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UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

TIMELY MATERIALISMS:

MODERNISM, SUBJECTIVITY, AND LANGUAGE

A Dissertation

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

By

MITCHELL R. LEWIS
Norman, Oklahoma
2001

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TIMELY MATERIALISMS:
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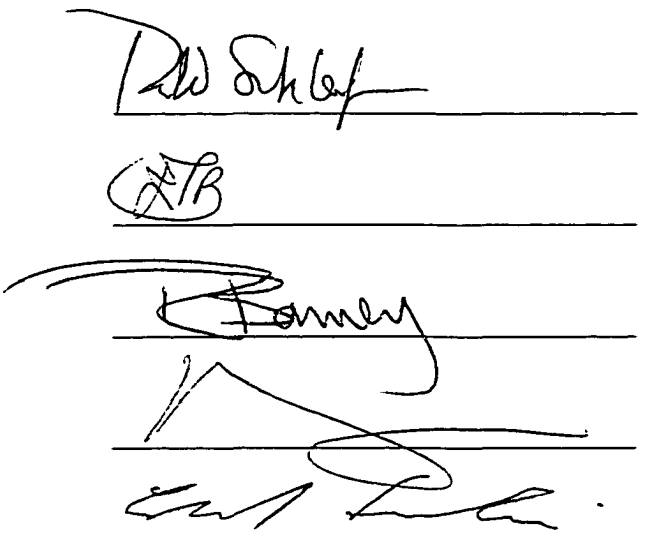
A Dissertation APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

BY



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Abstract

In Timely Materialisms: Modernism, Subjectivity, and Language I examine some major figures in literary modernism in relationship to the critique of scientific positivism, particularly as it plays out in the human sciences. My argument is that while modernism in its earliest stages can be seen as shaped by the assumptions of positivism, it soon turns toward the critique of these assumptions. The two leading positivist assumptions under critique are the notions of disinterested subjectivity and linguistic transparency. In place of these assumptions emerge various post-positivist notions in which language is seen as a form or discourse that shapes the apprehension and understanding of the world, instituting or founding the subject in the process. These notions, I argue, mark the emergence of a more subtle materialism than positivism, one that attends to the discursive effects of language and the socially constructed nature of subjectivity. Because these materialist notions finally attempt to effect an historicizing of understanding—locating subjectivity in relationship not only to the changing forms of language and culture, but also to the experience of modernity—I have termed them "timely materialisms." I begin my study with an extended reflection on the relationship between modernism, positivism, and modernity, arguing that the crisis and critique of positivism can be historicized if it is seen as a necessary outcome of the experience of modernity. Next, I examine the articulation of the crisis of positivism in Joseph Conrad's The Secret Agent, which is deeply involved with Caesar Lombroso's criminal anthropology. Finally, as the principle instances of timely materialisms, I examine various works by Gertrude Stein, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf. First, I link Stein to Henri Poincaré and the crisis of Euclidean geometry, and then I discuss Joyce in relationship to Walter Benjamin and the crisis of historicism. Finally, I

conclude with an analysis of Woolf in relationship to Martin Heidegger and hermeneutic ontology. The overall significance of this study is that it clarifies modernism's relationship to the Enlightenment as well as to postmodernism. In other words, modernism, as a period, can be seen as critiquing the Enlightenment and as anticipating postmodernism.

Introduction

In his famous portrait of Gerald Crich in Women in Love (1920) D. H. Lawrence attempts, among other things, to portray the dangers of science as he perceives them. His primary concern here is with the subject of science and, more particularly, the relationship between knowledge and the world. Like Friedrich Nietzsche before him, he sees the scientific will-to-know as inextricably bound up with power, cruelty, and the desire for mastery. The following key passage from Women in Love, in which the narrator describes Gerald's motivation behind running his father's coal mines, captures what Edward Said would call this "worldly" sense of knowledge as being linked to seemingly extraneous "interests":

> Immediately he saw the firm, he realised what he could do. He had a fight to fight with Matter, with the earth and the coal it enclosed. This was the sole idea, to turn upon the inanimate matter of the underground, and reduce it to his will. And for this fight with matter, one must have perfect instruments in perfect organisation, a mechanism so subtle and harmonious in its workings that it represents the single mind of man, and by its relentless repetition of given movement, will accomplish a purpose irresistibly, inhumanly. It was this inhuman principle in the machanism he wanted to construct that inspired Gerald with an almost religious exaltation. He, the man, could interpose a perfect, changeless, godlike medium between himself and the matter he had to subjugate. There were two opposites, his will and the resistant Matter of the earth. And between these he could establish the very

> expression of his will, the incarnation of his power, a great and perfect machine, a system, an activity of pure order, pure mechanical repetition, repetition ad infinitum, hence eternal and infinite. He found his eternal and his infinite in the pure machine-principle of perfect co-ordination into one pure, complex, infinitely repeated motion, like the spinning of a wheel; but a productive spinning, as the revolving of the universe may be called a productive spinning, a productive repetition through eternity, to infinity. And this is the God-motion, this productive repetition ad infinitum. And Gerald was the God of the Machine, Deus ex Machina. And the whole productive will of man was the Godhead. (227-228)

In this revealing passage the narrator foregrounds the power inherent in Gerald's struggle with "Matter." Far from wanting to discover the laws of nature or to work harmoniously with it, Gerald wants to subjugate it, to reduce it to his will, to make it operate according to his needs like a machine eternally repeating certain productive activities. In talking about mechanistic forces, matter, and timeless repetition, the narrator not only recalls the rhetoric of classical science, but also clearly reveals the often over-looked mastery and cruelty that can be involved with science. The narrator also shows science extending its range of control from nature to humanity, working toward what contemporaneous sociologists would call the "rationalizition" or "taylorization" of society in which social relations become reorganized along impersonal lines for mechanical economic efficiency.

In an ironic twist, finally, the narrator of Women in Love reveals that religion reenters a domain in which it was previously thought to be banished. Gerald, the subject of knowledge behind the machine-like efficiency of the coal mine, is seen to be the "Deus ex Machina," a characterization that points to the potential megalomania of science,

further revealing the element of power in its will-to-know (and its striving toward metaphysics). Considered within the overall context of Lawrence's career as whole, it is this "worldly" understanding of subjectivity and knowledge that Lawrence frequently critiques in his effort to reimