slogans, in connection with the Tulenkantajat group the 1920s. An alternative term was avantgardism: the literary critic Alex Matson (1888–1972), for instance, divided writers into those who are representatives of mainstream thought and those who look "forward," that is avantgardists. According to Matson, such authors as H. G. Wells, John Galsworthy and Arnold Bennett belonged to the former group, while D. H. Lawrence, Dorothy Richardson, T. S. Eliot and James Joyce were avantgardists. Since Matson's days, however, the term avantgardism has almost completely disappeared from Finnish literary discussion and Finnish literary histories (in recent times there are again signs of a new interest in the avant-garde).

New trends in literature and art (futurism, dadaism, surrealism, etcetera), some new art forms (jazz, film, modern ballet) as well as changes in life in general (advertisements, machines, nudity culture in Germany, etcetera) were presented by the leading member of the Tulenkantajat group, Olavi Paavolainen (1903–1964) in his 1929 collection of essays *Nykyaikaa etsimässä* (In search of the modern age). Compared to Finland-Swedish cultural discussions, Paavolainen's book was relatively late: for example, the architect Sigurd Frosterus (1876–1956), a member of the Euterpe group, had since 1901 presented modern phenomena in his essays, from new weapons and U-boats to lawn tennis and architecture. As Paavolainen later remarked, in the decade after the First World War "everything was modern." He dedicated his book to "Dear Hagar," the Finland-Swedish modernist writer Hagar Olsson (1893–1978), who was called the "high priestess of modernism." Paavolainen's leading idea, as a cultural critic, was that people in Finland did not understand what was really going on abroad. Paavolainen was an admirer of such Romantic, Symbolist and *fin de siècle* poets as Théophile Gautier, Pierre Loti and Anna de Noailles. Colorful style and exotic imagery were typical of Paavolainen's essayistic writings. As a personality he was a dandy, as witnessed by his portrait by Väinö Kunnas (1896–1929), where he appears elegantly dressed in tailcoat and with an orchid in his buttonhole, or by the numerous photographs where he poses as a fashionable gentleman.

Although by the 1910s Finnish poetry had become capable of a flexible handling of various metres and free verse, more audacious experiments were not made until the 1920s. In 1928 Olavi Paavolainen and Mika Waltari (1908–1979), who later became well-known as a writer of historical novels, jointly wrote a collection of poetry, *Valtatiet* (Main roads), which enthusiastically propagates the advantages of modern life and new technology. *Valtatiet* as well as Paavolainen's *Nykyaikaa etsimässä* are characterized by futurist ideas, but expressionism, too, can be seen in the background. In Aaro Hellaakoski's (1896–1952) 1928 collection of poetry *Jääpeili* (Mirror of ice) there are experiments with free verse and typography. It was a collection "that furthest extended the parameters of Finnish modernism at the time," as Markku Envall puts it ([1998], 157). In the mainstream poetry, as represented by V. A. Koskenniemi (1885–1962), clarity and unambiguousness were the ideals, which at its worst led to rigid Classicism or pathetic patriotic poetry.

*Tulenkantajat*, the literary magazine of the Tulenkantajat group, often included translations of foreign fiction and poetry. The first translations of Joyce's stories and poems, and of new Ameri-

can poetry, were published along with the translations of Swedish poetry. Unfortunately, they often remained occasional specimens, which were not followed by more comprehensive translations. Not until after the First World War were modernist works translated more extensively.

Between the wars in Finland there were also other poets whose works can be connected with the expressionistic movement. Perhaps the most important was Uno Kailas (1901–1933), who also had contacts with the Tulenkantajat group. His imagery is expressionistic, but the form of his poems is restrained or even classicist, like in the “Vaeltajan oodi” (Wanderer’s ode) in the 1926 collection *Silmästä silmään* (From eye to eye) which is written in Sapphic strophes. There were also some interesting expressionistic experiments in Finnish theaters: German expressionistic plays were performed in Finland between the wars, and some Finnish playwrights wrote in an expressionistic manner. The Finnish theater, between the wars, may actually have been more open to modern trends than Finnish cultural life in general. In Finnish music there were several important avant-garde composers, like Aarre Merikanto (1893–1958), Ernst Pingoud (1888–1942) and Väinö Raitio (1891–1945). Their music, however, was not generally appreciated or acclaimed—Merikanto’s expressionistic opera *Juha* (1920–22), based on a novel by Juhani Aho, was not performed until 1963 (in addition to a radio production in 1958).

In prose literature, which mainly remained very traditional, there were some remarkable exceptions in the 1920s and 1930s. Volter Kilpi (1874–1939), who in 1900–02 had written three neo-romantic or symbolist tales on mythological (*Antinous*, *Parsifal*) and Biblical themes (*Bathseba*), remained as a novelist silent for many years. In 1933–37 he wrote his great *Saaristosarja* (Archipelago series), where he described country people on the Western coast of Finland. Rich vocabulary and idiosyncratic language, inner monologue and pervasive humour have made Kilpi’s later novels the Finnish equivalents to Joyce’s *Ulysses* or Proust’s *À la recherche du temps perdu*. For Kilpi, who was influenced by Henri Bergson, the problems of time and memory were essential. As early as in 1919–20, Joel Lehtonen (1881–1934), in his remarkable novel *Putkinotko*, had described life in the countryside in a single summer-day. Kilpi goes even further: the best-known part in the Archipelago series, *Alastalon salissa* (In the Parlour of Alastalo) from 1933, describes in 800 pages a six-hour long negotiation about the founding of a company for constructing a sailing vessel (a barque) and the part-shares in that company. *Alastalon salissa* has proven to be an even greater challenge for translators than *Ulysses*: so far it has been translated only into Swedish, by Thomas Warburton in 1997, who earlier had translated *Ulysses* into Swedish.

Kilpi’s novels also combine epic and novelistic traditions and have been labelled novelistic epics. The first part of the Archipelago series includes a preface, written as a prose poem, where in the church-yard the spirits of the dead are evoked. Kilpi thus calls the reader to the remembrance of the past. In the last part of the series, in the 1937 novel *Kirkolle* (To church, an allusion to Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse!*), Kilpi’s prose sometimes turns into free verse.

Volter Kilpi was a solitary figure who worked as a chief librarian of the University of Turku. Except for a short visit to Estonia, he never went abroad. In the background of his works we find Homer, the Finnish national epic *Kalevala*, the greatest nineteenth-century Finnish writer Aleksis Kivi (1843–1872) and the philosophies of Kierkegaard and Bergson. The foremost contemporary writer in Finland in Kilpi’s time, Joel Lehtonen, was in many respects quite different. Lehtonen was a versatile writer, who began his career with neo-romantic novels turning then to naturalistic descriptions of poor country people. His last work *Henkien taistelu* (Struggle of the spirits) from



1933 was a great Menippean satire, but instead of Kilpi's humour we are here met by bitter tones and grotesque images of the bourgeoisie. Lehtonen, who had travelled widely in the Mediterranean countries and translated into Finnish several works of world literature, was familiar with the whole satirical and picaresque tradition of Western literature, from Aristophanes and Petronius to Rabelais, Cervantes, de Guevara and Le Sage.

Unlike Kilpi and Lehtonen, Aino Kallas (1878–1956) had direct contacts with the English-speaking world. Married to an Estonian diplomat, she spent several years in London, where three of her novellas and a collection of short stories were published in English translation. Her work differs greatly from everything else written in Finland. She created an idiosyncratic style which reminds one of seventeenth-century chronicles. Yet, she disliked Joyce's literary experiments and, having seen Joyce in a meeting of the P.E.N. club in London, described him like a figure illustrating Lombroso's theories.

Kallas was an exception in that she had contacts in English literary circles. Usually Finnish writers and critics got information about new trends in European and American literature through Sweden. They read Swedish newspapers and magazines, like *Bonniers Litterära Magasin* (BLM) and *Ord och Bild*. There were also some (mostly short-lived) Finnish magazines that tried to present new literature and modern trends for Finnish readers. Such a magazine was for instance the *Sinin-en kirja* (The blue book, 1927–1930), which was edited by Alex Matson and Kersti Bergroth. The first Finnish translations of Proust and Joyce's *Ulysses* were published in that magazine. Among those open to modern literature was Lauri Viljanen (1900–1984), who in 1936 wrote a collection of essays, *Taisteleva humanismi* (Struggling humanism), where he presented modern European authors like D. H. Lawrence, Paul Valéry and André Gide in relation to vitalistic ideas. However, in the 1930s, modern trends and new sexual morals were also severely attacked by conservative critics like Professor of Art Philosophy K. S. Laurila (1876–1947) and some theologians and clergymen.

The contacts between Finnish and Finland-Swedish (modernist) writers remained sparse. This became even more evident in the 1930s, when in the nationalistic atmosphere the use of the Finnish language was emphasized. One interesting exception in the relations between Finnish and Finland-Swedish writers and critics was the correspondence between O. V. Kuusinen (1881–1964) and Elmer Diktonius (1896–1961) on aesthetic questions in 1920–21. It is one of the ironies of (literary) history that Kuusinen, after emigrating to the Soviet Union, for decades held high positions in the Lenin, Stalin and Khrushchev eras, being in the end a member of the Politbureau of the Communist Party. Diktonius's novel *Janne Kubik*, a description of a Communist worker in expressionistic style and using a kind of internal monologue, also reached the Finnish-speaking readers, due to Diktonius's own masterful translation *Janne Kuutio*. Some critics hold the Finnish version in even higher regard than the Swedish original.

The most important poet associated with the Kiila group was Katri Vala (1901–1944), who wrote her five collections of poetry in free verse. Like the other members of the leftist Kiila group, she was a supporter of radical social ideas. Like the Tulenkantajat group, they also tried to open windows for modern literature. Some of its members published their translations in *Tulenkantajat*, later on also in other literary journals. Their most remarkable translations, however, were published after the Second World War. Arvo Turtiainen (1904–80) translated Edgar Lee Masters's *Spoon River Anthology* in 1947 and Vladimir Mayakovsky's poetry in 1959, while Jarno Pennanen (1906–69) translated a selection of Lorca's and Neruda's poetry for the literary magazine *Parnasso* in 1950.

Until the beginning of the Second World War, there were in fact not many Finnish translations of modern or avant-garde literature that might have given new impetuses to Finnish writers. This was understandable: for a young nation (Finland became independent in 1917) with a relatively short vernacular literary tradition, it was a challenge to translate first the classics of world literature, like Homer, Virgil, Dante and Shakespeare — the modern European literature had to wait. And then the Second World War closed the doors to modern literature. As a contrast to the war period and its German-oriented cultural life, the interest in modern English literature increased rapidly. This became apparent especially in the field of translated literature, which helped usher in the real breakthrough of modernism in Finnish literature, which in itself occurred very late, really not until the early 1950s.

In 1946 Thomas Warburton's Swedish translation of Joyce's *Ulysses* was jointly published in Helsinki and Stockholm; *A Portrait of the Artist* was translated into Finnish by Alex Matson in the same year. Masterpieces of modern literature were sought from all over the English-speaking world, even from Australia: the Finnish translation of Xavier Herbert's *Capricornia* was published in 1946. The translation of Kafka's *Der Prozeß* dates from the same year. French existentialism was also introduced to Finland in the late 1940s: Camus's *L'Étranger* (The stranger) and Sartre's *La Nausée* were both translated in 1947 and Sartre's plays were performed in the same decade. Also, in the first years after the war, several important American novels were translated into Finnish, among them Hemingway's *Farewell to Arms* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and three novels by Faulkner: *Light in August*, *The Wild Palms* and *As I Lay Dying*. American novels were read by the young Finnish authors who became leading modernist prose writers in the 1960s, like Veijo Meri (born in 1928) and Christer Kihlman (born in 1930).

In 1949 a very influential volume of T. S. Eliot's poetry was edited and translated by a group of younger critics and poets. The publication of Eliot's poetry in Finnish was typical of the delay in Finnish literary contacts: in Sweden, for example, Eliot was presented much earlier. The Finnish volume consisted of the translations of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," *The Waste Land*, *Four Quartets*, and some other poems. The volume also included two essays on Eliot, written by Lauri Viljanen (see above) and Kai Laitinen (born in 1924), both of whom later became professors of Finnish literature at the University of Helsinki. Laitinen's 1958 collection of essays *Puolitiessä* (In the middle way; the title is a reference to Eliot's *East Coker*) included the first detailed Finnish presentation of Kafka. One should also remember that in 1944 Thomas Warburton had written a book in Swedish entitled *Två Främlingar* (Two strangers), where he presented both T. S. Eliot and James Joyce. The Finnish translation of Eliot's poems greatly influenced for instance Lasse Heikkilä's (1925–61) poetry, but Eliot was parodied as well: Kullervo Rainio (born in 1924) wrote under the pen-name T. S. Eliö a poem entitled "Autio pää" (The waste head, alluding to Eliot's *The Waste Land* which is in Finnish "Autio maa").

The Finnish poetry of the latter half of the 1940s was characterized by the debuts of important woman poets, like Sirkka Selja (born in 1920) and Aila Meriluoto (born in 1924). Especially the collection of poetry *Lasimaalaus* (Glass Painting) by Meriluoto (1946) was a great success and went through several reprints. Her work found an admirer even in the conservative critic V. A. Koskenniemi (1885–1962). In the prose literature of the late 1940s one of the most interesting works was Lassi Nummi's (born 1929) *Maisema* (Landscape) from 1949, "a fantasy, based on visual impressions, about man, who as a parachutist has been lost in a foreign country and a new

life,” as Kai Laitinen puts it ([1967], 166). Nummi’s book can be regarded as an early Finnish “nouveau roman.”

In the early 1950s, English and American literature and literary theory was introduced to Finnish readers, especially by Alex Matson and Tuomas Anhava (1927–2001). Matson, who in 1927 had written an essay on *Ulysses* and in 1946 translated *A Portrait of the Artist*, was a critic without university background but influenced by New Criticism. His book-length essay *Romaanitaide* (The Art of the Novel) from 1947, which includes discussions of Joyce’s *Ulysses* and Kilpi’s *Alastalon salissa*, proved very influential. Tuomas Anhava wrote important essays about the novel but was also an admirer of Ezra Pound. Anhava wrote six collections of poetry in 1953–66, such as *Runoja 1955* (Poems 1955) from 1955, which includes the cycle “Yleiset opit” (General doctrines), but since then he concentrated on translation—among other works he translated Japanese lyrics, Saint-John Perse’s *Anabasis*, Ezra Pound’s *Personae* and Constantin Cavafy’s (Konstantinos Kavafis) poetry—and editorial work; he played an important role as a “grey eminence” of Finnish literature (sometimes mockingly called “the pope”) and as an atelier critic of younger poets.

In the 1950s the poetry of the Finland-Swedish modernists began to be seriously noticed by modernists writing in Finnish. Along with Anhava, one of its promoters was Kai Laitinen, the critic and the editor-in-chief of the literary magazine *Parnasso*. Among the most notable poetic works in the 1950s were Paavo Haavikko’s (born in 1931) *Tiet etäisyyksiin* (Roads to distances, 1951) and *Talvipalatsi* (The winter palace, 1959) and Eeva-Liisa Manner’s (1921–1995) *Tämä matka* (This journey) from 1956. According to Laitinen, the typical features of Haavikko’s lyrics are “the easy movement and sudden combination of images, the speechlike vivacity of rhythm and the art of saying things as if at the same time on several levels” (Laitinen [1967], 157). In *Talvipalatsi* Haavikko discusses historical themes, but the collection is metapoetic as well. Haavikko’s most fascinating piece of modernist prose writing is his short story from 1964 *Lumeton aika* (literally “Snowless time,” translated into English as *Before History Begins*). It is a witty alternative history, describing the suspicious atmosphere in Finland as a people’s republic. When the story was published, the first critics did not catch the starting point: Finland as an imaginary people’s republic. The English translation contained the following explanatory note: “Haavikko’s short story is set in Finland in 1963—describing its political life, however, as if the Communist Party had come into power in 1948, and as if the year 1953 would have marked the beginning of a ‘liberalization’ similar to that taking place in the Central European People’s Democracies” (Haavikko [1967], 110). According to Juhani Niemi, Haavikko’s novella started a new genre, which could be called the “fiction of Sovietized Finland.” The genre, which discussed Finland in the shadow of Soviet Union, flourished in the 1960s and 1970s. Its last specimen was Matti Pulkkinen’s (born in 1944) postmodern novel from 1985, *Romaanihenkilön kuolema* (Death of a fictional character), which included references to Haavikko.

Eeva-Liisa Manner’s *Tämä matka* was celebrated for its tight images, unpredictability and cursory logic. In the collection’s last section, “Lapsuuden hämärästä” (From the dimness of childhood), the childhood memories from Vyborg (Viipuri), a city lost to the Soviet Union in the Second World War, are seen in grotesque light. Manner’s poems are full of allusions which range from old psalms to trite hits, from Classical myths to Heidegger’s philosophy. In her later collection *Fahrenheit 121* (1968) there are several quotations from and allusions to Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist*.

Among the young poets who started in the 1950s was also Pentti Saarikoski (1937–1983), the future translator of Joyce’s *Ulysses* and Homer’s *Odyssey* into Finnish. The most notable of Saari-

ski's earlier collections of poetry, *Mitä tapahtuu todella?* (What is really happening?) from 1962, has sometimes been regarded as the first postmodern work in Finnish poetry. After his emigration to Sweden in 1975 he wrote his main work, the *Tiarnia Trilogy* (1977–1983; translated into English as *Trilogy*, 2003), which consists of two collections of poetry and one long poem. Saarikoski's trilogy is a kind of collage, connecting impressions from Tjörn island in Sweden to quotations from and allusions to Greek, Swedish and Finnish literature. With his free renditions of Sappho, Hipponax and Catullus, Saarikoski radically changed the ways of translating and looking at the Classics. His way of introducing slang in his translation of Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* in 1962 also struck a new tone in Finnish literature and aroused much discussion.

The modernists of the 1950s were accused of aestheticism and one-sided theorizing about the problems of language. They were attacked by both conservative and Marxist critics. Writing about Lasse Heikkilä's poetry in 1952, V.A. Koskenniemi ascribed Heikkilä to those modernists who were influenced by the Swedish "fyrtiotalister" (poets of the 1940s) and who diligently read *Bonniers Litterära Magasin* as well as the poetry of Gunnar Ekelöf and Erik Lindegren. Koskenniemi's targets were not only the new poets but also the new critics: "In the wake of those poets vibrates like a vague comet's tail a crowd of younger critics of both sexes," he added (Koskenniemi [1952], 38). The modernists — writers, artists, composers — were also constantly ridiculed by the leading cartoonist Kari (Kari Suomalainen, 1920–99) in the Finnish newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat*.

The modernist prose writing of the 1950s cannot be discussed without Veijo Meri. His novel *Manillaköysi* (1957; translated into English as *The Manila Rope*, 1967) has been translated into several European languages. The plot, involving a man who in wartime has stolen a Manila rope, is constantly interrupted by other stories, sometimes with grotesque dimensions. Meri's other novels, like *Peiliin piirretty nainen* (A woman sketched in a mirror) from 1963, and *Everstin autonkuljettaja* (The colonel's chauffeur) from 1966, are characterized by "behavioristic" descriptions of the absurdities of everyday life.

An interesting phenomenon in Finnish literature of the 1960s was the appearance of the collage-novel, combining elements from advertisements to lists of streets and shops. Such novels are Kari Aronpuro's (born in 1940) *Aperitiff - Avoin kaupunki* (Aperitif - open city), Markku Lahtela's (1936–1980) *Jumala pullossa* (God in the bottle) and Pentti Saarikoski's *Ovat muistojemme lehdet kuolleet* (Dead are the leaves of our memories). All these novels were published in 1964–65. Saarikoski's novel was influenced by his translation of *Ulysses*. Lahtela's later novel *Sirkus eli merkillisiä muistiinpanoja* (Circus, or eccentric notes) from 1978 has been characterized as post-modernist. Aronpuro, for his part, has since then been known for his "semiotic" poetry, quoting freely from the writings of C. S. Peirce, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and others.

Apart from the Tulenkantajat group, the activity of which can be regarded as a search for modernity, modernism in literature written in Finnish is — with some remarkable exceptions — a late phenomenon. There are several reasons why modern foreign developments were adapted so late. It was a question of language barrier, but also of Finland's nationalistic and political situation. At the same time modern experiments were often condemned by conservative and academic literary critics, who aligned modernism variously with immorality, Marxism and psychoanalysis. Theologians often participated in the discussion on a similar note. In Finnish literary history it is customary to speak of "Book Wars," controversies which often proved not to centre only on aesthetic evaluation but also public morals.

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## IV Danish Modernism

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The term “modernist” can be used to designate, first, literature that primarily registers the reality of modernity (the city, speed, the decline of bourgeois-Christian values, the disintegration of the subject, and loneliness), and, second, attempts to confront this reality with artistic forms that express the division and the chaos and at the same time constitute a kind of alternative to modernity.

According to this definition it is no wonder that modernism established itself late in Danish literature. Until the 1950s Denmark was largely an agricultural society, and as a neutral country in the First World War it was peripheral to the event that was generally experienced as the first major crisis in bourgeois culture. Johannes V. Jensen’s (1873–1950) work nevertheless registers a modern worldview early on, especially his collection entitled *Digte 1906* (Poems 1906), which was profoundly influenced by Walt Whitman, and as does Sophus Claussen’s (1865–1931) late poetry. Otherwise it was largely art and art criticism that first introduced the modernist movements in Denmark. From 1917 to 1920 the periodical *Klingen* (The blade) called attention to the cubism and expressionism practiced in Europe, and painters like Vilhelm Lundstrøm and Harald Giersing were eager to try out the new forms. Emil Bønnelycke (1893–1972) also debuted in 1917, and with his poems *Asfaltens sange* (Songs of asphalt) and his novel *Spartanerne* (The Spartans) he brought a touch of futurism and modern enthusiasm for technique into Danish literature. The young Tom Kristensen (1893–1972) wrote his first poems and the novel *Livets arabesque* (The arabesque of life) from 1921 under the influence of especially the French and German avant-garde, but nevertheless did not abandon a normative, traditional idiom. This was done by the authors R. Broby-Johansen (1900–87) and Harald Landt Momberg (1875–1975), who in the Danish context represented the first examples of a political expressionism especially along the lines of the German model. In particular Broby-Johansen’s 1922 collection of poems, *Blod* (Blood), which was accused of immorality, is an early but also isolated example of a Danish avant-garde encompassing the enthusiasm for revolution and fascination with the city.

At the same time, in the periodical *Kritisk Revy* (Critical Review; 1926–28) the architect Poul Henningsen (1893–1967) formulated another concept of modernism, which pleaded the cause of functionalism, criticism and clarity. Poul Henningsen’s ideals were Bauhaus and Le Corbusier and his idea of a practical, reality-oriented modernism left deep traces in Danish literature. “We do not want any new form at all unless it is dictated by the task,” he wrote in the essay “Tradition and Modernism” in one of the first issues of *Kritisk Revy* (Henningsen [1963], 42). Another contributor to the periodical was Otto Gelsted (1888–1968), who as a poet was influenced by modernist traditions (for example Baudelaire and T. S. Eliot), but in his writings on expressionistic art and psychoanalysis pleaded the cause of a moderate, culturally critical Marxist approach.

Developing this cultural radicalism, Danish literature in the 1930s is primarily of a realistic nature and occupied with totalitarianism and the threat of impending Nazism. However, it also provides examples of a celebration of the animalistic and vital human being that was not entirely different from currents in Germany, although its forms (in, for instance, Bodil Bech, Hulda Lütken and Jørgen Nielsen) come close to the fragmentation of modernism. The 1930s furthermore saw a brief and hectic work by gustav munch-petersen (1912–38), who before getting killed in the Spanish Civil War, wrote visionary, surrealistically inspired poems, but in *nitten digte* (nineteen poems) from 1937 also demonstrated that he mastered the short, imagistic form. In addition, in Danish literature prior to 1945 one can find strong rudiments of modernist prose in two novels that were both written under the impact of James Joyce: Tom Kristensen's *Hærværk* (Havoc) from 1930, with its polyphone image of the city and associative technique of plays on words; and H. C. Branner's (1903–66) *Drømmen om en kvinde* (The dream about a woman) from 1941, which makes use of an advanced stream-of-consciousness technique and a radically fragmented psychology. Both works indicate that European high modernism was known in Denmark before the Second World War, although it is hardly correct to speak of an actual modernist current in the pre-war era.

The Second World War and the German occupation of Denmark from 1940 to 1945 brought to an end what many considered a “magic sleep,” and after the war a window was opened to European and American modernism. In literary historiography, Danish modernism is usually divided into three phases, the last of which in many ways covers what some would call “postmodernism” today. This model of phases is used in the following discussion.

The immediate reaction of many Danish authors to the war was to reject the political ideologies and the socially operative forms of literature from the interwar years and instead to seek out a more exclusive philosophy of art. From 1947 onward the literary journal *Heretica* became a mouthpiece for this movement that, with authors like Thorkild Bjørnvig (1918–2005), Jørgen Gustava Brandt (born in 1929), Frank Jæger (1926–1977), Poul la Cour (1902–1956), Martin A. Hansen (1909–1955), and Ole Sarvig (1921–1981), and with the approval and support of Karen Blixen, forged a link to European late symbolism and high modernism. Both in poetry and prose the group created works that contrasted a compact, elevated spirituality, often with a Christian profile, to a godless, alienated modernity that they nevertheless registered with raw sensitivity. People have spoken of the “sense of Advent” in this period and its “messianic” conception of art and the artist, which is also familiar from European high modernism. Authors like T. S. Eliot, Rainer Maria Rilke, and the generation of Swedish poets from the 1940s—the “Fyrtiotalister”—were also introduced in Denmark, and with his *Fragmenter af en dagbog* (Fragments of a diary) from 1948, Poul la Cour offered the first example of Danish modernist poetics. Also authors who would later head the rebellion against the *Heretica* spirit, such as Per Højholt (1928–2004) and Erik Knudsen (born in 1922), either debuted in *Heretica* or were somehow affiliated with it.

In fact, the final volumes of the literary journal, from 1951 to 1953, signalled a stylistic change in Danish literature. A greater openness toward the reality of the post-war era and a willingness to confront bourgeois values became manifest; thus, what may be called the second phase of Danish modernism involved taking up the link between cultural radicalism and modernism again, an effort for which Poul Henningsen had already made himself the spokesman in the interwar years.

Yet the forms were different: poets like Klaus Rifbjerg (born in 1931), Inger Christensen (born in 1935), Ivan Malinowski (1926–86), and Robert Corydon (1924–84), and prose writers like Villy

Sørensen (1929–2001) and Peter Seeberg (1925–99) debuted in the 1950s or in the beginning of the 1960s with works in which a fragmented, heterogeneous form expressed a will to directly encounter an absurd and meaningless reality and what many considered to be the beginning of the misery of mass culture in the new welfare society. In a decade where absurd French theatre and the new novel were introduced in Denmark, absurdism became a challenge to literature: rather than being full of annunciation and symbolic meaning, literature was considered a place to endure the emptiness. For Peter Seeberg the discovery of Ludwig Wittgenstein's linguistic philosophy prompted him on to provide an illusionless, liberatingly funny image of man in a world devoid of meaning in his novels *Bipersonerne* (Secondary characters) from 1956 and *Fugls føde* (Birdfeed) from 1957 and his 1962 collection of short stories *Eftersøgningen* (The Search). In *Sære historier* (Strange tales) from 1953 and *Ufarlige historier* (Harmless tales) from 1955, Villy Sørensen links Kafkaesque, grotesque fantasizing with the effort to fit the great myths and decisive life phases into his world picture. He touches on this in his collection of essays entitled *Digtere og dæmoner* from 1959 (Poets and demons), which became one of the most important theoretical manifestations of the period.

Nevertheless, it was a lyric work—Klaus Rifbjerg's *Konfrontation* (Confrontation) from 1960—that gave the period its name. Together with his following long poem, *Camouflage* (1961), Rifbjerg took the lead in the efforts to liberate the phenomena from what he saw as metaphysical layers of mould, and make literary language the place for a fruitful clinch with the concrete. This attitude can seem a trifle heroically desperate, like in Ivan Malinowski's poem "Disjecta membra" from his 1958 collection *Galgenfrist* (A brief respite): "indomitable is the flesh that clings to the bone" (Malinowski [1958], 45). At the same time, in an article in the most prominent periodical of the movement, *Vindrosen* (The wind rose) Malinowski formulated what he called "an existential minimum program," in part under the influence of Nietzsche's concept of nihilism. But the confrontation with reality also achieves a calligraphic simplicity in the poems of Corydon, who was preoccupied with art, and in Inger Christensen's first two collections, *Lys* (Light) from 1962 and *Græs* (Grass) from 1963.

The greatest strength of the critic Torben Brostrøm, who followed this literature with a congenial awareness of tradition, was the reading of poetry—even though he states that one of his most important initiations into modernism was his discovery of the Norwegian author Tarjei Vesaas, the majority of whose work he translated into Danish. And since the rise of the new current in Denmark was also accompanied by the entry of new criticism in the universities and soon after in the school system—an analytical method that was particularly well suited to interpreting the compact and composite forms of this literature—it contributed to defining the concept of modernism, especially modernist poetry, a mark of distinction in Danish literary consciousness. Modernism became synonymous with "good literature"—as opposed to the degenerated and kitschy forms of mass literature. The confrontation between a modernist elite and a consumer society intensified in the 1965 debate over how the fund for the endowment of the arts should be spent, in which the populist conflict with Danish cultural radicalism that later proved so persistent manifested itself for the first time.

Although Danish modernism in the 1960s was daring in its confrontation with the *Heretica* generation's mystical celebration of art and critical in its treatment of reality, it was still restricted by the faith of high modernism in the unity of the work, in the cohesive power of the image, and in art's privileged force of insight. Perhaps Inger Christensen's poem *det* (it) from 1969 constitutes a



culmination in Danish modernism, as it integrates an immense amount of social, global, and cosmic aspects of reality in a strict and systematic form, even though the system is not—as in Mann, Eliot, and Joyce—drawn from universal myth but rather from philosophy of language and mathematics. Later, in the poem sequences *Alfabet* (Alphabet) from 1981 and *Sommerfugledalen* (Butterfly Valley) from 1991, Christensen develops this synthetic will to unity into a mastery that has marked her as one of the great modern Danish poets. But it is this faith in the unity of the work that has vanished in what the critic Steffen Hejlskov Larsen (1971) has called the “third phase of modernism,” the prelude to the “formal breakthrough” (Mai [2000], 535) that from the early 1970s makes Danish literature so diverse that it is perhaps no longer possible to speak of a coherent modernist current.

The third phase of modernism has its background in a broader linguistic awareness of the material at hand and a more radical problematization of literary language that can be traced back in Danish literature to the beginning of the 1960s. Again, the inspiration seems essentially to come from the visual arts and the presentation of art. “Louisiana,” the art museum founded north of Copenhagen in 1960, opened its doors to European avant-garde and American pop art, and people like Bjørn Nørgaard and Per Kirkeby started to experiment with performance art. Authors such as Hans-Jørgen Nielsen (1941–1991), Vagn Steen (born in 1928), and Vagn Lundby (born in 1933) became spokesmen for a new concept of the text through their theory and literary practice: forms from mass culture and pulp fiction are superimposed on their texts with quotes, meta-reflections, and ironic plays on words. Starting in 1967 the literary journal *ta’* (seiz’) constituted a forum for a group of authors who saw their work as explicitly confronting the center-oriented poetics of the modernism of cultural radicalism.

This conceptualization of literature had nevertheless been prepared by a number of authors who had never really been part of the group of confrontational modernists. In his collection of poetry entitled *Poetens hoved* (The head of the poet) from 1963, Per Højholt departed radically from the post-*Heretica* style with which he had debuted, creating a series of texts whose dynamic multiplicity and polysemous departures from the central lyrical referentiality were a sign of something distinctly new in Danish literature. With the long poem *Turbo* (1968) and his novel *6512* (1969), Højholt continued a body of work whose linguistic complexity and critical dynamics have left profound traces in modern Danish poetry. His two collections of articles, *Cezannes metode* (Cezanne’s method) from 1967 and *Intethedens grimasser* (The grimaces of nothingness) from 1972, at the same time contributed significantly to formulating his generation’s deconstructive poetics of absence. His novel *Auricula* from 2001, a true masterpiece, is a late homage to James Joyce, who has been an important source of inspiration to Højholt throughout his work.

Peter Laugesen (born in 1942) debuted with single poems in the early 1960s but otherwise made a breakthrough with the *ta’* generation from 1967 and onward. He was influenced by Joyce and *Finnegans Wake*, as well as by other modernist traditions, which in no small part as a result of his efforts had a breakthrough in Denmark: the Beat generation’s flow poetry, the minimalist concentration of Haiku poetry, experiments with Jazz and poetry, and so on. In a large number of collections of texts and poetry (including criticism), Laugesen has given Danish modernism an extraordinary tone of tumultuous energy since the 1970s.

The most important inspiration for the prose poets of the third phase of modernism was Svend Aage Madsen, who debuted in 1963 with the novel *Besøget* (The visit), which in three different sequences requires the reader to construct a pattern himself. This is a technique that Madsen devel-

ops in his collection of short stories from 1965 entitled *Otte gange orphan* (Eight times an orphan) and that culminates with his novel *Tilføjelser* (Additions) from 1967, which appeared as a set of booklets whose order the reader himself could determine. The form corresponds well with what Hans-Jørgen Nielsen called “attitude relativism” in his 1968 collection of essays *Nielsen og den hvide verden* (Nielsen and the White World), a concept that in many ways came to emblemize an entire generation. But Svend Aage Madsen himself has described how, around 1970, he felt that the writing-oriented approach that he had practiced up through the 1960s under the influence of Samuel Beckett and Alain Robbe-Grillet trailed off into the absurd, and the body of work he had created over past thirty years could be regarded as a long attempt to reconquer and reconsider the narrative as a medium for expressing the modern world. An initial highpoint was the novel *Tugt og utugt i mellemtiden* from 1976 (Virtue and vice in the middle time), which, with the city of Århus at its core, resumed the urban novel of which Tom Kristensen had given the first modern Danish example with *Hærværk*, and which Peer Hultberg (born in 1935) pursued with *Byen og verden* (The City and the World) in 1992. This central high-modernist topos (the city as an encyclopedic section of the world from Proust, Joyce, and Woolf to Rushdie and Auster) is an indication that genuine parts of the modernist tradition are still alive in Danish literature today. Peer Hultberg raised a late monument to high modernism in Danish literature with his work *Requiem* (1985), reminiscent, for instance, of T. S. Eliot’s *Waste Land*. The novel consists of 537 voices, which Hultberg develops by often drawing upon his long experience as a psychoanalyst. Together they comprise a section of time, like a spiritual state that joins isolated individuals together, creating something that is in any case a kind of rhythmic unity—reminiscent of what Virginia Woolf did in *The Waves* to a less extended, more concentrated degree.

When it emerged around 1967, the third phase of modernism was introduced by important works that were rooted in distinctly modernist currents and that later followed their own, independent paths. Later turns of event in Danish literature, however, are very difficult to gather under the term “modernism.” While the Danish authors of the 1980s and 1990s were incredibly conscious of tradition and took into consideration classical modernist forms and themes in manifold ways, modernism is merely one of many traditions on which they felt they could draw. A wide array of realistic, mass-cultural and ethnically alien forms offer themselves as possibilities for experimentation, and non-linguistic media like film, rock music, and modern visual arts become increasingly important as a source of inspiration for the new literature. Modernism is no longer a prominent and predominant current in Danish literature toward the millennium; as long as it was possible to speak of high modernism as a decisive point of attack for a new poetics, it was possible to speak of a third and final phase of modernism. The moment this polemic energy is gone, we are *post* modernism.

There are, nevertheless, works from the past twenty to thirty years of Danish literature that can be designated as “modernist.” In Henrik Nordbrandt’s (born in 1945) poems the modernist disintegration of the subject and the sense of lost meaning is the point of departure for the eternal voyage towards a new construction of identity for which the poem is a medium. This is a labyrinthine movement that Nordbrandt makes use of in direct continuation of the travel motif in, for instance, Baudelaire and Rimbaud. But poetic traditions in the Eastern Mediterranean, where Nordbrandt has lived much of his life, can also be traced in his poetry, which, owing to its artistic brilliance and ironic love/hate relationship with Danish mediocrity, has achieved considerable popularity in

Denmark.

One can hardly say the same about Henrik Bjelke (1937–93), whose first books were published by the little avant-garde publishing house Arena, on whose board he sat—and whose ironic lack of illusions lay far from 1960s modernism. However, Bjelke's work must be regarded as a Danish contribution to the wider European modernism; for example, his novel *Saturn* from 1974, keeps together an intricate and heterogeneous structure through its palimpsestic use of the Mesopotamian myth of Gilgamesh. Moreover, Bjelke's radical use of various dictions and fully implemented quotation technique are reminiscent of James Joyce, to whom he often acknowledges his debt. The ruthlessness with which Bjelke has used his private life and emotional traumas in his work—for example, in his novel *Hundrede postkort fra helvede* (One hundred postcards from hell) from 1980 and collection of short stories *Rygternes atlas* (Atlas of rumours) from 1992—also links him to the modernist tradition, where language can be fragmented to the point of sounding psychotic, but where the dream of a liberating unity—among other things through the literary work—is never far away.

Poul Vad (1927–2003) presents a far more reserved personality, but he is also one of the authors that should be classified under Danish modernism. Vad debuted as a poet in *Heretica* and also contributed to *Vindrosen*, the main voice of the modernism of cultural radicalism. With his novel *De nøjsomme* (The frugal) from 1960, which thematically demonstrates similarities with contemporary authors like Seeberg, Rifbjerg, and Panduro, he offered a portrait of an existentially confused post-war generation. However, he acquired his great significance for Danish prose modernism with his huge novel *Kattens anatomi* (The anatomy of the cat) from 1978, a vast conglomeration of anecdotes, narratives, and stories, joined by a framing narrative about a train trip in the Danish provinces before the war. A large number of literary ancestors from Rabelais to Borges converge in this novel, which with its pictorial visionality and imaginative multiplicity also testifies to its author's work as an art historian. Like many key modernist novels, *Kattens anatomi* also contains a critical reflection of its own form, and along with Vad's substantial writings on art theory, this makes him one of the most important figures of late Danish modernism.

Perhaps the very fact that Danish literature in the 1990s was so hesitant to pursue the big, monstrous form is an important indication that “modernism” is no longer useful for designating a period. On the one hand, Danish literature excels in narrative forms in which the formal fragmentation is too slight to call the form modernism. Danish literature currently abounds with realistic narrators. On the other hand, the literature is populated by authors who skillfully master the innovative, experimental text but do not have the will or need to let these texts gather into a reparative whole. The twofold definition of modernism mentioned in the beginning no longer applies. But the limits are vague: in an author like Klaus Høeck (born in 1938) a thorough registration of nature and the postindustrial cultural landscape is combined with an encyclopedic will to synthesis that draws on older cosmological traditions as well as on the great classics of the twentieth century. His great poetry collections, *Hjem* (Home) from 1985, *Heptameron* (1989), and *1001 digte* (1001 poems) from 1995, constitute both a pathetic end to the twentieth century's Danish modernism and an announcement of a new spirituality for the twenty-first century. And in Kirsten Hammann's (born in 1965) novels *Vera Winkelvir* (1993) and *Bannister* (1997), we still find the modernist tension between linguistic disintegration and a search for identity. Thus, the transformations and limits of modernism remain undetermined in Danish literature at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

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## V Modernism in Norway

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Geographically, Norway is situated on the northern periphery of Europe; historically, the country was a colony of Denmark for four hundred years. This meant that nineteenth-century Norwegian authors easily turned to National Romanticism and later also to realism in various attempts to describe the mother country and its newly won freedom. In this cultural climate, which did not radically change with the turn of the century, one might have expected that the themes and forms of modernism were too foreign to be assimilated, but this was not the case. Modernism is a truly international movement, and Norwegian literary history shows the extent to which it can thrive on different historical and cultural soils. Our discussion also illustrates that it can do so at various points in time.

Norwegian modernism was not just a passive recipient of international trends. Rather, what we encounter is an intricate interplay of trends and ideas where Norwegian authors are both inspired by and make a significant contribution to European modernism. What constituted the basis for this Norwegian contribution? Two factors, operating on different levels and yet interestingly interlinked, are worth stressing here. First, since Norway was a small and relatively isolated country, Norwegian artists and authors of the nineteenth century travelled widely; and many of them stayed for extended periods of time in countries such as Germany, Italy, and France and received impulses unavailable at home. Many Norwegian artists and authors undertook, on a smaller scale, a variant of the “Grand Tour” — thus seeking a form of *Bildung* felt to be essential for artistic development. In metropolitan cities such as Berlin and Paris, Norwegian artists were susceptible to trends and impulses associated with the advance of modernism. Such impulses were in part literary ones, including the movement commonly referred to as French Symbolism. But the exposure to new tendencies and theories in the visual arts and in aesthetics was also important, as was the impact of new theories associated with Darwin, Feuerbach, Nietzsche, and John Stuart Mill, whose *Utilitarianism* (1863) and *On the Subjection of Women* (1869) were both translated into Danish by Georg Brandes. It should be noted that in the nineteenth-century written Danish and Norwegian were virtually indistinguishable, as is illustrated by the fact that from the 1860s onwards leading Norwegian authors published their work in Denmark. Scandinavian cross-currents were strong at the time, and Brandes in particular exerted a significant influence on Norwegian writers.

Due to the impact of translation, not only those Norwegians who actually travelled abroad were exposed to the plethora of new ideas and views that formed the roots of European modernism. Key texts and selections of texts were translated, and on their return to Norway those who had travelled were keen to impart their newly acquired knowledge to a home audience. Thus, in the latter part of the nineteenth century Norwegian authors were in closer touch with international developments than one might expect.

This is where the first factor to be stressed blends into the second. The literature produced by the most important names in this diverse group of writers has later come to be known as the “golden period” of Norwegian literary history, and even though most of them (including Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, Jonas Lie and Alexander Kielland) cannot be called “modernist” authors, two of them made significant contributions to European modernism: Henrik Ibsen and Knut Hamsun, in the genres of drama and prose fiction respectively.

The difference between Ibsen and Hamsun is, of course, not one of genre only. Ibsen (1828–1906) belonged to the generation preceding Hamsun (1859–1952), and the playwright’s relation to European modernism is less direct. Yet arguably Ibsen in his late work and Hamsun in his early books are both modernist authors, and the temporal span of their publications is illustrative of the way in which modernism in Norway is extended in time.

Ibsen is a dominating figure in the history of modern theater. This observation may be so obvious as to appear redundant, yet it provides the basis for a further point: there was a remarkable force, a sense of urgency, about Ibsen’s conquest of the theater—first in Scandinavia, and then very quickly in Europe, North America and the wider world. As much of this conquest occurred in the modernist era, and as Ibsen has been one of the most frequently performed playwrights of the twentieth century, his role is inextricably linked with that of modernism.

Unadapted Ibsen first appeared on the London stage with *A Doll’s House* in 1889, but “it was the Independent Theatre’s production of *Ghosts* [1881] in March 1891 that opened the floodgates to the phenomenon of execration/adulation of Ibsen” (Ewbank [2002], 27). One admirer who promoted Ibsen was Henry James, and, as Inga-Stina Ewbank notes, “[i]f art which scrutinizes itself and at the same time scrutinizes the reader is Modernist, then Ibsen in his plays of the 1890s is no less a Modernist than James” (Ewbank [2002], 36).

One must agree with Ewbank that in describing Ibsen as a modernist the importance of the late plays, those of the 1880s and 1890s, must be stressed. The ending of *John Gabriel Borkman* (1896), for instance, is an example “of how the late plays break away from the bourgeois parlour to use outdoor settings, interwoven with their thematic structures” (Ewbank [1994], 131). In the plays just mentioned and also in *The Wild Duck* (1884), *Rosmersholm* (1886), *Hedda Gabler* (1890), *The Master Builder* (1892), *Little Eyolf* (1894), and *When We Dead Awaken* (1899), Ibsen gave a wonderfully rich response—formally and dramaturgically as well as thematically—to the “crisis” which Peter Szondi identifies in European drama around 1880. According to Szondi’s somewhat controversial theory, the reason for this crisis is essentially generic: drama is no longer, he claims, absolute and primary (unfolding as a linear sequence in the present), but relies for its effect on narrative elements incorporated into the dramatic structure. Szondi’s main example is indeed Ibsen, in whose late plays the thematic significance of the main characters’ actions, dreams, and desires is inseparable from their past histories as unravelled through the playwright’s sophisticated retrospective technique (Szondi [1987], 8–9, 16).

Like most turning-points in literary form, the crisis Szondi identifies in European drama in the late nineteenth century is productive in that it precipitates the formal experimentation of modernist theater. Szondi’s notion of crisis also implicitly accentuates the link between various forms of generic interplay. Ibsen’s dramaturgic use of the past is partly motivated by his understanding of tragedy. In the genre of the novel, Hamsun’s exploration of the human psyche—or, more precisely, the way in which he foregrounds individual consciousness rather than presenting a broad social

analysis in the manner of Émile Zola or the Norwegian novelist Amalie Skram—cannot be separated from his innovative narrative techniques. As James McFarlane puts it: “We look with the hero equally when he examines the secret areas within himself and when he looks at the world about him, a world in which the things of greatest significance are precisely those other secret lives of his fellows” (McFarlane [1956], 571; see also Humpál [1998], 15).

McFarlane’s important essay laid the foundation for later attempts to consider Hamsun as a modernist writer. A significant feature of this essay is McFarlane’s selection of novels. He focuses on *Hunger* (1890), *Mysteries* (1892), *Pan* (1894), and marginally *Victoria* (1898), arguing that Hamsun’s twentieth-century novels retreat from experimental modernist writing to a more traditionalist realist idiom. This distinction has rarely been disputed, nor have critics questioned McFarlane’s good reasons for stressing the significance of the early Hamsun’s highly original narrative methods. Martin Humpál delineates the original features of Hamsun’s early method, not least by demonstrating that “*Hunger* presents the immediate experience of the narrator’s past self with minimum signs of narratorial mediation” (Humpál [1998], 31). The literary historian Per Thomas Andersen notes in his recently published *Norsk litteraturhistorie* (Norwegian Literary History) that there is “an unpredictable sensibility” about *Hunger* (Andersen [2001], 292). The novel presents the human mind—and, as a corollary, life as experienced by the human mind—in a new and for many contemporary readers disturbing way: a series of changing mental states which the subject (Hamsun’s unnamed first-person narrator) can neither satisfactorily control nor fully comprehend.

Even though no Norwegian author of the twentieth century contributed to European modernism in a manner comparable to Ibsen and Hamsun, the opposite movement, the impact of modernism on Norwegian literature, has remained considerable, constituting a tradition that has co-existed with various forms of realist literature. In the first part of the twentieth century, authors such as Cora Sandel, Sigurd Hoel and Aksel Sandemose made significant contributions to this modernist tradition. Cora Sandel (1880–1974) lived for 15 years in France, where she received formative impulses from modernist trends in literature and the visual arts. In the trilogy of novels commonly referred to as the “Alberte series” (1926, 1931 and 1939), Sandel makes innovative use not only of the present tense but also of iterative narration, which, as in Proust’s *Recherche*, presents an event in such a way that it suggests a number of similar ones. In matters of narrative and structure, Sigurd Hoel (1890–1960) was inspired by Kafka. Hoel also played a major role as a translator of important modernist novels (for example, Conrad’s *Lord Jim* and Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury*) into Norwegian. Various aspects and insights of psychoanalysis are observable in Hoel’s fiction, as they are in Aksel Sandemose’s (1899–1965). Sandemose’s best known novel is *En flykning krysser sitt spor* (A Fugitive Crosses his Track) from 1933, where the author explores the possibilities of unreliable first-person narration in order to present an engrossing psychological study.

That Norwegian novelists of the post-WWII generation continued to receive impulses from modernism is evident in the work of Tarjei Vesaas (1897–1970), who published his most important books in the 1950s and 1960s. Vesaas’s work is rooted in the local (Telemark), and yet a novel such as *Fuglane* (The Birds) from 1957 masterly integrates the presentation of ordinary life and apparently simple characters into a rich and complex symbolic landscape—there is a link between characters such as Stevie in Conrad’s *The Secret Agent* (1907), Benjy in Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) and Mattis in *Fuglane*. In the 1960s Vesaas published several novels which have dis-



tinctly modernist features. Two illustrative examples are *Brannen* (The Fire) from 1961 and *Is-slotet* (The Ice Castle) from 1963.

In the generation following Vesaas, few Norwegian prose writers seemed to invite the label “modernist.” However, the inspiration of modernism is notable in several short stories and novels. One example of this lasting impulse is Kjell Askildsen (born in 1929). He started to publish in the 1950s, but aspects of modernism are more prominent in his fiction from the mid-60s onwards, for instance in the novel *Omgivelser* (Surroundings) from 1969. Askildsen is first and foremost a short-story writer. One of his most original stories is “Carl Lange,” from the 1983 collection *Thomas F’s siste nedtegelser til almenheten* (Thomas F’s Last Notes for the Public), a tense narrative strongly reminiscent of Kafka’s *The Trial*.

Modernist poetry has a long history in Norway. Per Thomas Andersen sums it up as “a continuous tradition which has found its form through many phases, and which calls for new and steadily more finely shaded concepts of modernism” (Andersen [2001], 340; our translation). After the proto-modernist Sigbjørn Obstfelder (1866–1900), whose free verse forms have been an inspiration for later poets, new impulses came to Norway from German Expressionism. The work of Kristofer Uppdal (1878–1961), who had lived in Germany in 1913, is marked by his strong ties both to realistic and experimental modes of expression, the former most conspicuous in his fiction, the latter in his poetry.

A new phase in the early 1930s is represented by poets whose inspiration came both from Norwegian (and Scandinavian) poetry and from the Anglo-American world. Rolf Jacobsen (1907–94) published *Jord og jern* (Earth and Iron) in 1933. Both the title, with its evocation of the natural world as well as modern industry, and the cover of the volume, with a cubist-inspired design, marked the collection as Jacobsen’s attempt to write a new kind of poetry. In his poetic form he is sometimes traditional, but his use of free verse, resembling T. S. Eliot’s, is conspicuous, as is his subject matter—the second half of the book contains poems about cars, machines and pylons. Throughout Jacobsen’s long and distinguished career there is a fruitful tension between poetic forms and sometimes subject-matter linking him to the urban and international ethos of English modernism on the one hand and an insistence on the importance of local landscapes, communities and traditions on the other. Aslaug Vaa (1889–1965) had lived in Germany, France and England for years before she published her first collection, *Nord i leite* (On the North Fells) in 1934. In this work, a tension, corresponding to Jacobsen’s, is striking: free verse, though not in all the poems, as well as her awareness of the contemporary European scene (including the emergence of psychoanalysis) are balanced by her use of her own Telemark dialect and her allegiance to the values embedded in local life. Tarjei Vesaas, whose work as a novelist is mentioned above, is also a fine poet; and his poetry is perhaps even more strongly inspired by modernism than his prose fiction. Echoes of earlier modernist poetry are observable in many of Vesaas’s poems, ranging from his earliest collection, *Kjeldene* (The Sources) from 1946, to the last one, *Liv ved straumen* (Life by the stream) from 1970.

Claes Gill (1910–73) published two slim volumes of poetry, *Fragment av et magisk liv* (Fragment of a magic life) in 1939 and *Ord i jærn* (Words in iron) in 1942, in which his indebtedness to English and Irish poetry is obvious. Like W. B. Yeats he turns to various kinds of myths in search of a poetic language, and although, again like Yeats, he uses fairly strict stanza forms, this strictness is balanced by radical syntactic counter-movements, as in his unusual use of contraction and enjambment.

T. S. Eliot's importance to Norwegian literature was never seen more clearly than in the late 1940s. *The Waste Land* appeared in Norwegian in 1949, translated by Paal Brekke (1923–93), whose own collection of poetry, *Skyggefektninger* (Shadow fencings) appeared in the same year. Brekke, who had lived in Sweden during the war, had been deeply impressed by the 1940s generation of Swedish poets, and this, together with his enthusiasm for Eliot, made him *the* modernist poet in Norway. In *Roerne fra Itaka* (The Rowers from Ithaca) from 1960, the title poem is an ambitious attempt to use the *Odyssey* as a framework for a poetic cycle, in much the same way as Eliot had used classical and mediaeval myths in *The Waste Land*. A link with Joyce's *Ulysses* is also conspicuous in that Brekke is more interested in urban life and ordinary people and their sufferings than in the exploits of a great king and general like Homer's Odysseus.

It was not least Paal Brekke who triggered a lively and heated debate about "the ancients and the moderns" in Norwegian poetry at this time. Arnulf Øverland (1889–1968), a master of elegant invective and a poet whose style was definitely conservative, gave vent to his irritation in a talk which he called "Tungetale fra Parnasset" (Gibberish from Parnassus), published in *I beundring og forargelse* (In admiration and irritation) in 1954. Here Øverland accused recent poets of writing in a fashionable and pretentious style, imported from abroad, that nobody could understand. The talk was widely discussed and ended up being, all in all, definitely counterproductive.

The later story of modernist poetry in Norway is one of variety and dispersion. Olav H. Hauge's (1908–94) early poetic career is marked by traditional forms, but with *På ørnetuva* (On the eagle's mound) from 1961 his extensive knowledge of European modernism is evident. Hauge's later poetry reminds one of Aslaug Vaa's in that it is the result of a fruitful symbiosis of the international and the local, the Hardanger Fjord community in which he lived. Jan Erik Vold's (born in 1939) poetic world is urban. He is an unusually versatile poet, known, among other things, for straightforward realistic sketches and poems inspired by the political questions of the day. His modernism is seen in his concrete poems, in his many experiments with typographical form, and in his play with words that are broken up and put together again in new ways, a parallel to which is found on a much larger scale in *Finnegans Wake*. Like Vold, Tor Ulven (1953–95) is very much an urban poet. He takes the free forms of modernism for granted; and rather than reflecting a particularly Norwegian background, his themes are linked to those of earlier modernist writing: the relationship between past and present life, *vanitas*, death and archaeological resurrection, and the complexities of seeing.

Askildsen, Vold and Ulven must suffice as examples of some of the ways in which modernist inspired poetry has moved in the 1960s and beyond. Because of generous public support publication of new works has rocketed. The literary landscape is therefore particularly difficult to summarise. But in most of the very many new poets active in Norway in the last generation it is possible to see responses to modernism—a poetic tradition which in Norway as well as in many other countries refuses to die, and which is open to a great variety of modifications.

It has sometimes been taken for granted that Norwegian writers were influenced by English and European modernism rather than the other way round, and that a significant modernist strand is only observable in Norwegian literature of the 1950s and 1960s. But the history of modernism in Norway is more extended and more nuanced than such a generalised point might lead one to expect.

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## VI Icelandic Modernism

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At the outset of the twentieth century, the literature of Iceland appeared to rest firmly on a long-standing tradition, with seemingly unsevered roots reaching back to medieval eddic and scaldic poetry and saga prose. But the country was an overwhelmingly rural community with a scant book market in the modern sense. Around 1915, some of its most talented writers had settled in Denmark and wrote in Danish. This might have boded a crisis for modern Icelandic literature, but during the 1920s, the literary market grew and solidified, along with a significant distribution of cultural journals, the academic life in and around the new Icelandic university (established in 1911), and the slow emergence of urban culture, with an inherent awareness of developments in art and literature abroad. It is during this period that the first strong, if few, signs of modernism are to be noticed in Iceland. Two of the most significant poems of this period, “Sorg” (Sorrow) and “Söknuður” (Loss), by the expatriates Jóhann Sigurjónsson (1880–1919) and Jóhann Jónsson (1896–1932) respectively, revolted against the age-old patterns of Icelandic poetry, with its regular metre and rhyme. A close look manifests some earlier indications of modernism, and as early as 1892 two striking translations appeared that flew in the face of prevalent forms of Icelandic poetry, the alliterations found in them by no means counterbalancing the otherwise non-metrical, free-ranging expressions. These were Einar Benediktsson’s (1864–1940) translation of a section of Whitman’s “Song of Myself,” and Jón Ólafsson’s (1850–1916) rendering of August Strindberg’s “England.”

These translations were no doubt received as extreme exceptions by most readers, and such “unchecked” voices were not often heard in Icelandic poetry in the following decades. As early as 1915, however, some readers may have heard unusual sounds coming in from the wings, in parodic and satiric poems by one Þórbergur Þórðarsson (1889–1974) (who first wrote under the pseudonym Styr Stofuglamm), poems that undermined the neo-romantic solemnity of much contemporary poetry. Þórðarsson used the term “futurist” for some of his writing, although it is hard to say to what extent he had familiarized himself with the avant-garde movements thus named. He would soon emerge as one of the most original of Icelandic prose writers, and his *Bréf til Láru* (Letter to Laura) from 1924, in its mixing of genres and discourses, is an early radical expression of modernism in Iceland, while, again, it may be hard to trace to any foreign sources, and often seems to give an “internal” twist to various native traditions. It is easier to detect the contemporary continental modernism that Halldór Laxness (1902–98) drew on in his groundbreaking novel from 1927, *Vefarinn mikli frá Kasmír* (The Great Weaver of Kashmir), as well as in his poem “Únglingurinn í skóginum” (The Teenager in the Forest) from 1925. Laxness himself later acknowledged how indebted he was to especially French Surrealism in these early works (Laxness [1956], 142).

While these early manifestations of modernism are important, there has been some critical disagreement about whether they form an actual literary paradigm. The dominant trends of the 1930s and '40s are clearly of a realist bent, and the neo-romantic strains of the early century, while occasionally swaying toward a radicalized modernist expression, were mostly quite naturally assimilated into more broad-based epic or lyric discourses. In a series of novels, Halldór Laxness made it his business to renew and revitalize the epic properties of realist fiction, where social criticism is at ease with nativist attitudes and romantic sentiments, both of which are instrumental in tapping into the literary heritage. In poetry, too, traditional forms were renegotiated. This is also true of the translator Magnús Ásgeirsson (1901–55), who brought a great deal of modern poetry into Icelandic, including several modernist poems, which he rendered mostly in classical Icelandic metric and rhymed forms. He is thus a borderline figure and extremely important as such, for in its assimilated forms, new foreign poetry was more widely accepted than it otherwise would have been, and several young writers were acquainted with fresh ideas, themes, and imagery, and became eager to continue exploring these in their own terms. Thus, while Ásgeirsson's method is one of compromise, and may have somewhat delayed the entry of modernism into Icelandic poetry, it also prepared the ground for a greater shift later on.

The Second World War constituted a watershed in Icelandic history, bringing with it a foreign army (first British and later American), economic prosperity, an accelerated urban development, and various contacts with foreign culture. There was a boom in the book market, reflected most clearly in a substantial increase in translated fiction. This translation activity opened up new cultural horizons but also had the effect of solidifying realist modes of writing, even as they were reshaped into a more urban discourse, which was also on the rise in original Icelandic fiction. While modernism did not make much of a headway in the domain of fiction—the novels of Hemingway appearing to constitute a kind of popular limit here—new wheels started turning in poetry. Two very different books are often taken to mark the inauguration of modernism in Icelandic poetry, *Þorpið* (The Village) by Jón úr Vör (1917–2000) in 1946 and *Tíminn og vatnið* (Time and water) by Steinn Steinarr (1908–58) in 1948. The first made a clean break with traditional metric forms, while the second stuck to and parodied these forms, undermining their traditional role with its radical imagery and inward-turning expressions. A third book, appearing in 1948, appears in retrospect also as very important in this context, and its impact has probably been underestimated. This is a collection of translated poetry, *Annarlegar tungur* (Unfamiliar tongues), in which the “anonymous” translator collects poetry from around the globe, placing the Western modernists, such as Eliot, Rilke and Edith Södergran, among poets from other ages and other continents. “Anonymus” does the very reverse of Magnús Ásgeirsson, for as he points out in his afterword, he also translates rhymed original poems into free modernist verse, thus making the book as a whole a radical modernist statement. The identity of Anonymus, who also published original Icelandic poems, remained a mystery for some years, and it was a shock to some when he revealed himself to be Jóhannes úr Kötlum (1899–1972), who had previously established himself as one of the masters of Icelandic poetry in the traditional form. Together with Jón úr Vör and Steinn Steinarr, he therefore joined forces with a new generation of poets, especially the so-called “Atom poets,” a term most often used for the following five poets: Stefán Hörður Grímsson (1920–2002), Jón Óskar (1921–98), Einar Bragi (1921–2005), Hannes Sigfússon (1922–97), and Sigfús Daðason (1928–96).

Some of the Icelandic modernist poets spent time in Sweden in the late 1940s, a country less

impacted by the Second World War than others in Northern Europe, and one where modernism had found a haven and a fertile soil in the 1940s. The Icelandic poets not only became acquainted with contemporary Swedish modernist poetry, for it was in this context that some of them read the earlier Finland-Swedish modernists, like Södergran and Björling, as well as Swedish translations of for instance T. S. Eliot, the Czech poet Vítězslav Nezval (translated by Hannes Sigfússon from Swedish into Icelandic), and others. Other young Icelandic modernists resided for some years in France, including Daðason, Thor Vilhjálmsson (born 1925) and Geir Kristjánsson (1923–91), the last two being pioneers in the modernist short story. Such foreign contacts were a source of inspiration for cultural activity in the post-war years—including the translation of modernist poetry, several of the above writers being important translators—and helped shape for instance the journal *Birtingur* (1953–68), a new forum sympathetic to modernist writing and art. Focusing both on Icelandic and foreign activity, it encompassed original writing, translation, and critical debate in various areas. One of the people associated with the journal was the German-Swiss avant-garde artist and designer Dieter Roth, who lived and worked in Iceland for several years, experimenting with interart forms that extended into concrete poetry and other forms of “word art”. His presence in Iceland energized the so-called SÚM-group of young artists who in the late 1960s revolted against what they saw as “academic” abstract/modernist painting which seemed well on its way to taking over the Icelandic art establishment. Their activity in the visual arts similarly crossed over into experiments with language and written statements.

However, while modernism had in some areas advanced to the point where the young and eager felt inclined to revolt against it, modernism had not made much of a headway in the novel by the early 1960s. One of the reasons for this was no doubt the negative stance Halldór Laxness had assumed vis-à-vis modernism, his strong position in Icelandic letters, especially as its pre-eminent novelist, having solidified when he received the Nobel Prize in 1955. But by the 1960s, Laxness had made a drastic turn, writing a sequence of plays that seemed to be inspired by the theater of the absurd, plays which constitute a part of the modernist breakthrough that was under way in Icelandic theatre since the late 1950s. Translations again play an important role here, and modernism also went on to assume various dimensions in the plays of Guðmundur Steinsson (1925–96), Erlingur E. Halldórsson (born 1930) and Oddur Björnsson (born 1932).

Even though several writers had attempted to revolt against the dominance of realism in the Icelandic novel, it was not until the late 1960s and early '70s that a new paradigm was to establish itself in the works of several writers who did not really form a coherent group, although there clearly was an aesthetic affiliation between them. In 1968, having put out several books of short fiction and travel writing, Thor Vilhjálmsson finally published his first novel, *Fljótt fljótt sagði fuglinn* (Quick Quick Said the Bird), quickly followed by other novels. Another productive modernist in this period was Guðbergur Bergsson (born 1932), whose sequence of groundbreaking novels began with *Tómas Jónsson metsölubók* (Tómas Jónsson bestseller) in 1966. Svava Jakobsdóttir (1930–2004) emerged as a leading short-story writer, but she also brought out an important modernist novel, *Leigjandinn* (The Lodger), in 1969. Other writers who made a modernist mark on the novel in this period were Steinar Sigurjónsson (1928–92), Þorsteinn frá Hamri (born 1938), Jakobína Sigurðardóttir (1918–94), and a few others, including the grand master himself, Halldór Laxness, who in his 1968 novel, *Kristnihald undir Jökli* (Christianity at Glacier), a formally as well as conceptually radical book, turned round one more corner in his colourful career.

The historical situation of Icelandic modernism is thus riddled with time-lags and seemingly a-contemporaneous developments and “anachronous” relations between different genres of writing and art. But rather than seeing modernism as simply a late—or even belated—phenomenon in Icelandic literature, especially the novel, one might in fact look there for fresh insights into the life and afterlife of modernism (or its *Nachreife*, to use a word Walter Benjamin applied to translation in “The Task of the Translator”). Modernism in the Icelandic novel could claim to be not only post-Joyce and post-Proust, but also post-Beckett, post-Borges, post-nouveau roman, and it is contemporary (and often quite aware of being so) with much activity that is now seen as postmodernist and/or neo-avant-garde—indeed, this activity *is* part of it.

Another twist is added to this historical situation once we take into account that many of the most influential modernist works of fiction had not been translated when the paradigmatic shift occurred, even though the writers concerned were obviously influenced by foreign writing. Perhaps translation had to be kept in abeyance while the “internal” revolt was taking place in prose writing. As a result, several key modernist works by writers such as Joyce, Proust, Kafka, and Beckett were translated into Icelandic for the first time in the 1980s and 1990s—and many others still remain to be brought into the language. Some time will pass, therefore, before one can make any definite claims about the fate and legacy of modernism in Icelandic literature.

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## VII Modernism in Faroese Literature

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I tell you the truth, to this day the farmhouse remains  
(C. Matras, 1926)

The traditional view holds that modernism was coined in French, Anglo-American and German literature and spread to more peripheral regions according to the tempo in which they were able to receive it—in the case of Scandinavia, modernism arrives after the Second World War. Within Scandinavia, of course, there is also a time lag between the appearance of modernism in the dominant and the more peripheral literatures—such as the Faroese. The modernism criteria which Faroese literary history has adopted from European models demand a thorough renewal of form and theme in order to reflect the rejection of traditional values that is at the core of modernism.

Such requirements place the actual breakthrough of modernism in Faroese literature in 1963 when Guðrið Helmsdal (born in 1941) published *Lýtt lot* (Warm breeze), the first Faroese poetry collection in completely unrhymed form and the first by a woman. The absence of rhyme as well as the frequent use of irregular strophes are typical if not necessary modernistic traits. Partly holding on to traditional poetic vocabulary and style (notice for instance the use of alliteration in the title of the collection), Helmsdal's application of language is innovative with a personal imagery characterized by metaphor. Themes connected to the concepts of nation, persistent in Faroese poetry, are absent. Instead we have the expression of the poetic self and the modernist metapoetic theme of defining the art and the artist. Published in Copenhagen, Helmsdal's collection deals with urban experience. Helmsdal embraces the high language style of Faroese literature and puts it to her own aesthetic use.

Following Helmsdal a number of poets appeared: Steinbjørn B. Jacobsen, Arnbjørn Danielsen, Alexander Kristiansen, Rói Patursson, and Heðin M. Klein. Most of them were highly influenced by the youth revolution of the 1960s. The decisive appearance of Western popular culture, especially music, in the Faroes resulted in the blurring of the traditional border between poetic and non-poetic as well as the high and low in culture. As a result these poets widen the variety of poetic topics and imagery by including contemporary life, international subjects and the individual's notion of self in a changed world.

Extremes of this varied poetry are on the one hand texts close to straightforward prose, mimicking other modern discourses such as the new Faroese broadcasting, only graphically laid out as poems, as in Jacobsen's "Tøl í degnum" (Numbers of the day). On the other hand we find poems characterized by subjective use of traditional poetic language as seen in the aesthetics of Helmsdal or the radical rejection of tradition as seen in the surrealist title of Danielsen's collection *Meðan eg*



*tyggi norðlýsi* (While I am chewing northern lights), published in 1968. The most influential poet from the 1960s is Rói Patursson (born in 1947). His first, untitled collection of 15 poems appeared in 1969. Here and in the second book, *Á alfaraveg* (On a public road) from 1975, the present time, the world and world politics are his subjects. He frees himself from traditional poetic language and replaces it by contemporary spoken language, admitting “international” words and thereby at odds with the canonized language purism of Faroese literature. Besides critical engagement in the situation of his own country as well as that of the world, Patursson’s first books are characterized by eroticism and love for life. In 1986 Rói Patursson won the Nordic Literature Prize for his collection of poems *Líkasum* (As it were) from 1985, a playful, artistic and philosophical work.

The one-and-a-half-century-old Faroese print literature has its origin in the national romantic movement and has been a vital component of the Faroese struggle for cultural and political independence from Denmark. Since the reformation, the written language of the Faroes was Danish. Therefore the Faroese print literature sought its foundation in the oral culture, especially the medieval ballads, that have been labelled the cultural Magna Carta of the Faroes. The ballads provided a genealogy for a modern Faroese literature.

The attainment of modernism is crucial to a new literature. Oskar Bandle maintains that from its emergence in the nineteenth century, Faroese print literature has gone through a compressed version of the centuries-long development of older literatures towards an ever closer similarity to contemporary European literature. With the breakthrough of modernism in the 1960s Faroese literature catches up with other literatures and can claim an equal position. By leaving behind the national literary tradition and embracing the internationality of modernism, Faroese literature may seem to acquire its position as one of the literatures of the world.

As stated earlier in this article, by being imported as an apparently fully developed category, the concept of modernism has been narrowly defined in Faroese literary history by criteria such as radical dissolution of traditional values reflected in formal experiments and the thematic representation of urbanization, mechanization, and internationalization. But from the present perspective, the poets of the 1960s seem to have more characteristics in common with postmodernism. The stylistically popular language and the inclusion of pop culture phenomena in this poetry point in this direction as does the partly ironic revival of genres and forms of earlier periods. But then what of the modernist period? Maybe we can resort to Bandle’s concept of compressed literary periods and account for the simultaneity of Faroese modernism and postmodernism. Another way to put the question is to say that if we actually have postmodernism from the 1960s on, did we then have an exclusive Faroese high modernism from the 1920s on?

The prevailing interpretation of the main representatives of Faroese lyrics from the 1920s to 1960, C. Matras (1900–88), Karsten Hoydal (1912–90) and Regin Dahl (born in 1919), is that they are innovators who point towards modernism but are not modernist. All of them have abandoned the long-lived national romanticism of Faroese literature and they all share the awareness of the individual’s seclusion in the world. Matras, professor of Faroese letters at the University of Copenhagen and from 1965 professor at the University of the Faroes, uses his native village as a point of departure, but he elaborates the native themes with a double perspective of distance and intimacy. The pantheism in his eulogy on nature is existentialist rather than romantic. In some early poems an intermediate position between pre-modernity and modernity is represented in a modernist imagery. Thus in “Eg sigi tær satt” (I tell you the truth) from 1926, the main room of the medieval Faroese

farmhouse with its ceiling black from soot is a metaphor of the human mind and in a wider perspective becomes a cosmos where irrationality and other “anachronisms” flourish and where the modern speaker of the poem to his horror discovers that he is fatally stuck. In this position he looks at both pre-modernity and modernity from the outside. Through imagery, rhythms, and alliteration the poem has an expressionist suggestiveness. From 1940 on, Matras in some poems expresses himself in extreme concentration in stanzas where concepts of the mind and the outer world are juxtaposed and inner and outer perspectives are tightly interwoven, showing a clear affinity with Chinese poetry, which inspired European, including Scandinavian, poets in the 1920s and 1930s. A productive translator, the scholar-poet Matras worked within different periods, but his serious engagement with modernist literature is reflected in his translation of Camus’s *La peste*, as well as of a small exquisite selection of contemporary European poetry from non-central areas, such as Czechoslovakia, Romania, Italy, Ireland. It appears from the translator’s preface that a main criterion for his choice of poems is modernity in form.

A scientist by profession, the poet Hoydal uses the natural elements as a frame of reference in his lyrics. Water and solid matter, light and darkness, in a geohistorical perspective structure his work where the individual is a miraculous momentary representative of the whole. On his extensive travels he hears the wind rustle in the bamboo forest and there recognizes the sound of grass at home. In the same way the individual rock in his native country is a result of processes going on worldwide. Through such modern scientific categorization Hoydal reaches his unifying world view, which also includes concerns about a nuclear war. A prolific translator of poetry, Hoydal translated poems by Walt Whitman, including parts of “Song of Myself” from *Leaves of Grass*. Other important, modern poets that Hoydal has transferred to Faroese are Neruda and Lorca. Among his translations of Nordic poetry are the poets Stefán Hörður Grímsson and Einar Bragi, both of whom play an important role in Icelandic lyric modernism.

In renewing Faroese poetry, Regin Dahl represents a further step towards a more complex perception of the relations between language and world. Dahl is also a composer and has set older Faroese and Scandinavian poetry to music. A productive poet, he has not engaged in translation into Faroese. Therefore it is significant and in accordance with his high artistic demands that he translated and edited Baudelaire’s prose poems in Danish during his career at Gyldendal publishers in Copenhagen. As with Baudelaire, intoxication and euphoria are frequent topics with this bohemian poet.

Matras, Hoydal and Dahl stayed in Copenhagen for educational purposes in their formative years and thus confirm the dictum that modernism is connected with “exile,” (as for Joyce and Södergran) and often emerges from the meeting of periphery and metropolis. They introduced modern poetry into Faroese literature, including symbolist, neo-romantic, and expressionist trends. Their poetry translations give a hint about the context of budding Faroese modernism. However, as pointed out by Leyvoy Joensen, Faroese literature has developed for a long time as an ongoing nationalist revival. It fell to these three poets to at once create and translate modern poetry and to fill gaps in the Faroese print literature—Matras by composing dictionaries, Hoydal by writing scientific papers in Faroese and Dahl by editing a school anthology of song texts accompanied by his own melodies. By the 1960s, the literary tradition finally had a strength and completeness which made it possible to revolt against it and deal with its “trolls” without wiping out one’s own foundation.

This article on modernism in Faroese literature has concentrated on poetry because the development of a modern and modernist style started in the lyric genre. Thus the first book of lyrics

appeared in 1892 while the first Faroese novel dates from 1909. From around 1920 the writing of novels of romantic and realistic bent developed. Until 1970 the majority of the novels were written in Danish; William Heinesen's works of prose and Jørgen-Frantz Jacobsen's single novel *Barbara*, published posthumously in 1939, represent the peak of Dano-Faroese literature. Written in the empire language but unmistakably immersed by Faroese, focusing on the meeting of the pre-modern Faroes with the modern world, this literature forebodes the magic realism of later decades. After 1970 the Faroese language took over in novel writing, as Malan Marnersdóttir has shown, and from the 1970s on we can talk about modernist Faroese prose.

Jens Pauli Heinesen (born in 1932), in his numerous short stories and novels, has dealt with Faroese society and its confrontation with modernity, his typical protagonist being the writer and intellectual who experiences a gap between himself and society. The novel *Frænir eitur ormurin* (Frænir is the name of the dragon) from 1973 juxtaposes the Faroese "ballad of Sigurd and the gold dragon" (a branch of the Norse and Germanic Volsung and Niebelungen poetry) with Faroese society in the near future where democracy has been replaced by the power of relentless capitalism. A manifold narrative perspective characterizes the novel, which contains diary fragments, essays, short-story-like chapters, and the first person narrator, a minor figure in the novel, is a poet.

After 1970, the international name of Faroese literature, William Heinesen (1900–91), was one of the few Faroese novelists left who wrote in Danish. He was active as a novelist from 1934 on, beginning with fairly straightforward social realistic novels on the contemporary Faroese development, but gradually changed his fictional universe into a timeless mythic place. In the novel *Tårnet ved verdens ende* (The tower at the end of the world) from 1976 we have modernist characteristics like an alternation between narrated time and narrating time and a metapoetic perspective. In *Laterne magica. Nye erindringsnoveller* (New stories of remembrance), a collection of short stories from 1985, the use of genre denominations of earlier periods, in titles of the individual stories—ballad, saga, tale, etcetera—indicate the (post)modernist breakdown of temporal perspective and the overall recycling and intertextuality as constituting traits of literature. Among William Heinesen's Faroese-writing successors are the novelists Gunnar Hoydal (born in 1941) and Carl Jóhan Jensen (born 1957).

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## Central and Eastern European Symbolist Literature and Its Projects

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The present study traces the consolidation of a specifically Eastern Central European modern consciousness and the subsequent establishment of a redemptive utopia in the symbolist literature from the end of the nineteenth to the beginning of the twentieth century. I will try to show how spiritual and social theories of utopia were combined, and describe the attempts in the literature of the region to undo this tangled knot of metaphors.

Paul de Man, through his readings of Nietzsche and Baudelaire, arrived at the conclusion that the spirit of modernity “exists in the form of a desire to wipe out whatever came earlier in the hope of reaching at last a point that could be called a true present, a point of origin that marks a new departure” (de Man [1970], 388–9). In his opinion, modern thinking runs into this paradoxical notion when it becomes conscious of its own strategies, and discovers that it is not just one of the forces of history, but also an actor in a historical process reaching deep into the past (de Man [1970], 390). De Man is clearly thinking of Western European modernism—symbolism included—although he makes no direct reference to it, and the essence of his account concerns efforts to conceal the modernist utopia behind everyday historical processes.

When symbolism became the dominant literary trend in Russia, it was already two decades old in the West. In the West symbolism remained only one area of the “modernisation project”—an individual aesthetic concern and an answer to particular questions posed by history. It was not, or only in exceptional cases, confused with social or political modernization. In Russia and other countries in the region this same poetry—and the disturbing theories coursing alongside it—burst the banks of the “river of speech,” attempting to create an ideological framework by which mankind might radically transform itself, in its own lifetime, in the interests of social and individual salvation. In short, symbolism, construed as a *Weltanschauung* (Andrei Bely’s Russian term was *mirooshchuchenye*), had swollen into a metaphysical system aimed at resolving the same paradox that de Man was later to describe. And, to quote de Man again: “such a conception would imply a revision of the notion of history and, beyond that, of the notion of time on which our idea of history is based” (de Man [1970], 403).

The Central and Eastern European region (see Bojtár [1993], 7–33), the subject of most of what follows, has not produced any well-defined “symbolist theories”: the literary works of the symbolist period still read as attempts at reinterpretation. The symbolists themselves, and their later descendants between the wars, used literature to formulate individual and communal redemption strategies, ‘narratives’ which endeavored to arrest the march of history and bring time to a standstill, to realize an eternal present. And this is precisely the origin of the paradox of symbolism in the region: it was a seeking for utopia, which Stephen Toulmin calls “the hidden agenda of modernity,” but under

another name (Toulmin [1990]). And it was anti-historical inasmuch as it claimed to have reached the endpoint of development (or would reach it soon), a point that “signifies a new point of departure.”

### A Specific ‘Modern’ Consciousness

The term “modern” is not easy to define. It is often associated with an approach that strives to replace a preordained “divine world order” with a more rational “human world order.” Michel Foucault considers modernity to be an “attitude” rather than a historical era: “By ‘attitude’ I mean a mode of relating to contemporary reality; a voluntary choice made by certain people; in the end, a way of thinking and feeling; a way, too, of acting and behaving that, at one and the same time, marks a relation of belonging and presents itself a task” (Foucault [1991], 39). In this key statement, we find everything that Western and Eastern modern (in terms of feelings, ways of thinking, attitudes) human beings have in common. In his analysis, Foucault reserves a central role for the Enlightenment as a “collection of political, economic, social and cultural events,” and claims that the purpose of the particular freedom of action described above is to allow thought to transgress the limits imposed by the Enlightenment: “But that does not mean that one has to be ‘for’ or ‘against’ the Enlightenment. We must try to proceed with the analysis of ourselves as beings who are historically determined, to a certain extent, by the Enlightenment” (Foucault [1991], 43). The intellectual fabric of nineteenth-century Central and East Europe was almost entirely produced by the Enlightenment. One of the French Enlightenment philosophers’ “promises transformed into deeds”—to use Robespierre’s aphorism—was the creation of a state organized on the basis of nationhood.

This idea propounded in the general debates in Germany during the 1810s and 1820s soon seeped into East Central Europe, where two caricatures of the nation-state ideology eventually became widespread. Those nations already in possession of statehood generally wanted—in a phrase borrowed from Rousseau’s *Projet de constitution pour la Corse* (Constitution project for Corsica)—to “form the nation in the image of the government” (Rousseau [1964], 900). Those desiring independence, on the other hand, following the advice of Count Gobineau, endeavored hermetically to isolate their own culture from the influence of their neighbors. These two opposing “state-utopias” became definitive during a relatively peaceful period in the region over the second half of the nineteenth century: monarchy bloomed and wars of independence were for the most part over. According to the historian Peter Hanák, “small nations built their intellectual infrastructure” at this time, consisting of a more or less unified and standardized language, a national church and education system, and a national cultural life in which, for example, the first national journals appeared (Hanák [1991], 15). “National institutions. That is what gives form to the genius, the character, the tastes, and the customs of a people; what causes it to be itself rather than some other people,” dreamed Rousseau ([1985]) in his *Considérations sur le gouvernement de Pologne et sur sa réformation projetée* (Thoughts on the Polish government and its projected reform). In Central and East Europe the promises of the great Enlightenment philosophers were to a great extent fulfilled: national institutions shaped public thinking, and, more generally, the public sphere. In addition, every artist and thinker of consequence adopted the national-public and national-mythological perspectives of the Enlightenment as a moral duty.

The subsequent appearance of the “modern attitude” in Central and Eastern Europe took the form of an opening up, a self-examination in the form of a comparison with the West, signaling the desire to emancipate *outer* and *inner* culture. This is why the term “modern” is applicable to the totality of trends in the final third of the nineteenth century that opposed the official conservative popular-national line—or “public” opinion—which demanded that artists serve, with their art, the common national cause of state-building and preservation. And although this step toward the modern did not produce its own autonomous art movement, it did bring a certain intellectual unity to a small group of artists and thinkers concerned with the desirability and possibility of social and individual “renewal,” and who faced scorn in their own time as “cosmopolitans,” “youths,” “Westerners,” and “individualists.” Literary and artistic novelty, through innovations of style and approach, operated as a mechanism for the accumulation of ideas: the new did not flush out the old, but rather settled beside (or more precisely on top of) it, and although they were opposed, they nevertheless shared numerous characteristics for a long time.

It is here that modernism in the East and West part company: the questioning of the alternatives offered by the Enlightenment did not appear in the East in as pure and radical a form as it did in the work of the first great modern, Baudelaire. Instead, the first “moderns” of the East still wished to serve the “public,” the shared national cause, although they tried to do so within the framework of a pronounced individualism. And so there appeared “a generation”, in the words of the Polish poet Cyprian Norwid, “born between the past and the future,” to which the concepts of Western cultural history were not applicable, since the members of this generation were both Westerners and traditionalists, individuals and communitarians, liberals and nationalists. A typical organ of this transitional period was the Bulgarian journal *Misāl*, the eclectic worldview of which was fed on the “resigned” atmosphere of the individualism of the 1860s, while the main objective of its authors was to integrate Bulgaria into mainstream European culture. Similar ideological oddities characterized the Romanian *Junimea* and its circle of writers, whose leader, Titu Maiorescu, was both an advocate of the official national-popular “literary politics” and an exponent and practitioner of *l’art pour l’art*. To this group can be added the Czech *Lumír* produced under the spiritual guidance of Jaroslav Vrchlický; the Slovenian conservative *Dom in Svet* and liberal *Ljubljanski Zvon*; the Warsaw paper *Życie*, edited by Zenon Przesmycki; and even the Latvian *Dienas Lapa* under Janis Rainis’s stewardship, whose leftist leanings made it exceptional in its time in the region. Elsewhere in the literature of Central and East Europe, the advent of modernity is tied to the names of outstanding personalities rather than circles and journals: the Serb Vojislav Ilić, the Hungarians Gyula Revicky and Jenő Komjáthy, the Slovak Ivan Krasko, the Ukrainians Lesja Ukrainka and Ivan Franko, the Belarusians Jakub Kolas and Janka Kupala, and Juhan Liiv of Estonia.

### The Social Project

In Central and Eastern Europe, therefore, the “modern attitude”—withdrawal from the Enlightenment sphere of thought—was formulated in terms of the Enlightenment itself, and, most significantly, it preserved its voluntarist character and susceptibility to social utopias. Modern thought discarded the idea of the nation as an organic whole, as a “body,” and instead of the notion of national—and universal—organic development, it put redemption. Nevertheless, for the modern artist in



Central and Eastern Europe the search for individual redemption went hand in hand with national and communal redemption. As a result, symbolism, the new movement fostered by the modern attitude, was not confined merely to art—it became a complex phenomenon, a kind of ‘philosophy of life,’ presenting a challenge at every level to ‘public’ thought and ‘general conditions.’ The argument of the manifesto of the Czech moderns enlists at least six key issues of this kind (detailed below). Many of these also crop up in other proclamations: the Bulgarian *Iz nov păt* (On a new road), the Croat *Što hočemo?* (What do we want?), the editorial preface inaugurating the Hungarian journal *Jövendő* (Future), and the Estonian *NoorEesti* (Young Estonia).

First, “[e]verything that is old collapses, and a new world begins”: so begin the Czech moderns. “These pages are written for the future” is the Hungarian formula. The first Bulgarian symbolist “prophet,” Ivan S. Andreichin, defines the task of his generation with the following rousing allegory: “The *bashibouzoos* will purify the battlefield in time for the fight”. Countless more examples of this unmistakable reference to future utopia and “pastlessness” can be cited. (It is unnecessary to quote the Croat manifesto, since the Croat moderns living in Prague drew heavily on the Czech manifesto). The meaning is clear: we do not accept the present—but the future is not inevitable, and it is up to us to construct it.

Second, this future will be born in a spirit of “Justice” of which we, that is, the bearers of collective consciousness, are the repositories: “We want justice in art [...] which will be borne only by the bearer of justice—the individual”, say the Czech moderns, and the concept of justice also plays a central role in each of the other proclamations.

Third, *justice*—the salvation strategy available to mankind—should not be limited to the field of art: the *redemption plan* can only be fulfilled if it also reaches the social and political spheres: “The literary moderns, in their pure commitment to the new and the better, discovered a kinship with the political moderns. Both trends were born from an identical disposition,” declare the authors of the manifesto. The texts of the other programs also dwell on discontent with general conditions. The Hungarian writers, for example, enumerate what they are “not delighted about”—not surprisingly “political, literary, artistic and, particularly, social relations”.

Fourth, as regards contemporary publications, the drafters of the Czech manifesto put most of their efforts into clarifying the relationship between their own generation and the instigators of the modern “opening”:

Our fathers accepted their inheritance from the oldest party, the ‘Old Czechs.’ We readily acknowledge the great effort they put into the work of enlightenment. Their achievements were either rejected by the ‘young Czechs’ or personalized by them. This is why the activities of the ‘young Czechs’ will be correctly recorded in our cultural history as the lean years. We came to our senses and stood on our own two feet. For years we strove and now we are lining up for battle.

Fifth, in these few sentences the conscious self-examination which Foucault associates with the appearance of the “modern attitude” is precisely formulated, and here a characteristic that is generally applicable to Central and East Europe is brought to light for the first time—in this region, the modern consciousness took shape among the intelligentsia in a two-step process: first, through the new movements imported from the West, and then by opposing the ambivalent world-views of the latter, even the “revolts” that are inseparable from the symbolists. These generations awoken to

self-consciousness were, in the expression of the Czech modernists, “finished with Slavicism and reflex-patriotism,” and instead of the “national future”, they saw their mission in realizing social equality, the accomplishment of the tenets of social solidarity. The Bulgarian manifesto mentions a “new political-economic order,” and the preface to *Jövendő* also demonstrates a socialist sensibility: “But what other struggles are there, in fact, apart from these two: that of the powerful and the oppressed, [and that] of the rich and the poor?” The national question still exists, of course, but in the new regime of thought the answer is simplified: “Be yourself and you will be Czech”; “Let us remain Estonian but let us become European” In the Hungarian manifesto, too, the previously accepted order is reversed: “Our search is for the greater human justice and for its counterpart: national justice”.

Sixth, the ‘avant-garde’ mission of the self, regarded as the repository of the “new justice”, was clear:

To rear the people is no more than the elevation of the individual to the pinnacle of total and vigorous self-awareness, to smash the adherence to indolence and stupidity, the comforts of cowardice, irresponsibility, poverty of thought and lack of principles, all viewpoints which do not privilege the enrichment of thought, the soul and the mind, but only the indolent body and the voting hand!

In other words: from now on the object of art and artist is to raise the people to the level of the self, to set the goals for a new society.

### The Spiritual Project

“When a cultured society falls away from its religious traditions, it immediately expects more from art than art can offer according to its own ‘aesthetic consciousness’”: in other words, art comes to the fore as a kind of “secular savior”—says Gadamer ([1993], 88). Here the difference between the Romantics and the search for transcendence of the *godless* post-Nietzsche era is perceptible. For the Romantics, the transcendental-demonic world is identical to the world of dreams and imagination, which of course was regarded as being just as real as empirical reality, with the difference that it could be found only in another dimension. As clear examples, one can consider the case of Anselmus, the student in the short story by E. T. A. Hoffmann, who had to fall asleep in order to cross over from the “everyday” world, or the Hungarian Mihály Vörösmarty’s Romantic play *Csongor and Tünde*, in which Csongor manages to enter his own soul, the “garden,” while sleeping. Baudelaire and his modern disciples, by contrast, substituted the momentum of “let’s imagine” (“let’s dream”) for the action of “let’s live through”: the absence of God became a real experience and so it became the primary task of artists to build a new hierarchy of values without a guiding transcendental principle. The Catholic literary historian Ferenc Szabó tackles this phenomenon with exceptional sensitivity in his study on the French symbolists: modern poetry cannot be understood wholly from the perspective of classical aesthetics; it cannot be regarded exclusively as mere literature. The poetry of Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Valéry reflects an experience of the soul, an existential outlook, which “illustrates” the restlessness of modern man and his constant struggle with (against) God (Szabó [1970], 10–11).

If creativity and life, creative reality and an “existential outlook,” have merged, then life can be lived and constructed like a work of art. This is the theme of *De Profundis*, in which Baudelaire cries out for help *from the depths*, in the hope that art (beauty) can bring redemption as a “substitute religion.” Symbolist poetry attempts to grasp values to aid the soul in its quest for liberation into a “transcendental space” where it will be elevated to godliness, beyond the prison of materiality. Individual artists rework the concept of “liberation” according to their own (circumstantial) experience and knowledge. The first dilemma confronted by the artist searching for transcendence without God is of an ethical nature: what are the values that exist even in the absence of the highest essence? The Bulgarian Dimcho Debeljanov, the Czech Antonín Sova, the Lithuanian Balys Sruoga and the Romanian Alexandru Macedonski, for example, built transcendental hierarchies on the basis of what they accepted as such eternal values in the hope that an acquaintance with them would open up the path to the new absolute.

Another trend, represented by the Bulgarian Dimităr Boiadzhiev, the Serbs Petković Dis and Milan Rakić, the Croat Fran Galović, the Slovenes Dragotin Kette and Josip Murn, the Hungarian Gyula Juhász, the Czech Karel Hlaváček and the Belarussian Mihail Bahdanovich, saw death as the only “crossing,” a chance to unite with the universe. For them, death is not merely redemption from the suffering of the world, but (as in many cult religions) the first condition for initiation and rebirth of the soul. As a result, the central concern of their poetry is not the transcendental quest of the soul, but the unbearable burden of “the prison house of the material” and preparation for life’s greatest event: death.

A third concept is the “naked soul” theory of the Polish Stanisław Przybyszewski which, despite its many “satanic” features, also advertises a kind of *redemption strategy* where only the “innermost human essence” is capable of fusing with the “world spirit.” The artist who rejects the given order of things inevitably becomes embroiled in a “metaphysical conflict” with the creator of this “faultily constructed” world. He then either denies or starts a fight with God, or else he constructs his utopia for a new God, a new absolute that involves recreating the world again and again until eventually mankind is given a role in this “continuous Genesis.” All the artist has to do is to search doggedly for the divine essence in himself (since people are made in the image of God): as soon as he reaches perfection he can become a worthy partner of the Lord of the world—or, in other words, the difference between *Creation* and *creativity* disappears. The artist who is saved (“reborn”) in his life in this way, and who becomes the demiurge of his created world, will afterwards, like Prometheus, carry the “fire” of immortality, happiness and social equality (and so on) to humankind, to society and to the nation, and so become the redeemer of his community. This last objective demands that the symbolist artist live his own art work to the fullest, or, more exactly, regard his life and his work as one and the same.

The three “concepts of liberation” outlined above are found in a kind of synthesis in the works of Tadeusz Miciński. Unlike the Hungarian Mihály Babits, the Slovak Ivan Krasko and the Pole Jan Kasproicz, Miciński was not squeezed between the “Catholic God” and the “absolute” revealed deep in his own soul. Instead, he broke with all faith tied to denomination and, under the influence of a Russian theosophic Free Mason society by the name of Brotherhood of Labor, adopted the postulates of “occult Christianity,” which was so widespread at the time. Miciński’s oeuvre is also an excellent example of a conscious attempt to produce utopianism and messianism, from a fusion of mysticism and socialism (or even liberalism) which he considers to be the two areas of

human existence with the potential to fully order the universe, two strategies for achieving *inner* and *outer* freedom. In his novel *Nietota* for example, socialism appears as a faith on an equal rank with theosophism. The central argument of his 1902 volume *W mroku gwiazd* (In the Twilight of Stars) is the anticipated clash between the forces of good and evil in the world, the battle between Christ and Lucifer. Few of the poem's interpreters, apart from Czesław Miłosz, noticed that in Miciński the two principles are somehow one, two appearances of the same divine essence ("the absolute"). According to the teachings of "esoteric Christianity," that is theosophism, Lucifer (the maker of light) is identical to Prometheus and is therefore a prototype of Christ, another son of God who came to teach humankind. The trajectory of Miciński's thought and the thematics of his poetry exhibit numerous parallels with the Bulgarians Dimcho Debelianov and Hristo Jasenov and the Czech Karásek ze Lvovic. The battle of good and evil appears in the form of a tempest in Debelianov's poetic work *Krāstopāt na bādeshteto* (The Crossroads of the Future) and the same theme is broached in the Polish poet's *Przed burzą* (Before the Storm). Jasenov's cycle of poems *Ricarski zamāk* (Knight's Castle) sketches the same hopelessness of the "bodily imprisoned soul" as Miciński's *Zamek duszy* (The Castle of the Soul), and Karásek complains of the same thing in his *Blind Windows*, in which walled windows make it impossible to cross over to "the other world." The fight between Lucifer and Christ cannot simply be the battle between the forces of light and darkness, the encounter between two "modes of existence," the spiritual and the material, since the opponents are ultimately identical beings. No morality exists to distinguish good from evil in a world in which, in Miciński's words: "My God has died... every flag has burned in the fire: that of love, of hope, of faith..." And only one valid question remains: how can man find an absolute to serve as the basis for a new system of values? The fight between Christ and Lucifer will determine whether the road to a new hierarchy of values will be built on the dictates of rationalist positivism or intuitive-mysticism, and will immediately supply an answer to the central question of Miciński's poetry: "but who can free me from my own soul?"

A hint of opposition to Miciński's vision appears in a later poem by the first Central and Eastern European symbolist poet, Alexandru Macedonski. After a long search, the Romanian poet finally "rediscovers" God, or more precisely, in "the experience of God" he finds the synthesising force of numerous self-contradictory values. In his poem *Noaptea de august* (Night in August), he presents the experience of enlightenment through the mystical symbolism of the Rosicrucians. The literary gatherings of the circles of Macedonski's own journal, *Literatorul*, celebrated (presumably profoundly profane) "initiation rites" in which the Master (Macedonski himself) initiated his young poetry students into the secrets of the "shrine of art," also following the rituals of the Rosicrucians and Free Masons. From the text of *Night in August*, furthermore, it is apparent that the Rosicrucian symbol meant much more to Macedonski than its sheer formalities. Here the poet emphasizes on several occasions that the dream-journey, or rather, trance-journey takes place beyond time and space, or more precisely, on the border of real and irrational (transcendental) space and time: "I don't know when, yesterday or long ago, or where, here or there, / From the harmony from which our earthly bodies swept away this minute / Meanings from eternity were born and rose floating endlessly..." The "eternal meanings," the frightening order of the world of ideas, awakens the ancient principle of organization around God's omnipotence, to the fact that the universe and life are the result of the "overflow," the emancipation, of Creation. The reality of objects and ideas are simply two modes of appearance, differing in quality, of this divine essence. In short, the world's spiritual

and material components (the body and the soul, for example) are only a single essence. Following this vein of thought, Macedonski comes to the same conclusion as a number of his symbolist contemporaries searching for immortality in redemption: "Beyond every torment, future pleasures sang with clear voices, I knew: God is eternal and with him I felt myself eternal".

Some sense of a utopian unity with the universe can be found in the life work of almost every symbolist poet. At its base is the kabbalist myth that the world is the product of the overflow of the absolute and that matter is the surface membrane of the energy the absolute radiates. The material world can be recognized through the workings of matter and thought, while the essential world is revealed only to the intuitive soul capable of liberation from its material burden. Sound and light are messages radiated from the absolute to receptive souls, to illuminate the path to liberation for them. Today, we would describe the transcendental space of the symbolists, where the soul will emerge, as the recession of empirical space-time relations in favor of a space-time continuum created in conceptual time, wherein the difference between space and time disappears. Only the creative force of the *Word* (Logos) can mediate between rational and irrational space-time, as it embodies an interface between the "world-soul" and the human soul.

In a notable experiment, the Ukrainian Pavlo Tichina tried to attain the transcendence of an artist-self who creates his own world. Without any precedents in Ukrainian literature, Tichina attempted, through the power of music, to reinstate the harmony of the universe, the "music of the spheres," the co-dependency of sounds, lights, natural phenomena and human emotions. Among the lyricists of the region, such a perfect execution of this Verlaine-esque purely musical program—a poetry so cleansed of all lyric, of all the "dead-weight" of alien thinking—can be found only in that of the Serb M. Rakić, the Czech Hlaváček and the Bulgarian Nikolai Liliev. Tichina is not an impressionist and does not paint an inner landscape with his poems. His poetry does not search for a hidden connection between objective reality and an "ideal world" (nor does it testify to the torment of such a quest); instead he preserves for us his own lived (mystical) experience: "I looked in the sky, I saw the starflock burning there. / And already I knew: You are not anger—/ But the Sunlighted Clarinets".

In this poem Tichina presents the experience of fusion with the "absolute," of the "unio mistica": "I awoke and I am You now: / Above me and below / Worlds shine, the light buzzes now / In a musical deluge". The absolute, the ancient principle for organizing the world, is light (rays) and music, as in Javorov, Miciński, Belyj and many other symbolists. In the poetry of Tichina, God sings every one of His creations. The bush does not simply thrive: "Behind the fence / It springs a green anthem"; the trees are not blowing in the wind: "The cradled boughs swing / And sing along with the / Cu- / Ckoo!"; and brooks do not babble: "The brooks ring from the throats of skylarks / A golden melodic swell".

In the background of this apparently ethereal, artfully metaphysical poetry, seemingly unburdened with analysis of, or even reference to, theories of existence, however, lurks the idea of emanatism—an idea of Gnostic origin later formulated again by Jakob Böhme. This is one of the keystones of the Polish Stanisław Brzozowski's *Legenda Młodej Polski* (The Legend of Young Poland), and this is in the base of Andrei Belyj's tract, *Emblematika smysla* (The Emblematism of Sense). The central thesis of their argument is also the basic truth common to all "secret sciences": the phenomena of the universe, both material and beyond matter, are "essentially" uniform, since every being is one and the same product of the overflowing "absolute."

The great majority of symbolist works reflect this concept of space-time: rational and irrational spaces split in two, the act of poetry pertains to an inner soul space, being the human analogy of the world beyond the material manifestation of the absolute. Time stands still, it ceases to exist; the events of the past appear—as they did so often in Romantic poetry—as the images of a former golden age projected on the future: the utopia of a “radiant future” carrying the promise of an eternal present in the wake of redemption.

The utopian space-time concept of the Central and Eastern European symbolists can be identified in the poetry of the Lithuanian Balys Sruoga. Like Tichina, Sruoga hears the “music of the spheres,” the call of the “world beyond” in the quivering and rustling of every one of God’s creations: “Peace to you, my sorrow, be ever more silent! / It’s not you who float the secrets of forever! / Kissed away by the wind, alighting above earth, / The startled leaves float away, they float away...”.

Sruoga does not wish to immerse himself in his own soul; he is not examining “inner endlessness.” Rather, he is researching the interdependence of impressions from the outer world, he is waiting for intimations and signs; he is seeking values that can help him into a “new life”: ““They carry tidings of the new life to us, / Take away the dust, the earth and sky from us, / And they unfurl new paths in front of us—/ They carry tidings of the new life to us...”.

The two most often cited motifs of the symbolists of the region meet in his poem *There is No Time in my Castle*: the sense of being outside time and the “walled-in soul.” These weld the time motifs of Krasko, the Hungarian Dezső Kosztolányi (in, for instance, his poem *Megállt az óráj* or *My Watch Has Stopped*), the Romanian Ion Pillat (for example, the poem *Casa amintirii* or *House of Memories*) and the “arrested time” Macedonski refers to, with the body-castle metaphor expressed by Jasenov amongst others, in thoroughly predictable symbolist fashion: only through the transformation of ordinary space-time relations can the soul be successfully liberated into irrational (transcendental) space.

## History Embodies the Metaphor

History brought to life the last great metaphor of the turn of the century by using the same method that our stalwart utopianist salvation historians used to magnify a Western flea into a regional elephant—by molding the innocuous “mirror” ideas from over there into a local philosophy of redemption. One of Alexander Blok’s intuitions of genius was his presentiment, in the midst of the Russian Revolution, that space-time relations were on the verge of collapse:

As though there were two types of time and space, one historical, calendrical and another—immeasurable—musical space and time. Only the first space and time are absolutely present to civilized consciousness: we live in the second when we can touch our proximity to nature, when we give ourselves over to the surge of the world orchestra swelling above us. (Blok [1972], 443)

Blok interprets the nightmares of the Russian revolution as purifying Apocalypses, which finally will restore the balance between the permanently fighting oppositions (as for instance the one between civilization and nature). The totalitarian utopia indeed put an end to this struggle, though in quite a different way than Blok had imagined. The “half-Gods” of the Soviet literary and cultural life were canonised, while the others—let them be avantgardists, akmeists, catastrophists, post-

symbolists or representatives of any other literary trend—were physically annihilated or had their books prohibited. What actually happened was that first those who generated the (cultural) events were arrested and the “arrest of history” came afterward.

Outside the Soviet Union symbolism and the poetic-metaphysical concept of redemption died out by itself between the two world wars, without any brutal political intervention. Nevertheless the descendants of the “classical” Symbolism that was active and creative during this period include partly dilettante philosophers like Béla Hamvas or the Czech Ladislav Klíma (who was a wonderful prose-writer, though) or lonely poets like the two Bulgarians Teodor Trajanov and Nikolaj Liliev, the Polish Bolesław Leśmian, the Lithuanian Jurgis Baltrušaitis, the Serbian Momčilo Nastasijević, the Albanian Lasgush Poradeci, the Estonian Ernst Enno—just to mention the most outstanding ones. Some of them ended their artistic career during the newly established Communist regimes in the countries of Central and East Europe. They were neither canonized by the new “Esthetical Authorities” nor exposed to physical repression. The connection between the two sets of ideas remained largely unexplored. The Romanian George Bacovia—another former symbolist poet—was the only one who felt and expressed in a poem the relationship between the (never realised) metaphysical and (realised) social utopias:

Cogito  
Behold,  
All my political prophecies  
Came to pass.  
I’m so happy.  
The sky  
Is so beautiful.  
A splendid aphorism  
Gives me a new lease of life...  
There is no tomorrow,  
Today,  
Nor yesterday —  
Time...

The irony is that he should have written this key poem in the revolutionary year 1956, the very year that, in Hungary and Poland at least, time, or history, sparked briefly back to life.

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## Russian Modernism

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### Introductory Remarks

Russian literary modernism has not yet received the comprehensive critical consideration it deserves. Studies devoted to its meaning and significance are rather fragmentary, limited to either essay-length generalizations (Bristol [1992]; see also Tager [1968]) or books which discuss some specific aspects of its evolution (Gibian and Tjalsma [1976]; see also Gasparov, Hughes and Paperno [1992]; Hutchings [1997]; Vroon and Malmstad [1993]; Lachman [1997]) and less so the totality of its historical complexity as regards both its thematic range and generic, formal distinctness. The purpose of this article is to sketch a blueprint for the establishment of both its chronological space and understanding as a certain aesthetic unity manifested in diversity. Russian modernism can be viewed primarily as a cluster of various correlated tendencies and subsequent currents such as e.g. decadence, symbolism, futurism, acmeism, imagism and so on; there is no all-embracing programmatic statement that we could refer to as a manifesto of Russian modernism which would unite all *isms* under a single banner. In other words, modernism did not exist as a homogenous, uniformed empirical phenomenon but it could be construed as a theoretical model having various appearances or paradigms characterized by one common aesthetic denominator: a radical break with the mimetic tradition of the nineteenth-century Realism.

The term does not appear in any significant texts of the time, but in his *Diaries and Notebooks*, Aleksander Blok writes about “the poison of modernism” (Blok [1955], vol. II, 463) and associates it with Vsevolod Meierkhöld’s stage production of such plays as *The Awakening of Spring* by F. Wedekind, *Hedda Gabler* by H. Ibsen and some tragedies by ancient authors. “Modernism is poisonous” — wrote Blok — “because it is within literature.” (Blok [1955], vol. II, 463). In a letter to Andrei Belyi, dated April 16, 1912, he complained (Blok [1963], vol. VIII, 386) about Viacheslav Ivanov’s article published in the first issue of *Trudy i dni* (Works and days), in which the author of *Tantalus* does not speak about man and the artist but about art and a school of art. Blok’s critical comment expressed concern that the new art is detached from human problems and breaks the contact between art and life. A few months later the same year, Blok passed yet another critical judgment about modernism: “I am afraid modernists do not have pivot but are only talented flourishes around emptiness” (Blok [1963], vol. VII, 164). By and large it can be said that regardless of aesthetic, political or social orientation, modernism acquired in the history of Russian creative consciousness a rather negative connotation: it was perceived as a foreign implant without genuine roots in the Russian cultural tradition (see Weidle [1976], 22). Later, after the revolution of 1917, this point of view was taken and exploited by Soviet critics who used it to support their struggle

against modernism. Among émigrés, the term was not well received either, and the entire epoch covering approximately the period 1895–1930, came to be known as *the silver age* of Russian literature (Makovskii [1962]).

### The Early Critical Reaction

Although the term *modernism* did not appear in any significant texts of writers of the time, it was functional in Russian literary criticism in the first decade of the twentieth century as a label defining the changes that took place in Russian literature, particularly in poetry, at the turn of the twentieth century. Ironically, A. Blok was included in it as one of its most significant representatives. As early as 1908, a circumstantial book under the title *Modernists, their forerunners and critical literature about them* (Poves and Kogan [1908]) appeared in an obscure Odessa publishing house's "Katalog biblioteki obshchestva vzaimngo vspomoshchestvovaniia prikazchikov-evreev." Apart from two names of editors, the entire text and the attached bibliography was published anonymously. Compiled by adherents of "new poetry," the book contains a broad and very competent survey of modernist tendencies, its origins in European literature and within this context its last section was devoted to early modernists such as D. Merezhkovskii, K. Bal'mont, V. Briusov, N. Minskii, Z. Gippius, F. Sologub who are presented as the founders of the movement and later often referred to as a decadent current within Russian symbolism or as its "first wave". The next group of modernists included such writers as V. Ivanov, A. Bely, and A. Blok, who came to be known as the "second wave" of Russian symbolism. In prose, I. Bunin, L. Andreev, together with the less known poetess M. Likhovitskaia complement this trend. In the book, European modernists are described as "writers who distinguish themselves by deep individualism and implacable hatred towards the old aesthetics and traditional poetics they strive to destroy; they proclaim a full freedom of artistic creation and are in the state of incessant search for new paths and literary forms" (Poves and Kogan [1908], 7). The anonymous authors discerned within modernism several artistic streams (decadence, symbolism, impressionism) and clearly set out to defend its aesthetic premises by stating that if one shows that literary sources of modernism can be traced back to writers and poets such as William Blake, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Edgar Allan Poe and others "then the preposterous fable about modernism as degeneration or caprice of perverted characters, will fall by itself" (Poves and Kogan [1908], 7–8). To be sure, this favorable stand taken by unknown Russian critics in relation to the term itself — "modernism" — was a curious exception.

Two years later, the influential liberal monthly *Vestnik Evropy* (Newspaper of Europe) published in two parts a long article entitled "Modernism in Russian Poetry" (Chernov [1910]) which was entirely devoted to Valery Briusov, whom the critic Victor Chernov proclaimed to be the "head of Russian 'modernism'". The critic maintained that he is far from "worshipping all the zigzags of contemporary modernism's and decadence's wanderings dictated by fanciful fashion or its artificiality and affectation" but he is equally opposed "to groundless denial by contemporary literary old-believers of everything that originates from the Nazareth of modernism" (Chernov [1910], 209). In the first part of the essay, Chernov dwelt on the form and content of Briusov's poetry. According to him, Briusov is tireless in his search for "new beauty" and the form of his lyrics is characterized by eccentricity. He linked Briusov's poetry with impressionism and pronounced it "a synthesis

of Pushkinian classicism and modernist Western tendencies". If the first part of Chernov's analysis was focused primarily on Briusov's creative work, then in its sequel he situated the poet in the context of European modernism, somewhere "between Baudelaire and Verhaeren". In his general assessment of modernism, the Russian critic perceived it as a manifestation of intense individualism and "socialization of feelings and experiences". According to modernism, poetry is not a social phenomenon in its traditional sense, that is, as a response to or expression of ideas circulating in a given society. The poet is not inspired from without, by external stimuli but s/he communicates his/her most intimate thoughts, feelings, and experiences to others and even imposes them on the world. The direction of the inspirational artistic constituent is now reversed: it flows not from so-called external reality but from within, that is, the inner world of the poet, and poetry becomes the "property of the individual, the kingdom of the fullest and absolute subjectivism" (Chernov [1910], 218). Thus, the poet emerges as an autonomous force capable of creating a world of its own, a *demiurge* who reigns indisputably over his/her literary output.

## Manifestoes and Theoretical Concepts

### *The Symbolist period*

The preceding discussion of some aspects of early modernism in Russia gives an indication how important it was to conceptualize the basic premises of a "new art", to formulate its specificity and to break with the tradition of nineteenth century realism which dominated literature for almost half a century.

Dmitrii Merezhkovskii was the first to provide his contemporaries with a general overview of Russian literature at the end of the twentieth century and to point out possible alternatives to the lingering tradition of what he called the "smothering, deathly positivism" of that period. In a critical essay from 1893 entitled "On the reasons for the decline and on the new currents in contemporary Russian literature" (Merezhkovskii [1972]), the author of the trilogy *Antichrist*, *Peter* and *Alexis* claimed that what is left of the great realistic legacy of L. Tolstoy, F. Dostoevskii, I. Turgenev, I. Goncharov and others is now empty epigonism. He complained about the terrible boredom of published texts, a "lack of European air", deterioration of the language (which was becoming lifeless), and blamed literary criticism of the time for promoting cheap populist realism. What matters, maintained Merezhkovskii, is not the banality of human feelings however truthful they may be in relation to external reality represented in pseudo-populist prose, and not the moral significance of art, but the unselfish, fearless sincerity of the artist, his/her uncompromised truthfulness to himself/herself. Following this line of reasoning, Merezhkovskii noted that the literature and art of *fin de siècle* are torn between two contrasting tendencies: extreme materialism and passionate idealism. Dreamers who expound indignation represent the latter trend. Yet their lyrical poems can weigh more and carry more truth than a "series of grandiose novels". Merezhkovskii's remark, combined with his favorable and quite lengthy discussion of symbol as the principal formal device of the new literature, foretold the triumph of poetry as the dominant genre of Russian symbolism. It can be said that *if* Merezhkovskii concentrated his attention on the inner world of the writer—an attitude typical for the early decadent current of Russian symbolism—his later successors within the symbolist camp, the "second wave" of symbolists, went beyond this limitation: they pushed on

in search of a higher metaphysical “truth” which lies entirely outside of the material world we may experience by our senses.

Viewing Merezhkovskii’s statement from a more general perspective, it can be said that his lengthy examination of the literary situation at the close of the nineteenth century, with its clear programmatic bent and affinity to the Nietzschean idea of superman (Rosenthal [1986]) may well be considered to be the opening volley of Russian modernism but one should also remember that this was not an isolated effort. In the years 1894–1895 Valerii Briusov published a three-volume anthology *Russkie simvolisty* (Russian symbolists) that lent the name “symbolism” to the whole period stretching between the years 1892–1910. While V. Briusov understood poetry as an expression of individual moods and allusions, his close friend and associate Konstantin Bal’mont penetrated the mysteries of death, loneliness, contemplated the motif of instability and the ever-flowing changeability of human fortune. These two poets, together with Fiodor Sologub, whose poetry and prose was pervaded with extreme pessimism, formed the first generation of Russian symbolism (as decadence).

All the poets of both decadent and symbolist streams within modernism displayed an exceptional theoretical awareness and tried to define the specificity of its aesthetics. A sharp debate, however, developed in the first decade of the twentieth century and its three chief participants A. Belyi, A. Blok and V. Ivanov constituted the most significant and famous core of Russian symbolists. They advanced their ideas not only through direct critical discourse but in their poetry as well. A fourth writer and philosopher who preceded this debate and exerted a great impact on the evolution of Russian symbolism was Vladimir Sergeevich Solov’ev. Interestingly, he never developed a comprehensive, coherent philosophy, aesthetic or literary theory based on rational principles: his views were strongly informed by religious mysticism and an apocalyptic vision of history. Solov’ev formulated the idea of panmongolism based on the assumption that Europe would be subjected to an Asian invasion and its old culture would be destroyed (Jakóbiec [1971], 567). He somewhat moderated these opinions on the matter in his mature years but they became part of the Russian cultural consciousness in the years to come. In the *Povesť ob Antikhriste* (Tale of Antichrist) he talked about the oncoming epoch of Antichrist which will prevail for a certain period of time but eventually will be followed by the second coming of Christ and the triumph of the “Third Evangelium,” ushering in a spiritual revolution and ethical renewal of humanity. Another concept he developed was the Eternal Feminine incarnated in the Sofia-myth (for a more detailed discussion see Pyman [1994], 226–32) — a vague symbol of Divine Wisdom and all-embracing Love which was shut in matter and awaited to be liberated. His entire creative output was tinged by messianic undertones about Russia’s special role in the history of mankind. As for Solov’ev aesthetic views, they were akin to the Dostoevskian belief that the world can be redeemed by beauty. All these ideas resonated in the works of the above-mentioned symbolists (most recent monograph on W. Solov’ev is Przebinda [1992]).

Among them, A. Blok was probably the one most strongly impacted by Solov’ev thought, particularly in his early writing. However, this trait did not manifest itself in critical statements as much as in poetry, in his *Stikhi o Prekrasnoi Dame* (Poems About the Most Beautiful Lady). On the whole, A. Blok understood and approved of the decadents’ urge to break with nineteenth century realism, but definitely disapproved of their aestheticism and extreme individualism. Like his immediate predecessors, he believed in the Platonic duality of the world but at the same time, unlike them,

he presumed that the ideal world could become a commonplace reality. Art has a theurgic mission to fulfill, to help in achieving the change in the condition of human existence. Together with other younger symbolists he raised the question about the content and the task of their poetry. This tendency became noticeable in the late first decade of the twentieth century. In the articles "Tri voprosa" (Three questions, 1908) and "O sovremennom sostoianii russkogo simvolizma" (On the present state of Russian symbolism, 1910), Blok made a determined effort to dismiss the predominant perception of symbolism as an abstract trend having no relation to social reality or to the tradition of Russian literature; he talked in both statements about "new tasks" and the need to reflect on the question of *what is the purpose of literature and what utilitarian function does it fulfill from the standpoint of social demands*. At the same time he did not relinquish his position about the duality of the world. "Life", he wrote, "has become art" but it is mediated by the poet, transformed into art through his own subjective perception of the world. "The reality I describe is the only one which gives me the meaning of life, to the world and to the art [...] I lost once and for all the desire to convince anybody about the existence of that what exists farther and higher than I". Indeed, Belyi implemented this thought in his novel *Peterburg* (1913–1914; a reworked version appeared in 1922). It can be considered a milestone which marks not only the beginning of Russian experimental prose comparable in its importance to that of M. Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* (In search of lost time), but it constitutes also a broad synthesis of Russian historical experience at the turn of the twentieth century, particularly the revolution of 1905. Belyi does not "reflect" the events. He deforms the reality in order to present ideas — both those of conservative absolutism and those that will determine Russia's future, that is, her crucial ties with European humanistic tradition and culture. Together with F. Sologub (*Melkii bes*, 1905), Mikhail Petrovich Artsibashev (*Sanin*, 1907) and Mikhail Aleksandrovich Kuzmin, whose novel *Kryl'ia* (Wings) introduced for the first time the subject of homosexuality into Russian literature, A. Belyi shaped the early evolution of Russian modernist prose.

Belyi's theoretical and critical activity greatly exceeded that of A. Blok. In 1909 he published a collection of articles under the title *Simvolizm* (Symbolism). It contained a variety of studies on topics such as culture, the meaning and the future of art, the interrelation between experiment and lyrics, the role of rhythm, the essence of the word in poetry. Articles included in this volume were linked by one common denominator: they were intended to clarify the aesthetic premises of symbolism as a literary movement. The article "Magiia slov" (The magic of words, 1909) can be read today as a real, albeit belated manifesto of symbolism and evokes immediate connotation with V. Shklovskii's article of 1914 "Voskreshenie slova" (Resurrection of the word) and the futurist idea of "word as such". Belyi wrote the following: "If words did not exist, the world would not exist. My 'I' detached from all that surrounds me does not exist at all; the world detached from me does not exist either; 'I' and the 'world' come into existence only in the process of their fusion in the word". In developing this thought, Belyi rejected the idea of expediency in art because the purpose of art is rooted in the creation of objects of knowledge. If we want to discover the meaning of art, it is necessary, he claimed, to turn life into art or to make art vital: only then art reveals and illuminates its own sense. Poetry means creativity in language and the language creates vital relations of life experience. In fact, speaking of the objects of knowledge, Belyi partly disclosed his theory of knowledge based on the distinction between scientific and spiritual knowledge, between the rational and irrational cognition. For him, there is no conflict between the two. The latter (the irrational cognition) broadens the boundaries of our knowledge and it sets in motion our sense of values.

Some of Viacheslav Ivanov's theoretical concerns were akin to those of Belyi. The differences pertained rather to some nuances than to the essence of the symbolist aesthetics. While the author of *Peterburg* was inclined to consider the word a more steadfast element within the system of poetic discourse, Ivanov, in his seminal essay "Zavety simvolizma" (The legacy of symbolism) addressed the role of the word too but at the same time indicated its inadequacy as a means of expression of what we wish to say. According to him, there exists an inadequacy between the spiritual growth of the modern individual and external measures of communication. This view, undoubtedly, placed Ivanov among the most significant precursors of modern Russian literature. To deal with the problem and by the same token to alleviate the impression of symbolist literary practice being an "ivory tower", Ivanov insisted that one should reject the precept that there is a split between the sound of the word and its meaning. It seems, however, that his reflections about the word strengthened his conviction about the importance of the symbol in poetry and literature in general. The symbol makes us sense the changeful, swaying nature of the word but it also alludes to a variety of its meanings and therefore opens to us new worlds of the Unknown.

Ivanov made the distinction between the world of appearances (*iavleniia*) and the world of essences (*sushchnosti*). Poetry should reflect both but the poet cares primarily for a language that would explain the latter (essences). He introduced two terms denoting his understanding of symbolism: *realia* and *realiora*. The former refers to external reality, the latter to "internal, higher reality." Artistic realization always takes into account this parallelism of the phenomenal and the noumenon and presents it as a harmonious consonance, but the artist's gift of foresight allows and even compels him/her to penetrate and find in the external appearances (*realia*) an inner higher reality (*realiora*). Another characteristic of Ivanov's theoretical position was his perception of the artist as a lonesome, isolated priest (*zhrets*) who stands opposed to the mob. The mob demands from the poet an "earthly language" because it forgot religion and subdued itself to "utilitarian morality". Ivanov, indeed, showed much stronger interest in religion than other symbolists, which certainly set him apart from the "insensitive" mob. He went as far as to say that the poet is a religious organizer of life, interpreter and fortifier of the divine unity of the essential (substantial); s/he is a theurg. It is not difficult to behold that Ivanov's theoretical foundations rest on duality, on oppositions, on clash between him as a poet and the mob, on correlation of the real and the unreal; yet there is also strong component striving at the resolution of these incompatibilities. It was the notion of *sobornost'*, a collectivist concept, deeply rooted in the Russian cultural tradition and tinged by the theosophy of the Russian orthodox church. It implies some sort of collective "union of souls" centered on a common national goal. However, Ivanov's interpretation of *sobornost'* is of a more universal nature: it departs from Russian historical accretions in that it implies a kind of cosmic unity of mankind based on religious understanding of the world.

After 1905 Russian symbolists found themselves in an awkward situation. Caught between their own aesthetics of abstract poetic worlds, a search for absolute truths on the one hand and the growing socio-political unrest in the country, exploding in the revolution of 1905 on the other, they realized the necessity of adjusting their program to the call of the time, to historical circumstances which began to forecast more tragic events to come. Russian symbolists of the younger ("second") generation claimed that they continued the great tradition of Russian literature of social commitment but did so in their own way. The crisis and the weaknesses of the empire revealed in the beginning of the century (the lost war with Japan and the revolution of 1905), forced them to reemphasize

this claim. Paradoxical as it may sound, the appearance of the best critical, theoretical texts of Russian symbolism coincided with its crisis: symbolism reached its final, agonizing stage. Their publication did not prevent the inevitable decline of the movement as a whole (see Venclova [1989] and Masing-Delic [1989]). Symbolism in Russia exhausted its inner dynamics, reached the end of its limits and was challenged by new literary trends on the horizon.

### *The Post-Symbolist Period*

It has become almost customary to analyze symbolism as a completely separate literary period, distinct from what followed it; and sometimes one examines what came afterwards as a so-called “reaction” against symbolism. Yet if we place both periods within a broader and long-range modernist perspective, we quickly realize that such a line of demarcation is highly artificial because both periods share many common characteristics, and that symbolism can or even ought to be looked upon as the forerunner of the new artistic phenomena which appeared on the literary scene after 1910. Symbolism, including its early phase (individualism, decadence), declared for the first time the independence of the artist (writer), relieved him/her from the burden of “social obligations”. Even when symbolists altered their position by turning greater attention to historical developments in Russia at the turn of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, they insisted on the necessity of preserving the integrity of the writer. As in the rest of Europe, Russian symbolism is typified by extreme subjectivism, and the zeal for literary experimentation. Symbolists undertook the initiative to put an end to the traditional dichotomy of content and form; eventually their views paved the way for the formulation of the basic tenets of Russian formalism. It should be noted, however, that the transition from the symbolist to the post-symbolist period did not bring about a radical change to the existing generic paradigm: poetry, albeit in its renewed form, remained the dominating genre of the immediate, subsequent literary tendencies.

The most resounding opposition to symbolism came from the futurist groups, which began their formation around 1910. The futurist current as whole went through several stages of development and was torn by internal divisions (see for detailed discussion Markov [1968]). One of the first manifestations of futurist writing came with the publication of *Sadok sudei* (A trap for judges, 1910). It was inspired not only by poets but also painters. The principal initiative behind this work belonged to David Burluk; the almanac contained poetry by Velimir Khlebnikov, Vasilii Kamenskii, Elena Guro and others who were to become well known names in Russian literature. The collection did not include any programmatic statements but one could discern in it the seeds of experiments to be developed later as typical attributes of futurist poetics: the usage of neologisms, some timid attempts to unsettle traditional formal structure of the stanza and verse, a visionary tone of the content. In what was already a different literary and cultural landscape, a second book of *A Trap for judges II* was published in 1913. Some of the previous authors were absent from it (e.g. V. Kamenskii) and unlike the first one, *A Trap for judges II* encompassed an untitled manifesto which declared the rejection of some basic grammatical rules of the Russian language referring to its syntax, vocabulary (“to attach meaning to words according to their graphic and phonic characteristics”), orthography, punctuation (“we have abolished punctuation”), rhythm and meter. In addition, they insisted on the need to use “rich vocabulary”, which implied that special attention must be given to the employment of neologisms, to regional, colloquial, and unusual (archaic) words. The reason why so much attention was attached to the question of the word seems clear in view of the fact that the



authors of *A Trap for judges II* considered the word to be a creator of myth. This point brings up the question of thematics proposed in the manifesto; and it comes as a surprise that next to the assertion about the myth-making power of the word, one reads about the commitment to new themes: meaninglessness, futility, mediocrity and so on. The manifesto was a result of a compromise, and reflected the views of its three major authors: Velimir Khlebnikov, Aleksei E. Kruchenykh and Benedict C. Livshits, each representing within futurism somewhat different artistic attitudes.

Whatever the merits of *A Trap for judges I-II*, it is by far not as important and indicative of Russian futurism in its early stage of existence as other programmatic statements enunciated between 1910–1913. As early as 1910, poets who signed *A Trap for judges* began to form an artistic group known as Hylaea (Russian: Gileia). Initially, they called themselves *budetliane*, a neologism which means “men of the future”, but gradually they came to be known as the Hylaea circle. They came out into the open by publishing, at the end of 1912, a manifesto entitled *Poshchechina obshchestvennomu vkusu* (A slap in the face of public taste) which became generally acknowledged as the “real” manifesto or the *credo* of the new futurist aesthetics.

The content of this declaration struck with its radical rejection of the past. Signed by D. Burliuk, A. Kruchenykh, V. Maiakovskii and V. Khlebnikov, the manifesto condemned everything that constituted the great tradition of Russian literature: “Throw Pushkin, Dostoevskii, Tolstoi, et al., et al., overboard from the Ship of Modernity” –advised the authors and “look at their nothingness from the heights of skyscrapers!” The negative aspect of the proclamation was much clearer than its constructive, positive postulates but the authors forcefully let it be known that their main concern lay not with content but with form. In his essay included in *A slap in the face of public taste*, D. Burliuk wrote: “It has been known for a long time that what is important is not *what* but *how*.” They urged that the rights of poets be honored, that is, the right to enlarge the vocabulary in its scope (neologisms); they demanded respect for their collectivist stand (“we adhere to the solid block of the word *we*”), and by attacking “common sense” along with “good taste”, and by claiming their “hatred of the language existing before them”, they welcomed at the same time “the ‘New-Coming Beauty’” and professed the triumph of the “Self-sufficient (self-centered) Word.” Except for A. Kruchonykh who tried to live up to these principles, this radical program did not find a literal and consistent realization in the literary output of futurists, but it certainly became a general direction to be followed and a distinct hallmark of their early activity. In search of new expressiveness, Kruchonykh created his own language in which words did not have a meaning because they consisted of an arbitrary arrangement of sounds. He called this mode of writing poetry *zaum* or *zaumnyi iazyk*, that is, transrational language at the subversion of sense. Similar experiments, albeit with a different intent, were conducted by V. Khlebnikov who published in 1910 his famous poem “Zakliatie Smekhom” (Incantation by Laughter), based on the root of the word *smekh* (laughter). Both poets co-authored in 1913 an article *Slovo kak takovoe* (Word as such) in which they formulated the concept of transrational language. *A slap in the face of public taste* contained poetry by all of the above-mentioned writers and eventually the Hylaea group came to be known as cubo-futurists. It is not clear why the term “cubo-futurism” was added. Most probably, the ongoing discussion about cubism may have had a certain influence, as may the group’s cooperation with painters who were often described as futurists.

Almost all cubo-futurists combined writing poetry with visual arts (Janecek [1984], Compton [1978]). The case in point, of course, is the poetry of Vladimir Maiakovskii, the most towering fig-

ure of the futurist current in Russia (Katanian [1963]). He “visualized” his poetry by breaking the continuity of the traditional verse-line and by creating a “stair-like” image of the poem. Later on after the revolution of 1917, he would illustrate his propaganda epigrams (so called “agitki”) with drawings representing the main features of those who became targets of his satire. His interests in visual arts found also an expression in painting, drawings and film. While he did not shun experiments, he never turned (with a few early exceptions) to the extremes of so-called trans-rational language which would derail the meaning of his poetic message. No doubt he shook the principles on which traditional Russian verse was based, yet at the same time he wanted to express his youthful revolt and make it comprehensible. Maiakovskii’s passionate poem entitled “*Oblako v shtanakh*” (The cloud in trousers, 1915) challenged the old order with his emotional outcry: down with your love, down with your art, down with your society, down with your religion! In post-revolutionary social and political conditions, Maiakovskii declared himself the messenger of the new Soviet regime and pronounced futurism to be the art of the revolution. He wrote several poems that were permeated with a strong ideological content, heralding the dawn of a new era in the history of mankind. In the poem “150 000 000” (1919–20), whose title is an allusion to Soviet Russia’s population of the time, Maiakovskii projects himself as a bard through whom 150 000 000 speak to the world (Maiakovskii [1949]). The poet’s extreme subjective “I” of the pre-revolutionary period is now substituted by a collective hero—the working class that will emerge as a victorious force in the struggle against worldwide injustice. Disillusioned with the following evolution of the Soviet system, Maiakovskii committed suicide in 1930.

### *The Futurist Period*

As mentioned above, Russian futurism never formed a coherent, unified artistic current. Besides cubo-futurists, another group was founded by Igor’ Severianin (real name Igor’ Vasil’evich Lotarev), who prior to creating his own branch of futurism—so called ego-futurism—published several tiny collections of poetry (Lauwers [1993]). The group appeared in 1911 under the banner of anti-symbolism; it accused its predecessors of showing excessive interest in the content of literature and neglecting its formal aspects. Apart from glorifying Severianin’s poetry, the first manifesto *Prolog Ego-Futurizm* did not offer any stimulating new ideas. More specific concepts were expressed in the so-called *Tables*, which appeared as a leaflet in the beginning of 1912. It propagated “*glorification of egoism*,” cult of intuition, and concentration on soul as the source of ultimate truth. In other words, ego-futurists preached extreme individualism, which did not differ much from the position occupied earlier by symbolists. *Tables* were signed by Igor Severianin, Konstantin Olimpov (C. C. Fofanov), G. George Ivanov and Graal-Arelsky. With the exception of Severianin himself and G. Ivanov, no other authors could claim any noticeable place in the history of Russian modernism. The group gained its notoriety thanks to the efforts of Ivan V. Ignatiev, the actual organizer of the group, a critic and publisher. After his death the group practically ceased to exist.

Among the various shades of futurist tendencies, one is of particular interest to historians of Russian avant-garde: *Tsentrifuga* (Centrifuge), a splinter group known for its rather moderate poetic program, close connections to avant-gardist painting and two major participants—Boris L. Pasternak and Nikolai N. Aseev. *Centrifuge*’s first literary manifestation came into the open in 1913 with the publication of *Lirika*; it contained the poems of eight poets, but no programmatic statement was included to clarify their artistic position. The unwillingness to write programmatic dec-

larations can be considered a distinct feature of this circle. Instead, they preferred to disclose their aesthetic beliefs through poetic practice. However, Sergei P. Bobrov, the third most important figure within the circle, wrote articles that come close to what might be viewed as manifestoes. In one of them, titled “O lirecheskoi teme” (About the lyrical theme), Bobrov called for the “reevaluation of all values.” It was directed primarily against the legacy of symbolism to which members of *Centrifuge* nursed feelings of closeness, at least in the initial stage of their existence. Later the fabric of their poems was built out of the material drawn from concrete elements of life, the external world, with the intention to represent its marvelous richness and ambiguity. Although Bobrov insisted that a “poem should not mean but be”, the poets of *Centrifuge* did not engage themselves in extreme experimentation so typical of cubo-futurists.

Parallel to futurists, another literary group began to develop its opposition to symbolist domination: the “acmeists.” The driving force behind their program became Nikolai S. Gumilev, a poet, critic and theoretician of what prior to “acmeism” was called Tsekh poetov (Poets guild). Initially Gumilev was closely linked to leading symbolist poets. Gradually, however, he revised his position. It happened partly under the influence of Innokentii F. Annenskii and Sergei M. Gorodetskii. The former nurtured a great admiration for the ancient and classical European tradition, the latter cultivated strong interest in Russian folklore, old Slavic and Finnish legends and elements of nature. While Annenskii embraced creative classical discipline and clarity, Gorodetskii fostered the elemental freshness of earthly phenomena we enjoy with our physical sensations. Both these artistic modes of experiencing the world found their modified yet very original realization in the poetry of two most prominent and talented members of the acmeist circle: Osip Mandelstam and Anna Akhmatova. Yet the initial push for the acmeist undertaking was given by N. Gumilev. He founded the group in 1911 but it was not until 1913 that he formulated some of its basic premises. In the article *Nasledie simvolizma i akmeizm* (The legacy of symbolism and acmeism, 1913), Gumilev spoke about the need to do away with the “giddy symbolist metaphors” and “to look in live popular language for a more steady content” (Gumilev [1923], 39). He also rejected the symbolist abstractness and the search for the unknown: “in accordance with meaning of the word ‘unknown’—the unknown cannot be apprehended ... all attempts in this direction are unreasonable.” A few years later, O. Mandelstam specified and developed further the initial tenets of acmeism. In his essays *Utro akmeizma* (The dawn of acmeism, 1919) and *Slovo i kultura* (The word and culture, 1921), he emphasized that the material thing (object) is not the master of the word, yet the poetic word cannot be detached from the material reality. In other words, a word can “search”, so to speak, for the most appropriate “thingness”, to become its soul and at the same time not to lose its bond with reality (Tager, Mikhailovskii, Evgen’ev and Paperny [1972]; Tager [1988], 344–466) because “the poet does not want any other reality than life itself”. Like futurists, Mandelstam formulated the locution “word as such” but he did not treat it exclusively as a subject of experiment devoid of any meaning or relevance to reality. On the contrary: in the acmeist poetics (and this is particularly true of Mandelstam) the word acquired an intense multiplicity of meaning.

The acmeist group dissipated shortly after the revolution; yet the most distinguished poets of acmeism—O. Mandelstam and A. Akhmatova—continued to write in the vein of its creative principles. Their personal fate, however, cannot be described as otherwise than tragic. Mandelstam vanished in Soviet concentration camps and Akhmatova lost her husband, N. S. Gumilev, who was executed in 1921 by Bolsheviks for his alleged subversive, counterrevolutionary activity. Later on,

their son suffered persecution, too. Upon reaching adulthood he was arrested and spent many years in Stalinist jails. While the poetry of Mandelstam bears the stamp of an intellectual who considers himself a “craftsman” of the word who is aiming to achieve precision of expression, Akhmatova’s poetry strikes with its affectionate immediacy of emotions, with its “narrative” mode of enunciation that has its ground in the tradition of Russian folklore. Akhmatova was deeply afflicted by the adversities of life. It found its reflection in her longer poems such as *Poema bez geroia* (Poem without a hero, 1962) and particularly in *Rekviem* (Requiem) published for the first time in München (1963) but composed throughout the years 1933–1961. Yet when she shared with the reader her own painful experience, she described at the same time the tragic sufferings of her entire nation:

No, this isn’t me, someone else suffers,  
I couldn’t stand it. All that’s happened  
They should wrap up in the black covers,  
The streetlights should be taken away...  
Night.

(Akhmatova [1974], 84)<sup>1</sup>

“Requiem”, commented Joseph Brodsky, “can be explained only by the author’s Orthodox faith” (Akhmatova [1967], quoted from the introduction by Joseph Brodsky).

### Modernism in the Post-Revolutionary Period: 1917–1930

After the political upheaval of 1917 the modernist movement in Russia thrived for a while with unabated force. However, its various subgroups had to make adjustments in order to reflect the new political, social and cultural realities caused by the revolutionary change. They were allowed to continue their existence under the premise that their works would not contain themes challenging revolutionary transformation and they would not engage in any anti-revolutionary actions. In fact, immediately after the revolution there was a generally shared consensus that the revolution was conducive to new avant-gardist currents because they carried out revolutionary changes on the level of literary form and revolutionized the entire understanding of art in general.

It comes as no surprise, then, that new tendencies shot out after 1917. One of them became known under the label of imagism (1919–1924) (Markov [1980]). Its roots can be traced back to the pre-revolutionary period and is associated with the name of Vadim G. Shershenevich who managed to rally a few writers and critics, including one of the most fascinating young poets of the time: Sergei A. Esenin. Other members of the group were Anatolii B. Mariengof, Riurik Ivnev (real name Mikhail A. Kovalev) and Nikolai R. Erdman. Prior to his involvement with the imagists, Shershenevich headed a small group of pro-western Moscow futurists who were closely associated with ego-futurists but called themselves *Mezonin poezii* (The Mezzanine of Poetry). A well-educated man, he oscillated between an urge for unmitigated experimentation (particularly in the area of rhyme) and moderate eclecticism comprised of “all the basic traits of Russian modernism” (Markov [1968], 102). The first manifesto of imagism was published in 1919 and it appears that Shershenevich was its lone author. The content of the manifesto reflected a dependence on previous declarations

made by other literary groups, particularly futurists and acmeists. It projected the image of the poet as craftsman. Reference was made to the function of the image in poetry which ought to be “modern”. In its opposition to futurism, imagism pledged to prevent the obliteration of old values. At the same time, in the article *Iskusstvo i gosudarstvo* (Art and the state, 1919), Shershenevich demanded a separation of art from the state and displayed anarchistic inclinations by calling for a total freedom of expression in poetry. It ought to be mentioned that before Shershenevich printed his imagist declarations, S. Esenin wrote in 1918 his lengthy essay *Kliuchi Marii* (The Keys of Mary). The term imagism was not yet in circulation and Esenin was not aware of it, yet *The Keys of Mary* contained some ideas that became part and parcel of the imagist program. By and large it can be said that if futurists insisted on the liberation of the word as such and experimented with its expressive value and sound, the imagists’ dominant concern rested on the larger unit, that is, the sentence as a poetic image turned into a metaphor. According to the imagist conception, poetry is understood as a series of subsequent metaphors that are not necessarily tied in with a logical progression or fully comprehensible.

However, the strongest modernist current after the revolution turned out to be futurism, albeit under a different name. Its continuation became known as the *Levyi Front Iskusstv* (LEF)—the Left Front of Arts. The establishment of this literary and artistic trend was preceded by the creative and organizational activity of Vladimir Maiakovskii who brought together some former futurists with the intention of reevaluating their program and assessing their role in the wake of the new, revolutionary situation. This reevaluation process led to the conclusion that the purpose of art and literature is not only to serve the revolution but also to revolutionize itself by rejecting some of its former premises. Thus, one condemned the “individualistic distortions” of the pre-revolutionary futurist period, self-contained formalism and decadence. At the same time, however, Maiakovskii insisted that in order to create a new tendentious realism, it is necessary to make use of all the formal devices that were invented by previous avant-gardist schools.

In its most radical statements, LEF writers and artists insisted on the necessity of the identification of art with life. Hence, emphasis was put on new artistic forms such as e.g. lengthy newspaper reports, short political poems or so called “agitki”, utilitarian sculpture, painting and theatre involving large masses of performers. Writers were now defined as “workers of art” who must act hand in hand with the party and the political purpose of achieving the victory of communism. Literary material shaped by the creative talent of a writer ought to be turned into a “thing” which would serve the revolution and communism (LEF [1923]). Writers and artists of the *Left Front of Arts* declared themselves to be fighters for art understood as *zhiznestroenie*, that is, building of life which in the final analysis would lead to the disappearance of art as we know it, to its dissolution in practical creativity and construction of utilitarian objects. However, at the same time the LEF artists insisted on the necessity of continuing experimentation and vigorously objected to the idea of “realistic” art and literature. It was exactly this point of their program that brought them into conflict with the party and sealed their fate as competitors with the so-called proletarian concept of literature.

Parallel to LEF’s movement another avant-gardist group was formed in 1922, known under the name of *Literaturnyi Tsentri Konstruktivistov* (Literary Center of Constructivism). Considered occasionally as a splinter group of futurism and courted by LEF as a possible ally (they published their first manifesto in *LEF*), literary constructivists worked out a program (Grübel [1981]) of their own opposed, in fact, to many of their (that is, LEF’s) artistic premises. While rejecting the past canons

of realistic literature, they questioned above all LEF futurists' postulate of extreme experimentation that would eventually lead to the annihilation of arts. Instead, they proposed literature that would be guided by "rational" thought and defined principles of experimentation. Thus, they proposed the following, general rules of experimentation:

- the postulate of semantic dominant (*smyslovaia dominanta*)
- the postulate of the maximum "weight" of meaning in the smallest possible textual unit
- the postulate of local semantics (*lokalnyi printsip semantiki*)
- the introduction of epic narrative and artistic devices of prose into poetry.

Literary creativity must be based, according to constructivists, on rationality, conciseness, expediency and organization. The most important component of literary work is sense or meaning (Russian: *smysl*). Contrary to the Russian formalism's concept of formal dominant, constructivists introduced the notion of the semantic dominant: what ought to dominate in every literary work of art is a thematic keynote. The spiritual leaders of literary constructivism were the poet Il'ia Sel'vinskii and the critic Kornelii Zelinskii. Other members of the group included V. Inber, V. Lugovskoi and E. Bagritskii. Their literary output was at times characterized by an ambiguity of judgment of the revolution and its consequences. This is particularly true of I. Sel'vinskii, who advocated the idea of so-called "double realism" (Mozejko [1978]). Constructivists ran into open conflict with the party at the end of the twenties and were forced to dissolve themselves in 1930.

The last modernist current in the post-revolutionary period came to be known as Obschestvo Realnogo Iskusstva (in short "Oberiu"—Association for Real Art). It was formed in 1927 under the tutelage of two writers, Daniil Kharmis and Alexander Vvedenskii; they managed to survive until 1931. During this time some other poets joined in their effort: N. Zabolotskii, I. Bakhterev, K. Vaginov and others. In their manifesto (Taylor [1992], 105) published in 1928, "Oberiuty" declared that in the realm of art the proletariat cannot be satisfied with the formal methods of the old schools and it would be ridiculous to think that Repin, who painted in 1905, is a revolutionary artist. Oberiu writers acquired fame as masters of the absurd, of the surreal. They subverted in their texts the "rationality" and "logic" of external reality by using the device of "collisions of meaning" and "broadening the meaning of the object and of the word". An extremely important place in their creative strategy was occupied by the principle of so-called relativity that manifested itself in the instability of personage (e.g. in Kharmis's play *Elisaveta Bam*, 1928; see also Gibian [1971], 200–2). As far as their understanding of the poetic word is concerned, they stood on the opposite pole of the futurist principle of transrational language (*zaum*) (Kobrin'skii [1999], vol.I) and claimed that one cannot deny the language its referential significance.

### The Crisis: Other Writers and the Dissolution of Modernism

There are some other writers who did not belong to any of the above-mentioned groups, schools or currents, who played however an important role in the evolution of Russian Modernism. Anton Pavlovich Chekhov can be considered as one of the greatest forerunners of Russian modernism both as a storyteller and dramatist. He was often labeled as an impressionist but it is difficult to

lock him inside such an unequivocal formula. The concise style of Chekhov's narrative broke with the tradition of Russian tendentious prose of the nineteenth century. He introduced the principle of *detachment* of the writer's relation to his characters, combined at times with bitter humor or mockery of human vices and touched by irony. Chekhov's short stories are devoid of any ideological inclinations, his personages are not bearers of any "great narratives" which are supposed to redeem humanity but at the same time they are sketched in a manner that reveals their personal psychological traits, their complexes and obsessions. Chekhov did not write novels. His longest story *Step* (Steppe, 1888) is distinct with ideological emptiness by which Russian life is tainted.

Chekhov is credited with an even greater contribution as innovator to the genre of drama. His first play, *Platonov* (1881), can be read in different ways but above all it represents the hopelessness of Russian provincial life, its total torpor, lack of any perspective which brings it to the point of the absurd. By creating such an image of Platonov, the main protagonist, Chekhov anticipated the rise of the absurdist drama of S. I. Witkiewicz, S. Beckett, T. Williams and others. The most typical feature of these dramas is their lack of rapid action and concentration on dialogues and representation of every day life. The dialogues of Chekhov's dramas are masterpieces of psychological vignettes—they show how the characters are socially alienated and isolated from each other. They are deaf to each other's questions and comments; hence they are doomed to loneliness and inaction.

Leonid Nikolaevich Andreev displays some affinity with Chekhov's writing in that he both cultivates similar genres (prose, drama) and does not show any particular interests in social issues. Andreev continues the tradition of great Russian classical literature (F. Dostoevsky, V. Garshin, psychological prose of L. Tolstoy), but at the same time his writing is an augury of new aesthetic trends. He is considered by some critics to be a representative of expressionist prose. This can be illustrated by his assertion that one cannot describe reality in concrete terms (as one observes in realism), but show only signs or indications of some general universal paths of existential behavior. Andreev's dramas *Car'-golod* (King Hunger, 1908) and the story *Iudas-Iscariot* (Judas Iscariot, 1907) seem to confirm this contention. By and large Andreev's prose and drama is imbued with extreme pessimism and the inclination to touch upon the darkest sides of human nature.

The year Andreev died, Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov emigrated to the West. His early prose written in Russian (the "Russian period") bears all the traits of modernist intellectualism characterized by uncertainty of human existence in an unstable world and the impossibility of fulfilling one's dreams or intentions (*Mary*, 1926). Nabokov authored novels based on sophisticated formal experiments. He exposed the role of the narrator who often conducts an interplay with the reader, which leads to what Russian formalists defined as laying bare formal devices. Nabokov detested any kind of utilitarian, instrumental treatment of art. This found its expression in his "last" Russian novel *Dar* (The Gift, 1938). After emigrating to the United States of America in 1940, Nabokov began to write in English but he translated (and in some cases reworked) this prose into Russian. It can be said that *The Gift* is literature about literature. The author reveals in it his literary sympathies and antipathies by elevating the influence of A. S. Pushkin and condemning N. Chernyshevskii. Nabokov is often analyzed in terms of his role as forerunner of postmodernism in American and European literature.

The work of another Russian émigré writer Ivan Alekseevich Bunin can be compared to some of Nabokov's themes. Particularly his story *Gospodin iz San-Francisco* (The Gentleman from San Francisco, 1915) represents in a very straightforward, even brutal manner the fragility of human

existence and the futility of planning the future. He was the first Russian writer to receive the Nobel Prize for literature in 1933.

Among the above-mentioned writers a very special and distinct position is occupied by Aleksei Mikhailovich Remizov, whose prose, at least in its early stage, displays a close affinity with symbolism. It is characterized by a broad range of themes, extending from a description of disadvantaged, humiliated and poor people (*Krestovye sestry*, *Sisters in the Cross*, 1910), the big city, the Bolshevik revolution (*Vzvikhrennaia Rus'*, *Whirlwind Russia*, 1927) to autobiographical works such as *Podstrizhennymi glazami* (*With Clipped Eyes*, 1952) and an exceptionally strong interest in Russian literature, its legends, hagiographies and folklore. Remizov (Slobin [1991]) exercised a tremendous, if not exceptional influence on subsequent generations of Russian prose writers thanks to his stylistic experiments and initiation of a new narrative stream that became known as *ornamentalism* or *ornamental prose*.

The departure of an entire generation of writers (e.g. A. Blok, L. Andreev, N. Gumilev) and the emigration of others (I. Bunin, V. Nabokov, A. Remizov, B. Zaitsev)—just to name a few—coincided with a diminished interest in theoretical issues of modernism which typified its earlier stages of development. It was most probably caused by some fundamental change introduced by the Soviet political system. Literary and theoretical discussions shifted now towards ideological conflicts and problems concerned primarily with so-called committed literature, its proletarian and socialist manifestations. Yet basic principles of modernism still found their continuation in the literary practice of some strong literary figures who determined the evolution of Russian prose in the next decade and even beyond it. Boris Andreevich Pilnyak, Mikhail Afans'evich Bulgakov, Isaak Emanuilovich Babel', Andrei Platonovich Platonov, Iurii Olesha. Il'ia Grigor'evich Erenburg with his early prose of the twenties can be added to this group. In 1921 the so-called *Serapion Brothers* circle was formed; it included such writers as Vsevolod Viacheslavovich Ivanov, Konstantin Aleksandrovich Fedin, Veniamin Aleksandrovich Kaverin, Mikhail Mikhailovich Zoshchenko, Lev Natanovich Luntz, Evgenii Ivanovich Zamiatin and others.

Among the above mentioned prose writers, special attention should be given to B. Pilnyak, M. Bulgakov and I. Babel'. Boris Pilnyak can be considered a follower of A. Remizov, who developed a new style of Russian prose known as *ornamentalism* (Carden [1976]), typified by distinct, at times shocking expressivity and dynamic, fragmented action without a strongly marked plot. These characteristics can be found in Pilnyak's novel *Golyi god* (*The Naked Year*, 1921), describing the vicissitudes of Russian people who represented diverse social strata and political orientations: on the one hand, and the decay of the aristocracy and the rise of "new man" on the other. In 1929 Pilnyak published abroad *Krasnoe derevo* (*Mahogany*), a story critical of the Soviet internal conflicts, particularly of the period known as the new economic policy (NEP). He was imprisoned in 1937 and executed in 1938.

A similar fate befell I. Babel, a master of short narratives and compact style, permeated with all the most characteristic features of *ornamentalism*. In his prose Babel exploited autobiographical material from his youth, the theme of Odessa's underworld and the Bolsheviks military campaign against Poland in 1920. It was the latter theme known as a cycle of short stories under the title *Kon-armia* (*Red Cavalry*, 1926) that brought him wide recognition and acclaim in spite of the criticism launched by the officials of the party and the state apparatus. By the very fact that Babel participated in the war as a soldier and reporter of S. Budonnyi's army, he demonstrated his attachment to the



Bolsheviks' cause but his prose contained an ironic distance to his material, and he did not hesitate to represent the brutality of the campaign. In the late thirties he was accused of treason, arrested and shot in 1940.

M. Bulgakov was a prolific writer who left an indelible mark on Russian literature of the twentieth century. He became known as both a dramatist and prose writer who achieved a high level of shrewdness in the assessment of post-revolutionary Soviet reality in both of these genres. One of the most evident characteristics of his writing is skepticism. It constitutes a strong trait of his satirical prose such as e.g. *Sobach'e serdce* (A Dog's Heart, written in 1926 but published posthumously in 1987) and the novel *Belaia gvardia* (The White Guard, 1924), in which he examined the viewpoint of those who opposed the revolution. It was adapted to a stage production in 1926 under the title of *Dni Turbinykh* (The Days of Turbins). Bulgakov worked on the novel *Master i Margarita* (The Master and Margarita) up to the last days of his life. It was published in 1966, long after the writer's death, and brought him worldwide recognition.

*The Master and Margarita* does not lend itself to easy interpretation. It contains manifold threads and interpretative clues, but none of them is definite. It can be said that the dominant characteristic of this novel is its ambiguity, yet one can also concretize in it some open and hidden themes, including the following: (1) the human being's inner split between conscience and external existential conditions: if one is to preserve dignity and independence, one cannot subject oneself to the pressures of political power and violence; (2) thus, the question of freedom lies at the bottom of Bulgakov's message; (3) the problem of truth and justice (here, again, the responsibility, Bulgakov's seems to suggest, rests with the individual who must be prepared to sacrifice himself/herself for the sake of defending the truth and one's own beliefs; (4) *The Master and Margarita* represents these beliefs by challenging the prescriptive, normative rules of socialist realism imposed on Soviet writers in 1934.

The duality of styles (metaphysical and satirical) applied in the narrative structure of Bulgakov's novel, the multiplicity of threads, the problematic nature of its characters, are not only essential constituents of modernist prose but they prognosticate Russian postmodernist writing of the seventies, eighties and nineties.

To be sure, with the exception of A. Chekhov, L. Andreev, V. Nabokov and I. Bunin, one should keep in mind that all of the above-mentioned writers wrote under Soviet conditions, and one could express reservations as to whether they can be included into the modernist mode of belles-lettres. Such an argument does not seem to hold water for two reasons: first, the experimental nature of their prose is clearly of modernist provenance and above all different from the realist and later socialist realist writing of Soviet literature; second, there is an obvious ideological rift with the official Soviet interpretation of the early post-revolutionary period. In other words, all of these writers, often referred to as *poputchiki* (fellow travelers), continued the experimental course of Russian modernist literature until they were forcibly silenced, either by bullets or by ideological (administrative) pressures.

A somewhat different picture may result from the presentation of poetry. Marina Ivanovna Tsvetaeva and Vladislav Felitsianovich Khodasevich, who can be included in any discussion of Russian modernism, emigrated after the revolution to the West. Tsvetaeva returned to Russia in 1939 but committed suicide two years later. Khodasevich remained in exile and continued to write poetry

which can be described as one of the most interesting manifestations of the classical current within modernism, akin to the aesthetic premises of acmeism. Maximilian Aleksandrovich Voloshin, who began to write during the period of symbolism, initially shared some aspects of its poetic program but quickly placed himself in a position that allowed him to be perceived as a forerunner of the acmeists. Voloshin's poetry is distinguished by its strong interaction with the visual arts. In this respect, he can be considered one of the most typical poets of modernism. He did not emigrate, which did not mean that he reconciled with the Soviet system and its aesthetic demands. In his later poems he described tragic events of Russian history and died in total solitude.

## Conclusion

In summary, some general conclusions can be drawn. Russian modernism is one of the most fascinating periods in the history of Russian literature — exceptional in its aesthetic diversity, rich with its multiplicity of creative attitudes and philosophical depth. It represented a new paradigm of literature and art which corresponded with similar developments in the West but perhaps somewhat more versatile and concerned with transcendental issues of the human condition. One can distinguish in it two major currents: the classical one and the avantgardist. If we are to look for emblems representing these two tendencies one can point to their two extraordinary figures: Anna Akhmatova and Vladimir Maiakovskii. The former claimed a strong affinity with the tradition of Russian culture and insisted on the necessity of preserving its richness in the process of creative activity, the latter postulated its total abandonment. There exists, however, between the two poets a certain contrastive, polemical correspondence: if Maiakovskii cried “at the top of his voice” (the title of one of his poems) about the optimistic future of the oppressed and collective poetic subject “we”, Akhmatova rendered in a very intimate, pessimistic and silenced voice the tragedy of an individual “I” who had to live through one of the most dramatic periods in the history of the entire Russian nation (see Amert [1992], 54–9). Both, however, agreed about the need to experiment, to keep the ongoing flow of literature as a lively, ever changing phenomenon. Russian modernism did not die a natural death. It was suffocated by the utilitarian concept of literature, introduced by the party and the state in the early thirties. This program was based on the assumption that the twentieth century is characterized by a gigantic split between so-called progressive socialist realist art and reactionary, decadent modernism doomed to defeat and oblivion (Vanslov [1987]). History made an ironic twist in that it reversed the above assumption: as it turned out it was socialist realism which experienced total rejection, while modernism became the inspiring force which reclaimed the vitality of contemporary Russian literature and redeemed it from a total destruction.

## Notes

1. “Нет, это не я, это кто-то другой страдает. / Я бы так не могла, а то, что случилось, / Пусть чёрные сукна покроют, / И пусть унесут фонари... / Ночь” (Akhmatova [1967], 364).

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## In the Shadow of Byzantium

### Modernism in Italian Literature

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#### **The *Risorgimento* and Its Discontents: *Fin-de-siècle* Italian Culture and the “Making of the Italians”**

In 1984 Michael Levenson opened his now classic *A Genealogy of Modernism* by acknowledging that the contours of the object whose genealogy he intended to sketch were far from definite: “Vague terms still signify,” he wrote. “Such is the case with ‘modernism’: it is at once too vague and unavoidable. Anything more precise would exclude too much; anything more general would be folly” (Levenson [1984], vii). While the term can be hardly described as “unavoidable” for Italian literary historiography—which, in fact, has managed to do without it until very recently, as we will see—Levenson’s comment is nevertheless quite appropriate as a preliminary gesture in trying to approach Italian literary and cultural production between the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century. Indeed, anything more precise—let us say, one of the many—*ismi* that populated the landscape of the period, from *verismo* to *futurismo* to *crepuscolarismo* and so on—would hardly have any validity as a general category, while anything broader, for instance a purely temporal marker such as “primo Novecento” (early twentieth century), often found in school manuals, does not allow for the level of specificity that modernism, as it has come to be understood in the Anglo-American critical tradition, entails.

Naturally, a comprehensive account of the different literary and artistic tendencies of the period with which we are concerned, of its major figures and movements, is beyond the scope of this essay. Rather, by following some of the aspects of the debate on the role of the artist, I am interested in delineating here the peculiar ways in which what has been called the “modernist crisis” is inflected by the specific historical, social and cultural situation of Italy. In this context, I take modernism not as a series of stylistic-rhetorical options or as a particular articulation of the relationship between aesthetics and politics, or between cultural production and ideology, but rather in the perhaps more indefinite but also broader sense suggested by Marshall Berman, as “any attempt by modern men and women to become subjects as well as objects of modernization, to get a grip on the modern world and make themselves at home in it” (Berman [1988], 5), or by Astradur Eysteinnsson, who defines it as “an attempt to *interrupt* the modernity that we live and understand as a social, if not ‘normal,’ way of life” (Eysteinnsson [1990], 6). In other words, I understand modernism as a reaction—in every sense of the word—to social and economic modernity, to the triumph of positivism in philosophy, capitalism in the economy, and imperialism in politics, to the inscription of every

human activity into the utilitarian logic of industrial production. It is what we might call, with a term that would gain currency precisely in this period, the “unconscious” of modernity, in the sense that it articulates and brings to light its underlying but repressed (or unrepresented) assumptions and its ensuing social and personal “diseases.”

If a sense of tumultuous and uncontrollable transformation characterizes European culture as a whole, the self-understanding guiding the work of artists and intellectuals takes distinctive shape in different socio-cultural contexts, in a complex process of mediation that brings together the specificities of the cultural, political, economic and social discourses of a given milieu and the influences that radiate from certain cultural centres (Paris, London, Berlin) to more peripheral areas, and vice-versa. This dialectic between pan-European social and cultural trends and local realities is already evident in the earliest phase of Italian modernism. An established critical tradition traces the origins of Italian modernism to the fracture between artists and bourgeois society in the second half of the nineteenth century, or, to use the terms of Romano Luperini, to the “loss of identity of the intellectual class and of the literary function” (Luperini [1985], 3).<sup>1</sup> In France, the country that exercised the strongest and most visible influence on Italian culture throughout the period in question, Charles Baudelaire had already described, in all its ambiguous fascination, the “loss of the aura” of the poet in the famous *poème en prose* of that title, written in 1865. In Italy, however, the debate on the gradual assimilation of the artist to any other producer and on the widening gap between the self-understanding governing the field of artistic production and the norms regulating the capitalist marketplace developed later because it was closely entangled with the political events of the *Risorgimento*, the process of national unification culminating in the decade between the proclamation of the Kingdom of Italy in 1861 and the conquest of Rome in 1870. The task at hand once national unity was achieved can be best summarized with the famous — if probably apocryphal — dictum of writer and politician Massimo D’Azeglio: “With Italy made, we must now make Italians.” In other words, the problem had become that of the constitution of a shared cultural and national identity that would complete the process of formation of Italy as a nation-state. In this situation, intellectuals seemed to retain a guiding function that prevented their assimilation to the ranks of salaried workers.

The political and military events of 1870–71 are a good indication of the social and political differences between Italy and France. If the Commune of Paris marked the first open conflict between the urban proletariat and the bourgeoisie that had consolidated its power under the Second Empire, in Italy, on the contrary, it was precisely with the conquest of Rome and the substantial achievement of the political and nationalist goals of the *Risorgimento* in those very same years that the Italian mercantile and professional bourgeoisie emerged as the hegemonic class, replacing the landowning aristocracy. This was, however, a particularly cautious middle class, for which modernization was as much a source of apprehension as the means of transforming the economic structure of what was still a fundamentally agrarian country. This caution also translated into a substantial convergence of the two political formations that divided between themselves parliamentary life, the conservative-liberal *Destra* (Right) and the radical-democrat *Sinistra* (Left). The country was profoundly divided economically and culturally: only a minority, calculated around 25%, could actually read or write Italian (Dombroski [1996], 459) and the percentage of subjects for whom Italian was the language of everyday exchange was even lower, around 2.5%. The narrow electoral base (the right to vote was determined by census) and in general the distance between the institutions and the often

very diverse local realities fostered a sense of suspicion towards the political establishment. The so-called *trasformismo* of the 1880s, that is, the practice whereby the traditional parliamentary dialectic between Left and Right was replaced by the predominance of a fundamentally centrist politics founded on flexible and fractious coalitions of interests, only seemed to confirm this sense of alienation between citizens and institutions. As was said with an expression that became almost proverbial, the “poetry” of the *Risorgimento*—that is, its political and social ideals—had been replaced by the prose of the new Italy.

It was in this context that Italian intellectuals and artists were forced to re-evaluate their public role. The frustration at the “loss of the aura” that began to find expression in the 1880s was felt all the more bitterly given the status that the intellectual class had enjoyed during the *Risorgimento*. Before unification, in fact, the existence of an Italian *cultural* identity was the only effective counter-argument to the notion that Italy was nothing more than, in Metternich’s words, a “geographic expression.” In the absence of a shared political identity and even of a common language, the elite that recognized itself in a cultural tradition that traced its origins back to Dante and, going beyond him, could even present itself as the heir of Classical culture, performed the crucial task of “creating a mythology, a symbology, a historical reconstruction of the Italian nation that had exceptional communicative power” and circulated “the idea of the real existence of a subject—the Italian nation—which seemed quite difficult to identify in practice” (Banti [2000], 30).<sup>2</sup> After the unification, on the contrary, the work of the intellectuals became subaltern to that of the politicians, who were now the legitimate representatives of the unified nation. Far from being the “creators” of national myths, artists could be, at best, the celebrators of the new national institutions.

The expansion of the literary “market” with the founding of new publishing houses and, most importantly, with the veritable boom of newspapers and journals was regarded with great ambivalence by Italian writers. By the mid-1890s, poet and prose-writer Arturo Colautti, responding to the writer and journalist Ugo Ojetti for his *enquête Alla scoperta dei letterati* (Discovering the Intellectuals) from 1895, could frankly and openly acknowledge the subjection of the artist to the laws of the marketplace, pointing to the years of unification as the moment of transition. “Finally around 1860 literature began to be paid,” he said, “and at first this appeared shameful. Now it is subjected to the laws of other industries, and, like other industries, it is exploited by capitalists” (Ojetti [1946], 288).<sup>3</sup> However, Colautti’s analysis was neither negative nor nostalgic: rather, looking forward to what needed to be done, he suggested that the most urgent problem for intellectuals was the re-articulation of their relationship with an audience in transformation—an audience no longer limited to a professional bourgeoisie endowed with cultural, as well as economic, capital. “The public is there: we must now draw its attention, also to multiply it since we still have eighteen millions of illiterates to *exploiter*” (Ojetti [1946], 288).<sup>4</sup> Less optimistically, the successful popular novelist Francesco Mastriani observed bitterly that “scientists, intellectuals, artists were equated to the condition of the lowest among labourers” (quoted in Petronio [1990], 617).<sup>5</sup>

Few cultural products of the period reflect the complex entanglement of politics and literature and of elite and popular culture as clearly as the weekly periodical *Cronaca bizantina* (1881–85), one of the most famous examples of the literary journalism that flourished in Rome in the 1870s and 1880s. The two lines from Giosue Carducci’s poem “Per Vincenzo Caldesi” (1871; published in 1883) quoted on the masthead—“Italy, prepared, demanded Rome / They gave her Byzantium”—clarify the meaning of the journal’s title. They not only placed the periodical under the aegis



of the great poet, who had indeed been the most important sponsor of its founder and editor, Angelo Sommaruga, but also suggested a substantial agreement with his negative diagnosis of the cultural and political conditions of contemporary Italy and his denunciation of the supposed betrayal of the ideals of the *Risorgimento* in the petty power games of a corrupt political class that had not lived up to the expectations of the founding fathers of the nation. In other words, Rome, instead of being restored to its former greatness, had been turned into its decadent version, Byzantium. But in the late nineteenth century and in the hands of writers less confident than Carducci of the invigorating and redemptive power of tradition, Byzantium was also a symbol of the condition of the modern artist, forced by the harsh reality of history to live not at the height of his culture, but at its nadir. Thus, in the *Cronaca bizantina* the celebration of Carducci as the “Vate,” the spiritual guide of the nation and defender of its moral and ethical values, co-existed with the representation, for a bourgeois audience, of the idle pleasures and the pastimes of the Roman *beau monde*, the description of the coiffures and dress styles, of the fashionable parties and outings to the races that would shortly be used to great effect by Gabriele D’Annunzio, one of the journal’s regular contributors, in his 1889 novel *Il piacere* (Pleasure).

Sommaruga and his methods were controversial in the cultural landscape of the period. One of his collaborators, Edoardo Scarfoglio, remarked about him: “For Angelo Sommaruga a publisher was not the impresario of a literary school, but the producer of a good, and his task was simply to peddle as much as possible” (quoted in Ghidetti [1979], 15–16).<sup>6</sup> He thus played an important role in the “industrialization” of the literary domain, narrowing the gap between the production of culture and the circulation of products, with a project that has been rightly defined as “always poised between cultural dignity and mercantile greed” (Ghidetti [1979], 14).<sup>7</sup> *Cronaca bizantina* was, in the end, short-lived, and by 1886 its publisher, who in the previous year had been condemned for fraud and other crimes, had fled to Argentina. The term “*bizantino*,” however, had entered into the cultural vocabulary to describe a kind of ironic, cynical, self-referential and anti-realist mode of writing, and it would soon overlap with another term, imported from France: *decadente*. This latter adjective, which, like *bizantino*, evokes an over-refined but also corrupt civilization, would eventually come to identify a whole phase of Italian literary history.

As is well known, the idea that modernity represents a phase of cultural decadence gained wide circulation in France in the second half of the nineteenth century (see Calinescu [1987]; Gilman [1979]; Jonard [1980]). Central to the discourse of decadence is the perception of a radical transformation in the social role and function of the artist in modernity, which in turn is the result of a re-articulation of the network of relations linking the artistic and the socio-political spheres. Not only is the intellectual forced to renounce the claim to a guiding role in the evolution of society as professed in the Romantic period, but he also witnesses the invasion of the legitimating principles of the social and political spheres into that of the aesthetic. In other words, artists risk losing their guiding role even in the field that should be their specialty, namely that of aesthetic judgment, because the value of the work of art will be determined by the “bad” consensus formed by the marketplace, and embodied by the choices of the mass audience.

In Italy, the notion of decadentism was introduced by the critic Vittorio Pica, who in the late 1880s wrote a series of very informed articles on contemporary French poetry that were collected in the volume *Letteratura d’eccezione* (The Literature of Excess) in 1898. Significantly, in the essay dedicated to Mallarmé, Pica too suggested that Democracy and Art are inherently hostile to one

another because one is governed by “inexorable levelling tendencies,” while the other “represents indefinite inequality and [...] creates new and more rigorous castes on the basis of intelligence” (Pica [1898], 100–1).<sup>8</sup> Pica’s conclusion, however, called for a kind of *aurea medietas*, warning artists against the dangers of their absolute subjection to the norms of commercial production, but also against a withdrawal into an over-refined aesthetics that renounces communication altogether. Thus, the reception of French decadentism in Italy was from the beginning aware of its contradictions and critical of its excesses. Indeed, even D’Annunzio, the writer whom the critical tradition that began with Benedetto Croce has identified almost tautologically with decadentism, approached the French movement with caution and with a keen understanding of its limitations. On 10 June 1885, in an installment of his column “Piccolo corriere” for the Roman periodical *La Tribuna*, which was dedicated to French drawing and caricature, he thus described the French artist Félicien Rops: “He is one of those who call themselves *decadents*, who love and study *decadence*, and want to remain in *decadence*” (D’Annunzio [1996], 419).<sup>9</sup> In his reading of this passage, Paolo Giovannetti has argued that D’Annunzio’s condemnation of Rops on moral (or rather, moralistic) grounds is a symptom of the inability of Italian culture to come to terms with the modernist crisis. It seems to me, however, that the problem can be considered from a different angle.

For the reasons already considered, the “crisis” in Italy is articulated in terms that are peculiar and specific to its social and cultural situation: in both politics and culture, the crucial question is how to reclaim for the artist a guiding role, and for this reason the discourse of French decadentism, founded upon an already established and insurmountable breach between artist and mass audience, is rejected in favor of other options that identify a social function for the intellectual. It is not by chance that at the turn of the century Italian avant-garde artists became very interested in those French movements that, unlike symbolism and decadentism, called for a renewed negotiation in the relationship between the artist and the audience. Thus, for instance, Saint-Georges de Bouheliér’s Naturism, officially founded with a manifesto published in *Le Figaro* on 27 January 1897, drew the immediate attention of Mario Morasso, who wrote an article for the important Florentine cultural journal *Il Marzocco* in which he stressed the specifically political dimension of the naturist project, as opposed to the narrow aestheticism of symbolism-decadentism. Noting that the generation of intellectuals he represented was born after 1870, that is, after the conclusion of the great epic of the founding of the nation, he called upon his fellow artists to recover the moral and political dimension of their calling, in words that would not have been unacceptable to Carducci: “And we too were forced to confront the necessity of re-invigorating the national spirit, of morally reconstructing the race in an organic ethnic unity that by degree will reach in Europe if not preeminence, certainly one of the most important positions” (Morasso [1897], 2).<sup>10</sup> Clearly, in this article Morasso’s appeal to the necessity of constructing a national and even “ethnic” character for Italians, distinct from that of the French although related to it via the common heritage of “Latinity,” brings back into the foreground the unfinished project of the *Risorgimento*, the formation of a shared national identity.

### “Why Do You Call Me ‘Poet’?” Being a Poet after D’Annunzio

Gabriele D’Annunzio, certainly the most publicly controversial and contradictory intellectual figure of the period, must be located at the intersection of these partially overlapping but also competing

discourses on the mission of art and the artist, on the hegemonic position of the intellectual in the institutional and symbolic practices of national identity formation, and on the relationship between the norms governing the aesthetic realm and economic production. In his narrative works in particular, D'Annunzio insistently thematized the conflict between the legitimating principle of the aesthetic activity, quality, and that of liberal democracy, quantity, defining art as precisely that which has become victim of "the grey democratic deluge of our times, which miserably drowns many beautiful and rare things" (D'Annunzio [1988], 34),<sup>11</sup> as he wrote in *Il piacere* (Pleasure), his first novel. However, *Il piacere* fundamentally remained, with some peculiarities, within the horizon of the aestheticism formulated by its most influential predecessor, Huysmans's *À rebours* (Against the Grain) from 1884. In *Le vergini delle rocce* (The Virgins of the Rocks) from 1895, however, D'Annunzio, influenced by the Nietzschean theory of the *Übermensch*, attempted to articulate a project of aesthetic renewal that was also essentially political. His protagonist, Stelio Cantelmo, expresses his aesthetic and spiritual credo on the opening page of the book:

The world is the representation of the sensibility and of the thought of a handful of superior men, who created it and then augmented and adorned it throughout time, and who will augment and adorn it more and more in the future. The world as it appears today is a magnificent gift bestowed upon the many by the few, upon the slaves by the free, upon those who must work by those who think and feel. (D'Annunzio [1989], 12)<sup>12</sup>

And yet his project is destined to fail since it is predicated upon the return to a form of political power hopelessly surpassed by history and symbolized in the novel by the decayed and half-crazed aristocratic family of the Capece-Montaga. Both novels thus dramatize the blind alleys that offer themselves to the "decadent" artist/politician: the retreat into the ivory tower of aestheticism or into a tradition that has severed its connections with the present. Neither can be the starting point of a cultural and political renewal because both condemn the would-be poet/leader to isolation and irrelevance. The artist thus must return to life, but in a way that reconciles his elitist and aristocratic aspirations with the changed political and social reality.

The solution to this impasse finds its most eloquent articulation in *Il fuoco* (The Fire) from 1900, and in particular in the celebrated episode in which its protagonist, the playwright Stelio Effrena, gives a speech that glorifies both the city of Venice, where it is delivered, and the task of the artist. In this complexly staged scene, Effrena addresses the members of his audience—a crowd initially described as a monstrous mob—as individuals, and simultaneously forges them together into a group united by a common faith and a common vision, thus bridging the gap between the two apparently incommensurable principles that decadentism had sought to define in oppositional terms: quality and quantity, individual and mass. The aesthetic experience returns to enact the function of mediating between the individual and the community, but in a new way: it does not arise from the encounter of the individual with the work of art, but rather from the encounter with the artist himself. The short circuit of "art-life" that characterizes the historical avant-garde thus finds here its first articulation. In bourgeois art, the process of autonomization of art is the result of the process of disconnection between life praxis and collective experience, in which both the production and the reception of the work of art are reduced to individual acts (see Bürger [1984], 48). By staging the scene of the aesthetic experience as one of collective fruition, D'Annunzio re-consigns it to time and to history, as an event that occurs and is consumed in the moment of its performance, rather than

as an encounter that abstracts the subject from lived experience. But D'Annunzio's attempt to overcome the strictures of aestheticism by no means escapes contradiction: what remains unchallenged is the mode of production, which still assigns to the artist the function of ordering and giving shape to reality.

What I would like to suggest here, then, is that D'Annunzio—not the biographical figure, but rather what Paolo Valesio (1992) would call the “semiohistory,” the body of works gathered under that name and the public image that arises from the author's multiple activities—constituted a grand-style, but ultimately unrepeatable, solution to the bifurcation that had confronted the *fin de siècle* French and the Italian theorists of aestheticism and had forced them to choose between the withdrawal of the poet from the world and his transformation into a producer of mass goods. D'Annunzio managed to establish a continuity, rather than a breach, between these two models of literary production, and, at the same time, to bring together the private and the public dimension of artistic activity as the two faces of the same coin, by turning the producer into the product, and by constantly re-inventing himself as artist, public figure, military hero, and even politician (his brief and ultimately disappointing political adventure as a member of Parliament in 1897–1900 took place precisely in the years in which *Il fuoco* was written). D'Annunzio was indeed *inimitabile*, as he was often dubbed, insofar as his attempted resolution of art and life involved the reciprocal penetration of the two domains through a transformation of the figure of the living poet himself into a work of art, but a work of art that, in turn, could be the object of fruition by a mass audience. In any case, what the literary production that follows could not ignore was the problem itself: the legitimacy of the artist was no longer something to be taken for granted by virtue of the traditional identification of the poet with the values of the community. On the contrary, it had to be re-negotiated at every turn, and often in ways that led in the opposite direction of the one taken by D'Annunzio and his followers, such as the outright rejection of the very notion of the aesthetic. In no small way, Italian modernism is often a continuation of *dannunzianesimo* by other means.

An important feature of the cultural life of the early twentieth century is the emergence of several forms of collective practice, almost in opposition to D'Annunzio's individualism, whether resulting from the active supervisory efforts of cultural organizers like Marinetti or from informal and occasional contacts among artists with similar poetic concerns. In the 1900s and 1910s, the city of Florence became one of the most active cultural laboratories of the nation, especially through a series of influential journals that marked the intellectual and political life of the whole period, from *Leonardo* (1903–07) to *La Voce* (The Voice, 1908–16) to *Lacerba* (1913–15). Founded and directed for much of its editorial life by Giuseppe Prezzolini, who, with Giovanni Papini, dominated the Florentine cultural life of the period, *La Voce* emphatically stated from the beginning its distance from the aestheticism associated with D'Annunzio and his followers. With concrete and, in the editor's intention, honest language, it promised its readers a dialogue in which the ethical dimension of intellectual life would be a central concern, best articulated in the editorial “La nostra promessa” (Our Promise) in 1908, where Prezzolini put forward an extremely explicit and substantial program:

to follow certain social movements complicated by ideologies, such as [catholic] modernism and syndicalism; to inform, without being too obsessed with novelties, of the best that is done abroad; to propose reforms and improvement of public libraries; to address the issue of the moral crisis of Italian universities; to mention the works to be read and to comment on the cowardice of contemporary life. (Prezzolini [1988], 241)<sup>13</sup>

Thus, at least in its early years, the intention of “sticking to the concrete” (Prezzolini [1988], 240)<sup>14</sup> became almost the slogan of the journal. In literature, the writers associated with *La Voce*—among them Scipio Slataper, Piero Jahier, and Giovanni Boine—moved towards expressive forms like the fragment of lyric prose and the memoir that eschewed traditional genres, and allowed for a freer research into the question of the moral responsibilities of the intellectual.

Futurism, “the first fully formed [...] truly international avant-garde movement,” as Charles Russell has called it (Russell [1985], 87), articulated a response to what it considered the *cul-de-sac* of aestheticism that other avant-gardes—Dada *in primis*—would follow: the wholesale rejection of the aesthetic as an institutional practice. Its founder and organizer, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, already argued in the manifesto founding the movement, published in the French newspaper *Le Figaro* on 20 February 1909, that the only art appropriate to the dynamism and energy of modernity is an art that continuously calls itself into question and overcomes its own achievements. Following the Nietzschean opposition of history and life in the third of the *Untimely Meditations*, Marinetti represents tradition as an enervating and castrating force that, by casting its oppressive shadow upon the present, keeps the artist from freely expressing himself. For this reason, he imagines an artistic practice that frees itself from the weight of history by incorporating its own destruction. Thus, he concludes the manifesto of foundation by imagining the self-overcoming of the movement:

The oldest among us are thirty. We thus have at least a decade to fulfill our task. When we are forty, let other younger and stronger men throw us into the wastebasket like useless manuscripts. [...] They will finally find us—on a winter night—in the open country, under a bleak shelter drummed by a monotonous rain, and they will see us crouching by our throbbing airplanes, as we warm our hands by the meager fire that our books of today will give off as the flames leap under the flight of our images. (Marinetti [1973], 88)<sup>15</sup>

In literature, this theoretical position was translated into what Marinetti called “*parole in libertà*” (words in freedom), in which all aspects of traditional linguistic communication, down to syntax itself, were rejected in favor of a practice that could no longer even be called “poetic,” and that intended to free the writer *and* the reader from any pre-established constraint in the production of meaning.

Futurism was also the first artistic movement of the twentieth century to call openly for a renewed engagement of intellectuals with the political and the social sphere. The foundation of a Futurist political party coincided almost exactly with the foundation of the artistic movement, and resulted in a program that sought to reconcile a libertarian and even anarchist social agenda (among other things, Marinetti called for the vote for women, the replacement of the monarchy with the republic, and the expulsion of the Pope from Rome) with a nationalist internal and foreign policy, held together by Marinetti’s desire to fulfill the uncompleted project of the *Risorgimento*, the “making of the Italians” (on Marinetti and the *Risorgimento*, see especially Lista [2001]).

Other authors lived their relationship with the past in a less vitalistic and more traumatic way. In a 1910 review of Marino Moretti’s *Poesie scritte col lapis*, Fausto Maria Martini’s *Poesie provinciali* (Provincial Poetry), and Carlo Chiaves’s *Sogno e ironia* (Dream and Irony), the critic Giuseppe Antonio Borgese coined a term, “*crepuscolare*,” which was to enjoy great critical acceptance. The term was used by Borgese in a fundamentally negative sense, and served to designate what he considered a generation of poets who retrieved the residues of Romanticism in an atmosphere of

psychological and emotional decline (the word “*crepuscolo*” means “twilight”). Since then, it has come to designate the experience of a group of poets (including the ones criticized by Borgese) linked by a network of personal and literary connections who lived in a nostalgic and ironic way the experience of the loss of authority of art that other groups like the *Vociani* and the Futurists had sought to sidestep by discarding the question of the aesthetic from their discourse altogether. Working firmly within the poetic tradition whose forms they both adopted and stretched to their limits, the major representatives of *crepuscolarismo*, the Piedmontese Guido Gozzano and the Roman Sergio Corazzini, returned insistently to the question of what it means to be a poet. In their works, the loss of the aura is lived nostalgically, as a historical inevitability that has nonetheless resulted in a cultural trauma that cannot be healed except, perhaps, by narrating incessantly the story of the loss. In Corazzini, the poet abdicates to that role and claims to be merely “a small crying child” who has nothing left “but tears to offer to Silence” (Corazzini [1992], 175),<sup>16</sup> to quote the famous lines of “*Desolazione del povero poeta sentimentale*” (Desolation of the Poor Sentimental Poet). On the contrary, in Gozzano the awareness of the superfluous nature of art in a world dominated by the mercantilist economic values of capitalism and the conservative social values of the middle class results in a highly ironic poetry in which the artist is ambiguously positioned between the posturing of the aesthete and the materialism of the bourgeois, and in the end cannot belong to either space. If Corazzini’s figure of the poet is the poor, sick child, Gozzano’s is the equally marginal Totò Merumeni, from the poem of the same title (which is, in turn, an ironic reference, via Baudelaire, to the Latin poet Terentius’s “*Héautontimorumenos*,” meaning “he who punishes himself”), one of the many embodiments of the figure of the “inept” who populate the literary landscape of the twentieth century, and who becomes, as Edoardo Sanguineti (1966) has suggested, a decayed and defeated version of the Dannunzian poet-hero.

Working at the intersection of *crepuscolarismo* and Futurism, Aldo Palazzeschi (pseudonym of Aldo Giurlani) elaborated a highly original poetics in which the value of poetry lies precisely in its unredeemable uselessness. In “*Chi sono?*” (Who Am I?) from 1909, published in the volume *Poemi*, the artist renounces his identity, the title of “poet,” “painter” or “musician.” The anaphoric repetition of “non” and other negative adverbs in the poem seems to point to a purely negative definition of the role of the artist, while the deployment of a series of *topoi* of *crepuscolarismo* — “folly,” “melancholy,” and “nostalgia,” connected through rhyme and through their isolation in the verse — reminds the reader of the mournful and feeble Corazzinian poet-child. The final verse, however, turns this apparently typical *crepuscolare* scene on its head. In the question and answer exchange that structures the poem, Palazzeschi writes:

Then, I am ... what?  
 I place a lens  
 over my heart  
 to show it to people.  
 Who am I  
 The saltimbanco of my own soul. (Palazzeschi [1996], 7)<sup>17</sup>

The poet puts on display his own self, not, as in D’Annunzio, as an unattainable model, but rather as an object of amusement and enjoyment. Far from being the “vate,” the inspirer and champion

of the nation, the artist becomes a mere entertainer, a role that is further defined in the poem “E lasciatemi divertire!” (Let Me Have Fun!), in his “official” Futurist collection *L’Incendiario* (The Arsonist) from 1910. Here, the saltimbanco becomes a sort of playful saboteur who, following in his own way Marinetti’s lesson, undermining the very foundation of poetry, reducing language to a purely phonetic and almost self-generating stream of syntagms. The conclusion of the poem is both a statement about the uselessness of poets and their paradoxical necessity, as their “work”—their play—remains the only domain free of the utilitarian logic of capitalist society:

times have truly changed,  
people no longer demand  
anything from poets,  
let me have fun! (Palazzeschi [2001], 68)<sup>18</sup>

In the atmosphere of *rappel à l’ordre* that characterized post-war modernism in general, and even more so Italian culture after the advent of Fascism in 1922, the space of maneuvering for the artist became even narrower, as demonstrated by the slow but steady wane of the Futurist political project, eclipsed and incorporated by Fascism. While the relationship between Marinetti’s movement and the regime is a complex one that cannot be resolved simply in terms of cooperation and cooptation, the Futurist leader’s statement in *Futurismo e Fascismo* (Futurism and Fascism) in 1924 that “Futurism is a purely artistic and ideological movement [that] intervenes in political struggles only in the hour of direst danger for the Nation” (Marinetti [1968], 562)<sup>19</sup> is, in spite of its pugnacious rhetoric, a white flag hoisted to signal the surrender of the Futurist project of radically transforming both art and life, and the movement’s retreat onto the terrain of its erstwhile *bête noir*, the aesthetic. It is thus not by chance that the two collections that introduce the two major Italian poets of the twentieth century, Giuseppe Ungaretti’s *Il porto sepolto* (The Buried Harbour) from 1916, and Eugenio Montale’s *Ossi di seppia* (Cuttlefish Bones) from 1925, both place in a strategic position poems that thematize the question of the poet’s function.

“Il porto sepolto” is the second poem in the collection of the same title, and follows immediately after “In memoria,” which constitutes a sort of preface. Like most of the poems of Ungaretti’s first book, it has an almost epigrammatic quality:

The poet arrives there  
and returns to the light with his songs  
and scatters them  
Of this poetry  
I have left  
that inexhaustible secret  
nothing. (Ungaretti [1981], 26)<sup>20</sup>

The “uselessness” of poetry, its being “nothing,” is no longer treated parodically, as in Palazzeschi: rather, that “nothing” is precisely what modernity has made invisible, and what the poet must travel to the “other side”—the repressed, the psyche, the underworld—of quotidian reality to recover. This is the gift of the poet, scattered freely because inexhaustible.

In “Italia,” the penultimate poem (and therefore in specular relation to “Il porto sepolto”) Ungaretti begins by reclaiming the title of poet with a bold “I am a poet” (Ungaretti [1981], 222). At this point, however, the office cannot be simply recovered, but has to be redefined. If on the one hand the poetic subject here identifies openly with the nation at war, on the other, it does not have a positive message, an exemplary tale to offer. Unlike D’Annunzio the *comandante*, who rose above the troops in feats of daring like the famous air raid on Vienna, the Ungarettian poet can reclaim a public role only by going deep into the earth, into the trenches, to give voice to the experiences of his fellow human beings. But even in this case, the revelation that the poetic word brings about can only be defined in negative terms. The poem’s first line is thus qualified: “I am a poet / a unanimous scream / I am a tangle of dreams” (Ungaretti [1981], 222).<sup>21</sup> The “scream,” the raw and painful expression of a terrifying ordeal that reduces experience to its most primitive and basic elements—death, survival, and the brotherhood that arises from being thrust into the maelstrom of war—is the opposite of the carefully etched, rhetorically sonorous Dannunzian verse. Indeed, Ungaretti deconstructs traditional versification so that, while it remains present as a sort of echo, a horizon of possibility to which his lines aspire, what predominates is the white page, the empty space on which stand out, like fragments, his short lines that at times resolve in the isolated word. Communication is thus brought back to its most basic elements, the word and the sentence, shards of a communicative circuit that the poet desperately attempts to re-establish as an antidote to the devastating, de-humanizing effects of the war.

More controlled and characterized by a more complex orchestration of symbols, “I limoni” (The Lemons) is Montale’s own meditation on the function of the poet. Like “Il porto sepolto,” it follows an introductory poem, and thus constitutes a sort of *introibo* into the collection *Ossi di seppia*. The beginning openly evokes the shadow of D’Annunzio, certainly an example of the “laureate poets” who “move only among plants / with seldom used names: boxes, privets or acanthuses” (Montale [1984], 11).<sup>22</sup> Against that rhetorical tradition, Montale ranges a poetry that looks at things in their materiality and apparent inertness—their silence. The poet thus becomes a guide who accompanies the reader on a journey in a material universe made up of neatly delineated things behind which hides an “ultimate secret” that can only be glimpsed indirectly when, almost by chance, the surface of reality becomes blurred and nature seems to reveal “the dead point of the world, the link that does not hold / the thread to be disentangled, which finally can put us / in the midst of a truth” (Montale [1984], 11–12).<sup>23</sup> The play of pronouns in “I limoni” is significant: in the first stanza, the I of the poet is introduced emphatically to delineate an alternative to the “laureate poets.” Then, the poetic subject addresses the reader to enjoin him to listen to the silence of things and to experience the moment in which they “seem close / to betraying their secret” (Montale [1984], 11).<sup>24</sup> Finally, by the end of the poem, it is the plural “we” that sanctions the closure of the gap between the poet and the reader, between the artist and the audience. Poetry’s cognitive function lies in its power to evoke, through strategies of indirection, what other forms of communication are unable to speak, the secrets of a universe of experience that is only tangentially and incidentally related to the material one. However, Montale’s poetry, while obviously influenced by symbolism, avoids the fetishization of the word that had characterized the French movement, and which had simply shifted the center of gravity of human experience from the material world to the artificial paradise evoked by the poetic word. In Montale, the poetic word has always a material weight as well, it operates in the world. Thus, the poet is characterized by a contradictory power that is also the mark of his “irrelevance”:



unable to give form to reassuring myths and fables, he remains nonetheless the necessary witness to the fact that human experience cannot be resolved simply in material terms, and that other modes of existence can be imagined, if not put into practice. The most powerful definition of what poets can do, offered in the first “osso breve,” that is, the first poem in the section entitled properly “Ossi di seppia,” is thus formulated in purely negative terms: “This is all that we can now tell you / What we are *not*, what we do *not* want” (Montale [1984], 29).<sup>25</sup> Certainly this poetry of silence, of the unsaid and unspoken that pierces like a sudden burst from the stillness of the universe, constituted the most powerful and influential alternative to D’Annunzio’s emphatic vindication of the poetic word as a shaping and molding instrument.

### **We Have Never Been Modernists: Decadentism, Modernity, Modernism in the Italian Historiographic Debate**

Given the focus of this book on modernism as an international phenomenon, there is one last issue that needs to be addressed: how is it that in Italy the label of “*decadentismo*” has come to identify much of what in other traditions is described as “modernism”? Indeed, the early fortune of the term in Italy was precisely a result of the polemical, critical and ultimately *anti-modernist* thrust implicit in its superimposition of moral and aesthetic motivations—a thrust of which the term has never been completely free throughout its subsequent history. This negative critical position found its greatest and most influential representative in the critic and philosopher Benedetto Croce, who practically single-handedly shaped the debate on literary decadence in the first half of the twentieth century. Throughout his long career, and in particular in *Storia d’Europa nel secolo decimonono* (History of Europe in the Nineteenth Century) from 1932, *Poesia e non-poesia* (Poetry and Non-Poetry) from 1935, and the essays on contemporary literature collected in the six volumes of his *Letteratura dell’Italia unita* (Literature of United Italy) from 1914–40, Croce carried out a resolute and tenacious struggle against a literary production that he characterized as a betrayal of the moral and political ideals of the *Risorgimento*. For Croce, Carducci had been the last true poet of Italy, the artist who had been able to give voice to the eternal or “elementary” sentiments of humanity: “heroism, struggle, love, glory, death, the past, virile melancholy” (Croce [1915], 180).<sup>26</sup> In a well-known essay of 1907 “Di un carattere della più recente letteratura italiana” (On a Characteristic of the Most Recent Italian Literature), from which the previous quotation was taken, Croce compared Carducci to the generation that had come to intellectual maturity in the 1880s and had as its major representatives D’Annunzio, the poet Giovanni Pascoli and the novelist Antonio Fogazzaro. These artists were described famously as “labourers of [...] the great industry of emptiness” (Croce [1915], 186),<sup>27</sup> a formally polished and captivating but fundamentally insincere production aiming at either replacing reality or at dominating it by virtue of its rhetorical excesses.

The values this literature espouses—mysticism, aestheticism, and imperialism—are, in Croce’s interpretation, a perversion of the healthy religious, aesthetic, and democratic values of the middle class fathers of the nation, and are predicated upon a vague quest for the “ineffable” that shifts the ground of the cultural debate from its social dimension to a vacuous and egotistic individualism. Ironically, Croce’s idealism and modernist literature, in its various articulations, in fact represented the two faces of the same coin, two complementary responses to the late-nineteenth and early

twentieth-century reaction against the limitations of scientific positivism and economic materialism. While for Croce the crisis could be overcome only by returning to the moral and social values of the *Risorgimento*, for the artists that came to maturity in this period, the crisis appeared as a result of the failure of those very same values. In any case, Croce's censure continued to shape the critical and historiographic debate even during the period of general reaction to *crocianesimo* in Italian criticism after his death in 1952.

Already in 1963 Riccardo Scrivano was able to distinguish three clear periods or phases in the historiography of *decadentismo*. The first was substantially a militant moment in which the outright rejection of modern literature by Croce and his followers was countered by the defense of an art that reflected on the new social and cultural conditions of modernity, often carried out by the artists themselves (consider for instance the tireless and unflagging production of manifestoes on the part of the Futurists). The second phase began with the 1920s and was characterized by a historicization of the notion of decadentism that also entailed, almost as a preliminary move, the distinction between the specific features of the different phenomena that were grouped under that label. In particular, the studies in this period—which include classics like Mario Praz's *La carne, la morte e il diavolo nella letteratura romantica* (*The Flesh, Death and the Devil in Romantic Literature*; translated as *The Romantic Agony*) from 1930—tended to bring into relief the international dimension of the phenomenon, and to frame contemporary Italian literature in a broader European context. The most influential work of this period was Walter Binni's *Poetica del decadentismo* (*The Poetics of Decadentism*) from 1936, whose stated aim was “to consider decadentism historically, to separate it from the abstract concept of decadence, to give it the same historical value that we give to ‘romanticism’” (Binni [1949], 4).<sup>28</sup> Binni reconstructed the cultural context in which the poetics of Italian decadentism had formed, with particular attention to the influence of French symbolism in poetry and of German thought in philosophy. Yet, groundbreaking though it was, Binni's work also exemplified the difficulty of evading the value judgment implicit in the term. Thus, for him Montale and Ungaretti, the “new poets” who had learned and interpreted in a personal way the lesson of the “foreign poetics” of what we could call modernism (from Baudelaire to Valéry to Apollinaire), also consigned decadentism to history. They “re-affirm the human values, the serene song, which brings them back to the core of our most intimate tradition. All we intend to do is to indicate the new period as the conclusion of decadentism and the birth of a new poetry—Italian, yes, but experienced, European” (Binni [1949], 135).<sup>29</sup> Aside from the fact that it set up an implicit hierarchy of values in the experience of modern Italian poetry, this *caesura* between decadentism and post-World War One poetry, and, in a further permutation, between decadentism as an uncritical appropriation of European tendencies and the new poetry as its critical re-elaboration, certainly obscured the dialogic relationship that linked the authors of so-called decadentism to their successors.

Scrivano's third phase was characterized by an expansion of the studies of decadentism, heretofore confined to the literary and artistic field. The relationship between cultural experiences and broader social and political phenomena now became crucial, and Marxist criticism played an essential role in this shift in perspective. This approach, which continued into the 1970s and in which the boundaries of decadentism expanded to include figures firmly rooted in the twentieth century like Luigi Pirandello or Italo Svevo, is exemplified by works such as Carlo Salinari's *Miti e coscienza del decadentismo italiano* (*Myths and Consciousness of Italian Decadentism*) from 1960, which outlined an “anatomy” of the archetypal figures of decadentism, or Angelo Leone De Castris's *Il*

*decadentismo italiano* (1974), which interpreted decadentism as the crisis of the hegemonic phase of the bourgeoisie, in which the conflict between bourgeois institutions and the universalistic ideological values underlying it exploded openly and with dramatic results. The most important work of this period is probably Elio Gioanola's *Il decadentismo* (1972), an exhaustive attempt to interpret decadentism as a general category covering, both geographically and chronologically, the territory of what Anglo-American criticism has called modernism. Setting aside the strictly terminological debate, Gioanola's book remains one of the most ambitious projects of systematic analysis of the period, as the author isolates a series of central themes and tropes through which he articulates a topography of the various movements and "-isms" and of their overarching poetics, founded on the crucial problem of the fracture between artist and society. Since for Gioanola the contemporary cultural landscape belongs to the horizon of "decadentism," his study also calls into question—before "post-modernism" became a new period term—the notion of a radical cultural break between modernity and post-modernity.

However, the extensive use of the term decadentism of which we have traced a brief overview was by no means universally accepted and has fallen into disuse in more recent years. Praz had already defended its specific and more historically acceptable application to the *fin de siècle* in his review of the first edition of Gioanola's volume (for Gioanola's response, see his introduction to the second edition [1977], 7–10). Likewise, Enrico Ghidetti, author of numerous works on late nineteenth and early twentieth century literature, considers the historical course of decadentism closed by the end of the first decade of the new century, significantly on the threshold of the experience of the avant-garde. Thus, Giovannetti, in one of the most recent monographs on the problem, could conclude that "nowadays, the idea that for over a century world art has been decaying after reaching the apogee of its aesthetic and cognitive greatness in the middle of the last [meaning the nineteenth] century is seen as an absurdity, as nothing more than a polemical exaggeration" (Giovannetti [1994], 99). Rather, he calls for a more historically specific notion of decadent literary culture, which would mark the transition from the waning world of nineteenth century post-*Risorgimento* liberalism and the new cultural experiences of the twentieth century. Thus, Giovannetti's conclusions allow us to see clearly that more is at stake in a debate on the uses of the term "decadentism" than a mere—and rather sterile—nominalist question. There is indeed no particular reason to prefer one term to another, if each is properly understood to have a historical rather than an evaluative function, and yet, period terms often have also a certain degree of performative power. As Giovannetti makes clear, the moral(istic) implications of decadentism remain close to the surface even in the most sophisticated readings, but his own solution, while providing a salutary reminder of the need to understand the historical specificities of the "micro-phases" of Italian modernism, de-emphasizes the continuities between a properly decadent and a post-decadent phase.

The limitations of the other critical categories used to describe the modernist period demonstrate that, with decadentism now decisively out of favor, no shared meta-language has yet been produced to replace it. Thus, when in his introduction to the monumental collective volume *Modernismo/Modernismi*, from 1989 (significantly, on Anglo-American modernism), editor Giovanni Cianci explained that the term indicated "what elsewhere, and above all in our culture, is called historical avant-garde" (Cianci [1991], 15),<sup>30</sup> he was in fact offering at best a partial explanation since in Italy, as in most European traditions, the term historical avant-garde is usually and most rigorously reserved for "fully oppositional" forms of cultural production, to use Raymond Williams's terms

(Williams [1989], 51), and is distinguished from those modernist practices whose protest is conducted within the traditional institutional sites of the cultural field. Distinctions between the experience of, let us say, Marinetti and Futurism on the one hand and Pirandello or Montale on the other, are a necessary aspect of any discussion of Italian modernism.

Cianci also observed that the critical debate on “post-modernity” and “post-modernism” in the late 1970s and 1980s—a debate, one might add, which by necessity forced the Italian critical tradition to confront solicitations and suggestions coming from the outside, in particular from France and the United States—has stimulated a renewed interest in what came before, that is in the “modern.” And in fact, “modernity,” often qualified with the adjective “literary,” has come to be used as a general category. To date, the most important articulation of a theory of literary modernity is Fausto Curi’s *La poesia italiana d’avanguardia* (Avant-Garde Italian Poetry) from 2001, whose introduction begins precisely by thematizing the question of the relationship between the experience of the avant-garde and the various forms of aesthetic modernity that result from the different patterns of confrontation between art and the social, economic and political institutions of modernity. Significantly, Curi includes a chapter on the *Neo-avanguardia* of the 1960s, that is, of a period usually assigned to the dawn of post-modernity or, in any case, outside of the temporal boundaries of the modernist *koine*, as if to underscore that, first of all, chronological and poetological boundaries are at best critical constructs that must be crossed and breached in order to understand the connections as well as the points of opposition among different cultural moments, and that, second, any attempt at a historical reconstruction must mediate between the descriptive and cognitive function of broad categories and the specific development of the local cultural traditions.

Finally, there is “modernism” itself, which, as Cianci has noted, has been sporadically used by a number of Italian critics (and, one might add, quite regularly and systematically by Italianists writing in English, such as, among many, Robert Dombroski [1996] and Cinzia Sartini Blum [1996]). It is likely that the use of the term at the turn of the nineteenth century to indicate a modernizing movement within the Catholic Church has initially limited its use in the cultural realm. The most interesting and theoretically fruitful use of the term is to be found in the work of Guido Guglielmi, in particular in the essay “Memoria e oblio della storia” (Memory and Oblivion of History), in which modernism and avant-garde are interpreted as two ways in which literary modernity addresses the problem of memory and of the relationship with tradition. While the avant-garde constructs its project as a rupture and a re-foundation *ex-nihilo*, modernism inscribes itself in the past, but it is precisely through this inscription that it re-orders and transforms the tradition. As T. S. Eliot had already suggested in *Tradition and the Individual Talent*, the order of the tradition is always already complete in itself, so that the introduction of a new “monument” transforms that order as a whole. Thus, Guglielmi argues, avant-garde and modernism share “the common awareness that the present no longer mediates organically between the past and the future. Avant-garde and modernism live modernity as a problematic time, not as an inherited time that they administer and augment” (Guglielmi [1993], 186–7).<sup>31</sup>

The conclusion requires one final observation. In *Alla scoperta dei letterati*, Ojetti remarked that, unlike his French colleague Jules Huret, who had found his interviewees conveniently gathered in Paris, he had had to tramp across Italy to the various residences of his respondents, scattered in several cities and towns on the peninsula. This “regional” or even “municipal” character of Italian modernism needs to be emphasized to remind us of its richness and variety. There is no capital of

Italian modernism that played a directive and trend-setting role as Paris did for France, London for England or New York for the United States: rather, we have a series of “capitals”—Milan, Florence, Trieste (which, politically, was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire until the end of World War One and as such constituted an important point of contact between Italian and Mid-European culture), Bologna, Rome, Naples—in which the general tendencies of modernism encounter and become contaminated, in fruitful and original ways, with local traditions. Indeed, some of the more interesting and innovative (but often internationally less known) figures of the period, from Umberto Saba to Dino Campana, from Matilde Serao to Federigo Tozzi, from Giovanni Verga to Italo Svevo, are precisely the products of such an encounter. For Italy then, it would perhaps be best to speak not so much of modernism as of *modernisms*, and in this sense the Italian situation can be seen as a blueprint for the constellation of experiences mediating between trans-European dispositions and poetics and local traditions that come together under the heading of “Modernism”.

## Notes

1. “perdita di identità del ceto intellettuale e della funzione letteraria” (Luperini [1985], 3).
2. “creazione di una mitologia, di una simbologia, di una ricostruzione storica della nazione italiana che ha in sé un’eccezionale forza comunicativa”; “l’idea dell’effettiva esistenza di un soggetto—la nazione italiana—che, nei fatti, sembrava molto difficile da identificare” (Banti [2000], 30).
3. “Finalmente verso il ‘60 la letteratura cominciò ad essere pagata, e dapprima ciò parve quasi un’onta. Ora sottosta alle leggi delle altre industrie, ed è dai capitalisti, come le altre industrie, sfruttata” (Ojetti [1946], 288).
4. “Il pubblico c’è: bisogna attirarne l’attenzione, anche per moltiplicarlo perché abbiamo ancora diciotto milioni di analfabeti da *exploiter*” (Ojetti [1946], 288).
5. “lo scienziato, il letterato, l’artista furono uguali alla condizione dei più bassi operai” (quoted in Petro-nio [1990], 617).
6. “Per Angelo Sommaruga l’editore non era l’impresario d’una scuola letteraria, ma il produttore di una merce, il cui compito si riduce a spacciarne la maggiore quantità possibile” (quoted in Ghidetti [1979], 15–16).
7. “sempre in bilico fra dignità culturale e avidità mercantile” (Ghidetti [1979], 14).
8. “Indiscutibilmente la Democrazia, con le inesorabili sue tendenze livellatrici, è ostile all’Arte, che rappresenta l’indefinita disuguaglianza e che crea nuove e più rigorose caste sulla base dell’intelligenza” (Pica [1898], 100–1).
9. “Egli è uno di quelli che si chiamano *decadenti* e che amano e studiano la *decadenza* e vogliono nella *decadenza* rimanere” (D’Annunzio [1996], 419).
10. “E per noi pure si impose la necessità di ringagliardire lo spirito nazionale, di ricostruire moralmente la razza in una organica unità etnica che grado grado raggiungesse nell’Europa se non il primato certo uno dei posti maggiori” (Morasso [1897], 2).
11. “il grigio diluvio democratico odierno, che molte belle cose e rare sommerge miseramente” (D’Annunzio [1988], 34).
12. “Il mondo è la rappresentazione della sensibilità e del pensiero di pochi uomini superiori, i quali lo hanno creato e quindi ampliato e ornato nel corso del tempo e andranno sempre più ampliandolo e ornandolo nel futuro. Il mondo, quale oggi appare, è un dono magnifico largito dai pochi ai molti, dai liberi agli schiavi: da coloro che pensano e sentono a coloro che debbono lavorare” (D’Annunzio [1989], 12).
13. “Già ci proponiamo di tener dietro a certi movimenti sociali che si complicano di ideologie, come il mod-

ernismo e il sindacalismo; di informare, senza troppa smania di novità, di quel che di meglio si fa all'estero; di proporre riforme e miglioramenti alle biblioteche pubbliche; di occuparci della crisi morale delle università italiane; di segnare le opere di lettura e di commentare la viltà della vita contemporanea" (Prezzolini [1988], 241).

14. "star sempre al sodo" (Prezzolini [1988], 240).

15. "Les plus âgés d'entre nous ont trente ans; nous avons donc au moins dix ans pour accomplir notre tâche. Quand nous aurons quarante ans, que de plus jeunes et plus vaillants que nous veuillent bien nous jeter au panier comme des manuscrits inutiles! [...] Mais nous ne serons pas là. Ils nous trouveront enfin, par un nuit d'hiver, en pleine campagne, sous un triste hangar pénétré par la pluie monotone, accroupis près de nos avions trépidants, en train de chauffer nos mains sur le misérable feu que feront nos livres d'aujourd'hui flambant gaiement sous le vol étincelant de leurs images" (Marinetti [1973], 88).

16. "Io non sono che un piccolo fanciullo che piange. / Vedi: non ho che lagrime da offrire al Silenzio" (Corazzini [1992], 175).

17. "Son dunque... che cosa? / Io metto una lente / davanti al mio cuore / per farlo vedere alla gente. / Chi sono? / Il saltimbanco dell'anima mia" (Palazzeschi [1996], 7).

18. "i tempi sono molto cambiati, / gli uomini non dimandano / più nulla dai poeti, e lasciatemi divertire!" (Palazzeschi [2001], 68).

19. "Il Futurismo è un movimento schiettamente artistico e ideologico. Interviene nelle lotte politiche soltanto nelle ore di grave pericolo per la Nazione" (Marinetti [1968], 562).

20. "Vi arriva il poeta / e poi torna alla luce con i suoi canti / e li disperde // di questa poesia / mi resta / quel nulla / d'inesauribile segreto" (Ungaretti [1981], 26).

21. "Sono un poeta / un grido unanime / sono un grumo di sogni" (Ungaretti [1981], 222).

22. "Ascoltami, i poemi laureati / si muovono soltanto fra le piante / dai nomi poco usati: bossi ligustri o acanti" (Montale [1984], 11).

23. "il punto morto del mondo, l'anello che non tiene / il filo da disbrigliare che finalmente ci metta / nel mezzo di una verità" (Montale [1984], 11-12).

24. "sembrano vicine / a tradire il loro ultimo segreto" (Montale [1984], 11).

25. "Codesto solo oggi possiamo dirti / ciò che *non* siamo, ciò che *non* vogliamo" (Montale [1984], 29).

26. "l'eroismo, la lotta, la patria, l'amore, la gloria, la morte, il passato, la virile malinconia" (Croce [1915], 180).

27. "Sono tutti operai nella medesima industria: la grande industria del vuoto" (Croce [1915], 186).

28. "Questo è proprio il caso di vedere il decadentismo storicamente, di separarlo dal concetto astratto di decadenza, di dargli lo stesso valore storico che diamo al 'romanticismo'" (Binni [1949], 4).

29. "Insomma i poeti nuovi [...] mentre rappresentano un atteggiamento coerente a tutto lo sviluppo della nuova poesia dopo il romanticismo, riaffermano valori umani, di canto serenatore, che li riporta nel pieno della nostra più intima tradizione. Noi non vogliamo che indicare il nuovo periodo come chiusura del decadentismo e come nascita di una nuova poesia italiana sì, ma esperta, europea" (Binni [1949], 135).

30. "quello che altrove, e soprattutto nella nostra cultura, è chiamato avanguardia storica" (Cianci [1991], 15).

31. "la comune consapevolezza che il presente non media più organicamente tra il passato e il futuro. Avanguardia e modernismo vivono la modernità come un tempo problematico, non come un tempo di eredità da amministrare ed accrescere" (Guglielmi [1993], 186-7).

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## Approaching Spanish Modernism

### Tradition and the “New Man”

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There has been no effort of any consequence in Spanish literary criticism to align Spanish writing of the early decades of the twentieth century to modernism in any of the varieties by which this phenomenon has been approached in other critical traditions or contexts, Anglo-American or European. There are historical reasons for this, not the least of which is the longstanding ultra-nationalistic form of government in Spain initiated by the Francoist victory in the Spanish Civil War. The political situation made it difficult for Spanish criticism to advocate points of commonality with literary movements outside of Spain, especially with groups identified as modernist/avant-garde that were considered to have political sympathies with the Spanish Second Republic. Rather than organizing modern literary history around a period concept, Spanish literary history adopted the “literary generation” model that proclaims such generations at intervals of around fifteen years. That the period of greatest creative achievement of these literary generations—the ones of 1898, 1914, 1927—coincides with the prominence of modernism in England, North America, and continental Europe, offers a starting point for their re-examination in the context of wider developments, especially since the unwillingness of Spanish criticism to consider modernism a viable critical model for modern literary history has had negative consequences for literary studies as well as for the appreciation of Spanish texts in relation to other European literature.

A corrective to this nation-centered model involves developing an ideological framework for modernism, one that includes a radical revaluation of the “Spanish tradition.” The principal affirmative Spanish contribution in this context is the elaboration of new formulations of subjectivity, unsettling the hegemonic dispositions of a late nineteenth-century middle-class culture that had been very much aware of its “modernity” and consolidated in the fullness and completeness of the “autonomous thinking subject.”

Ironically, the greatest difference between the approaches to the fragmented history of modern Spanish literature that highlight the prominence of literary generations and attempts to theorize modernism and the avant-garde as they occur elsewhere, is simply the fact that the Spanish contributions are considered to be inconsequential (outside Spain) while other European forms of national expression, that is, those that have been identified with avant-garde groups that have tended to cluster in national settings (Italian Futurism, German Expressionism, French Surrealism), are postulated as internationally decisive. Nevertheless, the tremendous flowering of writing in Spain from before 1898 to 1936—that is, precisely during the height of modernism in Europe—demands to be approached with greater conceptual rigor, as part of a multi-dimensional, multi-national phenomenon.

All varieties of modernist expression challenge the representational paradigm that dominated European literature and art for 400 years, the realist, perspectival model (see Eysteinsson [1990], 179–241), that is, what a free-thinking subject, one pair of eyes, perceives situated in a specific space-time and from a specific distance. Cubism's overturning of perspective refutes long-held aesthetic positions (see Lessing [1984] and Burke [1968]) that painting is a spatial medium whereas literature is by "nature" temporal. Cubism transforms the previously instantaneous activity of viewing into a type of "narrative." Vision cannot occur as a discrete act as referentiality is achieved primarily through the retrieval and reconstruction of the painting in an inner, mental realm, that also becomes a meta-artistic parody of mimesis (Drucker [1994], 46–52; Steiner [1982], 33–50). The cubist painting demands a "doubled" reality since the viewing subject does not simply receive a pictorial content but must also reassemble the painting in order to see it in conventional terms. Analogously, early modernist literature challenges the temporality of writing. Eliot's defense of Joyce's *Ulysses* in "Ulysses, Order, and Myth" (1923) criticizes the realist-naturalist novel's incapacity to confront the degradations of modern chaos that Joyce organizes by providing it with a mythic structure. Joyce's novel is not situated in time or history but in a superior structure, the Homeric myths which underpin European culture and provide a sense of order not to be found in the external world. Eliot's influence on subsequent criticism is epitomized in Joseph Frank's "Spatial Form in Modern Literature" which touts Eliot's capacity to suspend the temporality of language, and thus to interrupt "the process of individual reference temporarily until the entire pattern of internal references can be apprehended as a unity" (Frank [1963], 132). Reading a modernist text, analogous to the viewing of a classical painting, effects a "transformation of the historical imagination into myth—an imagination for which time does not exist" (Frank [1963], 60). Half a century after Eliot, Fredric Jameson represents the modernist sensibility

as a fragmentation of the psyche and of its world that opens up the semi-autonomous and henceforth compartmentalized spaces of lived time over against clock time, bodily or perceptual experience over against rational and instrumental consciousness, a realm of 'originary' or creative language over against the daily practice of a degraded practical speech [...] and of the growing independence of the various senses from one another—in particular the separation of the eye from the ear. (Jameson [1979], 14)

This, in effect, is a succinct conceptual restatement of Eliot's early formulation of what the new art is about. What changes is the view that the "passionate private languages" of modernism are innocent. Upon "entering the field of force of the real social world [these private languages] take on a [...] wholly unsuspected power" which, in the aftermath of world political events left "many of [these modernists] quite genuinely shocked to discover the things for which the words really stood" (Jameson [1979], 177).

Modernists tended to be "anti-liberal" that is, rightists, leftists, or sympathizers who had lost faith in the bourgeois order. The pervasive aggressiveness in modernist expression—whether of the Fascist Ezra Pound or the Stalinist Rafael Alberti—is a function of the need to create a new model of being in the world. Integral to the affirmation of a new art invariably conceived as superior to middle-class models is the giving over of oneself to unconventional forces: wilful, personal, even exalted, in an active consciousness dedicated to refashioning the literary, and sometimes social, reality in which he/she is obliged to reside; or, to ascribe agency to suprapersonal, telluric, or historical forces against which personal will is largely ineffectual. Modernists participate in a literary

agenda that accommodates both the “fabbro,” wilful makers of alternative “worlds,” and the “vates” who seem to occupy transcendent perspectives. The collapse of the bourgeois medium of mimetic, empirical space cedes to the production of a meta-literary “space”, not a space in any conventional sense, but an artistic substitute where the personal struggles to express new understandings of subjective positions take place. The development and evolution of this phenomenon is central to any account of modernism, and Spain is no exception. Meta-literariness extends to all modernist works in all genres, intensifying as the early twentieth century progresses, and characterizes most of the writers traditionally identified with the early twentieth-century literary generations as well as many others. The idea of a unified reality to which the writer must confine the scope of art is progressively rejected.

Mature expressions of this phenomenon can be seen in the writings of two allegedly “tradition-minded” talents of the generation of “1927,” in Luis Cernuda’s 1935 “Palabras ante una lectura” (Words Before a Reading), his introduction to the first edition of *La realidad y el deseo* (Reality and Desire), and in private correspondence in 1928 between Pedro Salinas and Jorge Guillén regarding the forthcoming appearance of *Cántico* (Canticle). These poets underscore the artificiality of generational groupings since their aesthetic-ideological differences are quite sharp. In a letter of 1928 to Juan Guerrero, Cernuda proclaims that “it’s true: there is a second reality. Just the way I envisioned it! But now I only have the form. Oh, to possess it some day” (Valdender [1976], 53).<sup>1</sup> In the first edition of *Reality and Desire*, Cernuda recounts his experience of its “content” and his incapacity to possess this force, likened to Moses’s experience of the burning bush, “a daimonic power,” to which he ascribes an aggressive agency in his life and art: “Poetry [...] is nothing but the expression of that dark daimonic force that rules the world” (Cernuda [1975], 875),<sup>2</sup> which brings with it the conclusion that “exterior reality is just a mirage” (Cernuda [1975], 872).<sup>3</sup> The poet must mediate between antagonistic realities, becoming himself the embodiment of a daemon, a creature who inhabits the ordinary world yet who has periodic contact with this “vast and undefined power that guides our destinies” (Cernuda [1975], 874).<sup>4</sup> In a variation on Eliot, Cernuda understands that his mission is to formulate a personal myth that embodies the elite status and desolate understanding of the modernist poet. Anecdotal, temporal life experiences become occasions to shape “myth,” a “second reality” far superior to the bourgeois “phantoms” with whom he is forced to reside, “the beings with whom I die alone” (Cernuda [1984], 117).<sup>5</sup>

Quite a different attitude finds expression in the first edition of Jorge Guillén’s *Canticle*, as succinctly pointed out in Pedro Salinas’s private assessment in a letter written shortly before the volume went to press. Guillén’s poetry exemplifies the willful act of fashioning

A world [...]—A world like nobody has today. Your own, invented, constructed with new and flawless materials. Better still, familiar materials but passed through something lustrous, through a clarifying medium [...]. Not sentimentality, not mysticism, not realism [...]. A selected, summoned world [...]. Not of verse or aesthetics, like the idiots believe, but rather of the new cosmos, of life in poetry. (Soria Olmedo [1992], 90)<sup>6</sup>

In sharp contrast to Cernuda’s futile attempts to deal with a telluric force that dominates his existence, Guillén’s poetry is produced by something considerably different, an aggressive consciousness, in order to bring forth an alternative “world” also incomprehensible to the horde of “idiots” incapable of understanding that aesthetics is but a means to display an elite intellect, a qualitatively

different type of dominant subjectivity that has fashioned a “new cosmos” by means of art.

While these poets are dedicated to similar goals—the elaboration of a superior meta-literary reality—the means of production are strikingly different. The role of force in poetry is conceived as a fashioning tool for Guillén, whereas for Cernuda it is the summoning agent of a poet subservient to its demands. What these positions have in common, however, is the idea that this force is responsible for the emergence of a “new man.” Generally speaking, Cernuda’s experience of “daimonic power” forces him into greater contact with the desolate, public world of ordinary reality against which he incessantly recoils, while Guillén remains faithful to his elaborations of a superior, private world that rarely portrays man in social settings. More important than the ways in which Cernuda and Guillén reflect contemporary political attitudes that make them more than simply “liberal” or “conservative,” is the fact that these attitudes reflect differences in the modernist project of transcending bourgeois subjectivity. To refer to the title of Pablo Neruda’s most significant volume of poetry of this time, *Residencia en la tierra* (Residence on Earth), modernists tend to regard themselves more as “residents” with divided allegiances rather than as “citizens” loyal to their ordinary historical circumstance. The modernist’s allegiance is firstly to his “ideological” intuitions of the expansive and extended experience of a superior alternative reality, or at least to a more honest exposition of the insufficiencies of existence as they present themselves in a more truthful ugliness.

The positive agenda of modernism that makes it more than the expression of ingenious “pointless rites” (Donougho [1989], 88) lies in bringing forth new models of subjectivity. There is a desire to transcend the phantom reality embodied in the copy premises of conventional representation. Reminiscing about “generation,” Guillén invokes Pound’s imagism to characterize, in his opinion, the dominant mode of expression after World War I: “The American name ‘imagists’ can be applied to writers of considerable imagination that wrote here or there during the twenties” because these writers were interested in a “reality [...] not duplicated in copies but rather fashioned in the freest manner possible” (Guillén [1969], 20).<sup>7</sup> This desire—typically envisioned as epiphanies or secular versions of “eternity” where conventional time-space is nullified—becomes a progressively more important theme for Spanish modernism even though for many, such a possibility may be only a distant nostalgia (Cernuda, Alberti) or tragically conceived as an impossibility from the outset (Lorca). At a thematic level if not as a literal aesthetic option, the issue of “the presence of being” is fundamental. It is here that Spanish contributions to a modernist development of new subjective models intersect explicitly with Europe. It is also here that the weight of the “Spanish tradition” in peninsular critical thinking makes such a thesis most difficult to advance. It will be necessary, therefore, to examine this issue in some detail, from a less isolationist perspective, in order to illustrate that for early twentieth-century writers it is an informed consciousness of the “Spanish tradition” that allows Spain to participate in the “positive” agenda of modernism, as a true partner and not as a servile imitation. To varying degrees, the case continues to be made by many Hispanists (see Parr [2001], 406–16) that every literary period from the Renaissance onward is in some sense “foreign” to Spain, which is seen as being distant from the evolving discourse of modernity in the rest of Europe and as being ever faithful to its own “unique” tradition, even as it moved into the twentieth century. The need to stress Spanish national values and differences becomes almost a requirement as Francoism makes itself their defender as well as a vigorous repudiator of internationalism. The post-war climate is thus not favorable for adopting critical arguments that align Spanish literature with a wider European milieu. An alternative hypothesis begins by revisiting the modern era from

the point of view that Spanish ideological differences with Europe promote what all ideology dedicates itself to advancing: the notion that a specific point of view is not simply one of many but rather “better” than others.

The “Spanish point of view” does not merely present itself to its true believers, but it also responds dialectically to European positions. Spanish positions are not “alien” from Europe—in early modern literature or in subsequent periods—but in theme and content, and especially in many of its greatest literary and artistic achievements, an informed issue is taken with the direction in which the “new man,” from the Renaissance onward, is leading European culture. What is important in a discussion of modernism is that the Spanish positions throughout modern literary history resist the evolutions of the European “autonomous thinking subject” that artists elsewhere in Europe only begin to question and reject as the twentieth century approaches. The early twentieth century, quite ironically, witnesses the return of the rest of Europe to a discourse that in Spain had been ongoing since the Renaissance. This also serves to explain why a significant number of writers from perhaps the least “modern” nation of Europe can “enter” modernism as an integral partner in the struggle to bring forth yet another “new man.” Modernism can, indeed, be viewed from a variety of perspectives, significant among which is Europe’s rapprochement with a long “tradition” of consistent Spanish attitudes towards this central theme.

A brief survey of exemplary instances of Spanish attitudes throughout the modern era toward the insufficiencies inherent in the model of the “autonomous thinking subject” will serve to elucidate this idea more fully. Indeed, one of the most significant contributions to European cultural studies over the last quarter century—initially propounded by Michel Foucault and subsequently refined by Timothy J. Reiss—has contrasted a pre-modern epistemological model with attitudes that emerged subsequently and that became dominant by the nineteenth century. According to Foucault, the decisive turn away from a medieval, theocentric mode of understanding, premised on analogical thinking, toward the “discourse of modernity” based on deductive reasoning begins in the sixteenth century. For pre-modern understanding, which Reiss ([1982], 30) characterizes as a “discursive exchange within the world,” recourse to the referential world is fundamental to the production of any type of certain knowledge. Foucault characterizes this analogical mechanism as an unstable, almost interminable process in which

resemblance never remains stable within itself; it can be fixed only if it refers back to another similitude, which then, in turn, refers to others; each resemblance, therefore, has value only from the accumulation of all the others, and the whole world must be explored if even the slightest of analogies is to be justified and finally take on the appearance of certainty. (Foucault [1970], 30)

In sharp contrast, the modern system is centered around a new principle of “identity and difference,” which Reiss ([1982], 30) succinctly characterizes as a “reasoning practice upon the world,” a mode of ratiocination in which the human mind frees itself from referentiality in order to perform operations upon the world. This fundamental epistemological shift allows for the emergence of the intellectual structure responsible for constituting “modernity”—that is, its successive re-definitions from the sixteenth to the twentieth century—via a revolutionary expansion of knowledge.

Fundamental to Foucault’s and Reiss’s concepts of a discourse of modernity is autonomous, “free-thinking” subjectivity. The movement away from dependence on the experiential world toward an outlook in which the “world” becomes a means to perform intellectual operations upon

it is impossible without the construction of a subjective position aware of a distinctness and separation from its physical circumstance—or in the words of early Renaissance art theorist Leon Battista Alberti, there is “a definite distance for seeing” (Alberti [1966], 57). In art and literature, the “superior” imitative models from the Renaissance onward are directly attributable to the invention of one-point perspective which brings forth a “new man” whose subjectivity allows him to use signs in a different way. If pre-modern representation depended upon “the sign and its likeness [...] nature and the world [...] intertwine[d] with one another to infinity, [to] form for those who can read it, one vast single text” (Foucault [1970], 34), the Renaissance artist, like his counterparts in other areas, became an active manipulator of signs that belonged to him as the consequence of a much expanded imagination-consciousness which allowed him to produce a multitude of autonomous versions of the world.

While Spanish writers reveal an intimate familiarity with the values of the discourse of modernity, their responses to the variations on European representational themes throughout the era of modernity are often distinguished by resistance and, more importantly, by a willingness to engage, dialectically, their reservations about the modern literary paradigms embodied in the ideology of autonomous subjectivity. In opposition to the “thinking subject” is a pre-modern “structural” model of consciousness that does not recognize a “clear and distinct” separation from the world and also considers such a “definite distance for seeing” as a source of error and even delusion. In fact, the enactment of such differences in relation to the question of subjectivity constitutes the main focus of the most important early modern Spanish masterpieces—*Don Quijote* (Don Quixote), *La vida es sueño* (Life Is a Dream), *El burlador de Sevilla* (The Trickster of Seville), the picaresque novel, and many others. All of these works feature similar situations in which the protagonists find themselves, at least initially, at the margins of society and this for various reasons. The successful characters, however, are able to find their way toward the social and moral mainstream while the unsuccessful ones remain at the periphery or suffer an even harsher fate.

Foucault’s interpretation of *Don Quixote* prominently considers his madness as an embodiment of pre-modern thinking, a nostalgia for an earlier time when a system of similitudes and resemblances guided the production of knowledge that must now confront the windmills of an intractable, implacable reality in which words

are no longer anything but what they are; words wander off on their own, without content, without resemblance to fill their emptiness [...]. The written word and things no longer resemble one another. [...] there has opened up a field of knowledge in which, because of an essential rupture in the Western world, what has become important is no longer resemblances but identities and differences. (Foucault [1970], 48–50)

Actually, precisely the opposite takes place in Part I, since in reading the long-discredited books of chivalry to great excess Don Quixote incapacitates himself from engaging in a discursive exchange within the world and instead performs ludicrous reasoning practices. He fills his imagination with words and images that have no basis in referentiality and thus alienates himself from the all-encompassing structure, the “great text of the world,” in effect, willing himself into the madness of a self-created, subjective consciousness, the consequence of a devotion to the discourse of “difference,” which leaves him without an “identity.” *Don Quixote* parodies the new discourse of modernity by embracing, albeit unwittingly, ascendant values in Europe in order to become a monstrous carica-

ture of the type of autonomous subjectivity that Cervantes and his Spanish colleagues consider the foundation stone of error and delusion. As a “free-thinking subject,” Don Quixote denies himself the capacity to participate in the discourse of salvation. Foucault’s reading is especially infelicitous in relation to Part II, a major motivation of which is to restore the madman to sanity by having him return to the world, that is, to remember his real name, Alonso Quijano. Only by adjusting his intellectual position can Don Quixote undertake the type of “reading” that will bring him redemption and give his life positive meaning.

As is the case with most European interpreters, Foucault’s interest in *Don Quixote* stops at Part I. There are, however, a number of prominent Spanish characters who also begin at the alienated margins and do not succeed in reincorporating themselves into the mainstream. Principal among these are the *pícaros* whose names are also the titles of the books in which they relate their infelicitous life stories. Like Don Quixote, the *pícaro* is an *ingenio*, a man of wit who confides in his own free-thinking subjectivity only to outwit himself. Frequently associated with unstable watery mediums—Lázaro de Tormes presents himself in his prologue as “rowing toward a safe port,” Guzmán de Alfarache writes his story as a galley slave, El Buscón travels the sea to the New World only to begin another unhappy chapter of his life—these characters delude themselves by their subjective perspectives in order to expose untenable lives built on a sea of “difference,” a self-engendered discourse that keeps them at the margins.

Spanish resistance to the type of subjectivity that these protagonists exemplify is also prominent in the theater. Examples abound of characters whose excesses of detached, self-absorbed thinking and imagining lead to delusional anti-social consequences. Calderón’s wife murderers in *El médico de su honra* (The Doctor of His Honor) and *El pintor de su deshonor* (The Painter of His Dishonor) who seize upon flimsy circumstantial evidence to avenge imagined offences against family honor. Also, prosperous commoners in Calderón’s *El alcalde de Zalamea* (The Mayor of Zalamea) and Lope de Vega’s *El villano en su rincón* (The Peasant at Home), who represent an incipient middle class unwilling to be governed by established laws and/or authority, offer additional signals of the social confusion and personal delusion that accompany the appearance of this “new man” in Europe. The most powerful manifestations of the monstrous consequences of “reasoning practices upon the world,” however, are developed in Calderón’s *Life Is A Dream* and Tirso de Molina’s *The Trickster of Seville*.

*Life Is A Dream* parallels *Don Quixote* in that the brute Segismundo progresses from extreme marginality toward an affirmation of his proper role in his community by means of adjustments to his understanding of the world. Made monstrous because his father King Basilio imprisoned him at birth and thus unable to engage himself with the world, Segismundo’s considerable formal education is ineffective because his knowledge is groundless and thus inadequate to provide an understanding of the all-encompassing structure with which it needs to be integrated. Even more monstrous than Segismundo is his father who by means of deluded “reasoning practices”—his private, subjective determination that he can penetrate mysteries reserved for a higher power—produces a human creature who can only think as an autonomous subject apart from a structure that demands active participation with the natural and social world. It is by means of experiences initially understood as “dreams” that Segismundo discovers the capacity to affirm the values of “discursive exchange within the world” and thus to surpass his father’s intellectualizations and to affirm a transcendent structure which leads to an ultimate truth:



What is determined  
 By heaven, and on a blue tablet  
 God with his finger wrote,  
 For whom these pages of blue  
 Are signs and ciphers  
 Adorned by golden letters,  
 They never lie and never deceive. (Calderón [1971], 106)<sup>8</sup>

Affirming a “better reality,” Segismundo’s message speaks equally to all of Europe: the “new European man” is the ultimate monster.

Tirso’s depiction of Don Juan Tenorio in *The Trickster of Seville* delivers the most forceful message of all since his protagonist embodies the discourse of modernity to the fullest extent imaginable. Paying only lip service to the existence of a structure ordained by God as the proving ground of redemption, Don Juan uses his wit and intellect to commit repeated acts of treachery, including to his “master” God who is so offended by Don Juan’s unrepentant state of mind that He intervenes directly to punish a subject who threatens the fabric and structure of society. Don Juan is a nobleman in name only; he is an anarchic subject who embodies a radically subversive set of values. Of all the brilliant Spanish characters that could have inspired replicas by other authors, only Don Juan, and spectacularly so, captivates the literary, philosophical, and psychological imagination of Europe. This is true partly because Tirso’s character so closely corresponds, in his capacity for “free thinking,” to values that in early modern Europe were worthy of emulation rather than condemnation. As Europe progressively invested in the rational thinking subject, Spanish reservations about its “dark side” continued. If the rest of Europe abandoned the structural model of pre-modern consciousness, Spain did not, although this was not because of a resistance to secularism.

Spanish participation in the Enlightenment—exemplified by Benito Feijoo and Francisco de Goya—extends the consistent Spanish position of dialectical opposition to the continuing European construction of a rationalist model of autonomous subjectivity. Prominent among the topics of discussion in the Age of Reason is the nature and scope of what by mid-century is Reason’s most prominent counterpart, the imagination. This becomes a progressively more important topic during the eighteenth century, especially in the context of pronouncements on the sublime by influential thinkers such as Kant, in *The Critique of Judgment and Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, and Burke in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*. The high valuation of the “natural sublime” by these and other thinkers is another significant occasion for the strong enhancement of subjectivity since the colossal, form-defying nature of the sublime—and the delight that is integral to its experience—is accompanied by the aggrandizement of the scope of the imagination and, therefore, of autonomous subjectivity as well, since the imagination now becomes a partner of the intellect as opposed to its pre-modern subservient role. These philosophical enhancements of the capacity for “free thinking” prepare the way for an even greater role for the imagination during romanticism. Significantly, Spanish thinkers continue to resist these enhancements and the progressively greater independence of the human subject from the referential world.

The most systematic Spanish advocate of the virtues of reason is Feijoo, who understands his intellectual mission as exposing errors of all kinds, a primary source of which lies in the new ideas

regarding the imagination as an active co-equal partner of the intellect. The most significant source of error is the imagination and its false products: idols of the mind, ungrounded images that disengage the intellect from the wider structure of the world. Indeed, as he advocates the importance of reason, Feijoo continues to adhere to a traditional epistemological model of the “rational soul” as consisting of the intellect, will, and memory. In this model, the imagination is primarily a conduit that communicates external perceptions to the understanding in order for judgments to be made. Feijoo’s objection to an enhanced role for the imagination is that it separates the human subject from direct observation and experience in order to favor the represented image or idea. Thus, for example, he describes Descartes’s mind as having “a vast and exalted imagination” (Feijoo and Jerónimo [1952], vol. LVI, 131) that “doubts even the existence of God and the world” (Feijoo and Jerónimo [1952], vol. LVI, 64).<sup>9</sup> Descartes and others have abandoned the experiential world and the structural model of being for the “arbitrary ideas” of the imagination. The means to avoid error is thus to “surrender to experience, if we do not want to abandon the real path of truth; and to search for nature in herself, not in the deceptive image of her that our phantasy fashions” (Feijoo and Jerónimo [1961], vol. CXLI, 340).<sup>10</sup> Feijoo’s strong resistance to the expansion of the imagination anticipates positions that achieve full prominence by the time of Goya.

Spanish resistance to modern subjective models epitomized in Kant and Burke finds a strong if eccentric collaborator in Goya. His most succinct pronouncement on the role of the imagination in relation to reason occurs in the celebrated self-portrait in *Los caprichos* (Imaginations) which is accompanied by the celebrated phrase: “El sueño de la razón produce monstruos” (The sleep/dream of reason produces monsters). The ingenious aspect of this phrase is that, in contrast to all the other engravings of this series, the words that appear here are actually constituted as untouched by the etching process, for they appear in the “empty” spaces on white paper. They constitute a reference to empiricist models of the mind such as the one in Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, in which he likens the intellectual process to etching and imprinting on “white paper,” arguing, indeed, that the human mind is incapable of producing “original ideas.” Goya’s peculiar presentation of his statement suggests that its status is precisely the opposite of Locke’s pronouncement, for it is an “original idea” and thus a subversive counterpoint to a mind model that acknowledges no such possibility. The great irony of Goya’s “idea” is that it is completely unreliable, and defective, owing to the ambiguity of the word *sueño*. Either the imagination is to blame for the monsters that populate this series or precisely the opposite, reason is to blame—that is, the doctrine of reason in which the Enlightenment and the intellectuals of the Spanish Bourbon court had placed their faith. The engravings offer strong testimony to Goya’s equal disenchantment with both the doctrine of Enlightenment reason and an expanded imagination which, when left to its own devices, produces a fevered, fragmented, de-centered consciousness that is incapable of finding a stable place from which to establish claims to autonomous subjectivity. Affirming essentially the same traditional epistemological model as Feijoo, Goya nevertheless subverts it completely by denying reason an unambiguous leading role.

Goya’s vision here is more than simply modern, it is “modernist” in the sense that it decries the supremacy of the paradigm of “reasoning practices upon the world.” Like the unfortunate characters from Golden Age literature who condemn themselves to ever more severe alienation from the world, Goya, in a personal way via an abundance of autobiographical references in these engravings, manifests the incapacity of a doctrine to account for his lived experience. As another instance

of Spanish dialectical engagement with Europe, Goya not only takes a radical leap forward into the modern but in the process invalidates the conventional discourse of modernity. His vision is also grounded in a structural model of consciousness acutely aware, as were his Renaissance-Baroque predecessors, of the monstrous nature of the European subject. At the moment of the triumph of the middle-class political revolutions, Goya does not celebrate their triumph but rather heralds the inadequacy of its ideology to account for the fullness of human experience. Goya is thus a precursor to what will eventually become prominent in modernism a century later as European artists also come to perceive the untenability of nineteenth-century positions.

The few masterpieces of Spain's modest participation in romanticism—for instance, José Zorrilla's *Don Juan Tenorio*, a play often cited for its "modernity" because of its many departures from realist conventions—continue the Spanish tradition of resistance to European subjective models. The play, in fact, seems to be a conscious reply to the now-institutionalized values of European subjectivity as manifested in the extensive discourse on the pre-eminent role of the sublime and the imagination in relation to the values of the beautiful which have been relegated to an inferior role—that is, to embody only aesthetic, formal properties—whose primary motivation is love and the continuation of the species (Burke [1968], 40–3). By the mid-nineteenth century, the figure of Don Juan had been fully appropriated by Europe and had certainly captivated the collective imagination. Zorrilla presents his audience with this sublime character who has by now run the entire gamut of seductive possibilities save for two—the beloved of his best friend and a "bride of Christ." Exceeding even his own time schedule for seduction, Zorrilla's Don Juan arguably performs the spectacularly impossible in Part I by consummating these remaining categories of conquest within the space of two hours on the same night. In the context of the present discussion, Zorrilla's character can fruitfully be seen as an embodiment of sublime values that, in this work, are resisted and ultimately overturned by Inés, a character that throughout the play is consistently associated with the beautiful. Given this perspective, the play is not so much about a flesh and blood Don Juan but, at the level of legend and imagination where this character is most real for nineteenth-century European audiences, is concerned with redressing the imbalance between the discourse on the sublime and the beautiful. If the sublime affirms an aggressive, dominating, masculinist form of subjectivity that reconfirms Goya's vision of the monstrous, then the antidote is a strong dose of "the beautiful" in the character of Inés, and, by extension, a tempering factor to such a form of boundless subjectivity, which Zorrilla caricatures in response to European positions that had transformed Tirso's monster into something completely different.

Even toward the end of the nineteenth century, Spanish consciousness of and resistance to what was by then the full hegemony of bourgeois subjectivity—that is, a mode of being that has acquired "naturalness," that has apparently transcended ideology and has aligned itself with the "objective" discourses of science—continued its dialectical critique. More significant than Emilia Pardo Bazán's rebuff of the deterministic aspects of naturalism in her essay "La cuestión palpitante" (The Burning Issue), are the novels of Galdós whose most notable characters reaffirm the consistent Spanish position since the Renaissance. Whether sympathetic or not, most of Galdós's characters who persist in an attitude of performing "reasoning practices upon the world" are unsuccessful. What causes the downfall of characters such as Isidora Rufete of *La desheredada* (The Disinherited One), Ramón Villaamil of *Miau*, and the merciless userer Francisco Torquemada of the series bearing his name is their intellectual detachment from the world, their propensity to wrap themselves in their

own alienating subjectivity that leaves them ill-equipped to deal with the vicissitudes of their lives. Isadora's obsessive belief that she is a displaced heiress leads her to identify herself with premises, quite similar to the heroines of popular novels, that guide her progressively into delusion and, when reality fails to conform to her imagined idea, eventually to a dissolute life. Likewise, the unfortunate Villaamil, dismissed from his job only months before he can collect his pension, also devises pathetic mental strategies that lead to delusion and suicide. Torquemada does not suffer poverty, but when a crisis arises that money cannot resolve, the death of his son whom he had imagined a genius destined to save the world, it becomes clear that Torquemada is a victim of his own deluded self-importance and will spend the rest of his days bitter and resentful toward a world whose only meaning to him is a material one.

Indeed, Galdós's characters are not tragic but rather, as the more modern representatives of a consistent Spanish position and "tradition," deluded, done in by their incapacity to acknowledge the world. The exemplary counterpoint to these characters is the servant Benina of *Misericordia* (Compassion) who suffers the cruel injustice of being discharged from the family she so faithfully served and kept together for many years just as the fortune of her mistress improves owing to an unexpected inheritance. It is clear, however, that Benina will endure because she does not live exclusively in her consciousness. She is a "thinking subject" who believes in other dimensions of "reality," which is what saves her from despair. Galdós is thus reaffirming, from the perspective of subjectivity, a Spanish "tradition" which at no time during the modern period conforms to the conventional European model. As late nineteenth and early twentieth century European writers and artists become dissatisfied with the hegemony of the middle-class subject, modernism emerges to offer its own critiques that in this instance actually mark a remarkable "return" to consistent Spanish positions over the course of its modern literary history.

Contemporary criticism seems somewhat at a loss to offer "positive" accounts of the contributions of modernism, perhaps tired of its verbal disruptions that today seem to some late twentieth-century critics like game-playing—think of Donougho's notion of modernism's "pointless rites"—as well as of its often rightist political sympathies. If a case is to be made for an affirmative agenda for modernism, it is likely to center around the issue of subjectivity. Judith Ryan ([1991], 1–22) has commented that by the end of the nineteenth century, empiricist subjective models grounded primarily in sense perceptions were already undermining the idea of the middle-class subject. The growing awareness of what Ryan terms "the vanishing subject" thus becomes the basis for more intense explorations, within modernism, of alternative models. Analogous to the Renaissance project of bringing forth a "new man," therefore, a spectrum of artistic interests dedicated to new modes of being in the world arises in modernism, that is, to the creation of another, different "new European man." In relation to middle-class norms, these efforts to a great extent parallel the above-mentioned Spanish position. While the rest of Europe had to come to a somewhat abrupt and often alienated awareness of the insufficiencies inherent in its most important cultural product, now understood as stifling and empty, Spanish writers, who never invested as fully in this ideology were poised, in relation to continental movements as during no time in modern literary history, to continue to lead a critique that elsewhere had only just begun.

Free-thinking autonomous subjectivity from the Renaissance to modernism has been consistently portrayed in all the great characters and stories of the "Spanish tradition" as fundamentally monstrous. The greatest Spanish characters have nearly always been cerebral types who have

parodied—in serious fashion as in Calderón and Tirso, or in comic or sardonic postures as in Cervantes and Goya—their European counterparts for 300 years. Excessive thinking detached from one's social circumstance nearly always leads to unfortunate consequences for the individual and his immediate milieu. Those characters who can free themselves from what amounts to a vicious hermeneutic circle are eventually successful and also tend to bring greater harmony and peace to their environment and to themselves. The unsuccessful characters, although they are quite capable of generating sympathy, are deluded rather than tragic. They convince themselves that their wives are unfaithful and murder them; they devise mental scenarios that have no basis in reality, only to have calamity befall them; and, like Goya, they caricature themselves when they understand the inevitable consequences of a misplaced faith in reason in the face of a world capable of easily overturning enlightened theories of the proper scope of the workings of the human mind. If autonomous subjectivity has repeatedly been characterized as a "monster subject" in Spanish literary discourse, the antidote to such a mode of being harkens back invariably to periodically updated versions of a pre-modern model that has been characterized here as a "structural" model of consciousness in which mental activity alone is never sufficient to bring about a desired resolution to a character's dilemma.

As modernists abandon the bourgeois subject and search out other options, they fall upon two predominant alternatives that correspond quite remarkably to the long-standing Spanish traditions of the "monster" and "structural" subjects. These, of course, are the very phenomena that Spanish criticism has used—in its own peculiar way, and certainly not in the terms outlined here—to try to establish fundamental differences between Spain and Europe and to suggest an even further breach between Spain and Europe during the vigorous experimentation in literary form of the modernist period, to insisting that the literary generation provides the best model through which to understand and study this estrangement.

Arguably, the most profound content of modernist literature is the exploration of the bifurcation that takes place in relation to bourgeois subjectivity and that establishes, in variations on a theme, on the one hand a mode that corresponds closely to the Spanish "monster subject" and, on the other, a pattern that is fundamentally similar to pre-modern consciousness that was eclipsed with the advent of the autonomous thinking subject. Johanna Drucker characterizes the dominant subjective model of modernism as the psychoanalytic subject, "constantly in formation, psychically dynamic, open-ended and complex," and further, that this "subject as such is never complete, whole, or intact: it is split from the very outset between self/other, conscious/unconscious" (Drucker [1994], 109–10). With the ascendance of structural models, the ego-centered subject is progressively understood as simply a public referent, part of something much more significant, "being" is not seen as centered in consciousness at all and that, if there is indeed a core of being, that it resides in a much larger structure. This structural model of consciousness is not essentially different from the pre-modern model that was replaced by the "thinking subject" during the Renaissance. The greatest difference between these structural models, of course, is the domain of being. Taking its clues from the romantic notion of the natural sublime, this sphere in modernism becomes an "oceanic" unconscious from which the "island" of consciousness emerges. In pre-modern terms, of course, this area was to be encountered, via one's faithful reading of the "great text of the world," in the realm of eternity. Full being did not reside on earth or in a subjective consciousness but rather in the "second," superior reality. Thus, for many modernists as well as for the pre-moderns, being is not subject-centered but resides in a structure.

The other pathway in modernism lies in affirming versions of what in the Spanish tradition is consistently portrayed as “monstrous” subjectivity, the invariably unflattering parody of middle-class “free-thinkers.” In modernism this expresses itself in the equally prominent tendency of early twentieth-century writers to reject the supremacy of the unconscious and instead to infuse their works with characters and/or personae that dedicate their aggressive efforts to affirming the fullness of being in their own terms. This is a theme that dominates the masterpieces of Spanish literature during the early twentieth century, in variant forms, either to confirm the experience of epiphanic moments when the fullness of being centers itself in a subject, that is, a much more aggressive, wilful, and single-minded subject who also rejects the bourgeois model, a pale reflection of which resides in a domain where being can attain a secular version of plenitude and “eternity.” What Eliot, Pound, and the early apologists for the new art proclaim as modernism’s capacity to create myth in opposition to history is actually a part of a much more ambitious project, the creation of a “new man” whose beliefs and values also repudiate middle-class norms.

Initially manifesting itself in the novel, the modernist “monster subject” first makes its presence felt in the interruptions of an autonomous story line by an impatient, aggressive narrator who presents his own opinions and who imposes his will on the nominal protagonists that grow progressively more impotent as creatures of the *cogito*—notable examples are Miguel de Unamuno’s *Niebla* (Mist) from 1907 and Pío Baroja’s *El árbol de la ciencia* (The Tree of Good and Evil) from 1910. This type of radical subjectivity becomes central by the 1930s in the poetry of Jorge Guillén, Pedro Salinas, and Vicente Aleixandre. The principal content of this poetry is the portrayal of an aggressive consciousness that imposes itself by force on the immediate circumstance, these works being prime examples of what Jeffrey Herf (1984) and Erin G. Carlston (1998) have characterized as a reactionary, “thinking” fascist attitude that exults in the prospect of transcending and nullifying ordinary, reified consciousness. This is opposed by the utopian postures of the left, where revolution promises to restore the integrated subject and authentic human relations, and where liberal notions of rational subjectivity must cede to “ineffable forces” (Carlston [1998], 40). This stance, of course, is yet another manifestation of the secularized equivalent of the pre-modern “structural” subject. Significant instances of this attitude are also expressed primarily by poets—Cernuda, Alberti, and, in a more tragic sense, Lorca.

What I hope to have demonstrated is that there is more than one pathway to modernism, that the dead weight of the “Spanish tradition” that has kept early twentieth-century Spanish literature mired in a critical discourse that has remained largely unchanged even as other institutions of contemporary Spanish culture have demonstrated a renewed willingness to become part of a European mainstream, need not be “dead.” The failure of Spanish criticism to make a case for a “Spanish modernism” is symptomatic of an even greater failure: to recognize that Spain has been intimately and consistently involved with the discourse of modernity from the outset. Its contributions to that discourse are not aberrations or exceptions to the rule but rather form a pattern of dialectical response to European positions throughout the modern era. It is in the context of modernism that the rejoinders of the least “modern” country in Europe are, ironically, perhaps more compatible with continental positions than at any time in its history. At the risk of being consigned like Unamuno in *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida* (The Tragic Sense of Life) to “crying in the desert,” I offer this approach to a moment in Spanish literary history as a means to leave the wasteland.

## Notes

1. "es cierto: hay una segunda realidad. ¡Tanto como yo la he deseado! Mas ahora sólo tengo la forma. Si llego a poseerla algún día" (Valender [1976], 53).
2. "la poesía [...] no es sino la expresión de esa oscura fuerza daimónica que rige el mundo" (Cernuda [1975], 875).
3. "la realidad exterior es un espejismo" (Cernuda [1975], 872).
4. "poder indefinido y vasto que maneja nuestros destinos" (Cernuda [1975], 874).
5. "los seres con quienes muero a solas" (Cernuda [1984], 117).
6. "Un mundo [...] Un mundo como no lo tiene hoy nadie. Tuyo, inventado, erigido con materiales nuevos e intactos. Mejor, materiales conocidos pero pasados por algo lustral, por un medio clarificador [...] Ni sentimentalismo, ni misticismo, ni realismo [...] Mundo selecto, escogido [...] No del verso, no de la técnica, no como creen los necios, sino del cosmos nuevo, de la vida en poesía" (Soria Olmedo [1992], 90).
7. "El nombre anericano imagists podría aplicarse a cuantos escritores de alguna imaginación escribían acá o allá por los años 20", "[una] realidad [...] no reduplicada en copias sino recreada de manera libérrima" (Guillén [1969], 20).
8. "Lo que está determinado  
Del. cielo, y en azul tabla  
Dios. con el dedo escribió,  
De. quien son cifras y estampas  
Tantos. papeles azules  
Que. adornan letras doradas,  
Nunca. mienten, nunca engañan" (Calderon [1971], 106).
9. "de una imaginación vasta y elevada" (Feijoo and Jerónimo [1952], vol. LVI, 131). "duda de todo, hasta la existencia de Dios y del mundo" (Feijoo and Jerónimo [1952], vol. LVI, 64).
10. "rendirse a la experiencia, si no queremos abandonar el camino real de la verdad; y buscar la naturaleza en sí misma, no en la engañosa imagen que de ella forma nuestra fantasía" (Feijoo and Jerónimo [1961], vol. CXLI, 340).

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## The Spanish-American Novel and European Modernism

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There is widespread agreement that European modernist literature experienced its heyday during the first half of the twentieth century (Fokkema and Ibsch [1988], 2; Levenson [1999], 8). In the development of the Spanish-American novel, however, the body of work most appropriately labeled “modernist” begins to emerge in the 1940s, after the decline of European modernism. This does not mean that novels with the experimental qualities associated with modernism had not previously been written in Spanish America. The point is rather that a broad and significant transformation of the Spanish-American novel along modernist lines did not occur until later. It is this transformation I will be examining in this essay, with particular attention to the dialogue Spanish-American novelists of the 1940s and after established with their European modernist precursors. Since it is impossible to give an exhaustive overview of the topic in a relatively short essay, I have chosen to discuss eight Spanish-American novels that present important affinities with modernist aesthetics.

The study of modernism in the Spanish-American novel has been hampered by the fact that the term *modernismo* is used in the Spanish-speaking world to refer to a *fin de siècle* literary movement in Spain and Spanish America that resembles French Symbolism. Octavio Paz complains that the Anglo-American academy developed the concept of modernism without acknowledging the prior existence of Spanish and Spanish-American *modernismo*: “to use the word *modernism* to apply exclusively to a movement in the English language that came thirty years later, is to show cultural arrogance, ethnocentrism, and historical insensitivity.” The further step of using the term modernism in the Anglo-American sense in order to frame an approach to the Spanish-American novel of the 1940s and after strikes Paz as even more lamentable: “What is saddest—and most amusing—is that these terms, with the particular meaning attributed to them by Anglo-American critics, are beginning to be used not only in various European countries but also in Latin America and Spain” (Paz [1991], 55–6).<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, there seems to be no other way of capturing on a conceptual level the powerful links between this body of work and European modernist literature. As I will try to show, the novelists studied in this essay were profoundly shaped by the example of European modernism, even if, as will also become clear, they gave modernist aesthetics a significant inflection of their own.

The Spanish-American novel first gained broad international attention in the 1960s, with the so-called *boom*, a term commonly used to group the most prominent Spanish-American writers of the decade (Julio Cortázar, Carlos Fuentes, Gabriel García Márquez, and Mario Vargas Llosa). The *boom* writers were a diverse lot, but if there was one thing they shared apart from their commercial success and the favorable international reception of their work, it was an interest in modernist-style literary experimentation. Still, it was clear that these writers did not emerge out of nowhere in Span-

ish-American letters. One important precursor whose name was repeatedly mentioned was Jorge Luis Borges. Since Borges was a short-story writer (as well as a poet and essayist), his work will not be discussed here. Another name that came up frequently was that of the Guatemalan novelist Miguel Angel Asturias, whose ground-breaking *El Señor Presidente* (1946) may well be regarded as the first important modernist novel to be published in Spanish America.

*El Señor Presidente* describes the reign of terror imposed by the dictator of an unnamed Central American nation. Although it includes a large cast of characters, the novel's main plot focuses on the transformation of Miguel Cara de Angel from one of the dictator's collaborators into his opponent. A key stage in this transformation is Cara de Angel's romance with a woman named Camila, the daughter of a general in the army who has fled into exile in hopes of leading a movement to overthrow the dictator. What makes *El Señor Presidente* a modernist work is clearly not its subject-matter, since the dictator or strongman is a classic type in Latin American literature of all periods. Rather, the innovative element in Asturias's novel is his use of procedures such as free indirect discourse and interior monologue to capture the inner lives of his characters. The inward turn of narrative was no doubt one of the key features of the modernist aesthetic in Europe. It served to question traditional assumptions regarding literature's ability to depict a stable, objective reality, and gave support to Martin Heidegger's view of modernity as "the age of the world picture" (Heidegger [2002]). The modernist novelists discarded the omniscient perspective of the nineteenth-century realists, and focused instead on how different characters look at the world in different ways. Asturias shared this interest in the subjective quality of our perception of the world; hence his use of some typically modernist literary strategies. But Asturias adopted the techniques of his European precursors in order to explore specifically Latin American topics.

The characters of *El Señor Presidente* live in a shifting, uncertain world. Their perception of reality is fluid and unstable, as it is for the characters in the novels of James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, or Marcel Proust. Asturias shows a great interest in depicting hallucinatory states of mind, and the techniques of modernism allow him to get closer to the individual shades of experience of his characters than perhaps any previous Spanish-American novelist. Yet in *El Señor Presidente* the depiction of moments of intense fear, uncertainty, and even madness serves not so much to draw attention to the inherently subjective nature of any view of the world, as to capture the specific historical experience of living under a reign of terror. The climate of fear created by the dictator is responsible for the breakdown of the sense of an ordered world in the novel. Asturias's narrative, in other words, turns inward in order to develop not an epistemological meditation, but a political critique.

The difference between Asturias and the European modernists can be further pin-pointed by looking at the love plot in *El Señor Presidente*. Asturias views his protagonists in a profoundly romantic light, for Cara de Angel is ultimately redeemed by his love for Camila, even if it costs him his life. Such an approach is at odds with a key theme in European modernist literature, the critique of desire. The great precursor in the development of this critique is of course Gustave Flaubert, with his fierce insistence on the fictive and inauthentic dimension of romantic passion. The fascination with the illusory nature of desire — one of Proust's principal themes — is part and parcel of a larger concern with the problem of how we know the world. Asturias, however, is primarily preoccupied with politics, and he does not view love as an epistemological problem. Instead, he presents it as a realm of experience that allows his characters to escape from the nightmare of the dictatorship, even if only temporarily.

Asturias's representation of love is part of a broader view of the integration of character into society that sets him apart from the European modernists. Ricardo Quinones points out that the modernists questioned the linear, progressive view of time enshrined in the nineteenth-century realist novel. He also notes that the rejection of the ideology of progress had important implications for attitudes toward other social institutions, such as the family. In the nineteenth century, the family had acquired an almost sacred aura, as it was supposed that it was only through one's children that one could survive beyond death. For the modernists, on the other hand, to sacrifice oneself for the sake of one's children and the future entailed an unacceptable mutilation of the individual self. Quinones observes that the modernist rebellion against the ideology of the family was aimed primarily at the mother. He refers to Stephen Dedalus's struggle to free himself from his mother's influence in Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*, and quotes D. H. Lawrence, who in one of his essays launched the cry "À bas les mères" (Down with the mothers) (Quinones [1985], 45–55). Asturias, for his part, adopts the modernist interest in finding new ways of exploring individual psychology without, however, sharing this negative view of family ties.

*El Señor Presidente* includes a much-debated scene in which Camila, who is fifteen at this point in the novel, contemplates her reflection in the mirror and evokes with a profound sense of repugnance the suffocating closeness of her extended family. Even though one critic argues that this scene provides an important key to the interpretation of the novel (Martin [1990], 58–9), a careful consideration of this section's relationship to the rest of Asturias's text shows that the depiction of a modernist Camila wishing to fly away from the nets of her culture in fact constitutes an anomaly. In *El Señor Presidente*, the bonds of family generally carry positive rather than negative connotations. The novel is full of broken families, especially of sons who have lost their mothers and mothers who have lost their children. But the rupturing of family ties does not amount to a first step on the road to greater personal freedom and authenticity; on the contrary, it is a symptom of the social disintegration brought about by the dictator's harsh rule. It is significant that *El Señor Presidente* opens with a description of a group of beggars who make up a kind of mock family. One of the beggars, an orphaned idiot named Pelele, goes berserk every time he hears the word "mother," an intolerable reminder of the sense of refuge and consolation he has lost now that his mother is gone. It is also significant that the novel's most terrifying episode shows the dictator's henchmen torturing a young woman by forcing her to watch her infant child die. When the woman begs for her son's life, in the name of the Virgin, she is told that "no Virgin of Carmen will do you any good here" (Asturias [1963], 115).<sup>2</sup> There is no room in the dictator's dungeons for the traditional veneration for motherhood that characterizes a profoundly Catholic society. And it is precisely this utter rejection of the culture's traditional values that reveals the inhumanity of the political system created by the dictator.

Asturias's depiction of modernity helps us understand the reasons for the appeal to tradition. The dictator in *El Señor Presidente* offers an example of what can happen when European Enlightenment values are transplanted to Latin America: he presents himself as a democrat, a positivist, and a liberal, and his supporters like to tell him he should have been the President of Belgium or Switzerland. But Cara de Angel sees the element of caricature in the dictator's relationship to the ideals of European modernity: "We've got enough to live on anywhere," he says at one point to Camila, "and I mean live, really live, not just go on repeating all day long: 'I think with the President's mind therefore I exist, I think with the President's mind therefore I exist'" (Asturias [1963], 261–2).<sup>3</sup> The gap between rhetoric and reality could not be greater than in the world created by the dictator. And

where modernity is no more than a mask, it should come as no surprise that traditional social and cultural values emerge as the most plausible source of opposition to the dictator.

The counterpoint between Latin America and the metropolis, seen as the embodiment of modernity, is also a key element in the Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier's *Los pasos perdidos* (The lost steps) from 1953. The novel's anonymous protagonist and narrator is a musician who receives a commission from a museum in the large North American city (clearly based on New York) where he resides to travel to an unnamed Latin American nation to search for a set of primitive musical instruments. In the course of his journey, the narrator, born and raised in a Spanish-speaking country, rediscovers his cultural identity, falls in love with a *mestiza* woman, recovers his musical inspiration, and encounters, in the middle of the jungle, a utopian community named Santa Mónica de los Venados, where he finds, in a kind of timeless sphere, a state of perfect bliss. However, when it turns out that there is not enough paper available in the jungle for him to write down his musical compositions, he decides to leave Santa Mónica temporarily in order to obtain the supplies he needs. Back in the big city, financial difficulties and complications with his wife force him to postpone his return to the jungle. When he finally makes the return trip to the jungle, he cannot find the road back to Santa Mónica, and later learns that his lover, tired of waiting for him, has taken up with another man.

*Los pasos perdidos* appears to be organized around a straightforward contrast between the modern metropolis and the primitive community, and many critics have indeed interpreted the novel in terms of one binary opposition or another. In reality, however, Carpentier's novel is a much more complex work. To begin with, it offers an extended exploration of a third space, in between the two poles of the primitive and the modern. The first stop on the narrator's journey is the unnamed capital of a South American country, a city reminiscent of Caracas, where everything appears marked by contradiction. The city's architecture is a strange mixture of Le Corbusier and colonial-style buildings, and the country's political conflicts pit people against each other who seem to be living in different centuries. Yet it is in this very same chaotic and incongruous space that the narrator detects traces of a more integrated, more organic way of life that seems to carry him back to his own childhood. Similarly contradictory qualities underlie the narrator's accounts of the jungle community of Santa Mónica and the big North American city, neither of which is itself a one-dimensional space. Since a demystified reading of Carpentier's representation of the "primitive" has already been put forward (González Echevarría [1985a]), I will offer here some comments on his depiction of modernity, which has not yet been submitted to similar scrutiny.

On one level, *Los pasos perdidos* presents a series of commonplaces about how modern urban life is characterized by routine, anonymity, alienation, mechanization, standardization, and so on. In the big city, there are no true individuals, and there is no real community either. It is a world dominated by money, and without freedom. Everything—the time-tables, the architecture, the movements of the crowds through the streets—speaks of a soul-destroying uniformity, the loss of all genuine vitality. The protagonist's situation at the beginning of the novel captures this modern disease of inauthenticity: he works at a job in which he does not believe (making music for commercials), and he is trapped in a loveless marriage. In sketching his vision of modernity, Carpentier places special emphasis on how the new conditions of life in the large metropolises of our era create new ways of experiencing time. For the narrator of *Los pasos perdidos* time has become so thoroughly hollow and repetitive that there does not appear to be anything worth remembering about large portions of his existence.

And yet, the claim that modernity is defined by a stifling uniformity is undermined in Carpentier's own text by the presence of an alternative world in his description of the big city. The narrator speaks of a "city within a city" (Carpentier [1989], 10),<sup>4</sup> a nocturnal, underground city, where pleasure and excess rule, and where one can escape from the tyranny of clock-time. In contrast to the regimentation of what we might call bourgeois modernity, this other world, Carpentier's version of bohemia, is marked by a complete rejection of the qualities of order and discipline. True, the narrator of *Los pasos perdidos* heaps contempt on the life-style of his bohemian friends, whom he describes as no less fake than the mainstream culture they are ostensibly rebelling against. This is especially clear in his feelings for his mistress Mouche, who belongs to this bohemian world, and who deeply irritates him with her second-hand view of things. The problem with Mouche is that she has acquired all her ideas from the latest trends in European culture, and that she carries this cultural baggage with her wherever she goes. And yet it is clear at the same time that the narrator is drawn to the world Mouche inhabits (even if only for erotic reasons), and that on some level it does represent an alternative to mainstream society.

Carpentier also undermines what at first appears to be an uncompromisingly negative view of modernity through his representation of some key cultural institutions of bourgeois society. His portrait of bourgeois modernity encompasses not only the world of commerce and business, of the masses and their entertainments; it also includes some of the institutions of high culture, such as museums, universities, libraries, bookstores, and orchestras. It is precisely one of these institutions, the Museum of Organography, that dispatches the narrator on his mission to the South American jungle. What is interesting here is that there is no indication at all that the narrator ever questions the ethics of his mission. One might wonder, for example, what right the museum has to send one of its employees abroad "to secure" (Carpentier [1989], 22),<sup>5</sup> as the museum's curator euphemistically puts it, a set of musical instruments to add to its collection. But *Los pasos perdidos* does not place the spot-light on the tradition of looting that has fed the greed of the metropolitan museums. On the contrary, the narrator's attitude toward the museum for which he works is one of veneration to the end. In this way, a novel that is on one level set up as a critique of modernity, simultaneously ends up asserting the cultural preeminence of modernity.

Carpentier lived in Paris in the 1930s, and was close to the surrealists. Yet when he returned to Cuba in the early 1940s, he found a way of going one step beyond his avant-garde friends in Paris. In "De lo real maravilloso americano" (On the marvelous real in America, 1949,) he argued that there was something artificial and fabricated about the French surrealist break with conventional reality. In Latin America, he claimed, the marvelous was not an aesthetic discovery, but an integral part of lived experience. In a sense, he was saying that Latin America was an inherently modernist continent, a reservoir of subversive energy that contested European norms of order and rationality. What makes *Los pasos perdidos* such a fascinating work is that while it appears to be set up to illustrate the argument of "De lo real maravilloso americano," pitting the vitality and authenticity of Latin America against the exhaustion and routinization of Europe and the United States, in practice Carpentier undermines his own schema: in *Los pasos perdidos*, the primitive ultimately fails as an alternative, and the hero finds an ambivalent kind of home in modernity.

Although the novels I have examined by Asturias and Carpentier reflect the thorough immersion of their authors in modernist culture, the Mexican novelist and short-story writer Juan Rulfo went much further than his predecessors in a key area of the modernist enterprise: the destruction

of traditional novelistic form. In spite of the fact that he wrote only two short books, *El llano en llamas* (The burning plain, 1953), a collection of short stories, and *Pedro Páramo* (1955), a novel, Rulfo's work had an extraordinary impact in Latin America and beyond, in large part because he brilliantly demonstrated how modernist form could be used to develop a new approach to traditional Latin American subject-matter. *Pedro Páramo* is the story of a *cacique* or local strongman, his rise to power in the town of Comala, his unrequited love for a woman named Susana San Juan, and his eventual death at the hands of one of his sons. But Rulfo treats these conventional materials in a radically new fashion. His novel consists of seventy fragments arranged in a non-chronological order, many of which capture the voices of a set of characters who are literally dead. In this way, Rulfo defies traditional views concerning the logical development of a narrative, as well as conventional conceptions with regard to the organizing principles of reality. In my comments here, I will try to cast some light on Rulfo's handling of modernist literary innovations through a brief comparison between *Pedro Páramo* and Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927). I am not proposing that Woolf had a direct influence on Rulfo, only that there are both striking parallels and telling differences between the two novels.

To begin with, the two novels have similar points of departure. *To the Lighthouse* begins with a mother's promise to her son; *Pedro Páramo* with a son's promise to his mother. In Woolf, the opening scene shows Mrs. Ramsay promising her six-year-old son James that the next day he will be able to make a longed-for trip by boat to a nearby lighthouse. But Mr. Ramsay dashes his son's hopes: the weather will be bad, he predicts, and the outing will have to be canceled. Incensed by his father's insensitivity, little James briefly imagines striking his father with an axe. Rulfo's novel opens with a deathbed scene, in which a young man named Juan Preciado promises his dying mother that he will search for his father, who had long ago abandoned her, and make him pay for his treachery. It is this promise that leads Juan to the town of Comala, where he will remain transfixed by a multitude of stories about his father's many misdeeds. Both novels, therefore, begin by evoking the entanglement of desire and revenge. From their first pages, they depict Oedipal triangles, presenting sons who identify with their mothers and hate their fathers.

Woolf and Rulfo both exemplify the modernist focus on subjective experience. Woolf's attack on her realist precursors for writing only about the external trappings of life is well known, and Rulfo, too, excoriated the cumbersome and essayistic style that continued to dominate writing in Spanish when he was coming of age. Both drastically reduced the role of the narrator in their novels, and rejected traditional chronological models of story-telling. Such strategies helped them get closer to the inner lives of their characters. The modernist tendency to organize narrative according to a subjective logic is reflected in what is perhaps the most interesting formal resemblance between *Pedro Páramo* and *To the Lighthouse*: the fracture that occurs roughly in the middle of each novel. In both cases, the break is linked to the death of a key character: Mrs. Ramsay in Woolf and Juan Preciado in Rulfo. In both novels, however, the dead characters do not disappear from the novels: Juan continues to speak to us from his grave, while Mrs. Ramsay remains a vivid and forceful presence in the novel even after her death, as she is brought to life again in the minds of her surviving friends and family. Both Woolf and Rulfo use the rupture in the middle of the novel to explore new approaches to narrative perspective even as they defy conventional notions of textual unity.

Both novels describe the ghostly presence of the dead among the living as a way of exploring the themes of time and memory, death and immortality. Yet even though Woolf and Rulfo use similar

techniques to explore the same themes, they do so in order to create utterly different effects. Both *To the Lighthouse* and *Pedro Páramo* erase the boundary between life and death, but whereas Woolf's characters long for immortality, Rulfo's are condemned to it. In the first section of *To the Lighthouse*, both Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay's thoughts return again and again to the question of how they can prolong themselves in the lives of the people around them. Mr. Ramsay wants to be remembered for his work as a philosopher, while Mrs. Ramsay, the mother and matchmaker, hopes to remain woven into the lives of her friends and family through the personal influence she exercises over them. And for Mrs. Ramsay, at least, there is in Woolf's novel a persistence beyond death. Mrs. Ramsay survives in the memories of the other characters in the novel, who paradoxically grow closer to her in her absence. She survives in a painting by her friend Lily Briscoe, and in the trip her husband makes at the end of the novel to the lighthouse, a journey undertaken as a kind of homage to his wife. Woolf's novel is profoundly marked by the intellectual and spiritual crisis of the death of God, yet it is suffused with a sense, however qualified by the author's sense of irony, of the redemptive power of art and memory.

*Pedro Páramo* is also a novel about the hold that the dead have on the living, but it is a grip that does not enlarge but instead suffocates the souls of the survivors. In the opening scene, in which Juan Preciado promises his dying mother that he will find his father, he begins by squeezing his mother's hand in order to reassure her, and ends by prying his hand loose from her dead fingers. If Rulfo erases the distinction between life and death, he does so not only to show that the dead continue to haunt the living, but also that the living are often in some sense already dead. A recurring image in the novel is that of the bed that is also a coffin. Like *To the Lighthouse*, *Pedro Páramo* is a novel about grief. But Rulfo does not present mourning as a process, as does Woolf, but as an emotion that produces a kind of paralysis. Hence the many characters in Comala who cannot or do not want to move from where they are. Woolf disrupts conventional narrative in order to reveal time as flux. Paradoxically, it is precisely the fluid nature of time that allows the individual mind to create an order in reality. Rulfo breaks the sequential order of his story so as to paint a portrait of a frozen, arrested time. Whereas Woolf's characters confront a world without God, and discover in this crisis a sense of possibility as well as anguish, Rulfo's characters are immersed in a seemingly unchanging world dominated by centuries-old religious beliefs. Woolf registers the shock of modernity, but her characters remain linked to the worlds of money and power, a key fact that no doubt contributes to their sense of freedom. Rulfo, in turn, depicts a remote and impoverished rural world, still marked by the historical trauma of the Conquest of Mexico. In sum, the comparison between these two writers shows that a European modernist and a Latin American modernist can write about utterly different social and historical worlds even if they have a great deal in common at the level of literary ideas.

Rulfo's use of modernist literary form constituted a revolution in Mexican literature, but his work remained focused on traditional themes, and did not reflect the transformations taking place in an industrializing society. The task of using modernist technical innovations to depict the modernization of Mexican society was taken up by a younger Mexican novelist named Carlos Fuentes, who in 1958 published his first novel, *La región más transparente* (Where the air is clear), a big, bustling novel whose main character, in a sense, is Mexico City. In the 1940s and 1950s Mexico experienced rapid economic expansion, and the population of Mexico City increased from 1.6 million in 1940 to 3.1 million in 1950 and 5.4 million in 1960 (Mexico City, Mexico [2002]). In an exceptionally



energetic prose style, and with the help of devices of interior monologue, cross-cutting and collage that reminded many readers of Joyce and John Dos Passos, Fuentes set out to capture the explosive new urban reality that was now setting the tone for the entire country. But Fuentes did not focus exclusively on what was new in the world around him; rather, his theme was precisely the conflict between a modern, cosmopolitan Mexico and the enduring presence of an ancient Mexico with roots in the country's pre-Hispanic past. In a novel of numerous interconnected plots, there is one that stands out: the somewhat bizarre story of the efforts of an indigenous man named Ixca Cienfuegos to fend off the corruption and decadence of modernity by reinstating the ancient Aztec practice of human sacrifice.

Fuentes's interest in ancient Mexican culture linked him to the primitivism of the avant-garde movements of the inter-war years, and of modernist novelists such as D. H. Lawrence, whose *The Plumed Serpent* (1926) is an important precursor to *La región más transparente*. But whereas many European writers and artists idealized the realm of the primitive, presenting it as a nourishing and energizing alternative to the soullessness of modern society, Fuentes emphasizes the sinister side of Cienfuegos's attempt to reinstate ancient indigenous cultural practices. Fuentes's depiction of the ritualistic element subsisting in contemporary Mexican society owes much more to the negative elements in Octavio Paz's depiction of Mexican culture in *El laberinto de la soledad* (The labyrinth of solitude, 1950), than to the celebratory views of Mexico expressed by French surrealists such as André Breton and Antonin Artaud. *La región más transparente* climaxes with a series of deaths, all of which take place on 15 September, Mexico's national holiday. The coincidence recalls Paz's meditations on the Mexican *fiesta*, which he describes both as a profoundly life-enhancing and creative event and as the expression of a kind of cultural death-wish. But Fuentes's novel fails to capture any sense of cyclical renewal, except in parodic terms. It asserts the impossibility of reinstating the imagined wholeness of ancient cultural practices.

Fuentes's disenchanted view of Mexican culture also emerges from the manner in which he borrows another key motif of European modernist literature, that of the *acte gratuit*. For authors such as Valéry Larbaud, André Gide, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Albert Camus, and even André Breton, with his idea of firing a gun into a crowd as the ultimate surrealist act, the *acte gratuit* served to assert ideas about contingency and individual freedom. In *La región más transparente*, one of the novel's central characters, Manuel Zamacona, a Paz-like intellectual who likes to ruminate about the Mexican character, is killed in a random and gratuitous fashion by a complete stranger when he approaches a *cantina* somewhere in the countryside to ask for help after his car has run out of gas. Afterwards, the murderer merely comments that he had not liked the way Zamacona had looked at him (Fuentes [1971], 309). Clearly, what we have here is an *acte gratuit*, but whereas in the works of the French modernists it is always the protagonist who experiments with the boundaries of acceptable behavior, in *La región más transparente* the person at the center of the narrative becomes the victim rather than the perpetrator of a crime. As a result, the incident does not serve to demonstrate the absolute nature of individual freedom. Instead, with the focus now on the victim, it evokes ideas about the pathological nature of the Mexican character that were common among Mexican intellectuals in the first half of the twentieth century (Bartra [1987]). Fuentes benefited from a deep immersion in European modernist literature, but he used what he learned in order to express preoccupations that were typical of his Mexican intellectual milieu.

All of the novels discussed in this chapter are highly self-conscious works of art, but perhaps

none as much so as the Argentine novelist Julio Cortázar's *Rayuela* (Hopscotch, 1963). In modernist literature, the emphasis on subjectivity was reflected not only in the emergence of new strategies for portraying inner experience, but also in the increased interest in the figures of the author and the reader. Cortázar turned the idea that the reader was not simply the passive recipient of an author's message, but rather an active participant in the meaning-making enterprise, into a key structural element of his novel. *Rayuela* opens with a "Table of Instructions" informing the reader that the novel can be read in two different ways. It can be read "in a normal fashion," starting with Chapter 1 and ending with Chapter 56. This includes the first two parts of the novel, entitled "From the Other Side" and "From This Side," but leaves out the third part, described as "Expendable Chapters" and entitled "From Diverse Sides." The second option is to begin with Chapter 73 (one of the "expendable chapters") and then follow the sequence indicated at the end of each chapter until one has read the entire novel. To help the reader, the "Table of Instructions" provides a list of chapters in the order they should be read in case one chooses this option. By explicitly handing the reader the freedom to read the book in different ways, Cortázar indicates that *Rayuela* is open to many different interpretations and that the reader shares in the task of creating the text's meanings.

*Rayuela* is a self-conscious work of art not only for the novel way in which it focuses attention on a key component of any literary artifact—the role of the reader—but also because it tells a story about literature. Cortázar's novel describes the quest for meaning first in Paris ("From the Other Side") and then in Buenos Aires ("From This Side") of an Argentine intellectual named Horacio Oliveira. To a large extent, this quest involves an attempt to define his relationship to literature. Ossip Gregorovius, one of Oliveira's Parisian friends, describes him as a typical Latin American intellectual: "Very intelligent and alert, up to date on everything. Much more than us. Italian literature, for example, or English. And the whole Spanish Golden Age, and naturally French literature on the tip of your tongues" (Cortázar [1966], 133).<sup>6</sup> Indeed, Oliveira is an exceptionally cultivated individual, who sees almost everything through the prism of his reading. As he himself puts it, "[w]ith just a small effort any piece of reality could attach itself to a famous line of poetry" (Cortázar [1966], 487).<sup>7</sup> Oliveira's journey to Paris is a highly literary journey: he belongs in the Argentine tradition of cosmopolitan writers (like Cortázar himself) who travel to Europe (preferably to Paris) to better wrap themselves in the prestigious aura of European culture. But Oliveira's quest has a twist to it.

Gregorovius notes approvingly that Oliveira has been undergoing a transformation since he arrived in Paris: he is turning into a "real animal" or at least he is "trying his best" to become one. What he seems to mean by the word "animal" is a raw and uncultivated person. Gregorovius explains his friend's quest by noting that "he is looking for the black light, the key, and he's beginning to realize that you don't find those things in libraries" (Cortázar [1966], 133).<sup>8</sup> Oliveira, in other words, is making a reverse journey. Instead of traveling to Paris in order to become more cultured, he goes there to try to shed his cultural baggage. His principal helpmate in this endeavor is a single mother from Uruguay named La Maga, who seduces Oliveira because of her freedom from the literary concerns that have become such a burden to him. Near the beginning of *Rayuela* there is a revealing account of this couple's way of arranging meetings with each other: "The technique was to make a vague date in some neighborhood at a certain hour. They liked to challenge the danger of not meeting" (Cortázar [1966], 31).<sup>9</sup> The idea of courting chance and of avoiding anything that smacks of a prearranged plan takes on an additional dimension in Spanish, where the word

for “date” is “cita” which also means quotation. To escape from the confinement of a date is simultaneously to slip out from under the power of the quotation, of that which has already been said before.

Cortázar, however, shows that it is not so easy to escape from literature. Consider, for example, a curious episode that takes place after Oliveira returns to Buenos Aires. He finds himself with plenty of free time on his hands, so he devotes himself to catching up on his reading. After a while he comes to the startling conclusion that “whistling was not an important theme in literature” and “there weren’t many authors who made their characters whistle.” He also notes that “as far as Argentine literature was concerned, there was very little whistling, and it was a disgrace” (Cortázar [1966], 233).<sup>10</sup> Perhaps Oliveira’s eccentric approach to literature is an example of the type of “active” reading Cortázar advocates in his foreword to the novel. By focusing on an element that is usually not even considered worthy of being labeled a “theme,” he calls into question our conventional views of what is significant and what is not significant in a literary text. The attention to the trivial is also a way of exploding the solemnity that afflicts so much literature and literary criticism. But what is especially noteworthy is that from this moment on Oliveira regularly whistles in *Rayuela*, thus turning the novel in which he is a character into the very book he felt was so sadly missing from Argentine literature. By performing the very act that has rarely been depicted in literature, Oliveira continues his battle against clichés and inherited ideas. At the same time, however, the reader has the distinct sense that Oliveira is not whistling for the sake of whistling itself, but rather in order to introduce a change in the literary tradition. It is as if he knows that in the end he is just a character in a novel.

The literary element in the revolt against literature also emerges from one of the many linguistic games included in *Rayuela*. Oliveira has a habit of putting the letter “h” (a “wh” in the English translation) in front of certain words, as a way of expressing his feelings of distrust with regard to language. In Spanish the letter “h” at the beginning of a word is normally not pronounced, and adding it in this way creates an effect of mock pomposity. In a scene in which we see him reflecting on his relationship with La Maga, Oliveira explains how this assault on language shields him from the risks posed by language, especially language of a literary-philosophical kind:

Oliveira would grab a sheet of paper and write down the words over which he went slipping along in his ruminations. He wrote, for example: ‘The great whaffair,’ or ‘the whintersection’ [...] He used this wh the way other people used penicillin [...] ‘The whimportant thing is not to become whinflated,’ Who-liveira would say to himself. After moments like this he would feel able to think without having the words play dirty tricks on him. (Cortázar [1966], 416)<sup>11</sup>

The “dirty tricks” he refers to have to do with the fact that all language is second-hand; we cannot communicate without using words that have been used by others before us. But what to think of the fact that Oliveira’s technique for resisting the sense that all speech is a form of quotation is itself a quotation? It seems very likely that Cortázar got the idea for the game with the letter “h” from Jacques Vaché, the French dandy, soldier and proto-surrealist, who is the source for one of *Rayuela*’s epigraphs. In his letters to André Breton, Vaché, who died in 1919 at the age of twenty-four, also played games with the letter “h.” What is more, his letters establish an explicit link between these linguistic jokes and his rejection of literature (Vaché [1989]). Given this background, it becomes clear that *Rayuela*’s own battle against literature is carried out in a highly literary fashion.

The one novel of the Spanish-American *boom* that garnered even more international attention than *Rayuela* was Gabriel García Márquez's *Cien años de soledad* (One hundred years of solitude), first published in 1967. In some ways, these two novels appear to stand at opposite poles from each other. *Rayuela*'s fragmentary and self-reflexive structure contrasts vividly with *Cien años de soledad*'s focus on the telling of a gripping story, a feature of García Márquez's novel that led some to suggest that it represented a shift from modernism to postmodernism (Barth [1984], 204–5). Furthermore, Cortázar's urban, cosmopolitan sensibility seems very far removed from García Márquez's folkloric, anthropological perspective. Both authors questioned conventional definitions of reality, but whereas Cortázar did so in a skeptical, intellectualistic fashion, García Márquez sought to root his work in a natural, spontaneous sense of the marvelous he regarded as characteristic of the Latin American folk. Still, like Cortázar, García Márquez drew many literary lessons from his modernist precursors, and he openly acknowledged the impact on his work of Woolf, William Faulkner and Franz Kafka. On one level, *Cien años de soledad* may convey a sense of sublime ease and naturalness; at the same time, however, it is, like *Rayuela*, a highly complex and self-questioning work.

*Cien años de soledad* is a family saga that traces the lives of six generations of the Buendía family in the remote town of Macondo. The novel recounts the community's utopian origins, its irregular interactions with the outside world, its gradual integration into the national state, its role in the country's civil wars, the arrival of U. S. economic interests, and its gradual abandonment and decline, to name just a few episodes in this densely packed narrative. The grand sweep of the narrative, and the author's skill in recreating emblematic moments in the continent's history, leave the reader with the impression that *Cien años de soledad* is in a sense the story of all of Latin America. But García Márquez did not by any means produce a straightforward and transparent historical novel. Threading its way through *Cien años de soledad* there is a strand of critical self-reflection that links the novel to modernist aesthetics and distances it from the type of committed literature that has been so central to Latin American culture. One way to bring this out is by looking at the role of a character known as the wise Catalonian, who appears toward the end of the novel as a kind of mentor to a group of young men (including one Gabriel García) who share a passion for literature. In order to understand the precise significance of the wise Catalonian's role in the novel it is worth recalling that Latin American literature has always had a strong didactic dimension to it; in fact, some critics regard didacticism as one of the defining features of this literature (Portuondo [1955], 106). This phenomenon is related both to the felt need for an engaged type of writing in a continent facing massive social, economic, and political challenges, and to the dominant role in Latin American societies of its intellectual elites. One result is that the "the *maestro*, who is the possessor and transmitter of knowledge about culture" is one of the central mythical figures of Latin American culture (González Echevarría [1985b], 10). The significance of García Márquez's wise Catalonian is that he overturns this tradition. He runs a bookstore in Macondo that resembles "a dump for used books" where he teaches his disciples to approach their studies in a spirit of play (García Márquez [1970], 338).<sup>12</sup> He rejects the solemn aura that often surrounds the enterprise of literature, which he regards simply as "the best plaything that had ever been invented to make fun of people" (García Márquez [1970], 357).<sup>13</sup> He insists on keeping his feet firmly planted on the ground, arguing that wisdom is not worth anything if it cannot be used to invent "a new way of preparing chick peas" (García Márquez [1970], 357).<sup>14</sup> When he loses one of his precious manuscripts, he laughs it off, and states that such "was the natural destiny of literature" (García Márquez [1970], 368).<sup>15</sup> All in

all, the wise Catalanian is a highly unconventional *maestro* who expresses a typically modernist view of the provisional nature of life and literature.

The relationship of *Cien años de soledad* to modernist literature also emerges from García Márquez's adaptation of the device of the epiphany. For the modernists, the epiphany was a way of reinfusing the disenchanted modern world with a sense of the sacred. The modernist focus on the radiant instant was also part and parcel of a broad aesthetic and philosophical assault on the modern conception of progressive, linear time. García Márquez renews and transforms the tradition of the epiphany by injecting it with preoccupations drawn from his Latin American situation. We can see this at work in the famous scene that opens and closes the first chapter of *Cien años de soledad*. The moment of vision takes place when José Arcadio Buendía, the founder of Macondo, and the patriarch of the family whose story the novel narrates, takes his two sons, Aureliano and José Arcadio, to "discover ice" (García Márquez [1970], 11).<sup>16</sup> The first thing to note is that the scene has an explicitly pedagogical dimension. Furthermore, it serves to draw attention to Latin America's peripheral location within the world system, for what is an ordinary object in the advanced world (a block of ice) becomes a thing of magic in Macondo. Whereas the epiphany in the European modernist novel marks a distance with regard to a world that is perceived as overly rationalized and routinized, in García Márquez it expresses a desire to join the world of scientific and technological progress. As is the case with his European precursors, García Márquez's description of the moment of vision emphasizes the protagonist's sense of contact with the realm of the sacred. The scene also stresses the luminosity of the block of ice, as if it were reflecting back to José Arcadio his own longing for enlightenment. But the most important fact about this episode is that it ultimately constitutes a failed lesson, for José Arcadio does not understand what he is looking at, and he is unable to communicate any knowledge of the object under observation to his children. The novel opens with what is in effect a mock epiphany, in a way that sets the tone for the entire work, and shows how a modernist device can be used to cast light on Latin American historical dilemmas. The scene in which the Buendías discover ice is far less focused than the typical epiphany of the European modernist novel on the experience of the singular individual. It has broad cultural implications, as it recalls the utopian strain in Latin American history and at the same time illuminates the continent's relationship of dependency with regard to the modern world.

Argentine novelist Ricardo Piglia's *Respiración artificial* (Artificial respiration, 1980), offers one of the most remarkable examples in recent Spanish-American fiction of how a high level of literary self-consciousness need not prevent a writer from getting in the way of communicating a powerful political message. Set during the period of the military dictatorship that ruled Argentina from 1976 to 1983, the novel tells the story of the search of a young novelist named Emilio Renzi for an uncle, Marcelo Maggi, who many years earlier had disappeared under mysterious circumstances, only six months after marrying a very rich woman. In 1976, shortly after Renzi publishes his first novel, a Faulknerian rendering of the story of his uncle, he receives a letter from Maggi, who it turns out has settled down as a high school history teacher in the provincial Argentine town of Concordia. The first part of the novel consists of an exchange of letters between Renzi and Maggi, as well as various other texts and documents. In the novel's second part, Renzi travels to Concordia to see his uncle, only to find that he has once again disappeared. Hoping that Maggi might suddenly turn up after all, Renzi spends an evening and a night in conversation with one of his uncle's friends, an exiled Polish intellectual by the name of Tardewski, as well as several other local characters. The conversation

revolves mostly around literary matters, but if we recall that Piglia wrote and published his novel at a time when thousands of Argentine citizens were made to “disappear” by the country’s military rulers, it becomes clear that this novel, with its missing protagonist, is profoundly linked to its historical moment. Interestingly enough, one of the key ways in which Piglia organizes his views on the relationship between literature and history is through a reading of European modernism.

On the one hand, we have Renzi, an explicitly Joycean writer. When his uncle distances himself from Joyce in one of his letters, writing that “history is the only refuge I can find from a nightmare from which I would like to wake up,” Renzi appears to side with the author of *Ulysses*, stating frankly that he has “no interest in politics” and that he does not share his uncle’s “passion for history” (Piglia [1994], 17).<sup>17</sup> He likes to pepper his conversation with references to Joyce, and when he learns that Tardewski had actually made the great Irish novelist’s acquaintance many years before in Zurich, he is amazed and excited. In response to a slightly absurd story Tardewski relates about Joyce’s uncommunicativeness, Renzi triumphantly proclaims that Joyce “didn’t care at all about the world or his surroundings” (Piglia [1994], 146),<sup>18</sup> and insists that he was right to be so indifferent. At the same time, Renzi is also a writer profoundly shaped by the example of Jorge Luis Borges. He himself explains that his Faulknerian account of the story of his uncle actually sounds like Borges’s translation of *The Wild Palms*. One might also compare Renzi’s insistence that “parody has completely replaced history” (Piglia [1994], 110)<sup>19</sup> with his description of Borges’s fiction: “texts that are chains of forged, apocryphal, false, distorted quotations; an exasperating and parodic display of secondhand culture” (Piglia [1994], 129).<sup>20</sup> In sum, Renzi’s poetics are a combination of Joycean play and Borgesian artifice.

Opposite Renzi stands Tardewski, the man who had actually met Joyce, but who rejects Joyce’s aesthetics, and opts instead for Kafka. Tardewski is something of a failed intellectual. After having studied with Wittgenstein at Cambridge, he is forced into exile by the outbreak of World War II, and ends up publishing his sole contribution to academic knowledge, a meditation on the relationship between Kafka and Adolf Hitler, in the cultural section of the Buenos Aires newspaper *La Prensa*, where it goes entirely unnoticed. On the night he spends with Renzi, more than a quarter of a century after the publication of his article, he describes how in 1938 while working in the British Library he had discovered purely by chance that for a period of several months in late 1909 and early 1910 Kafka and Hitler had been part of the same circle of German-speaking writers, artists and bohemians who used to gather at a certain café in Prague. Not only that: Tardewski has proof that the two men had regular conversations with each other. From this apparent historical curiosity, Tardewski draws some powerful conclusions concerning the relationship between literature and history in Kafka’s fiction. During this obscure period of his life, Hitler had already started to sketch his “atrocious utopia of a world converted into an immense penal colony” (Piglia [1994], 206),<sup>21</sup> and Kafka’s genius was his ability to listen to the “sickly murmurs of history” (Piglia [1994], 208)<sup>22</sup> he heard in Hitler’s ravings, and to prophesize in his own books what was to come, “a future of symmetrical evil” (Piglia [1994], 208).<sup>23</sup> This is why Tardewski prefers Kafka to Joyce. Joyce, he says, was “too much of a toilsome virtuoso” whereas Kafka, he believes, was a “tightrope walker” (Piglia [1994], 212),<sup>24</sup> who confronted the greatest challenge for a writer of the twentieth century: “How to speak of the unspeakable?” (Piglia [1994], 212).<sup>25</sup> In sum, Joyce “tried to wake up from the nightmare of history so as to perform a pretty juggling act with words” whereas Kafka “woke up every day to enter that nightmare and tried to write about it” (Piglia [1994], 213).<sup>26</sup>

Tardewski makes a powerful plea for a literature that does not sidestep the horrors of history. It is a plea that clearly alludes to Piglia's own literary confrontation in *Respiración artificial* with the Argentine nightmare of the late 1970s. But Tardewski's eloquence should not be allowed to hide the fact that the rather tidy contrast between Joyce and Kafka with which he concludes his narrative makes things seem a lot simpler than they are. We should not forget that Tardewski is only a character in Piglia's novel, and we should not make the mistake of regarding him as the author's mouth-piece. In fact, *Respiración artificial* is a highly dialogical novel, deliberately constructed so as to deny any character or voice a monopoly on the truth. This is reflected in Piglia's use of the epistolary mode in the first part of the novel, and in the curious manner in which the novel's second part is in turn divided into two symmetrical and opposed sections, with Tardewski as narrator of the first section, and Renzi doing most of the talking, and Renzi as narrator of the second part, with Tardewski doing most of the talking. The effect of this is to highlight the degree to which almost everything in the novel is in the form of a quotation. And the notion of literature as quotation takes us back, of course, to Borges. It may be noted, furthermore, that while Tardewski expresses a passion for history, the narrative about Hitler and Kafka, which Piglia invents for him, has to be situated by us, the readers of the novel in which he is a character, in the Borgesian tradition of "texts that are chains of forged, apocryphal, false, distorted quotations" to which Renzi alludes. Piglia, in other words, balances between two opposite perspectives—the historical and the self-referential—in a way that turns him into the very "tightrope walker" Kafka is for Tardewski.

Kafka is also a key point of reference in Peruvian novelist Mario Vargas Llosa's *El hablador* (The storyteller, 1987), in which an anonymous narrator, who bears a striking resemblance to the author himself, attempts to reconstruct the story of Saúl Zuratas, also known as Mascarita, in honor of the huge mole covering the entire right side of his face. The narrator befriends Mascarita, a member of Peru's very small Jewish community, at the University of San Marcos in Lima during the 1950s. While the narrator studies literature and history, his friend takes up ethnology, becoming increasingly preoccupied with the fate of the indigenous tribes of Peru's Amazonian regions. After the two young men graduate, their paths diverge: the narrator receives a fellowship to study in France, while Mascarita turns down the opportunity to do the same, and apparently joins his father in moving to Israel. The narrator, too, develops an interest in Peru's Indians, and makes a couple of trips to the Amazon rain-forest. In the course of these trips, he makes an astonishing discovery: the story about Mascarita's move to Israel turns out to have been a ruse designed to cover up the fact that he had gone to live with one of the remotest and most archaic of all of Peru's Indian tribes, the Machiguengas. What is more, Mascarita has managed to integrate so well with his new community that he has ended up taking on the all-important and near-sacred role of storyteller to the Machiguenga people. Accompanying Mascarita wherever he goes is his parrot, named Gregor Samsa.

What connects Vargas Llosa to Kafka is an interest in the aesthetics of estrangement. The chapters of *El hablador* alternate between two different narratives: the fairly straightforward story of the narrator's fascination with Mascarita, on the one hand, and a series of magical-religious stories spoken by a Machiguenga storyteller (who turns out to be Mascarita), on the other. The storyteller's dreamlike narratives recall the modernist tradition of turning to primitive cultures in the search for innovative aesthetic effects. At the same time, the marked contrast between the two narratives serves to draw attention to the notion of style itself, and the way in which any style is keyed to a convention-bound conception of the world. For Vargas Llosa, however, the technique of estrangement

does not serve only to help us get a fresh view of the world, and to question the norms of bourgeois rationality. In *El hablador* he uses modernist literary strategies so as to explore two compelling historical problems: the question of building a Peruvian nation out of a heterogeneous racial and ethnic mix, in the first place, and the place of literature in a mass, consumer society, in the second.

As students, the narrator and Mascarita argue ferociously about the fate of Peru's Indians. The narrator believes that since modernization is inevitable the indigenous tribes of the Amazon region will have to change their way of life. He argues that Peru must industrialize and exploit its natural resources, and that it cannot leave the Amazon untouched simply for the sake of some sixty or eighty thousand Indians. What was Mascarita proposing, he wonders: "That, in order not to change the way of life and beliefs of a handful of tribes still living, many of them, in the Stone Age, the rest of Peru abstain from developing the Amazon region?" (Vargas Llosa [1989], 21).<sup>27</sup> He quotes Marx to the effect that progress always comes soaked in blood. Mascarita argues that Peru's Westernized majority has an obligation to respect the otherness of the Amazon tribes. He refuses to idealize the Indians, and acknowledges that there are many aspects of their culture which he repudiates. He mentions, for example, the custom of the tribes of the Arawak family of killing all infants born with a physical defect. But, he says, "that's the way they are and we should respect them. Being that way has helped them to live in harmony with their forests for hundreds of years. Though we don't understand their beliefs and some of their customs offend us, we have no right to kill them off" (Vargas Llosa [1989], 26).<sup>28</sup> Mascarita resists the idea that assimilation is the inevitable fate of the Indians of Peru's Amazon region.

In spite of the narrator's disagreement with Mascarita, and even his occasional boredom with what he regards as his friend's monomania, there is one aspect of Machiguenga culture he finds profoundly seductive. On his first trip to the rain-forest in 1958, he learns about the role of the storyteller in Machiguenga society, how he circulates among the different groups of Machiguengas scattered about the forest, bearing the myths, legends and stories of the community. It is the centrality of the storyteller among the Indians which makes such an impression on the narrator:

the fleeting, perhaps legendary figures of those habladores who — by occupation, out of necessity, to satisfy a human whim — using the simplest, most time-hallowed of expedients, the telling of stories, were the living sap that circulated and made the Machiguengas into a society, a people of interconnected and interdependent human beings. It still moves me to think of them. (Vargas Llosa [1989], 93)<sup>29</sup>

Note that it is precisely this power to create a community that has been taken away from the writer in the contemporary world. The narrator, significantly enough, writes his novel about Mascarita in Florence, an exile from his native land. Moreover, it is summer, so that the city has been invaded by tourists, representatives of the frivolous, superficial, and inattentive way of life characteristic of the modern era. It is worth recalling that European modernist literature often presented itself as the spiritual antidote to modernity. It is to this same exalted view of art that Vargas Llosa pays homage, while lamenting its passing.

Paralleling the rise in Spanish America of a mode of writing shaped by the example of European modernism, there emerged a strain of critical thought that maintained that Spanish-American literature is characterized by its fundamentally subversive stance in relation to the European canon. One of the earliest and best-known Spanish-American formulations of this idea came from Borges, who in his 1957 essay "El escritor argentino y la tradición" (The Argentine writer and tradition), argued



that the Argentine writer is part of the Western tradition, but that his peripheral location within this tradition has gifted him with a talent for innovation. The Argentine writer does not feel “a special devotion” to the Western tradition, and the distance he keeps with regard to this heritage gives him a unique creative freedom: “we can handle all European themes, handle them without superstition, with an irreverence which can have, and already does have, fortunate consequences” (Borges [1964], 184).<sup>30</sup> The Uruguayan critic Emir Rodríguez Monegal, who played an important role in the promotion of Latin American literature abroad, especially in the United States, in the 1960s and 70s, argued in a series of essays that one of the key features of Latin American culture is its constant overturning of European cultural models. In his view, the best Latin American writers responded to their sense of being located on the fringes of Western civilization by developing a comic, iconoclastic, and carnivalesque spirit (Rodríguez Monegal [1977, 1979, 1985]). A more explicitly political version of this theory was put forward by the Cuban critic Roberto Fernández Retamar in his influential essay *Caliban* (1971), in which he argued that Latin American writers most resembled the character Caliban from Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*: they too used the language that had been imposed upon them by their masters (the European colonizers) in order to curse those masters and free themselves from their rule.

Insofar as the modernist aesthetic places a high value on the notions of rupture and innovation, it might be argued that the notion that Latin American culture is characterized by the fundamentally polemical stance it adopts with regard to the European tradition implies a view of Latin America as, in a sense, a modernist continent. But does my reading of eight Spanish-American “modernist” novels lend support to this particular conception of the literary culture to which they belong? To begin with, it is clear that these novels demonstrate that the old Latin American fear that the continent’s culture is a mere copy of Europe has been completely dispelled. All of the works discussed are profoundly original novels that substantially transform the literary tradition to which they belong. But the fact that the novelists studied here go well beyond the simple imitation of European modernist literature does not necessarily mean they are subverting this literature. My discussion of the appropriation by Spanish-American authors of certain European modernist themes and devices shows that these authors consistently give a new turn to the models they inherited. Often this means infusing these models with a Latin American social and political content. But it is surely significant that the one novelist who conducts an overt polemic with a European modernist—Ricardo Piglia in *Respiración artificial*—recurs to another European modernist in order to stake out his own position on the relationship between literature and history. The present account of the Spanish-American novel’s relationship to European modernism demonstrates that at the level of elite literary culture Spanish America remains deeply connected to Europe.

## Notes

1. “llamar *modernism* a un movimiento de lengua inglesa posterior en treinta años al nuestro, revela arrogancia cultural, etnocentrismo e insensibilidad histórica” / “Lo más triste—lo más cómico—es que estos términos, con la significación particular que les dan los angloamericanos, no sólo comienzan a ser usados en varios países europeos sino también en Hispanoamérica y en España” (Paz [1990], 52).
2. “¡Aquí no hay Vírgenes del Carmen que valgan!” (Asturias [2000], 138).

3. "Y con lo que tenemos podemos vivir en cualquier parte; y vivir, lo que se llama vivir, que no es estarse repitiendo a toda hora: 'pienso con la cabeza del Señor Presidente, luego existo, pienso con la cabeza del Señor Presidente, luego existo'" (Asturias [2000], 311).
4. "ciudad dentro de la ciudad" (Carpentier [1985], 73).
5. "para conseguir" (Carpentier [1985], 88).
6. "Muy inteligentes y despiertos, informadísimos de todo. Mucho más que nosotros. Literatura italiana, por ejemplo, o inglesa. Y todo el siglo de oro español, y naturalmente las letras francesas en la punta de la lengua" (Cortázar [1991], 117).
7. "Con un mínimo de trabajo, cualquier pedazo de realidad podía plegarse a un verso ilustre" (Cortázar [1991], 403).
8. "verdadero bruto" / "hace lo que puede" / "busca la luz negra, la llave, y empieza a darse cuenta de que cosas así no están en la biblioteca" (Cortázar [1991], 117).
9. "La técnica consistía en citarse vagamente en un barrio a cierta hora" (Cortázar [1991], 34).
10. "el silbido no era un tema sobresaliente en la literatura" / "Pocos autores hacían silbar a sus personajes" / "En cuanto a la literatura argentina silbaba poco, lo que era una vergüenza" (Cortázar [1991], 194).
11. "Oliveira agarraba una hoja de papel y escribía las grandes palabras por las que iba resbalando su rumia. Escribía, por ejemplo: 'El gran hasunto', o 'la hencrucijada' [...] Usaba las haches como otros la penicilina [...] 'Lo himportante es no hinflarse', se decía Holiveira. A partir de esos momentos se sentía capaz de pensar sin que las palabras le jugaran sucio" (Cortázar [1991], 343).
12. "un basurero de libros usados" (García Márquez [1991], 500).
13. "el mejor juguete que se había inventado para burlarse de la gente" (García Márquez [1991], 524).
14. "una manera nueva de preparar los garbanzos" (García Márquez [1991], 525).
15. "era el destino natural de la literatura" (García Márquez [1991], 539).
16. "conocer el hielo" (García Márquez [1991], 79).
17. "La historia es el único lugar donde consigo aliviarme de esta pesadilla de la que trato de despertar" / "ningún interés en la política" / "pasión histórica" (Piglia [1988], 21).
18. "Le importaba un carajo del mundo y sus alrededores" (Piglia [1988], 184).
19. "la parodia ha sustituido por completo a la historia" (Piglia [1988], 137).
20. "textos que son cadenas de citas fraguadas, apócrifas, falsas, desviadas; exhibición exasperada y paródica de una cultura de segunda mano" (Piglia [1988], 162).
21. "utopía atroz de un mundo convertido en una inmensa colonia penitenciaria" (Piglia [1988], 264).
22. "murmullo enfermizo de la historia" (Piglia [1988], 266).
23. "un futuro de una maldad geométrica" (Piglia [1988], 265).
24. "demasiado trabajosamente virtuoso" / "el equilibrista" (Piglia [1988], 270).
25. "¿Cómo hablar de lo indecible?" (Piglia [1988], 271).
26. "Trataba de despertarse de la pesadilla de la historia para poder hacer bellos juegos malabares con las palabras" / "se despertaba, todos los días, para *entrar* en esa pesadilla y trataba de escribir sobre ella" (Piglia [1988], 272).
27. "¿Que, para no alterar los modos de vida y las creencias de unas tribus que vivían, muchas de ellas, en la Edad de Piedra, se abstuviera el resto del Perú de explotar la Amazonía?" (Vargas Llosa [1987], 23).
28. "eso es lo que son y debemos respetarlos. Ser así los ha ayudado a vivir cientos de años, en armonía con sus bosques. Aunque no entendamos sus creencias y algunas de sus costumbres nos duelan, no tenemos derecho a acabar con ellos" (Vargas Llosa [1987], 28).
29. "la silueta furtiva, tal vez legendaria, de esos habladores que con el simple y antiquísimo expediente —que-hacer, necesidad, manía humana— de contar historias, eran la savia circulante que hacía de los machiguengas una sociedad, un pueblo de seres solidarios y comunicados, me conmovió extraordinariamente" (Vargas Llosa [1987], 91–2).

30. "una devoción especial" / "podemos manejar todos los temas europeos, manejarlos sin supersticiones, con una irreverencia que puede tener, y ya tiene, consecuencias afortunadas" (Borges [1957], 160–1).

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## Modernism(s) in Dutch Literature

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### A Plethora of Modernisms

“Modernism” is a recurring feature in Dutch literary history. Nowadays, most historical surveys distinguish a “modernism” in the Dutch literature of the past century-and-a-half, either as a school, movement or period. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the distinction of a “modernism” as a more or less neutral descriptive classification is, in fact, a quite recently established practice in the historiography of Dutch literature. Although the term “modernism,” Dutch: *modernisme*, can be found in discussions of Dutch literature (and art) since the early twentieth century, the notion of “modernism” was generally used, however, *not* as a descriptive, historiographical category, but rather as a pejorative label in the context of critical-polemical assessments. Only in the last decades has “modernism” gradually turned into a by-and-large neutral term in Dutch literary history, mainly as a consequence of two recent developments in the Dutch literary field and, in particular, in Dutch literary studies. The first was the growing internationalisation of Dutch literary studies, which implied a considerable impact of English and American literary historiographical practices on the (local) study of Dutch literature; the second was the emergence of the category “postmodernism” as a popular label in Dutch literary studies and criticism in the 1980s that necessitated the introduction of an—until then virtually absent—“modernism” as movement or period preceding the postmodern present.

As a result, a broad consensus exists nowadays regarding the need to delineate a period called modernism. This agreement seems to vanish, however, when questions have to be answered as to what modernism exactly encompasses, how modernism should be understood, and when and where modernism manifested itself in Dutch literature. A more precise review of the historiography of Dutch literature shows, in fact, a wide variety of “modernisms” which partly overlap and intermingle, yet partly exclude each other as well. To name some: a “classical modernism,” “ultra-modernism” and “metamodernism” (Vuyk [1999], 78–81) next to a “non-spectacular modernism” (Sötemann [1976]), a left-wing and a right-wing modernism (Vaessens [1998]), a moderate and a radical modernism (Fontijn and Polak [1986]), “aristomodernism” and “vulgomodernism” (Ruiter and Smulders [1996]) next to “postmodern modernists and modernist postmodernists” (Jaap Goegebuure [2001]), each with a scope of its own.

Opinions not only differ concerning the content of the concept of modernism, but also in regard to the period in which modernism manifested itself in Dutch literature. Some trace the beginnings of modernism in Dutch literature back to the late nineteenth century (circa 1880 or a decade later,

cf. Gobbers [1997], Sötemann [1978], Bulhof [1995]). Others situate the first manifestations of modernism somewhere at the start of the twentieth century—in 1909, more or less simultaneous with the publication of the first Futurist manifesto, or rather in 1916, a year considered by many as a fault line in Dutch literature in the Netherlands (see Brandt Corstius [1976], Anbeek [1987]). That year was significant not only because Martinus Nijhoff, a poet and critic who dominated Dutch literature in the twenties and thirties, published his first volume of poetry, *De Wandelaar* (The Hiker), but also because Theo van Doesburg, editor-to-be of the internationally influential magazine *De Stijl* (The Style), founded in 1917, wrote a series of essays on the foundations of constructivist art, “De Nieuwe Beelding in de Schilderkunst” (New Figures in the Art of Painting). Furthermore, a new periodical, *Het Getij* (The Tide), was launched, offering an important forum for new developments in literature nowadays termed as modernist and avant-garde. Finally, in the same year in Flanders, Paul van Ostaïen published his first collection of poems, *Music-Hall*.

In other histories, modernism emerges only after World War I as a parallel development next to or as part of the historical avant-garde, sometimes only after the breakdown of the European avant-garde in the late twenties (see Fontijn and Polak [1986], van den Akker [1994]). And, whereas in the historiography of Dutch literature modernism is regarded mostly as a phenomenon of the first half of the twentieth century, one may also find modernism invoked in discussions of developments after World War II. For example, Paul Hadermann describes experimental literature since 1945 as a “second wave” of modernism in Dutch literature, which, in fact, led to the actual breakthrough of modernism in Dutch literature in the 1950s (Hadermann [1988], 273). This experimental literature, involving the work of among others Remco Campert, Gerrit Kouwenaar, Hugo Claus, Sybren Polet and Lucebert, partly in close relation to the Cobra movement and other neo-avant-garde artistic developments, is often described as modernist, in particular in essayistic literary criticism (see Gobbers [1997], 61, and for example Buckinx [1953], *Verslag* [1963], 2255, Weisgerber [1970], Denoo [1978], Mandelinck [1991], van Montelbaan [1996], Thomas [1961], de Waard [1999]). Even today, this post-1945 modernism is sometimes regarded as the “dominant discourse” in Dutch letters, for instance by the poet Elly de Waard in a recent issue of the literary review *De Revisor* (De Waard [1999], 4), in which another critic distinguished no less than “four forms of modernism” in the novel *Liefdesdood* (Death of Love) by Oscar van den Boogaard, which was published the same year (see Vuyk [1999]). A decade earlier, J. A. Dautzenberg drew an even longer line in *Nederlandse literatuur—Geschiedenis, bloemlezing en theorie* (Dutch Literature –History, Anthology and Theory), in accordance with De Waard’s assumption:

Around World War I, a new major period began in cultural history, which we call *modernism*, and in which we still live. All we nowadays call “modern art” emerged in the first quarter of the 20th century. Contemporary artists still work by the same principles as those around 1915 [...]. (Dautzenberg [1989], 267–8).<sup>1</sup>

These differences in the way modernism is situated chronologically coincide self-evidently with differences in the characterization of subsequent modernisms. Some relate their concept of modernism to the extent that writers, groups, movements or schools took notice of “modern” society and reflected on modernity in all (or some of) its aspects. Factors like industrialisation, rationalization, secularization, and the social and political emancipation of the masses—in short, elements of Max Weber’s *Entzauberung der Welt* (Disenchantment of the World)—are, then, major constitu-

ents of the context of a modernism situated temporally in the last decades of the nineteenth century. A second conglomerate of concepts understands modernism more or less as an umbrella term for the many isms of the so-called historical avant-garde (in the Netherlands by and large: during and after the Great War), including all forms of expressionism. Whereas the first modernism comprises a variety of cultural developments in the *fin de siècle*, this second modernism was, actually, directed *against* the culture of the *fin de siècle*. And, finally, a third concept can be made out in which modernism, in turn, opposed the historical avant-garde. This modernism manifested itself more or less in the same period as the avant-garde, yet flourished in particular (“high modernism”) in the late 1920s and 1930s, after the gradual dissolution of the historical avant-garde movements.

Besides, considerable differences can be made out in the way these three modernisms are distinguished and characterized. Some focus on the historical context and regard the literature of modernism as a reaction to the “modern” world, in which the changing role of literature as well as changes in the production and consumption of literature are of relevance. Another perspective focuses rather on conceptions of literature by respective authors: the question whether a literary text, a writer, group, or school should be labeled modernist, is primarily related to the opinions of authors and critics presented in essays, manifestos, critiques or other writings. Yet another approach focuses mainly on the literary products as texts, in which “modernist” traits can be discerned, both in content and in form.

Apart from all the differences there are, however, also some remarkable correspondences in the way certain parameters are used to distinguish different modernisms. Be it the literary reflection on modern life or modernity, be it the intention, embedded in specific conceptions of literature, to create an autonomous work of art, or be it epistemological doubt and linguistic skepsis as a constitutive factor for the presence of modernism: all these criteria can and are used not only for the distinction of modernism in a broad sense, but also for the distinction of the other, more restrictive, rivaling notions of modernism. Obviously, these three approaches have a tendency to intermingle and overlap (as for example in Fontijn and Polak [1986] and Vaessens [1998], see also Beekman [1985] and Grüttemeier [1995]).

### Three Modernisms in Current Dutch Literary Historiography

#### *Modernism as literature of modernity*

The three umbrella concepts of modernism circulating in Dutch literary historiography comprise two rather narrow and one broad notion of modernism. In the last case, modernism points—as Walter Gobbiers argues ([1997], 54)—at the whole complex of radically innovative movements in the art and literature of the second half of the nineteenth and the first quarter of the twentieth century in the context of (and reacting to) modern, capitalist industrialized society and culture (in short: modernity), which lead to a fundamental and definitive abandonment of hitherto dominant classicist artistic codes. This modernism encompassed a wide variety of writers, schools, and movements. As a result, this modernism in a broad sense is both diachronically and synchronically a quite heterogeneous, sometimes in itself contradictory phenomenon, including not only naturalism, symbolism, decadent literature, impressionism, and Art Nouveau, but also the historical avant-garde movements in all their multiformity (Gobbiers [1997], 54–5).



This broad notion of modernism, obviously kindred to the concept of modernism at the base of *Modernism* by Bradbury and McFarlane (1976) as well as *Modernisms* by Peter Nicholls (1995), implies for the historiography of Dutch literature of the past two centuries that a wide variety of divergent literary developments can be described as different forms of one single modernism. Starting with the so-called Movement of Eighty in the 1880s in the Netherlands and with the review *Van Nu en Straks* (Of Now and Later) in the 1890s in Flanders (both with an international focus on French naturalism, English aestheticism and, in the Flemish case, on the Arts and Crafts movement as well as on *Jugendstil*, and Art Nouveau), they include the later literary experiments in the literary and artistic circles around Paul van Ostaïjen in Flanders and Theo van Doesburg and *De Stijl* in the Netherlands as well, and have the poetry of the Dutch author Hendrik Marsman at their tail end.

At a symposium in Oldenburg in 1995, Francis Bulhof ([1995], 238) justly pointed out that “Anyone only slightly informed about Dutch literature will be amazed about its absence in Bradbury [and McFarlane].”<sup>2</sup> Bulhof, however, is not completely right when he continues: “*Van Nu en Straks*, the review that represented the feeling of modern life in Belgium, isn’t even mentioned,” since of all manifestations of Dutch literary modernism, Bradbury and McFarlane ([1991], 203) do in fact mention only *Van Nu en Straks*. Bradbury and McFarlane ignore, however, the Dutch Movement of Eighty and the review *De nieuwe gids* (The New Guide), in which—in the Netherlands—naturalism found a certain response and a new expressive notion of literature was developed against a traditional rhetorical poetics dominated by church(es) and state. In this movement, Herman Gorter, Lodewijk van Deyssel and J. H. Leopold were engaged in literary experiments, on the one hand embracing the special attention for the subtleties of emotions and expressive possibilities that can be found in the *fin de siècle* and in symbolism, on the other hand anticipating the explorations of the margins of language in the following historical avant-garde. Yet, these are not the only major developments around the previous turn of the century that are ignored in the volume edited by Bradbury and McFarlane. Their *Modernism* also leaves unmentioned literary contributions to the so-called “historical avant-garde” in the Netherlands and Flanders in the late 1910s and early 1920s. *Modernism* ignores not only Dutch poets influenced by expressionism like Herman van den Bergh, Hendrik Marsman and Hendrik de Vries, but also the substantial contributions to expressionist and constructivist experimental poetry by Paul van Ostaïjen and Theo van Doesburg (I. K. Bonset). Van Ostaïjen and Van Doesburg were not only pivotal figures in the Flemish and Dutch literary avant-garde; in particular Van Doesburg (Bonset) also played a profound role in the European avant-garde on an international level in the context of dada and constructivism.

Since most, if not all Dutch literature between the late nineteenth century and the mid-1920s can be summarized as modernism using the wide definition by Gobbers or Bradbury and McFarlane, the differentiating capacity of the term is, as a consequence rather small, not least due to the heterogeneous character attributed to modernism. There may be some Dutch authors, in particular in the orthodox Calvinist and Catholic strata of the literary field, who cannot be qualified as “modernists,” due to their overt traditionalism. Most of those involved in literary activities and in some way “up to date,” however, could be described as “modernists.” As a critical term, modernism may, therefore, not possess the capacity to differentiate within Dutch literature; however, it does facilitate the description of continuities, in particular since the wide scope of the term leaves room for contradictions and controversies as well as for “internal” modernist innovation. Though a claim to radic-

al unprecedented innovation can be found especially in the historical avant-garde—a claim often repeated in the historiography of this avant-garde—a more precise examination of avant-garde conceptions and poetics, for example by Van Doesburg or Van Ostaïjen, shows an apparent historical continuity as well as lines of tradition, which often led to the modernisation of Dutch literature in the late nineteenth century, despite the quite fierce polemics by the Dutch avant-garde against their *fin de siècle* forerunners (see van den Berg and Dorleijn [2002]). In the Netherlands, for example, the Movement of Eighty had broken radically with the rhetorical Calvinist clergyman's culture and a moralist literary practice that dominated Dutch literature in the nineteenth century and had proclaimed the opening of Dutch literature towards a new, modern poetics with much enthusiasm. This movement had such an impact on literary life in the Netherlands that it could occupy the niche of the modern for a long time. All writers until World War II recognized that Eighty meant the start of modern Dutch literature, even if they criticized the movement for one reason or another (cf. van den Akker and Dorleijn [2000]).

The main relevance of the wider notion of modernism, which can be found in particular—and certainly not accidentally—on those occasions when Dutch literature is presented in a wider, international setting, seems to accord with the possibility of placing Dutch literature in an international framework of modernism and to present the Dutch contribution(s) to this international modernism, to paraphrase the subtitle of several English publications on Dutch modernism. This effort, however, has met with very limited success. In 1995, in his Oldenburg paper on the debate on modernism in Dutch literary studies, Bulhof complained, as mentioned, about the absence of the Movement of Eighty and *Van Nu en Straks* in *Modernism* by Bradbury and McFarlane. Bulhof concluded that Dutch modernism remained still by and large unnoticed outside the Low Countries:

This most radical modernist revolution in the European literature of the *fin de siècle* isn't mentioned at all by Bradbury [and McFarlane]. Once more, the chance to integrate Dutch literature in the wider European context has not been utilised. This first modernist wave was followed around World War I by a second, in which avant-garde movements like imagism, futurism, expressionism, dadaism, and surrealism dominated. But here too, the Dutch input in the international debate in literary studies is minimal, although Dutch and Belgian contributions can be found in abundance. (Bulhof [1995], 239)<sup>4</sup>

An indication for the unsuccessful integration of these Dutch modernist revolutions—to use Bulhof's qualification—in the historiography of European modernism in a broad sense, despite a considerable number of studies on Dutch literary modernism in English since the first publication of Bradbury and McFarlane's book now twenty-five years ago, could be the fact that even the one and only reference to Dutch literary modernism in their *Modernism* was eliminated in 1995 by Peter Nicholls in his *Modernisms*.

#### *Modernism, or (traces of) the historical avant-garde*

Whereas the previously discussed notion of modernism functions as an umbrella term for a larger period in which modern literature manifests itself in all its variety of divergent authors, schools, and movements, competing with, opposing, complementing, substituting, or superseding each other, the term “modernism” is used by others in a more restricted way (a practice criticised by proponents of the wider understanding of modernism, like Gobbers [1997], 60–1). In the historiography of Dutch literature, notably two other more narrow conceptions of modernism can be found.

In Dutch literary as well as art history, “modernism” serves frequently as an (alternative) denomination for the multiform, yet still far more homogeneous conglomerate of isms also subsumed under the label “historical avant-garde”. In line with the classification introduced by Peter Bürger (1974) and nowadays common in German historiography, several literary historians refer to this conglomerate of radically innovative movements in the arts in the first decades of the twentieth century—including notably futurism, cubism, and to some extent expressionism in the years before World War I, dada during the war, and surrealism and constructivism in the following years—as “historical avant-garde”, also in the context of Dutch and Belgian literary history (see Drijkonin-gen [1982], Weisgerber [1984] and [1991]). Others, though, tend to refer to the same developments in the context of Dutch and Belgian art and literature as “modernism” (cf. Bulhof [1976], Fontijn and Polak [1986], Hadermann [1988], Chamuleau and Dautzenberg [1991], Dautzenberg [1989] as well as: Blotkamp [1989], Bruinsma [1998], Buelens [1996], [1997] and [2000], de Jong [1979], [1982a] and [1982b], Musschoot [1979], van der Ploeg [2000], de Vree [1977] and Fokkema and Ibsch [1984], 23).

When “modernism” serves as a synonym for “historical avant-garde,” some minor differences in their application can still be observed. “Historical avant-garde” is used in particular as a denomination for the movements and groups involved (thereby pointing at the social dimension of the avant-garde). “Modernism,” on the other hand, serves not only as a common denominator for the aesthetic expressions of these movements and groups, but also for kindred, yet frequently less radical innovative art and literature by other artists and authors who themselves were not or only marginally involved in the avant-garde as a social network. The term “historical avant-garde” in this understanding of “modernism” often refers to the hard core of “modernism” in the 1910s and 1920s or—as Jan Fontijn and Inge Polak (1986, 182) put it: modernism may have been innovative and experimental, but never broke fully with literary traditions, unlike the avant-garde. In line with this difference, Fontijn and Polak ([1986], 183) distinguish two versions of modernism, a radical version (the historical avant-garde), including futurism, dadaism, constructivism, and surrealism on the one hand, and a moderate modernism, including expressionism and the *Nieuwe Zakelijkheid* (New Objectivity) on the other.

In this way, “modernism” offers a solution for a double historiographical problem. Firstly, several Dutch authors may have sympathized with foreign avant-garde developments and even experimented in an avant-garde way themselves. It is noteworthy, however, that even those practitioners in the Dutch literary field who had obvious avant-garde sympathies on an aesthetic or poetical level, never showed the ambition to present themselves as avant-garde or to create a new avant-garde movement, with one exception: the circle around the constructivist review *De Stijl*. But this circle was represented only marginally in the Dutch literary field. Most of its members were visual artists, architects, and designers. Some of them ventured into the literary field with work of their own, next to their core visual oeuvre (notably Theo van Doesburg and Piet Mondrian). Other writers in the informal *Stijl* circle were amateur poets (Agnita Feis, Evert Rinsema, and Antony Kok) with no stronghold in the literary field.

Next to *De Stijl* other, mostly young authors joined in with innovative developments represented elsewhere by avant-garde movements: Hendrik Marsman, Herman van den Bergh, Hendrik de Vries, Constant van Wessem, the early E. du Perron (Duco Perkens), Albert Carel Willink and Hendrik Nicolaas Werkman (the latter two as visual artists as well). These authors generally did

not operate as representatives of a (foreign) movement, but rather on their own. Whereas Marsman, Van den Bergh, and De Vries followed certain trends in German expressionism in their early work, they did not present themselves as Dutch representatives of (German) expressionism or as representatives of a Dutch expressionism, but rather as Marsman, Van den Bergh, and De Vries. The same holds true for Du Perron, Willink, and Werkman. In the (early) 1920s, Willink and Werkman took part in avant-garde developments which may be termed “constructivist”. Besides, Willink and Du Perron played a modest role in an avant-garde network with expressionist tendencies as well as a constructivist focus. This network included among others the Antwerp review *Het Overzicht* (The Survey), *Der Sturm* (The Storm) from Berlin and the Romanian journal *Contimperanul* as well as—in the margins—the little review *De Driehoek* (The Triangle in 1925), edited by Du Perron together with Paul van Ostaijen and Gaston Burssens. As far as they aimed at a position in the Dutch literary field, however, none of the authors involved presented themselves as representatives of the avant-garde, or of for instance constructivism. Only Paul van Ostaijen was an exception, insofar as he related his work explicitly to expressionism and cubism. He too was cautious, though, to specify his “own” expressionism and cubism by idiosyncratic qualifications. Thus, he typified his poetics in 1920 in “Et voilà. Een inleidend manifest” as *geëmansipeerd kubisme*—emancipated cubism (Van Ostaijen [1979b], 129–34, 129), and firmly opposed a “humanitarian” or “romantic” expressionism in favor of an expressionist brand of his own: so-called “organic expressionism,” meaning a form of literary constructivism working on the basis of pure poetry, yet with some clear-cut mystical features (Van Ostaijen [1979b], 378, 328–30, 264–81, 270):

[O]rganic-expressionist poetry and art aim at a formal a-seity, at a construction balancing parts against each other which are in themselves already complete. [...] Ultimately, organic-expressionist atmosphere equals this vibration between two isolated groups [of objects or words]. [...] Before I say the word, there is a yearning for expression of the unknown [...]. Time and again the expression is altered by its own surprises. [...] The painting comes into existence on the canvas; the genesis of a poem determines its own content. (Van Ostaijen [1979b], 277–8)<sup>5</sup>

Van Ostaijen’s later, constructivist poems are, in a way, little linguistic machines in which musical structures prevail. Typographical design plays an essential role and self-referential elements emerge, as “*Zeer kleine speeldoos*” (Very Tiny Music Box) demonstrates (Van Ostaijen [1979a], 209):

#### VERY TINY MUSIC BOX

Amaryllis

here is

Iris

in a soapbubble

hang the bubble

on a ring

and the ring

on your nose

Amaryllis

Shake your head  
 and the light  
 plays with Iris  
 in the bubble  
 Shake it hard  
 the bubble breaks  
 Amaryllis

Where is  
 Iris  
 Iris was here  
 Amaryllis  
 on a ring  
 and the ring  
 on your nose

Snooty nose  
 Amaryllis<sup>6</sup>

In the second place, several authors in the early-twentieth-century Dutch and Flemish literary field may have taken up innovations which were developed and represented by foreign avant-garde movements. But in most cases they did so with some retardation. There may have been avant-gardism in early-twentieth-century Dutch literature, yet mostly it followed foreign developments—understandably with some delay. Exceptions, again, are the contributions to constructivism by *De Stijl* and Paul van Ostaïjen, with his volume of poetry *Bezette stad* (Occupied Town, 1920). The case of expressionism is typical, however. Whereas expressionism in Germany was already waning in the late 1910s, it was only then that the first influences of this expressionism became noticeable in Dutch literature, e.g. in the work of Herman van den Bergh and Hendrik Marsman. In Flanders, (German) expressionism may have had some impact a few years earlier, for example in the early poetry of Van Ostaïjen (notably in his poetry collections, *Music-Hall* of 1916 and *Het Sienjaal* (The Sign) of 1918). But it is typical in the case of Van Ostaïjen as well, that he still presented himself explicitly as an expressionist, be it as an “organic expressionist”, at a stage, in the 1920s, when expressionism in Germany had already become yesterday’s fashion.

Foreign avant-garde developments were generally appropriated with some delay, and often in a weakened form. The avant-garde orientation of most Dutch writers was basically confined to moderate forms of expressionism (leaving aside the question here, to what extent expressionism as a whole can be regarded as avant-garde development). The poetry by Hendrik Marsman in the series “*Seinen*” (Signals), written around 1920, which was inspired by the experimental work of the *Sturm* poet August Stramm, is the only exception, at least in Dutch literature from the Netherlands. The situation in Flanders may be slightly different, in particular in the case of Paul van Ostaïjen who during a longer stay in Berlin in 1918–20 authored his already mentioned *Bezette Stad*, a poetry volume full of “rhythmic typography,” compatible with the poetical experiments of Apollinaire and the dadaists. Yet, also in the case of Van Ostaïjen an obvious change can be noticed after his

return to Antwerp in 1921, when radical experiments in his work are reduced in favour of a more conventional poetics. Typical is Van Ostaijen's double entry in a recent history of Dutch literature, *Nederlandse Literatuur, een geschiedenis* (Dutch Literature, a History, 1993). In this history, Paul van Ostaijen makes his first appearance as an avant-garde representative, being considered for the "breakthrough of the avant-garde in Flanders" in October 1918 (Hadermann [1993a], 602–9). Later on, Van Ostaijen is introduced once more, now as member of "a modernist triumvirate" together with Burssens and Du Perron as co-founders of *De Driehoek* in 1925 (Hadermann [1993b], 621–9, cf. also Buelens [1997]).

The gradual difference between "modernism" and "historical avant-garde" offers—in summary—a solution for the problem that some avant-gardism can be found in early twentieth-century Dutch literature, yet mostly in a moderate form and sometimes—at least from an international perspective—with a slightly epigonal character. Whereas the criteria for a historiographical recognition as historical avant-garde are quite strict (cf. Drijkoningen [1982]), "modernism" leaves some more room for maneuvering, allowing even the description of decisively non-avant-garde innovation in Dutch letters as "moderate modernism," as in the case of Martinus Nijhoff.

Nijhoff created a singular oeuvre, which cannot be attributed unambiguously to one school or movement. Additionally, Nijhoff combined innovation with traditional forms. A.L. Sötemann was the first to characterize Nijhoff as a moderate modernist in two lectures in 1973 and 1976, entitled "'Non-spectacular' Modernism: Martinus Nijhoff's Poetry in its European Context" (published 1976) and "Some suggestions concerning two modernist traditions in European poetry" (published 1977). Sötemann didn't place Nijhoff in the more narrow framework of modernism as historical avant-garde, but rather in the previously described wider notion of modernism, for which Hugo Friedrich's *Die Struktur der modernen Poesie* (The Structure of Modern Poetry) served as a guideline. As Sötemann argues, Nijhoff took an autonomist, anti-expressive and anti-mimetic position in his conception of literature, and should therefore be regarded as a representative of a "modern" tradition of pure poetry. Sötemann points out that Nijhoff's work was related to many different "modern" schools and movements in the preceding years:

I do not know any other poet whose work has been identified with so many different and contradictory schools or movements. If we exclude naturalism, futurism and dadaism, it is hardly possible to think of a term of literary categorization which has not been applied to this poet. He has been called a classical artist as well as a baroque one, a romantic of course, but also a romantic realist. We find his typically parnassien character elaborated upon, but other critics consider him a specifically symbolist poet. Yet others set him down as an aesthete, a decadent, an expressionist, a realist, a cubist, a surrealist, a magic realist or a representative of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* ("New Objectivity"). (Sötemann [1976], 97)

Since Nijhoff's oeuvre can indeed be related to most of these schools and movements, as his work includes different elements of their divergent poetics, one could consider him a modernist par excellence as he combined a wide range of modernist isms; yet he was not a radical modernist, but someone who avoided the extremities and particularities of these schools and movements and aimed at such a "moderate" middle course as a "non-spectacular" champion of modernism:

[...] there seems to be hardly any doubt that Nijhoff started from a complex of presuppositions and assumptions that should be termed typically modern, and that he consistently worked out his individual solution to the resulting problems. In the process he obviously concentrated increasingly on the essen-

tial principles of modernism, while rejecting a number of facile, strained extremist developments of isolated aspects that had resulted in a number of ostensibly separate movements. Nijhoff's solution is to a large extent unique in a European context. (Sötemann [1976], 116)

Although many other historians point to the special role and place of Nijhoff in early twentieth-century Dutch literature as well, Sötemann's qualification "moderate modernist" has a different purport. Sötemann describes and positions Nijhoff—in terms of Wiljan van den Akker (1996)—as a "master of modernism". The assumption of a "moderate" version of modernism serves other historians, instead, as a way of situating Nijhoff as a rather idiosyncratic, unique case on the fringes, but still in the conglomerate of movements, groups, and individuals elsewhere described as avant-garde (see for example Fontijn and Polak [1996], 203–5).

### *International modernism versus historical avant-garde*

It is important to note that the term modernism serves not only as a vaguer synonym for "historical avant-garde", but also as a denomination for a chronologically parallel, yet poetically and aesthetically alternative development in literature from the Netherlands in the 1920s and 1930s opposing the avant-garde. Authors like Nijhoff, who are described by some as moderate, "weak" representatives of a modernism that centers around the hard core of the historical avant-garde (in the 1920s), are regarded by other historians as the main Dutch contributors to an international modernism (in the 1920s and 1930s), which isn't seen as a spin-off of the avant-garde, but is rather defined as an independent, autonomous development in literary life between the two world wars, notably as simultaneous with *and* after the avant-garde. This third version of modernism in Dutch literary historiography is often discerned in the work of the already mentioned poet and critic Nijhoff who rejected radical avant-gardism in favor of a refined "neo-classical" experiment à la Stravinsky (see Bronzwaer [1988] and [1991]). Nijhoff articulated a literary line of thought that has obvious affinities with the conceptions of T. S. Eliot and Paul Valéry. As with Valéry, he saw the creative process as paramount: the content being one of the effects of formal, linguistic operations. His aim was to produce an autonomous poem in which personal aspects had been erased (see Eliot's "objective correlative"). Nijhoff's poetry abounded with two major themes of modernist literature: reflection on the relation between subject and reality as well as reflection on literature itself (Bronzwaer 1991, 111). As such, Nijhoff can be considered a protagonist of international modernism seen as a specific literary school in the early twentieth century.

As Wiljan van den Akker has pointed out in a discussion of Nijhoff's narrative poem "Awater" (1934)—at least partially a polemical answer to T. S. Eliot's *Waste Land*—a whole range of modernist features, such as the fundamental estrangement of man in the modern world, the discontinuity of time and history and the impossibility of removing the rift between the present and the past (see Richard Quinones [1985]), the ambiguity and ambivalence of meaning, the use of fragmentary structure, the reflection on the act of writing, as well as intellectual and epistemological skepsis (Van den Akker [1994], 30–1, 44–6), indicate that Nijhoff can be regarded as one of the major representatives, if not *the* Dutch representative of modernism and not as the traditionalist odd man out of the historical avant-garde. Van den Akker's characterization of Nijhoff as modernist follows Sötemann's positioning of Nijhoff, yet in a more restrictive understanding of modernism compatible with the "modernism" common in the historiography of English litera-

ture, for example in *The Short Oxford History of English Literature* (Sanders [1996], 505–76).

The Dutch magazine *De Witte Mier* (The White Ant, 1924–1926) could be regarded as a local platform for this international modernism represented among others by Nijhoff. It exuded a cosmopolitan atmosphere and showed a profound knowledge of the international artistic situation with references to the work of “modernists” like Valéry, Svevo, Joyce and Eliot. Its publisher, A. A. M. Stols, was very much involved in this international network, being the depositary of the international modernist magazine *Commerce* (1924–1932), and the publisher of work by Larbaud, Valéry, Rilke and many Dutch authors like Nijhoff, Ter Braak and Du Perron (Levie [1988]).

In particular Menno ter Braak and E. du Perron figure prominently in the monograph *Het modernisme in de Europese letterkunde* (Modernism in European Literature) by Douwe Fokkema and Elrud Ibsch (1984), of which in 1987 also a slightly revised version was published in English under the title *Modernist Conjectures in European Literature 1910–1940*. Their prime focus is neither Nijhoff’s poetry, nor the magazine *De Witte Mier*, but rather the narrative and critical prose of a number of Dutch writers who found their momentum in the 1930s (although two of them started to publish already in the twenties) in the context of the influential Dutch literary review *Forum* (1931–1935). They include the editors of *Forum*: the above-mentioned Ter Braak, mainly an essayist with Nietzschean overtones, and the later Du Perron. Du Perron was an author with a strong international orientation and many foreign contacts, who could count André Malraux among his friends and knew French modernists such as Valéry Larbaud and André Gide. As a firm opponent of the avant-garde after a brief flirtation with Parisian Bohemia in the early 1920s he wrote “neo-classicist” poetry and a large novel, *Het land van herkomst* (The Land of Origin, 1935), full of intellectual reflections and epistemological misgivings, as well as a very personal form of internationally oriented literary criticism. Also included is the *Forum* collaborator Simon Vestdijk, an essayist, poet, and prolific novelist, who published among others a notorious novel in the vein of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* as well as a Proustian serial novel. Another writer often mentioned with this group is the novelist and essayist Carry van Bruggen: though not a contributor to the magazine, she was held in high esteem by its editors.

Works by Ter Braak, Du Perron, Vestdijk, and Van Bruggen are described by Fokkema and Ibsch as the actual backbone of the Dutch contribution to a European modernism, which they characterize as a movement *opposing* the historical avant-garde (cf. Levie [1991], 264–78). Their modernism encompasses authors and works “which do *not* partake of the historical avant-garde” (Fokkema and Ibsch [1987], 1), presenting a hitherto underestimated alternative to the historical avant-garde of a modest, detached, cautiously rational, self-reflective kind; an intellectualist alternative that remained invisible, since the authors involved failed to manifest themselves as an international movement. Unlike the isms of the historical avant-garde that presented clear-cut, one-sided beliefs in higher values to be forced on humanity, the modernists had, according to Fokkema and Ibsch, only a “provisional, fragmentary” interpretation of the world. Being “sceptics” rather than “enthusiasts,” emphasizing “the value of intellectual consideration and reconsideration,” they rejected assumedly any form of dogmatism, and instead “propounded their careful hypotheses,” presenting “their intellectual hypotheses in arguments which some moments later they may be eager to qualify or even revoke” (Fokkema and Ibsch [1987], 2–4).

It should be noted here, that the authors presented by Fokkema and Ibsch as the most important Dutch representatives of modernism are categorized as “anti-modernists” by other literary histor-



ians, in particular for their univocal rejection and—in the case of Du Perron—personal rift with the avant-garde (see van der Aa [1994], den Boef [1991], Gillet [1988], 403–5). Ironically, Ter Braak and Du Perron are also known—as editors of *Forum*—for a critical approach in which the personality of the author and his views serve as the main criterion in the critical apprehension of a work of art, by which they firmly opposed the more formal criticism of “modernists” like Nijhoff as well as of Van Ostaïjen’s adherents (see Oversteegen [1967]).

It may seem confusing, in the meantime, that Ter Braak and Du Perron have been called “modernists” as well. However, one may also argue that the term “modernism” offers a solution for yet another historiographical problem. If one surveys Dutch literary history between the two world wars and distinguishes a conglomerate of tendencies in the early 1920s that may be labeled “historical avant-garde,” a collection of disconnected, individual authors seems to remain in the following period—from the mid-1920s until the German occupation in 1940—that cannot be classified in a satisfactory way by one ism or another, in particular not by schools and movements commonly distinguished on an international level. In this context it is typical that a chapter on modernism (as historical avant-garde) in a Dutch literary history edited by Van Bork and Laan (1986) is followed by a chapter on the “thirties,” discussing a whole range of individual writers and magazines, among others Nijhoff as well as *Forum* and related authors like Ter Braak, Du Perron, and Van Bruggen. Describing the avant-garde, the umbrella term “modernism” seems to serve Dutch literary history well in several respects, not only as a common denominator for these individual, partly disconnected authors, now regarded as divergent representatives of a counter-tendency opposing the historical avant-garde in Dutch literature in the late 1920s and 1930s, but also as a way to summarize singular Dutch phenomena like Nijhoff’s poetry and the poetics of *Forum* as Dutch contributions to an international development discerned, in particular in English literary studies, in the work of, among others, T. S. Eliot and Virginia Woolf (see Sanders [1996]), who were regarded by the respective Dutch authors as literary peers in many ways.

### **“Modernism” in the Early Twentieth-Century Dutch Literary Field: A Polemical Invective**

Earlier, we pointed out that the term “modernism” situates literary developments in the Netherlands and Flanders in a wider, international framework. However, if one places the previously distinguished modernisms in Dutch literature in a European, if not global, context, one should be aware of a significant difference between Dutch literature on the one hand, and English and North-American as well as a number of Romanic literatures on the other. In the latter, a positive reinterpretation of the originally pejoratively used terms “modernist” and “modernism” can be observed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Although the terms were simultaneously still used in a negative way, some authors in these literatures started to present *themselves* (and not their opponents) as modernists (Calinescu [1987], 68–85). In the Dutch as well as Flemish literary field, these terms are used seldom and certainly not as a framework or denomination for oneself. Whereas e.g. Laura Riding and Robert Graves presented themselves in 1927 as advocates and propagandists of modernism in their *Survey of Modernist Poetry*, in a Dutch context in the same period, “modernism” and “modernist” were used by and large to describe others in a pejorative way. Two exceptions seem to confirm this general rule. In the same year Riding and Graves compiled their survey, H. N. Werk-

man published an extensive manifesto *Land—Volk—Zeit—Kunst* written by a fellow artist from Groningen, Johan Dijkstra, on the occasion of an exhibition by the local artist's circle *De Ploeg* (The Squad). Though written in German, Dijkstra's locally distributed text stated: "BOHEMIAN MENTALITY (SENSE OF FREEDOM), MODERNISM, INTERNATIONALISM, BASIC PROVINCIALISM was the foundation of our thinking [...]" (Dijkstra [1927], 3).<sup>7</sup> The ironic stance of Dijkstra's remark is obvious. It is also noteworthy that Dijkstra used the term "modernism" in a text written in a foreign language. Two years earlier, the last page of the final issue of the Flemish review *Het Overzicht* (The Survey) presented a tableau with the names of two dozen congenial avant-garde periodicals. The panorama of predominantly foreign journals had two titles, one in Dutch and one in French. Whereas the French title described the magazines as "*Revues modernistes*," the Dutch title reads "*Tijdschriften*," that is simply "reviews" (Anonymous [1925]). In Dutch, the predicate "modernist" was apparently not expedient.

For example in an article in the Italian journal *Valori Plastici* Theo van Doesburg, editor-in-chief of the constructivist review *De Stijl*, who regarded himself as a representative of the—then not yet historical—avant-garde that comprised an international front of "all modern and ultra-modern groups" (van Doesburg [1921], 109) stressed that *De Stijl* was fighting against "modernist dilettantism and snobism" in Dutch art (Van Doesburg, [1920]).<sup>8</sup> In a compatible way, the later Paul van Ostaïjen in the 1920s rejected the shapeless ethical-humanitarian expressionism of several writers of his generation, among others in an essay "Modernistische dichters" (Modernist Poets), written in 1923 (Van Ostaïjen [1979b]: 161–80). In this essay, Van Ostaïjen (dis-)qualified the rather pathetic expressionist poet Wies Moens and many other Flemish epigone expressionists as would-be modernists (Van Ostaïjen [1979b]: 264–81, 369–79).

The younger writers in the Dutch magazine *Het getij* (1916–1924), very keen on being "up to date" and innovative (Van Doesburg was even invited as co-editor of the review in 1918), avoided the term "modernism" as well. It was only in 1921—very late, indeed—that the term "modernism" appeared in the title of a sequence of contributions by "Een dilettant" (a dilettante) presented as a "bloemlezing van modernismen (en archaïsmen)"—a collection of modernisms and archaisms, which contained aphorisms, in part extracted from international avant-garde reviews and manifestos (among others a translation of Tzara's recipe for the creation of a dadaist poem). And even here the term "modernism" was used with a considerable portion of irony.

Another Dutch literary review, *De vrije bladen* (The Free Pages, 1924–1931) wanted to be in tune with the time as well (and in this respect wished to be "modern"), yet distanced itself gradually from "the modern," in the sense of avant-gardism and expressionism. In particular, the expansive ethical expressionism represented by the Flemish Wies Moens in the ethically humanitarian magazine *De stem* (The Voice) and the Catholic review *Roeping* (Calling) met with opposition from the competing "moderns" of *De vrije bladen*, who criticized the epigone and superficial imitation of "modern"—metropolitan—imagery and the expansive free verse. In *De vrije bladen*, the critique of "modernism" (meaning avant-gardism and expressionism), had an obvious strategic element: one *had* to distance oneself from previous, apparently shallow modernisms, to demonstrate how much one was still up to date.

The poet and critic Marsman, to some extent regarded as the spokesman of his generation, had been involved quite seriously in expressionism (in 1923 his prose still evoked the atmosphere of Kurt Pinthus's *Menschheitsdämmerung*), but distanced himself more than once from avant-garde

and expressionist “modernism”. Categorically, Marsman declared himself an opponent of “all epigonism and all *modernisme-a-tort-et-a-travers*” (Goedegebuure [1981], 147).<sup>9</sup> Almost simultaneously, in a letter to the editor of the Flemish avant-garde review *Het Overzicht*, Jozef Peeters, Marsman wrote that he had “radically reconsidered all modernism” (De Vree, [1977], 767).<sup>10</sup> Other contributors took a similar stand, as, for example, the poet and essayist Herman van den Bergh, who had made his debut with a collection of expressionist verse in 1917, but rejected “modernism” in the 1920s. “How many snobs dabble under the eighty-seven banners of modernism,” Van den Bergh ([1924], 138) complained in *De vrije bladen*<sup>11</sup>, notwithstanding his own ambition to be decisively modern himself.

The modern, *het moderne* (in a positive sense), is associated with intellectual self-constraint and critical distance not only by Van den Bergh, but also by Marsman and other contributors to *De vrije bladen*—in opposition to “modernism,” yet to some extent compatible with the previously described third concept of modernism in current Dutch literary historiography. Not only the decorative and atmospheric sensitivity of the *fin de siècle*, but also the noisy and apparently formless experiments of expressionism and the avant-garde are rejected as *schijnmodernisme*—sham modernism. It was in line with this stand that Constant van Wessem ([1925], 264) with considerable relief welcomed the restoration of punctuation in modern literature by Cocteau. There were, in other words, two forms of “the modern,” as the poet J. F. Otten argued in 1927, including the “true” modern, which needed no specific form, but emanates from an—intellectualistic, doubting—vision on life. Although “the modern” may have certain forms of its own, avant-garde experiments are expressly excluded by Otten, as manifestations of the “false” modern. “The all too often aprioristic usage of ‘modern forms’ leads to impurity (Joyce didn’t escape this risk in his ‘Ulysses’). Modernity turned into modernism,” Otten ([1927], 122) stated in *De vrije bladen*.<sup>12</sup> Already in 1930, the poet and critic D. A. M. Binnendijk referred to this false form of “the modern” while criticizing another writer for his would-be-modernist work and noted, “[t]hat this modernity manifests itself in a boisterous, hence ‘modernist’ way” (Binnendijk [1930]: 176).<sup>13</sup>

Also in later years, the term modernism is mainly used to (dis-)qualify expressionist and (other) avant-garde developments. For example, in 1937 in the review *Groot Nederland*, Simon Vestdijk discussed a Flemish poet, who, “publishing for a decade, remained faithful to ‘modernism’” (Vestdijk [1937a]: 204).<sup>14</sup> In the work of another poet, Vestdijk rejected “modernist keys”: “jazz,” “venal girls,” “Lucia Florio who rhymes with radio, Malaga which rhymes with baccarat, La Bohème which rhymes with nothing, not even with ‘voice’ [*stem*].” His conclusion leaves no room for doubt about his view of “modernism”: “This volume is worthless altogether.” (Vestdijk [1937b], 410).<sup>15</sup>

At the same time, du Perron made some notes for a never completed article entitled “Herinneringen aan ‘modern’ Vlaanderen”—memories of ‘modern’ Flanders, in which he discussed his contacts with the avant-garde artists and writers Jozef Peeters and Michel Seuphor in the early 1920s. The quotation marks around “modern” already indicate Du Perron’s later reticence, also obvious from ironical remarks such as: “Poetry by Seuphor, in which a number of the review was equated with a ship. Great! impossible to escape from ‘modernism’. I jotted down a few verses” (Du Perron [1959]: 501).<sup>16</sup>

Several of these verses were published by Du Perron in the early twenties under a pseudonym, Duco Perkens. When he met Paul van Ostaijen in the mid-1920s, Du Perron soon distanced himself

from this modernism. His alias Duco Perken's passed away in 1925. Du Perron himself remained suspicious of "modernism" until his death in 1940, for example in discussions with the co-editor of *Forum*, the essayist Menno ter Braak.

In 1940, Ter Braak reflected on the terms "modern" and "modernism" in two essays, published in his *Verzameld werk* (Collected Works) under the titles "De moderne dichter" (The Modern Poet) and "Nogmaals: modern" (Again: modern). In these articles, he made a sharp distinction between the *mode-moderne*, the fashion(able)–modern, in particular expressionism, on the one hand and a less showy, less superficial *modern*, represented by authors who "announce a shift in the thinking and feeling of mankind" on the other (Ter Braak [1980]: 476).<sup>17</sup> Ter Braak continued, as he replaced the qualification *mode-moderne* by the term *modernisme* in opposition to the real, authentic modern:

modernism, then, is something which in the way of a fashionable current ages irrevocably, the modern, instead, will still exist, even when the great fashion has faded away and a later generation will only acknowledge the past *quality*. In this sense, Wies Moens, for example, was modernist, the poet Slauerhoff modern. (Ter Braak [1980]: 477)<sup>18</sup>

The negative connotation of "modernism" in the Dutch literary field in the early twentieth century can be explained by the fact that the term *modernisme* was already in use in another context: it was for a long time the common denomination (and condemnation) for "modern" religious-theological developments (more specifically in Flanders, cf. Gobbers [1997]). It is significant that even in the 1970s, Dutch encyclopedias explain "modernism" without exception only as a theological term, pointing either at a (local) development in protestant Calvinist theology, which tried to adapt the Calvinist faith to modern times around the previous turn of the century, or—to some extent comparable—to a Catholic "heresy," explicitly condemned and attacked by the hierarchy of the church (see for example van Deinsen et al. [1971], 2: 1125).

Although the (double) theological understanding may have prevailed as the common meaning of *modernisme* in Dutch and Flemish society as a whole, this theological "modernism" only occasionally interfered with the invective "modernism" in the literary field. An early case are the essays by the Catholic Flemish nationalist theatre critic Constant Godelaine, who in several publications—benevolently—criticized "modernism" in the Catholic Flamingant theatre praxis; "modernism" not only (on an aesthetic level) as a label for expressionist and avant-garde tendencies, but also (on a theological level) as label for a more modern interpretation of Catholic morality (for example Godelaine [1926] and [1940]).

A more recent case is offered by the interventions of the Frisian senator Hendrik Algra, editor-in-chief of the conservative Calvinist daily *Friesch Dagblad* and representative of the no less conservative Calvinist *Anti-Revolutionaire Partij* (Anti-Revolutionary Party, ARP) in the *Eerste Kamer*, the Dutch Senate. In the early sixties, Algra frequently fulminated against "modernist" developments in Dutch culture and presented mid-nineteenth-century Dutch literature dominated by Calvinist clergymen as well as classical seventeenth-century religious literature as the real pious alternative for modernist aberrations (cf. Ouboter [1966], Fekkes [1968]). In a debate in the *Eerste Kamer* on state subsidies for Dutch writers on May 14, 1963, Algra firmly opposed these subsidies for "modernists" like Remco Campert, Lucebert, Simon Vinkenoog and Gerard van het Reve. From his perspective,

a bunch of writers, [...] a 'group', group in the same sense as some biking groups, with a common meeting point, a 'group' in which there is no place for the altar, only for a drinking table, where rowdies are welcomed and pilgrims jeered off. (Verslag [1963], 2256)<sup>19</sup>

The subsequent reaction by the Labour senator Cammelbeeck in the same debate is remarkable. Cammelbeeck was a proponent of state subsidies for "modern" writers and "the avant-garde" (this is contemporary, post-war experimental writers), yet, in his response to Algra, he too rejected "modernism" —in line with the earlier critique of modernism by Ter Braak:

When modern writers are modernists, I'll immediately keep well clear of modern writers, but I will also keep clear of seventeenth-century modernists. I am only interested in authentic authorship [...] (Verslag [1963], 2282)<sup>20</sup>

### Modernism as a Category in Twentieth-Century Dutch Literary Historiography

The contemporary usage of the term "modernism" in the historiography of Dutch literature is based only to a small extent on local tradition, as the quite different implementation of the term "modernism" in the Dutch literary field in the first half of the twentieth century and beyond indicates. To some extent, *modernisme* may have served already as an umbrella term for the innovative practice of the historical avant-garde in the early twentieth century, yet generally with a negative connotation, as, for example, in a schoolbook history of Dutch literature from 1932, *Stroomingen en hoofdpersonen in de Nederlandsche literatuur* (Movements and Figures in Dutch Literature), in which "modernism" is used as a negative qualification for literary avant-gardism in the 1910s and 1920s (Meijer Drees [1932], 196).

"Modernism" still kept its predominantly negative connotation in Dutch in the years after World War II, as the remarks of Algra and Cammelbeeck in the Dutch senate indicate. Little by little, though, a shift can be observed in this period, to some extent influenced by international developments in the cultural field, but probably also as a result of the decreasing role of the church in Dutch society. As early as 1950, the seventh edition of the major Dutch dictionary, *Van Dale's nieuw groot woordenboek der Nederlandse taal* (Van Dale's New Dutch Dictionary), mentioned next to the theological use of the term "modernism" another, wider understanding of "modernism" in the more or less neutral sense of "the spirit of the new in society, literature, and art" (Kruyskamp and De Tolenaere [1950], 1101).<sup>21</sup> In the course of time, "modernism" became gradually a neutral classification. It is noteworthy here that the term was already used in such a neutral way in the early sixties by the Dutch Central Bureau for Statistics for "the group of young, post-war writers who should be distinguished clearly from the pre-war generation of writers," among others Campert, Lucebert, and Vinkenoog (Verslag [1963], 2255).<sup>22</sup> Occasionally, this new generation of innovative writers in the 1950s and 1960s, who experimented in the tradition of the historical avant-garde, also referred to themselves as "modernists" or were labeled as such by charitable critics (cf. Buckinx [1953], Thomas [1961], Anonymus [1965], Weisgerber [1970]). Likewise, "modernist themes" were also discerned in a similar neutral way in a popular Dutch literary history for schools in the same period (de Voys and Stuiveling [1965], 169).

Little by little, "Modernism" may have lost its invective character in the first decades after the war; it was, however, still far from being a prominent term in the Dutch or Flemish literary field, as

may be indicated by the fact that the first edition of the *Moderne Encyclopedie van de Wereldliteratuur* (Modern Encyclopedia of World Literature) in 1968, written and edited by a wide range of Dutch and Flemish literary scholars, had no separate entry for the term. Only in the second edition of 1982 was an entry on a little French review from 1889 entitled *Le Moderniste* replaced by one on *modernisme*.

Three developments in the intermediate period (and following years) seem to be essential for the separate entry of *modernisme* in this encyclopedia. In the first place, the foreign, international orientation of the Dutch literary field changed. Initially, in the first half of the twentieth century, the Dutch literary field focused in particular on France and Germany, or rather: on Paris and Berlin. After World War II and the trauma of the German occupation, the relevance of the German orientation rapidly diminished. The role of France (Paris) decreased as well in later years due to the growing importance of the United States as the Western superpower in cultural matters as well as in economic and military fields. As a consequence, the significance of English literature and the relevance of an English-American orientation increased. It is probably no coincidence that the introduction of the term *modernisme* as a more systematic, prominent term in Dutch literary history, did not occur in the Low Countries, but in England and in the United States: In 1973 a symposium of mostly Dutch scholars on “Modernism in the Low Countries, 1915–1930” took place at the University of Texas in Austin (cf. Bulhof [1976]). In 1976 A.L. Sötemann presented the case of the moderate modernist Nijhoff to the Modern Languages Society in Cambridge (cf. Sötemann [1977] and [1978]).

Sötemann’s lecture and the Austin symposium point also to further developments in the Dutch literary field and, more in particular, in Dutch literary studies. Due to the increasing internationalization of culture and academia, there is a growing urge to describe and present Dutch literature in an international context. As part of this development, local particularities are downplayed in favor of phenomena that can be found in other literatures as well, especially in English and American literature. Likewise, local divisions in periods, currents and groups are replaced by international, or to be more precise, English and American classifications, as in the case of the *Forum* group nowadays being subsumed under the caption “modernism”. In this sense, modernism has become a term that allows more recent studies on *modernisme* in early twentieth-century Dutch literature to present the work of writers like Nijhoff, Ter Braak, Du Perron, or Vestdijk as — national — Dutch contributions to an — international — modernism.

Last but not least, the emergence of modernism as a prominent term in Dutch literary studies is unthinkable without the introduction of another term: postmodernism. It was, actually, the introduction of the soon very popular notion of “post-modern” in Dutch literary criticism in the 1980s as general caption for contemporary developments in literature, art, and society, which brought the final breakthrough of “modernism” in Dutch literary history. Until the 1980s, the term (and concept of) modernism was a marginal phenomenon in Dutch literary studies. A brief look at the indexes of the main bibliography of Dutch literary studies (*Bibliografie van de Nederlandse taal- en letterkunde* [BNTL], Bibliography of Dutch Linguistics and Literature) manifests no significant presence of the term until the 1980s, most certainly not as a major term. “Modernism” is even completely absent in the volumes covering 1965 to 1974, as Francis Bulhof already noted (Bulhof [1995], 237). After the mid-1980s, however, a considerable rise in publications on modernism in Dutch literature can be observed in the BNTL. In part, this may be seen as a result of the impact of Fokkema’s and Ibsch’s

*Modernism in European Literature*, which gained considerable attention after its first publication in 1984 (cf. Bulhof [1995], 242)—not least due to their effort to present a number of prominent Dutch authors, like Ter Braak, Du Perron, Van Bruggen, and Vestdijk, who were until then, in a Dutch setting, mainly discussed as authors in their own right (and not so much as representatives of someism) in an international framework next to big names such as James Joyce, Marcel Proust, and Thomas Mann. Similarly important, however, is the arrival of the notion “postmodernism” in the Low Countries in the same years, at a stage when “modernism” is still virtually absent in Dutch critical discourse (cf. e.g. Hudson and Van Reijen [1986], Goedegebuure [2001], Groen [1988], Vuyk [1999]). As Ulrich Weisstein ([1995], 414) has argued, postmodernism is unthinkable without its “antecedent,” modernism. Also in the context of Dutch literary criticism and studies, the emergence of a contemporary “postmodernism” necessitated the introduction of a hitherto missing “modernism” in Dutch literature. Weisstein argues in more general terms that “modernism” can also serve as “a natural *Lückenbüsser*” between the experimental stage of modern art in the historical avant-garde of the 1910s and 1920s and its neo-avant-garde resurgence in the 1950s and 1960s (Weisstein [1995], 413). “Modernism” seems indeed to fulfill this double function, facilitated by the fact that “modernism” can serve as a hitherto missing umbrella term for developments in Dutch literature of the 1930s (previously and by some still discussed not as “modernism,” but simply as “the thirties”).

The fact that “modernism” is now used frequently in Dutch literary historiography may not be only the result of the English-American orientation of the literary field, the growing internationalization of Dutch literary studies, and the necessity of a modernism preceding postmodernism, but also of the fact that in the meantime—at the end of the twentieth century—a considerable historical distance has grown between contemporary literature and developments in the Dutch literary field before World War II. In part, this distance may draw attention to constellations that are obvious in retrospect, but that were still invisible to writers and critics in the literary field half a century earlier. At the same time, it should not be ignored that “modernism” in Dutch literature is primarily an historiographical phenomenon, and only as such an historical phenomenon as well. This modernism may offer the possibility, on the one hand, of discerning and constructing new (or old) historical relations and constellations. On the other hand, this same modernism tends to distract attention from real and superficial historical controversies and polemics in the Dutch literary field between the two world wars, as for example the clear-cut enmity between Martinus Nijhoff and the *Forum* editors Ter Braak and Du Perron, who nowadays figure together as modest, detached, cautiously rational, self-reflective, intellectualist protagonists of Dutch modernism, whereas in the 1930s Du Perron and Nijhoff were involved in occasional brawls on the doorsteps of the Amsterdam Hotel Américain. As Du Perron related in a letter to Menno ter Braak about this fight with “Pom,” as Nijhoff was nicknamed:

Pom was a bit tight; Stols started to stir things up; Pom behaved quite quarrelsomely and talked about ‘trashing the matter out outside’ and so on, until I let him have it his way. The fight was brief and foolish, and curdled in the arms of many taxi drivers. Pom scratched me under my nose, and I gave him two clouts, one of which was, by his own account, ‘damned good’ and right on the middle of his nose. I considered it a ridiculous event from beginning to end and was not really angry myself; but I did not want to grant him the legend that he had to call me outside three times in vain, or something like that [...]. (Ter Braak and Du Perron [1962], 155).<sup>23</sup>

We may welcome the fact that “modernism” conciliated both parties over time, but it is unfortunate that such very real literary-historical conflicts have been simultaneously glossed over by this same term.

## Notes

1. “Maar rond de Eerste Wereldoorlog begint een nieuwe grote cultuurhistorische periode, die we het *modernisme* noemen en waarin we nog steeds leven. Alles wat wij nu ‘moderne kunst’ noemen, is ontstaan in het eerste kwart van de 20e eeuw. De kunstenaars van nu werken vanuit dezelfde principes als die van rond 1915.”
2. “Wie enigszins met de Nederlandse literatuur vertrouwd is, zal zich verbazen over het ontbreken daarvan bij Bradbury [en McFarlane].”
3. “Met geen woord wordt gesproken over *Van nu en straks*, het tijdschrift dat in België het moderne levensgevoel vertegenwoordigde.”
4. “Van deze meest radicale modernistische revolutie in de Europese literatuur van het *fin de siècle* wordt bij Bradbury [en McFarlane] met geen woord gerept. De kans op integratie van de Nederlandse literatuur in het grotere Europese verband is daardoor eens te meer onbenut gebleven. Op deze eerste modernistische golf is rondom de Eerste Wereldoorlog een tweede gevolgd, waarin avant-garde-bewegingen zoals imagisme, futurisme, expressionisme, dadaïsme en surrealisme de boventoon voerden. Maar ook daar is de Nederlandse inbreng in het internationale literatuurwetenschappelijke debat minimaal, terwijl het allerm minst heeft ontbroken aan Nederlandse en Belgische bijdragen aan de literatuur zelf.”
5. “èn in de organies-expressionistische dichtkunst èn in de organies-expressionistische schilderkunst [wordt gestreefd] naar een formele aseïteit, maar een konstruktie uit het afwegen tegenover elkaar van in zichzelf reeds gave gedeelten [...]’ [...]Organies-expressionistische atmosfeer is ten slotte dit trillen dat ligt tussen twee geïsoleerde groepen [van lichamen of woorden]. [...] Vóór ik het woord zeg is er een haken naar het uitdrukken van het onbekende [...]. Telkens wordt de uitdrukking gewijzigd door haar eigen verrassingen. [...] Het schilderij wordt op het doek, het worden van een gedicht bepaalt mede zijn inhoud.”
6. “ZEER KLEINE SPEELDOOS

Amarillis  
hier is  
in een zeepbel  
Iris

hang de bel  
aan een ring  
en de ring  
aan je neus  
Amarillis

Schud je 't hoofd  
speelt het licht  
in de bel  
met Iris  
Schud je fel  
breekt de bel  
Amarillis



Waar is  
 Iris  
 Iris is hier geweest  
 Amarillis  
 aan een ring  
 en de ring  
 aan jouw neus

Wijsneus  
 Amarillis"

7. "BOHEMIENGEIST (FREIHEITSSINN), MODERNISMUS, INTERNATIONALISMUS, URPRO-  
 VI[N]ZIALISMUS war die Basis unseres Denkens..." (Dijkstra [1927], 3).
8. "dilettantismo e [...] snobismo modernista."
9. "tegen alle epigonisme en alle modernisme-a-tort-et-a-travers".
10. "radicaal van elk modernisme [te zijn] teruggekomen".
11. "Hoeveel snobs er onder de zevenentachtig vanen van het modernisme liefhebberen."
12. "Het al te vaak aprioristisch gebruiken der 'moderne vormen' leidt tot onzuiverheid (Joyce  
 ontkwam in zijn 'Ulysses' niet aan dit gevaar). Moderniteit werd modernisme."
13. "Dat deze moderniteit zich nog wel eens te luidruchtig, en dus 'modernistisch', manifesteert."
14. Reeds een tiental jaren publiceerd, is hij het 'modernisme' trouw gebleven."
15. "modernistische toetsen" ... "jazz" ... "veile meisjes" ... "Lucia Florio die op radio rijmt, Malaga  
 dat op baccarat rijmt, La Bohème dat nergens op rijmt, zelfs niet op 'stem'." ... "Als geheel is deze bundel  
 waardeloos."
16. "Poëzie van Seuphor, waarin een nr. van het blad met een schip werd gelijkgesteld. Enorm! er viel niet te  
 ontkomen aan het 'modernisme'. Ik schreef haastig een paar verzen."
17. "... een verschuiving aankondigen in het denken en voelen der mensen."
18. "het modernisme is dan iets, dat als modestroming onherroepelijk veroudert, het moderne daarentegen  
 bestaat ook nog, als de grote mode is weggeëbd en een latere generatie in het verleden alleen nog de *qualiteit*  
 erkent. In die zin was b.v. Wies Moens modernistisch, de dichter Slauerhoff modern."
19. "een schrijversbent [...], een 'groep', groep in dezelfde zin als sommige nozemgroepen, die ook een  
 gemeenschappelijk trefpunt hebben, een 'groep', in wier milieu geen plaats is voor een altaar, maar wel voor  
 een bittertafel, waar men de nozems verwelkomt en de pelgrims achterna schreeuwt."
20. "Als moderne schrijvers modernisten zijn, moet ik reeds van moderne schrijvers niets hebben, maar ik  
 moet ook niets hebben van modernisten uit de zeventiende eeuw. Het gaat mij werkelijk om authentiek schri-  
 jverschap."
21. "... de geest van het nieuwe in maatschappij, letteren en kunst."
22. "... de groep jonge na-oorlogse auteurs, die duidelijk te onderscheiden is van de vooroorlogse schri-  
 jversgeneratie."
23. "Pom was aangeschoten, Stols begon te stoken, Pom deed erg haantjesachtig, sprak van 'buiten uit-  
 knokken' en zoo meer, tot ik hem zijn zin gegeven heb. De strijd was kort en idioot en stelde in de armen van  
 vele taxichauffeurs. Pom heeft me onder mijn neus gekrabbd, en ik heb hem twee muilperen verkocht, waarvan  
 één, volgens zijn eigen zeggen, 'verdomd goed' en precies midden op zijn neus. Ik vond het een belachelijke  
 historie van begin tot eind en heb me geen oogenblik boos kunnen maken; maar ik wou hem de legende niet  
 gunnen van mij 3 x tevergeefs naar buiten te hebben geroepen of zoo."

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## Greek Modernism and Inner-Oriented Art

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The very vagueness of the term modernism presents difficulties in predicating modernism's boundary stones in Greek literature. To avoid tidy simplifications and crude categorizations, one should compare what is admittedly considered Greek modernism to that art of abstraction and highly conscious artifice, which, at the advent of the twentieth century, subverted expected continuities, endorsing experimentation, stylistic virtuosity and introversion. The opinion of Bradbury and McFarlane, who associated modernism with "the coming of a new era of high aesthetic self-consciousness and non-representationalism, in which art turns from realism and humanistic representation towards style, technique, and spatial form in pursuit of a deeper penetration of life" seems to befit Greek modernism (Bradbury and McFarlane [1991], 25).

Modernism had a belated arrival in Greece (Jusdanis [1991], 104–21). It was the 1930s that witnessed the introduction of a new set of practices and formal innovations inextricably associated with the pursuit of the renewal of contemporary literature. The quest for modernization in the means of artistic creation was linked with controversies over national identity, language, and the role of literary tradition in modernity. Part of this modernization was the re-orientation of Greek literature toward Europe. This was also the period after the First World War and the Greco-Turkish war (1919–1922), which ended with the expatriation of Greeks from Asia Minor and the collapse of the ideas of nationalism and expansionism. Thus the despondency of the period also motivated the pursuit of a thorough cultural renewal. The modernization of life, the development of urban centers in Athens and Salonica (the second biggest city in Greece) and the return of expatriate intellectuals from European metropolitan centers, invited the introduction of divergent literary and cultural trends, particularly of contemporary European literature. This decade saw a great number of translations of European writers, also accompanied by a slight shift of interest from French to Anglo-Saxon culture. T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Aldous Huxley and D. H. Lawrence were introduced into Greece. During the same period there was significant development of the genres of novel and essay, and the experimentation with avant-garde techniques began.

Modernist practices and critical thought are admittedly linked with the literary movement, which pursued the renewal of Greek literature around the thirties, namely, in the so-called Generation of the Thirties. The term refers to the group of writers who emerged during the decade 1930–40. The poets George Seferis, Odysseas Elytis, Yannis Ritsos, and the authors George Theotokas, Angelos Terzakis, Kosmas Politis, Ilias Venezis, Stratis Myrivilis and M. Karagatsis belong to this generation. However, neither did all the principals of this group develop their ideas and techniques during the same period nor did they constitute a homogenous and unified movement. Writers, poets and literary critics of not necessarily compatible perspectives belonged to this generation,

whereas there are contemporaries of significant literary relevance who were not part of this group, for example the author Nikos Kazantzakis or the critic Tellos Agras. Also, the contemporary poets Andreas Embirikos and Nikos Engonopoulos followed surrealist practices.

Belated as the arrival of modernism in Greece is, it is also a fact that its culmination can be situated around the 1960s. As Tziovas observes, it is during this decade that “the two leading poets, Seferis and Elytis reached the peak of their careers”, and Ritsos published his *Τέταρτη Διάσταση* (Fourth Dimension 1966) marked by his shift toward ancient myth. Seferis was awarded the Nobel prize (1963) and Elytis published *The Axion Esti* (1959–60) which received a literary state award (Tziovas [1997], 30). It is also during this period that works with clearly modernist characteristics and techniques were published or written: N. G. Pentzikis published his novels *Αρχιτεκτονική της Σκόρπιας Ζωής* (Architecture of scattered life) in 1963 and *Το Μυθιστόρημα της Κυρίας Έρσης* (The novel of Mrs Ersi) in 1966 and Stelios Xefloudas wrote his *Οδυσσέας* (Odysseus) in 1965–67. Both authors belong to the long-term marginalized school of Salonica; a group of authors who, during the 1930s, developed their literary activity in Salonica. Stelios Xefloudas, Nikos Gavril Pentzikis, George Delios, and Alkiviadis Yannopoulos are the principals of this group. These writers have been acknowledged as belonging to the generation of the thirties only *ex post facto*.

As argued by recent literary criticism, the Generation of the 1930s can be split into two branches, namely the Athenian and the Salonican (Aragis [1996], vol. VII, 47–9). The modernist breakthrough of the Athenian group is manifested mostly in poetry and the development of a literary criticism that announced the forthcoming renaissance of literary letters; while fiction hardly ever surpassed the borderlines of the European urban novel. The modernist enterprise, especially in fiction, is linked with the Salonican authors rather than their Athenian peers. Criticism has observed certain affinities between the works of the Salonican authors and their European fellow-authors. It has been recognized that “each of the four authors of the *Macedonian Days* (Xefloudas, Delios, Yannopoulos, and Pentzikis), has his derivatives in Proust, Woolf, Pirandello, and Joyce respectively” (Kazantzis [1983], 19).<sup>1</sup> But this recognition remains piecemeal owing to the lack of a systematic comparative study. Also, Yiannis Skaribas and Melpo Axioti, who are not grouped with the Salonicans, are authors with modernist practices; the former is notable for his subversive comedy and the latter for her use of interior monologue.

As criticism has observed, the debatable issue of the role of tradition in modernity and the demand for a shift from extroversion to introversion overshadowed the Greek modernist venture (Moullas [1993], 17–157; Tziovas [1997], 32). However, these two dilemmas, which tantalized this generation, were neither of absolutely indigenous character nor the outcome of a chauvinistic Hellenocentric project. For example, Seferis’s “European Hellenism” was indeed part of his personal ambition to promote his own image as a national poet and to create a canon of “Greek Hellenism” to which he would be able “to append his own work,” and “thus to complete the critical groundwork necessary for the successful denouement of his creative project” (Tziovas [1997], 6; Calotychos [1990], 120); and yet one should neither ignore that Seferis’s aesthetic project clearly bore the impact of Eliot’s ideas about the role of tradition in modernity (Eliot, [1975], 37–44) nor that his use of Hellenic myth was propounding the latter’s mythical method (Eliot, [1975], 175–8). Similarly, his invocation of Hellenism complied with modernism’s reactivation of folk traditions and the foregrounding of those authentic, primitive and mythical elements of a nation’s soul which

could be rendered as universal and archetypal patterns of thought. Accordingly Seferis's employment of elements extracted from the national culture and his use of ancient Greek myth was part of his modernist project as will be discussed later in this essay.

Much ink has been spilled over the Hellenocentric, national and peripheral nature of Greek modernism (Jusdanis [1991]; Leontis [1995]; Tziouvas [1993]). Within the critical approaches of the most recent decades it seems that sometimes the social and political perspectives on literature have overshadowed the aesthetic one. Without dismissing the indispensable role of social conditions and ideology in literary production, I focus in my approach more on the aesthetic and artistic nature of Greek modernism than its social, political and/or national factors. Indeed, in so far as it is a literary and aesthetic rather than a political and/or ideological question, the consensual tendency of Greek modernism is best elucidated through the pursuit of the inner-orientated or introverted art, the principal lines of which are as follows: the transcendence of realism, the exploration of the inner processes of subjectivity, the treatment of time, and the manifestation of an alert aesthetic consciousness. These aspects also link Greek modernism to its European counterpart (Bell [1980], 3). As will be seen, the quest of the inner-orientated art became either the debatable issue of the day or the arena for experimentation with modernist and/or avant-garde techniques.

In 1929 Theotokas, under the pseudonym Orestis Digenis, published his seminal essay, *Ελεύθερο Πνεύμα* (Free Spirit), which functioned as the manifesto of the Generation of the 1930s (Vitti [1989], 20). *Free Spirit* announced an overall break away from this particular kind of realism, which encouraged the descriptive and superficial representation of life and customs of the countryside, namely *ethnography*. Theotokas's essay envisioned the renaissance of the Greek genius which could be achieved through the modernization of literature and life and its re-orientation toward its European matrix. He dismissed *ethnography* as "narrow" realism, "*the photographic school*" which fails to "speak to our soul" and does not reveal "its hidden soul" (Theotokas [1986], 177 and 178).<sup>2</sup> For Theotokas, the poet "surpassing [...] the external simplicity of the rhythms of humanity uncovers the great phantasmagoria of life." He is "a mythmaker and magician who tears down symmetries, breaks external rules, and arbitrarily recreates reality in order to extract its deepest meaning" (Theotokas [1986], 179).<sup>3</sup> *Free Spirit* also adumbrates the terms for the inner-orientated art which should reveal "the internal world" and the individuality of the fictional character as well as its creator's inner impulses and instincts:

The work of the poet is flesh from its flesh, blood from its blood. It is not an objective observation of external conditions, a dry transcription of forms and a statement of events, as Greek realists imagine literature to be. It is an excess of internal powers which tears man apart in order to come into the light, and which comes out kneaded with his deepest being, with the pulse of his existence, with the anguish of his soul and his pain, the pain of childbirth. (Theotokas [1986], 179)<sup>4</sup>

Dismissing the psychology of Greek ethnographers as the psychology of common cleverness and common sense, Theotokas envisioned a writing which would instill in the "character the breath of life and the pulse of individuality" (Theotokas [1986], 183–4).<sup>5</sup> His ideas signaled a turning point in the history of modern Greek literature which is linked with inner-orientated art and the exploration of the inner processes of subjectivity.

The poet George Seferis is one of the first of this generation to set forth the terms of inner-orientated art by negating the reconciliation of the opposing forces of imagination and rational



discourse. His emphasis on the illogical element in poetry turned him against his contemporaneous intellectual, the neo-Kantian philosopher K. Tsatsos as expressed in his famous “Διάλογος πάνω στην Ποίηση” (Dialogue on poetry) in 1938. Seferis believed that the art, which based itself exclusively on rational discourse, by means of “Verstand” or “Vernunft,” would be a voiceless art similar to silent films (Seferis [1984], 114). Seferis’s aesthetics were also influenced by Richards’s idea that “poetry is the supreme form of emotive language” (Seferis [1984–93], vol. 1, 144; Richards [1970], 216) and Eliot’s emotive dynamics of poetry (Eliot [1975], 40–3). However, Seferis’s inclination toward inner-orientated art is mostly manifested in his description of the act of creation as an experience of the inner self or a mystical experience deriving from the artist’s descent into those realms of obscurity of the inner ego, very close to Jung’s night journeys and to the Freudian id. Seferis concurs with modernism’s radical questioning of the boundaries of human identity. Without being an advocate of Freud’s theories, he too was interested in this unknown and unexplored domain of the human psyche from which personal and racial experience of the past unwittingly surfaces and affects the conscious present. Clearly distinguishing two levels of personality, he believed that the work of art is the cathartic outlet for those impulses (cf. Richards [1970], 10), for Aristotle’s terror and pity (*Poetics*), and a means of descending into this inner state of obscurity, which Saint John of the cross describes as the “selva oscura,” or the feeling of the dark forest (Seferis [1984–93], vol. 1, 153–5).<sup>6</sup> Seferis, however, tactfully avoided referring to the unconscious as the matrix and laboratory of artistic creation, which would associate him with either Freudian psychology, or the automatic writing of the surrealists. Obviously Seferis shared the reservation (if not the hostility) that his modernist peers (such as Eliot or Joyce) maintained against Freudian psychology. His use of myth, and particularly of the Odysseus archetype of the questing traveler, drawing more upon Jung’s racial archetypes, allowed him to present an open-ended personality in eternal search for aesthetic and/or personal accomplishment through the recreation of and the communication with the voices of its personal and racial past. Seferis’s interest in “the ritual ego of the crowd,” both “conscious and subconscious” or in the soul of the race (Seferis [1984–93], vol. 1, 289 and 48)<sup>7</sup> is the source of his admiration for demotic tradition and songs (Vayenas [1979], 36). All the same, in the seventeenth century the Cretan renaissance drama of *Erotokritos*, the “popular” painting of Theophilos and the *Memoirs* of Makryannis who was a hero of the Greek revolution (1821), Seferis discovered the “primitiveness” of the Hellenic spirit or “a very cultivated collective soul—the soul of our people” (Seferis [1982], 5 and 7).<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, Seferis’s use of the indigenous culture, not being different, for example, from Joyce’s use of the Celtic legacy or of the language of Shakespeare, or Ben Jonson, should be acknowledged as his assimilation of a modernist strain. The accusation, then, of ethnocentrism, for these reasons, would lead to the fallacy which would consider, for example, “Joyce’s *Ulysses* a work of defective modernism or a Hibernocentric novel because it contains abundant Irish elements,” as Vayenas astutely observes ([1997], 46).

The Odysseus myth became central in Seferis’s aesthetics and poetry. The pursuit of new forms in art took on Odyssean dimensions whereas the reactivation of the Homeric motif of the wandering traveler became a master metaphor for the ever-lasting journey of the Greek nation befitting the contemporaneous feel of nostalgia for lost homelands (Asia Minor Catastrophe). He also associated the quest for a new identity, or the rejuvenation of a lost identity, with the Greek “discovery” of English literature, namely modernism:

Whatever we call geographically Greece is but a starting point, an object of nostalgia, and a port for slow and tedious return. Odysseus's story is a story to be narrated as long as Greece exists. However, in 1922, the greatest part of this dispersed Hellenism returns and settles down within the limits of the Greek state. [...] All these travelers, who could not travel any more, brought the voyage to the heart of Athens. And as there is no voyage in which you don't meet an Englishman, we discovered at this very moment, I believe, English literature. [...] This generation, then, which grew up between two disasters, wanted to obtain consciousness of itself by assessing what its predecessors had bequeathed to it. [...] Its antecedents were very well informed about French literature. It was enchanted to discover English literature with which it felt more familiar.

This familiarization with English writing had two components. The first was the interest we showed in anything that took place in England and in whatever could contribute to a better awareness of English intellectuals in relation to our literature. I remember one day, years ago, being in the rue de l'Odéon with two friends who had published a selection of Greek poetry translated into English; we saw in Sylvia Beach's show-case the huge blue volume of the first edition of *U* and James Joyce's portrait with his thick glasses surrounded by Greek flags. 'He must have fought at the Macedonian front,' said one of them. Such was our ignorance about the celebrated Irish author. (Seferis [1984–93], vol. 3, 320–3)<sup>9</sup>

Seferis's words, written in 1941, recapitulate his long-term use of Odysseus in his poetry. His reactivation of the Homeric myth, not being an exclusive discovery of his, bears the influence of a resourceful European tradition recapitulated in Joyce's subversive employment of the Odysseus myth. However, Seferis's relation to Joyce should not be pressed to far. Moreover, the other significant source of influence is a resourceful tradition of modern Greek poetry, from the romantic poet Dionysius Solomos to C. Cavafy, a poet with certain affinities with English Aestheticism. Yet Cavafy, whose work Seferis tried to shun, at least in the early years of his career, is one among the first to successfully transpose the Odysseus myth in modernity as the inner adventure of the individual.

In Seferis's poetry the destiny of contemporary man is an inner Odyssey. Either as the inner sufferings of the individual or of the nation's soul, the journeys and eternal returns are recurrent in his poetry entangled with the Odysseus archetype. The questing voyager motif interlaces the theme of exile with the myth of eternal return to a pre-historical and/or unhistorical mythical past, of the nostalgia for "the myth of eternal repetition and in the last analysis, for the abolition of time" (Eliade [1954], 141–5). Thus myth, and particularly the Odysseus myth, functions as the conductive line which links past, present and future, both personal and racial, in an eternal journey and search for identity and self-completion.

In *Mythistorema* (Myth-history or novel) from 1933–34, Seferis's first poem in free verse, the themes of exile, eternal wandering and return are dramatized through the voice of an ever-traveling collective consciousness. It is the voice of an archetypal man communicating with and encompassing all voices of the Hellenic past, both mythic and historic. The voices of Odysseus and his companions, the Argonauts, Orestis, Andromache and Andromeda come into modernity to speak about modern man's predicament. The poem accommodates an atmosphere of both catastrophe and cultural decline. The former echoes the Asia Minor disaster (1922) and sustains the themes of exile and wandering of the refugees, while the latter expresses Seferis's darkening view of contemporary Greece. It is the suffocating atmosphere of a waste land, with mutilated statues, ancient sites, ruins of Byzantine churches, the low sky, the bony mountains and the Aegean landscape, of a "country closed in. The two black Symplegades close it in" (Seferis [1969], 27).<sup>10</sup> Seferis elicits from the

*Odyssey* the motif of eternal quest for and return to origins, which becomes a master metaphor for the destiny of the modern individual and for the nation's longing for renewal and regeneration.

*Mythistorema* attempts an open conception of personal identity and time. The Argonauts, Alexander the Great, the Nazarene, Socrates, Adonis, Elpenor Odysseus and many other mythic or historical names travel on the same boat of timelessness which links past, present and future. These adventurous travelers of the present, the anonymous narrator and the characters, can endure their plight by resorting to this past, both historical and mythic. In this way they manifest their impersonal, supra-human and mythic identity. And yet, the individuating rhythm of each persona is lost in the all-absorbing and monotonous voice of a collective consciousness in search of a rebirth from the ruins — Seferis's envisioning of the renaissance of the Hellenic spirit which prevents his personae from speaking in a personal idiom.

With *Κίχλη* (Thrush) from 1946, a poem from his mature period, Seferis recapitulates and culminates the employment of the Odyssean inner adventure in his poetry. The poem is exemplary for Seferis's use of the Odysseus myth as an entry to subjectivity and to the treatment of time. It takes its title from a ship named *Thrush*, sunk by the island of Poros during the Second World War. *Thrush* is separated into three parts: "The House Near the Sea," "The Lustful Elpenor," and "The wreck of the *Thrush*." The first-person speaking voice is a kind of Odysseus who has arrived at Circe's palace, which functions as the "first home" after his long wanderings. Yet, this information is provided by the poet in a separate text, entitled "Μια Σκηνοθεσία για την 'Κίχλη'" ("Stage directions for 'Thrush'") and published in 1949 (Seferis [1983–94], vol. 2, 30–56). The reader encounters an anonymous soliloquist, self-absorbed by his reveries and fantasies. The poem unfolds through Odysseus's soliloquy, which is interrupted by voices from his memory, surging from within himself, and by the sound of the radio which introduces musicality (rhythm and rhymes) and links to the contemporary real world.

The first part deals with Odysseus's reveries of and longing for his home. In the second part, comprising a conversation between Elpenor and Circe and the radio's intrusion, a spatio-temporal concretization is attempted. It is expressed through Elpenor's lustful desire for Circe who stands for the sensory bodily world, and the voice heard on the radio reporting the news. The song on the radio is an attempt at highlighting the temporal and spatial modalities of form, introducing rhythm and musicality in contrast to the prosaic style of the entire poem. Vayenas, who has drawn parallels between the *Thrush* and Eliot's "Four Quartets," argues that the poem was planned as a concert, as manifested by the orchestrated succession of its three parts (Vayenas [1979], 266–71). In the third part Odysseus embarks upon the wrecked ship to experience his imaginary voyage to the underworld, a journey in subjectivity, memory, and fantasies:

The ship's name was the *Thrush*, a small wreck, and  
the masts  
Broken, groped to the bottom, oblique, like tentacles,  
Or memory of dreams, indicating the hull  
An indistinguishable mouth of some sea creature,  
Dead,  
Quenched in the water. There was total calm around.

And little by little other voices in their turn  
 Followed in whisperings; they were thin and thirsty  
 And came from the other side of the sun, the dark side;  
 Familiar voices but I could not recognize them.  
 (Seferis [1982], 114–15)<sup>11</sup>

During this journey Odysseus hears the dead voices of the past. His journey goes to the underworld of senses, to a place where memory, dreams, whispering, “familiar” and yet unrecognizable “voices” dwell. It is an exploration of the “other side of the sun, the dark side,” Seferis’s experience of the *selva oscura*, a descent to Hades and the obscurities of the self, a temporary death out of which his hero will rise anew to continue his journey home. Thus from the voices of Teiresias, and Socrates, Odysseus’s mind shifts to the Oedipus myth, Eteocles, Polynices, the “dark girl” Antigone and from the blind Oedipus and the obscurities of the inner self to a revelation of light, a rebirth.

Associating his anonymous narrator with the mythic personality of Odysseus, Seferis attempts to free his persona from the bonds of time. Odysseus’s journey knows no time restrictions. He is heading to “Smyrna, Rhodes, Syracuse, Alexandria,” destinations representing different moments in Greek history which merge in his memory. He is in the present and yet he lives and breathes the air of the dead. The suggestion is that there is a living past, both personal and racial, within modern man which affects the conscious present. The endeavor is comparable to *Ulysses*, although Seferis’s Odysseus carries much more awareness of his historical role than Joyce’s Bloom. There is a Joycean touch about the poem mostly manifested in Circe’s symbolic presence and her humiliating dismissal of Elpenor’s lustfulness. In his comments, Seferis refers to Elpenor as this everyday man who could be called “poor” Elpenor, a characterization reminiscent of poor Paddy Dignam, Joyce’s modern Elpenor. However, Seferis’s antithetical casting of Odysseus and Elpenor, the former being the light and the latter being the flesh, a sort of Apollonian and Dionysian distinction, far from being Joycean, introduces an obscure otherness relating to the body’s senses, as both Elpenor’s lust and Circe’s sensuality suggest.

As Seferis explained in his commentary on *Thrush*, Odysseus sets out for the underworld from Circe’s isle:

Sometimes these old texts hide limitless understanding. Take Circe: the senses of the body, our sensuality, send us to the other world, to the dead, to show us the way to return home. And truly, what we call eroticism does have a bearing, as many things show, on the longing and struggle of man for liberation, which some call return to a lost Paradise and others union with God. (Seferis [1950], 504)

Indeed, Circe’s palace stimulates Odysseus’s yearning for his own home, enacting the circular quest for homecoming which unites origins with terminal ends. Circe, “a woman deep-girdled, with glancing eyes,” and “the slow speech of respected ladies” (Seferis [1982], 110)<sup>12</sup> with gray hair motivate Odysseus’s reveries and his embarking upon an inner journey for return to origins. Accordingly, Seferis’s attempt at an unframed presentation of the identity of modern man also encompasses the quest for this twin otherness which is woman, nature, body, the senses and the recurrent journey to those realms of a preconscious union with the maternal territory under the “earth,” in the depths of personality.

Complying with modernism's general qualities, the presentation of an open-ended and supra-personal subjectivity, and the treatment of time through myth (timelessness) and musicality (spatio-temporal formal arrangement) are all manifestations of an alert aesthetic consciousness in Seferis's work. These aspects also contributed to the modernization of Greek literature. His literary criticism and poetry set forth the terms of an inner-orientated art which was predominantly influential on the branch of Greek modernism which experimented more with modernist techniques in prose, namely, the Salonica School.

The authors of the Athenian branch of the Generation of the Thirties did achieve the transcendence of "ethnography," and to create a novel which, dealing with the urban middle class or petit bourgeoisie, aligned itself with the European urban novel. The works produced were modern and innovative for their time but not necessarily modernist in their techniques although bearing evidence of the influences of European modernist authors. In Theotokas's *Αργώ* (Argo) from 1933–36, for example, one may trace an echo of Gide's *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* (1925) both in the author's keeping of a journal and in the novel's characters who either aspire to be or are authors or poets; yet their transposition hardly raises questions about the relationship between art and real life, for it is an exploration and/or exposition of an inner life. The title *Argo*, elicited from the myth of Jason and the Argonauts in pursuit of the Golden Fleece, introduces the timeless journey of the Greek nation in search of renaissance from the ruins, very similar to Seferis's motif of the questing traveler. This destiny of the ever troubled and wandering Hellenic nation looms over the Notaras, a contemporary Athenian family, which is central to the novel's plot. This fate along with the chronicle-like character of the novel, although comparable to D.H. Lawrence's biblical genealogy of the Brangwens in *The Rainbow* (1915) and the subsequent *Women in Love* (1920), hardly imbues the novel with the psychological complexity and sensitivity of a Lawrence. The novel's focus is largely on the historical, social, and political situation of its time, reflecting its creator's ambition for modernization of Greek life, a rejuvenation of Hellenism, which would restore its bonds with European culture. Theotokas's *Argo*, remains mainly a realist novel interspersed with modernist elements manifested in its highly conscious structure (two parts, each of them consisting of ten chapters, starting with an introduction and closing with an epilogue—a structure which suggests musicality), and the use of myth and time. Similarly, in the works of authors like Politis, Karagatsis, and Terzakis there are modernist elements, which make some critics relate them to Joyce, Conrad and D.H. Lawrence respectively (Mackridge [1985], 9), while their fiction largely remains urban realism.

The claim for introversion and/or introspection thrived mostly in the Salonican authors who practiced and experimented with a new set of formal innovations in novel making which may be subsumed by the demand for transcending realism. The crux of this set of practices aimed at a novel without a plot which would delve the fathoms of subjectivity subverting the acclaimed norms of linearity and realist verisimilitude. The novels written by these authors are highly self-conscious narratives which draw attention to the fictional nature of the novel. The characters are often artists or authors of the work in which they participate, while the art making itself is the very theme of the novels. Thus the material of the novel was largely elicited from the artist's internal speculations about the means of his art making and dramatized the act of creation as well as the process of novel making. Therefore, these works bear evidently the characteristics of a novel preoccupied with forms of art or of what John Fletcher and Malcolm Bradbury characterized as the introverted novel

([1976], 394–415). To get a focus on this I will present Xefloudas and Pentzikis as characteristic cases in point.

One of the principals of the Salonican group, Stelios Xefloudas, was among the first to experiment with the introverted novel. He made his debut with *Τα Τετράδια του Παύλου Φωτεινού* (Pavlos Fotinos's notebooks) in 1930. As the book's title suggests it is a notebook for art-making which deals with the inner thoughts of its first person narrator Pavlos Fotinos, who is a would-be artist character. Lacking plot and characters, the novel discusses its creator's difficulties in novel making. *Τα Τετράδια του Παύλου Φωτεινού* troubled critics who saw it as belonging to a vague, "new European genre," with inventiveness and originality, distinguished for its introspective and psychoanalytic orientation (Berlis [1996], 271). In 1932, *Εσωτερική Συμφωνία* (Inner Symphony) followed, also written in a journal-like mode with a similar content. Xefloudas's first two novels are both experimental in character, suffering an internal crisis of presentation, raising questions linking life and art.

The first-person narrator and would-be artist monologist of these novels ignores external reality and elicits material from his inner self in an attempt to tell a story—a venture that he does not finally manage. The core story of the novel, then, is the aesthetic emancipation of this would-be artist, a process of self-becoming which assumes Odyssean dimensions as it takes place after the narrator's wandering around Europe, within the foggy, gray atmosphere of Paris, where his "interior reconstruction" takes place through "Valérian exercises" (Xefloudas [1930], 44).<sup>13</sup> The many allusions to authors like Mallarmé, Valéry, Gide, and Rilke as well as to the technique of interior monologue are the author's attempt to show that his work originates from French symbolism and is associated with the modernist venture.

Xefloudas makes one of the early attempts at transcending realism in fiction. He sought to create a novel without plot and adventures which would break with classic realism and transfer the focus from external reality to inner life. This pursuit was expressed as follows: "A book without facts, without theme. Detachment and distance of its personae from reality. Transcendence into a new reality [...] We could say a ceaseless coalescence of life and dream" (Xefloudas [1932], 5).<sup>14</sup>

Xefloudas is exemplary not only of the experimentation but also of the confused ideas of the period. The intense theorization of fiction-making in his novels, the soliloquizing narrators, and the author's frequent statements that his narrative technique was interior monologue led critics to the misconception that the texts were indeed written in the form of interior monologue. Because of the introspective character of his work rather than through his use of the technique itself, the author was considered to be a pioneer of interior monologue. Recent criticism has questioned whether Xefloudas used interior monologue (Kakavoulia [1997], 140). In fact his texts are free associative narratives where a soliloquist first person narrator exposes his inner adventures in his attempt to write a novel. Thus Xefloudas may be construed to be the initiator of the inward adventure in prose or, even better, a pioneer of the introverted novel.

The narrative techniques of introspection (interior monologue and stream of consciousness) had already attracted interest in this period. In interior monologue and stream of consciousness the authors sought the means for transcending realism and probing the depths of subjectivity. Misconceptions and misunderstandings were not rare. Sometimes the technique was associated with the artistic movement of surrealism, considered as "the alter ego [of surrealism] in prose, [...]"

the expression of the innermost and most spontaneous thoughts of the individual. [...] an inner flow [...] toward the unconscious, [...] the literary subject's submergence into the unconscious" (Kazantzis [1991], 206).<sup>15</sup> In 1932, Piniatoglou, one of the first and most important of the critics who introduced Joyce to the Greek literary scene, objected to the idea of linking anything introverted or psycho-biographical with interior monologue (Piniatoglou [1932], 258–60). Literary criticism has examined the interior monologue in reference to both Dujardin's *Les lauriers sont coupés* (We'll to the Woods No More) and Joyce's *Ulysses* (Mentzelos [1933], 163–8).<sup>16</sup> The translation of the free associative narratives of Molly's and Stephen's monologues, at the beginning of the thirties, also enforced the quest for introspection. Nevertheless, the whole period is suggestive of the preoccupation with techniques for presenting the inner life as part of the inward turn of the novel. As this interest took in preconscious and unconscious processes, anything opaque and dreamy was viewed as being related to interior monologue. Thus dream, free association, stream of consciousness and interior monologue, all sustained the attempt to delve into individual identity.

Xefloudas's work is exemplary of this period of ambiguities, where the urge for transcending realism favored anything introspective and/or introverted. As Moullas observes, it is an epoch

where the outlines are blurred, the sizes diminish, forms dissolve and the trajectory from 'outside' to 'inside' begins. Whatever follows in the first decades of our century (psychoanalysis, phenomenology, theory of relativity, synchronic linguistics, futurism, surrealism etc) widens the gap. (Moullas [1993], 131)<sup>17</sup>

Xefloudas's dismissal of realism led him to an overall skepticism of the possibility of someone writing a novel and perhaps this was the reason why his early works were journal-like. Yet this early assumption, which also sustained the idea of mixing of genres, led him later to his *Οδυσσέας* (Odysseus) and the idea of a book that encompasses everything.

Xefloudas's *Odysseus*, written in 1967 and published in 1974, is a modern transposition of the Odysseus myth, clearly inspired by, and aspiring to assimilate, Joyce's *Ulysses* as well as involving a transference of Seferis's poetics of inner adventure in fiction. The novel is a subversive transposition of the Homeric myth. It deals with the adventurous yet inner motions of an existentialist Odysseus who has come to modernity trying to escape his heroic and royal origins. Calypso accompanies him on his long journey. She too has become a modern wanderer and has denied the Homeric myth, according to which Calypso kept the hero imprisoned on her island. The wanderings start from Alexandria, a city saturated by history and myth, the crossroad of different civilizations and a place which stands for spatial concretization. From there Odysseus and Calypso embark upon a long journey on the Mediterranean Sea which concludes in a big anonymous metropolitan center. There, the travelers go on a Bloom-like wandering in the streets of the city. This Odysseus, being an outcast from history and modernity, is also a modern wanderer in quest of self-becoming and a would-be artist experimenting with a modern transposition of the Homeric myth. His wanderings in the city, egalitarianism and sensuality recall Joyce's Bloom, whereas his artistic restlessness and philosophical skepticism relate him to Stephen Dedalus.

The novel essentially has no plot. Instead it is a long wandering in Odysseus's fantasies and meditations about the destiny of the individual who lives in alienated modernity. Having denounced the past, royal, mythic, divine and along with it the kind of history which focuses on man's extroverted action, the two basic characters maintain a subversive role against history and myth. They

are both rebels who reject royal, military and divine power and questioned social, matrimonial and gender stereotypes in order to experience an earthly humanism of peace, relating to the body's senses. Being outcasts from history and modernity, the suggestion is that myth itself is in exile in modernity. Accordingly the text is suffused with nostalgia for a return to a pre-historic, mythic past, a lost paradise of sexual primitivism and pleasure. Like Circe in Seferis's *Thrush*, or Molly in Joyce's modern transposition of the Odysseus myth, Calypso's sensual body is both the motivation and the terminal end of this journey. She stimulates his long contemplative wanderings into history, myth and literature as well as his yearning for the world of senses and for union with his feminine otherness. The text is inundated with Odysseus's desire as he tries to retell his story and to recapture an earthly sensual humanism relating to the other, the woman who is the carnal affirmation of his quest.

Xefloudas is one of the first to question the possibility of a complete and stable ego and to attempt a multi-dimensional presentation of personality, as manifested in Odysseus's words: "Everybody that circulates around me tonight in these roads has within his body, as I have, another or many other selves and looks far beyond the limits of the world, while the world begins and ends within ourselves" (Xefloudas [1974], 63).<sup>18</sup>

The casting of Odysseus and Calypso as modern wanderers on a timeless journey for self-becoming attributes a supra-personal quality to their characters. The expansion of the limits of personality is also achieved through the contestation of gender stereotypes, each one of the two main characters seeking his/her otherness in the other. This pursuit of otherness, also being the precondition for articulating an artistic voice, subtly introduces the theme of a cross-gendered and ambiguous subject of utterance echoing Joyce's aesthetics of the androgynous artist.

Drawing upon a vast European literary tradition, the text advertises its Anglo-Saxon influences through many allusions to Shakespeare, Joyce and Eliot. This is also a shift from the Francophone orientation of the author's previous work and an attempt to locate *Odysseus* in Joyce's modernist tradition. Despite the many differences, Xefloudas's novel shares with *Ulysses* the subversion of the Homeric myth through the rendition of modern man's destiny as an odyssey of the inner self, which, not relating to extroverted actions, takes place in the depths of subjectivity. Experimenting with the spatio-temporal arrangement of events, narrative techniques, subjectivity and time, and laying open the artist's aesthetic consciousness, Xefloudas attempted to create a Greek modernist tradition parallel to its European counterpart. His work is resourceful in the context of modernism's early and premature steps of development in Greece. As I will promptly discuss, N. G. Pentzikis, the other principal of the Salonican school, provides a more successful and characteristic modernist paradigm than Xefloudas.

N. G. Pentzikis's interest in the techniques of introversion leads back to his translation of an extract from Dujardin's *Les lauriers sont coupés* in 1935. The author participated in the group translations of *Ulysses* and was profoundly influenced by Joyce's work. His aesthetic project is a constant attempt at bridging the gap between Western and Eastern civilization, by associating Christianity, Byzantine orthodox tradition and ancient myth with the modernist European breakthrough. His fiction is an idiosyncratic conglomeration of this vast tradition where Eastern medievalism and ancient myth meet modernism's uncertainty principle, scientific meditation, Freudian and Jungian recreation of ancient myths and Christian tradition, and experimentation with avant-garde techniques.



*To Μυθιστόρημα της Κυρίας Ερσης* (The novel of Mrs Ersi) from 1966, is representative of Pentzikis's mature work and indicative of his entire aesthetic project. This text, not only recapitulating but also surpassing the author's long-term experimentation with the techniques of introversion, manages to be a complete novel in itself. It actualizes the introverted novel while simultaneously flaunting its modernist characteristics. The title advertises the fictional character of the novel and for the Greek reader it becomes obvious that it is a rewriting of Drosinis's novel, *Ersi*. *Ersi* belongs to that kind of folkloric realism, which the Generation of the Thirties dismissed as superficially, and photographically focusing on external characteristics and actions, namely, *ethnography*. Drosinis won a prize in 1883, in a short-story contest whose basic criterion was the "Greekness" of the works. Obviously Pentzikis's decision to rework a novel with realist characteristics typical of this period signifies his attempt to beat realism on its own grounds.

As a highly self-conscious narrative, the text is an ironic and humorous reversal of Drosinis's novel *Ersi*, published in 1922, which is also the year of the publication of *Ulysses*, the book that provided most of the thematic patterns and structures for Pentzikis's novel. This choice may not be accidental as this author is distinguished for his play on time, spatio-temporal simultaneity, and timelessness which hark back to his Neoplatonic interest in Pythagorean numerology. In fact, the entire *Novel of Mrs Ersi* is constructed on the basis of a play on timelessness and Protean metamorphosis through time which makes myth, and consequently fiction, the linchpin which holds together the chaos of modernity.

In Drosinis's novel, *Ersi* is an agreeable young lady married to the archaeologist Pavlos Rodanos. Rodanos's research for his aesthetic treatise on the female hand and leg in ancient Greek sculpture brings the couple to an unnamed island for six months. The visible aloofness in their lives is contrasted with the practical life of the natives, fishermen and peasants. As Drosinis was also a poet with certain affinities with the Parnassians, *Ersi* is suffused with Parnassian elements. The Parnassian strain of the novel is manifested in its preoccupation with ancient erudition, in the embellishment of conjugal love and the ideal presentation of Ersi's beauty and conduct. Ersi is idealized and idolized to such a degree that she appears to have the characteristics of a work of art, comparable to the ancient sculptures of Victory of Samothrace, to the goddess Athena, to Demeter and to Persephone.

Pentzikis picks up this aloofness to attack Parnassian perfectionism, Drosinis's vague realism and along with it the legacy of the realist novel. In *The novel of Mrs Ersi*, the overt awareness of the complexity of fictional structure creates an extremely contorted narrative procedure, itself embodying a kind of Odyssean struggle with the material to be conveyed. Through many references to Homer and allusions to Joyce's *Ulysses*, it becomes obvious that while the novel in its manifest content is a rewriting of the Parnassian novel, in its latencies it bears the characteristics of an epic of modernity, one that concerns itself with the process of art-making.

In Pentzikis's novel, the characters of Drosinis's novel have outlived their author, and live in modernity experiencing the crisis of a prosaic life. To facilitate this, Pentzikis casts a narrator artist-to-be, who had read Drosinis's novel in his adolescence. Aspiring to become Drosinis's epigone, the narrator wants to rewrite the novel, reveal the fallacies of idealization and sentimentality and to transpose them in modernity. Sharing Stephen Dedalus's labyrinthine meditations, and Leopold Bloom's adventurous wanderings in the city, the narrator is presented as an Odyssean figure in quest of modern art. He converses with Drosinis's main characters, who, living in modernity, have been

stripped of their ideality. In Pentzikis's revision, Ersi and Pavlos go through a marital crisis and separate. The ideal relationship has been damaged as the fictional couple absorbed by its intellectuality has lost touch with the immediacy which acts upon the senses. Yet, maintaining the intellectuality of a connoisseur of art they scold the narrator for his experimentation with a modern transposition of their fictional life. Thus their artistic authority takes on parental dimensions and looms over the artist-son's endeavor.

Each one of the three main participants of Pentzikis's novel, the artist-to-be, Ersi and her husband, Pavlos Rodanos, embark upon a circular quest for a return to origins, for recapturing lost love and/or lost art. Ersi yearns for the bodily pleasure and for Pavlos's lost affections and Pavlos for hers. Pentzikis emphasizes the corporeal aspects of an erotic union in order to create a modern parable of art which echoes Joyce's aesthetics of the androgynous artist. He presents the union between a male and a female as the source of all creativity, and artistic creativity as an imaginary copulation taking place in the body of an androgynous artist, who is always an epigone, the son and successor of a vast literary tradition in pursuit of authority and fatherhood. Thus, the narrator, too, sets out on a long journey to literature and art in order to recreate the new text, to subvert the paternal authority of the maker of *Ersi*, and thus to conquer Ersi the character and the novel, and along with them a secret otherness suppressed by the rationality of the world of forms.

All these wanderings unfold as regressive journeys to past memories, personal and collective, stimulated by the random invasion of a detailed solid world which imparts to the novel the trivia of mundanity. The external world is out there but its presentation depends upon the character's own perception. Similarly, the character's objective participation in the novel is undermined by his/her dependence on the perspectives of the other participants in the story. Thus, the reader will create the complete image of the character by putting together the bits and pieces of external observation and inner meditation of the different perspectives of each character. Pentzikis's text transcends realism in a most Joycean way. Using the principle of cubist simultaneity, he creates a kaleidoscopic collage of events. In this evasive narrative, each insignificant detail, elicited either from the solid world or from inner speculation, is the microscopic manifestation of a macrocosm, and of the hidden pattern behind the text. The adventitious arrangement of events plays down Drosinis's Parnassian perfectionism, realist linearity and rationality. At the same time this fortuitousness draws upon universal patterns of thought and archetypes sustaining the coherence of the narrative; the archetype of the wandering traveler, the Protean motif of metamorphosis, the circular quest and the myth of eternal return, the myth of Adonis and its Christian transposition as death and resurrection, the Oedipus myth and its humorous association with the Dogma of the Trinity, the family romance and eventually the myth of Ariadne, the woman savior and liberator of man, are all employed to sustain the coherence of the narrative.

The novel is modeled as a family romance with an Oedipal and incestuous bias. Ersi takes on all possible feminine roles, becoming seductress, mother earth and author of the novel in which she participates. Pavlos is an aesthete, a paternal and conjugal figure who is eventually put to death. The narrator's filial attitude, variously manifested in the narrative, culminates in his replacement as Ersi's husband and his becoming her companion in her travels and co-writer of the revised version of the novel.

The narrative unfolds through dreams, phantasmagoric metamorphoses and hallucinations. In one of his dreams, the narrator conflates the ancient myth of Ariadne with the Greek folk-tale of the

Sack-stitcher to produce a linguistic effect which foregrounds the constructive work of language as part of myth making on the basis of sound. The focus on the similarity of sounds between the words “myti” and “mitos” and their suggestive relation to “mythos,” marks the development of the whole story. In Greek “myti” means nose and “mitos” is the word for Ariadne’s thread. As the narrator says, he had a dream that he was touching and pulling Mrs Ersi’s nose (Pentzikis [1992], 146). This inconsequential and amusing gesture becomes the nodal point of a chain of thematic sequences and metaphors. He associates the word “myti” (nose) with the “mitos” (thread) which Ariadne gave to Theseus to save him from the labyrinth. Likewise, the narrator, touching and pulling the “myti” (nose)/“mitos” (thread), finds a way out of his labyrinthine meditations through the rewriting of the novel. The pinching of the nose-thread becomes a master metaphor for the act of writing as embroidery and corporeality. The suggestion is that the act of writing, which is also an act of salvation and life, is related to the reclaiming of this feminine otherness, represented either by Ariadne, or Ersi, or the weaving Penelope.

In another of his dreams, the narrator imagined that he died and was transformed into a needle and thread in the hands of Mrs Ersi, who now becomes the authoress of the new text. The needle punctures Ersi’s finger and the blood-letting begins. This bleeding takes on cosmic dimensions. Pentzikis draws upon a folk song in which a young man, by kissing the red lips of his beloved, dyes his own lips red; wiping them with his handkerchief, this too is dyed red; successively the handkerchief colors the river waters and the whole universe. This is the folk song which Seferis used as an example of the illogical element in poetry, in his dialogue with his contemporary philosopher Tsatsos (Seferis [1982], 80). Therefore, the employment of the folk song is a vivid dramatization not only of Seferis’s and Theotokas’s aesthetics—mentioned before—but also Pentzikis’s own endorsement of the imaginary and the irrational in art which derives from his Freudian and Jungian perspective as well as from his Christian metaphysics, namely his belief in miracles. The writing of the novel with the blood of Mrs Ersi, is such a miracle occurring in the secular world yet with Freudian dimensions as it clearly suggests erotic union and menstruation. The allusion here is also to Joyce’s modern Penelope, Molly, whose chaotic monologue is accompanied by her menstrual blood.

The book closes with a humorous dramatization of the idea of the artist giving birth to his work in a propounding of Stephen Dedalus’s theory of the androgynous artist, giving birth to his art and Mulligan’s clownish performance of this impregnation in “Scylla and Charybdis.” The narrator, lying next to his wife in bed, recapitulates the events of the book in a long interior monologue, entitled “When the moon fell asleep” (Pentzikis [1992], 343–78).<sup>19</sup> It is a celebration of the matrimonial thalamus, inspired by Molly’s nocturnal monologue. The narrator is now married, and his wife takes the place of Mrs Ersi. They have four children. But just as this union is symbolic so are their children. They are Pavlos Rodanos (Ersi’s husband), Andreas Dimakoudis (the main character of Pentzikis’s eponymous novel), the author Stavrakios Kosmas (an early pseudonym of Pentzikis) and the needle and thread. The narrator discloses the artist’s polymorphous identity by taking all possible positions within the narrative: artist-son, and procreator father/mother of his own work, represented in the four children.

*The Novel of Mrs Ersi* is a modernist text. In it all elements of Greek modernism are mustered and welded together: the transcendence of realism, the multidimensional presentation of identity, the employment of myth, the experimentation with the spatio-temporal modalities of the narrative,

the dramatization of the aesthetic consciousness, and in general most of the modernist premises of the Generation of the Thirties which thrived in Pentzikis's mature work. The author's work, distinguished by a rare openness to diverse ideologies and traditions, is also a sample of the Greek modernist enterprise.

It is hard to assess Greek modernism's multifaceted development or tackle all its diversities in a single survey. The writers discussed in this paper constitute characteristic modernist paradigms in literary criticism, poetry and fiction. Their contribution, sometimes subversive (school of Salonica), or with a moderate plan for innovation (Athenian branch of the Generation of the Thirties), is in tune with modernism's general controversies and paradoxes. The Greek modernist venture encompasses both the pursuit of cultural/national renaissance and the quest for aesthetic renewal. At a distance from and despite the controversies over national identity, language, authority and ideology, it is modernism's aesthetic project and the work of art itself, the text, that provide the evidence for the new imports of this epoch, which was progressive, innovative and at times and in terms of art making, radical, if not subversive.

## Notes

1. "Καθένας από τους τέσσερις πεζογράφους των Μακεδονικών Ημερών (Ξεφλούδας, Δέλιος, Γιαννόπουλος Πεντζίκης), έχει τις αφετηρίες του αντίστοιχα, στον Προύστ, στη Γούλφ, στον Πιραντέλο και τον Τζούζ" (Kazantzis [1983], 19).
2. "φωτογραφική σχολή," "δεν μιλά στην ψυχή," "την κρυμμένη ψυχή [του]" (Theotokas [1998b], 39, 40 and 41).
3. "Ξεπερνώντας [...] την εξωτερική απλότητα των ρυθμών της ανθρωπότητας ξεσκεπάζει τη μεγάλη φαντασμαγορία της ζωής." "Ανατρέπει τις αναλογίες, σπάνει τους εξωτερικούς κανόνες, ξαναπλάθει αυθαίρετα την πραγματικότητα για να εξαγάγει το βαθύτερο νόημά της, *μυθοπλάστης και μάγος*" (Theotokas [1998b], 42- 43).
4. "Το έργο του ποιητή είναι σάρκα από τη σάρκα του, αίμα από το αίμα του. Δεν είναι μια αντικειμενική παρατήρηση των εξωτερικών συνθηκών, μια ξερή αντιγραφή μορφών και έκθεση γεγονότων, όπως φαντάστηκαν τη λογοτεχνία οι Έλληνες ρεαλιστές. Είναι ένα πλεόνασμα εσωτερικών δυνάμεων που ξεσκίζει έναν άνθρωπο για να βγει στο φως, και που βγαίνει ζυμωμένο με το βαθύτερο είναι του, με τον παλμό της ύπαρξής του, με την αγωνία της ψυχής του, με τον πόνο του, τον πόνο του τοκετού" (Theotokas [1998], 43).
5. "στα πρόσωπά του την πνοή της ιδιαίτερης ζωής, τον παλμό της ιδιαίτερης ατομικότητας" (Theotokas [1998b], 50).
6. "Το αίσθημα του σκοτεινού δάσους, η *"selva oscura"* (Seferis [1984-93], vol. 1, 153).
7. "το τελετουργικό εγώ της ομάδας" "συνειδητό ή υποσυνείδητο" (Seferis [1984-93], vol. 1, 289).
8. "προμιτιβισμό," "μιας πολύ καλλιεργημένης [...] ομαδικής ψυχής όπως είναι η ψυχή του λαού μας" (Seferis [1984-93], vol. 1, 460 and 462).
9. "Ότι αποκαλούμε γεωγραφικά Ελλάδα δεν ήταν παρά ένα σημείο εκκίνησης, ένα αντικείμενο νοσταλγίας, κι ένα λιμάνι για αργούς και πολύμοχθους γυρισμούς. Η ιστορία του Οδυσσέα είναι μια ιστορία που θα τη διηγούνται όσο θα υπάρχει Ελλάδα. Όμως, γύρω στο 1922, το μεγαλύτερο τμήμα του διάσπαρτου Ελληνισμού επιστρέφει κι έρχεται να εγκατασταθεί μέσα στα όρια του ελληνικού κράτους. [...] Όλοι αυτοί οι ταξιδιώτες, που δεν μπορούσαν πια να ταξιδέψουν, είχαν μεταφέρει το ταξίδι στην καρδιά της Αθήνας. Κι όπως δεν υπάρχει ταξίδι όπου να μη συναντήσεις κάποιον Άγγλο, τότε ακριβώς ανακαλύψαμε, νομίζω, κι εμείς την αγγλική λογοτεχνία. [...] Αυτή λοιπόν η γενιά που μεγάλωσε ανάμεσα

σε δύο καταστροφές θέλησε [...] να αποκτήσει συνείδηση του εαυτού της σταθμίζοντας αυτό που οι προγενέστεροι της είχαν μεταδώσει. [...] Οι προγενέστεροι της ήταν πάρα πολύ καλά πληροφορημένοι γύρω στη γαλλική λογοτεχνία. Η ίδια γοητεύτηκε ανακαλύπτοντας την αγγλική λογοτεχνία, που την ένοιωθε όλο και πιο οικεία.

Αυτή, η εξοικείωση με τα αγγλικά γράμματα είχε δύο συστατικά στοιχεία. Το πρώτο ήταν το ενδιαφέρον που δείχναμε για ότι συνέβαινε στην Αγγλία και για το κάθε τι που θα μπορούσε να συμβάλει σε μια καλύτερη πληροφόρηση των Άγγλων λογίων σχετικά με τη λογοτεχνία μας. Θυμάμαι πριν από πολλά χρόνια, μια μέρα, στην οδό Οντεόν, μαζί με δύο φίλους, που εξέδιδαν μια ανθολογία ελληνικής ποίησης σε μετάφραση αγγλική, είδαμε στη βιτρίνα της Sylvia Beach τον ογκώδη γαλάζιο τόμο της πρώτης έκδοσης του *Οδυσσέα* και το πορτραίτο του James Joyce με τα χοντρά γυαλιά του πλασιωμένο από ελληνικές σημαίες. 'Θα πολέμησε στο μακεδονικό μέτωπο,' είπε ένας από τους δύο. Τέτοια ήταν η άγνοια μας σχετικά με τον λαμπρό Ιρλανδό συγγραφέα" (Seferis [1984–93], vol. 3, 320–3).

10. "Ο τόπος μας είναι κλειστός. Τον κλείνουν/ οι δυο μαύρες συμπληγάδες" (Seferis [1974], 55).

11. "το 'λεγαν 'Κίχλη' ένα μικρό ναυάγιο· τα κατάρτια, σπασμένα, κυματίζανε λοξά στο βάθος, σαν πλοκάμια ή μνήμη ονείρων, δείχνοντας το σκαρί του στόμα θαμπό κάποιου μεγάλου κήτους νεκρού σβησμένο στο νερό. Μεγάλη απλώνονταν γαλήνη.

Κι. άλλες φωνές σιγά-σιγά με τη σειρά τους ακολούθησαν· ψίθυροι φτενοί και διψασμένοι που βγαίνουν από του ήλιου τ' άλλο μέρος, το σκοτεινό· ήτανε γνώριμες μα δε μπορούσα να τις ξεχωρίσω" (Seferis [1974], 226).

12. "μια γυναίκα ελικοβλέφαρη βαθύζωνη," "και γύρω του μιλούν σιγά σεβάσμιες δέσποινες" (Seferis [1974], 220).

13. "Εσωτερική ανασυγκρότηση. Βαλερικές ασκήσεις" (Xefloulas [1930], 40).

14. "Ένα βιβλίο δίχως γεγονότα, δίχως υπόθεση. Απόσπαση και απομάκρυνση των προσώπων του από την πραγματικότητα. Μετατόπιση σε μια πραγματικότητα νέα [...] Θα μπορούσαμε να πούμε, σύγχυση αδιάκοπη της ζωής και του ονείρου" (Xefloulas [1932], 5).

15. "Το πεζογραφικό alter ego του [υπερρεαλισμού] [...] η έκφραση των εσώτατων και πιο αυθόρμητων σκέψεων του ατόμου. [...] η εσωτερική ροή [...] προς το ασυνείδητο. [...] κατάδυση[ς] του λογοτεχνικού ατόμου προς το υποσυνείδητο" (Kazantzis [1991], 206).

16. "Οι Δάφνες κόπηκαν."

17. "όπου θολώνουν τα περιγράμματα, μικραίνουν οι όγκοι, διαλύονται οι μορφές και αρχίζει η πορεία από το 'έξω' προς το 'μέσα.' Ό,τι ακολουθεί, στις πρώτες δεκαετίες του αιώνα μας (ψυχανάλυση, φαινομενολογία, θεωρία της σχετικότητας, συγχρονική γλωσσολογία, φουτουρισμός, υπερρεαλισμός κλπ.) διευρύνει το χάσμα" (Moullas [1993], 131).

18. "Ο καθένας που κυκλοφορεί απόψε γύρω μου σ' αυτούς τους δρόμους, έχει στο σώμα του, όπως κι εγώ, έναν άλλο ή πολλούς εαυτούς του κοιτάζει μακριά έξω από τα σύνορα του κόσμου, ενώ ο κόσμος αρχίζει και τελειώνει μέσα μας" (Xefloulas [1974], 63).

19. "Όταν το φεγγάρι κοιμήθηκε" (Pentzikis [1992], 343).

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## Afterword

ASTRADUR EYSTEINSSON AND VIVIAN LISKA

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The present volumes do not contain the history of modernism, or even *a* history of modernism. It does, however, comprise a good deal of evidence regarding the ongoing constructions of modernism as a historical and cultural paradigm. Its aim was not to be an encyclopaedic guide to modernism and modernist studies, but rather to examine, in a systematic yet not too schematic a manner, the state of the art in the field, exploring recent orientations, interests, trends, as well as to seek new evidence about the crucial parameters of modernism. Now that it seems clear that the “postmodern condition” is not one in which modernism has been abolished as an aesthetic and cultural enterprise, it seems crucial to understand what has been involved in this enterprise and what it means to the inhabitants of the twenty-first century, as a legacy and as a living practice—although as such it may also have merged in various ways into new cultural matrices.

As editors, we felt we knew several questions that we wanted to have addressed in these volumes, but the wide framework of the project and the large number of participants, ensured that the outcome did not completely “fit” our anticipations: many more questions were raised and grappled with in the articles. We were often surprised by the heuristic focus, the analytical emphasis, the theoretical point, the historical context, the interdisciplinary connection, as well as by the wealth of information and insights provided by the numerous contributions. We wondered whether the book would “hang together” but learnt to hold such worries in abeyance while observing not only the expanding portrayal of modernism but also the reciprocity or mutual reflexivity of the different sections and articles. As a book, this work is in a way bound to be too big, but also too limited, since it implies a map to which it could never have done justice. We are painfully aware of questions of the genres, the social implications, and especially the geographical and historical areas of modernism which are *not* investigated between the covers of these volumes. By the same token, we hope that the volumes stake out some of the premises of further explorations of modernism.

In our introduction we mentioned the radical change in cultural inquiry which has taken place in literary studies in recent decades. The present volumes are a manifestation of this change in modernist literary studies. In their revaluation of modernism, the many authors contributing to this book seek to probe the cultural landscapes which can to some degree be seen as emerging from modernism—although they are of course also formed by other forces—and which in turn influence our present understanding of what modernism was and is. Hence, although the chief emphasis of the book is on literary modernism, literature is seen as entering into diverse cultural and social contexts, ranging from interart conjunctions to philosophical, environmental, urban, and political domains, including issues of race and space, gender and fashion, popular culture and trauma, science and exile.



The facets of modernism revealed in these explorations may seem a far cry from the detached, autonomous, and immobile works of art which have so often been variously celebrated or censured as the central outputs of modernism. But these issues have not been settled yet—there is still much dust in the air, and outlines are hazy. It seems befitting, therefore, to conclude this book with some thoughts about the culture, the art, and the mobility of modernism.

In the past ten to fifteen years, modernist studies have inevitably met with cultural studies. Important forces within cultural studies have moved against or sought to sideline what has been seen as the preeminence of modernism as an object of academic study and as the primary sector of “high culture” in the twentieth century. At the same time, also as part of the “cultural turn,” we have seen the emergence of vigorous rereadings of modernist works as cultural documents rather than as monolithic objects of art. Modernist works, when “culturally” observed, often prove to reach for the margins, for “subcultural” experiences, in a broad sense of these words—but they also, and sometimes in the same movement, attend to the less noticed aspects of everyday life. As a result, the “culture of modernism” may be an elusive and composite field. The alleged fortress of hermetic art may at a closer look turn out to be a laboratory of the quotidian, which is, to mix metaphors, the undercurrent and the rock-bottom reality of artistic creativity and aesthetic rituals. However, in modernist works, everyday life often emerges in fragmentary form—whether as newspaper clippings in a cubist collage or as the lavatory (what is more quotidian?) consumption of “tidbits,” as in the chapter introducing one of the best known modernist “heroes,” Leopold Bloom in Joyce’s *Ulysses*.

Modernism has ever so often been accused of being elitist and ignoring popular interests. It would of course be ridiculous to accuse it also of trying playfully to assimilate or co-opt popular culture—which is indeed geared toward general leisure and entertainment. It is true that modernism may often have appeared to be the opposite of popular culture and to some extent the prevalent ideas of the respective modes of reception may seem mutually exclusive. But modernism’s creative incorporation of popular culture—even when it may seem to have highbrow implications, as for instance in some of T. S. Eliot’s poetry—implies that modernism harbors a sense of culture which does not exclude popular forms.

This may be the moment to recall Theodor Adorno’s statement that both modern high culture and the culture industry are open wounds of capitalist society. They are two halves of a freedom which has been torn apart and the halves do not add up to a whole (Adorno [1970], 129). Clearly, not every contributor to this book approves of Adorno’s theories of modernism, and we may argue that hidden in this description is the questionable surmise that there has ever existed such a “whole” outside narrow social circles.

Be that as it may, Adorno here points to an important source of modernist culture in Western post-enlightenment society: the wound—and we are aware that this is a metaphor also used in our introduction, in a different but related sense—the wound resulting from the mismatch of on the one hand leisure, entertainment, and respite from the workaday world, and on the other the active, creative and critical reception of challenging forms of art. It is surely one of the cultural ironies of “enlightened,” democratic societies, which enjoy and provide “free” access to these qualities of life, that entertainment is often taken to exclude creative and critical reception. Of course, many claim that this border has been crossed, this gap or divide closed; some point out (quite reasonably) that contrary to arrogant (modernist?) views, ordinary people often lead their everyday lives in a most creative way. Others see contemporary culture as an uninterrupted simulacral surface where wrinkles have been

smoothed out, modernist interiority and “depth” being nothing but nostalgic signs, many of which have been commercially recycled by increasingly effective tools of mechanical reproduction.

But the wound will not simply go away, perhaps because it has much to do with the frustrations suffered by rationality, mimesis, and representation in the Western symbolic order. The “lessons” of history, from which we do not seem to draw logical conclusions, and the inescapability of power and ideology amidst our enlightened responses to the world—these are among the legacies of the social modernity in which modernism took shape but which it also sought to rupture rather than simply reflect. We are still, in fact more than ever, inundated with cultural signs and we are still, perhaps more than ever, grappling with the freedom we are given, as individuals and social beings, to respond to and search for meaningful constructs. We are still in places where subjectivity, creativity and receptivity intersect. Such points of intersection are to be found, in aggravated forms, in various modernist works, be they allegedly “high modernist,” such as Kafka’s *Das Schloss* (The Castle) or Pound’s *Cantos*, or the apparently most radical anti-aesthetic pieces and performances of Dada. It may not be as far as one thinks between the aesthetic convolutions, found in some modernist works, and the ascetic meta-discourse, found in others, which questions the viability of the aesthetic itself. The aesthetic is perhaps one form of the wound that haunts Western rationality. If certain modernist forces seem adamant in their emphasis on the anti-aesthetic, this is because one of the driving forces of modernism has been the tracking and testing of the aesthetic in a symbolic order which has a hard time with the non-rational aspects of art. Excess and ascetism may, in this context, be two sides of the same coin.

This is also why one should not too eagerly seek to divide modernism into monuments and fragments. It has left us monuments, to be sure, but rather than being solid monoliths, these are fragmentary constructs, unusually receptive to readerly creativity. Similarly, the mechanics of canonization may have staged certain modernist works as mainstream art, but modernism is nevertheless closely associated with the margins of culture, art and the social world. However, while modernism may be seen to emerge as a kind of counter-culture within Western modernity, it enters into a multifaceted dialogue with that modernity, a dialogue which is variously contestative *and* affirmative, depending on texts and contexts. These volumes provide a good deal of insight into this mobile character of modernism.

If modernism is not the same everywhere, this is especially true when we follow its signs and developments in different geographic and social locations. The articles above, especially but not exclusively those in the last two sections, richly demonstrate the different ways in which modernism is inflected in different cultural situations. The modernisms of, for instance, Russia, Brazil and Greece manifest local diversities, but read in our broader context, these are not homogenized but rather become translatable through an understanding of a groundbreaking aesthetic which reaches beyond linguistic and national borders to the limits of modernity itself. One aspect of this is the way in which modernism has travelled from one culture and language to another, through various channels of translation—and much of this mobility still remains to be researched in depth. Reviewing modernism from an international and cross-cultural point of view is itself an act of translation, and while the language of this book is in one sense English, we hope that it registers modernism in many tongues.

To end, this insight raises the question whether we might be justified in looking not just for the different cultural contexts of modernism—that is for a global but also locally specific “culture of

modernism,” that runs through this whole book—but for a “modernist culture,” which is not an overarching and dominant aesthetic of the early twentieth century, as some like to see it, but an assemblage of cultural constructs that respond to social modernity through radicalized aesthetic modes of expression; that remain sceptical of the promises of modernity, yet keep open its hopes and possibilities, keep alive its critical and creative literacy amidst the accelerating swirls of communication, information and gratification which make their bids for our attention and our everyday lives.

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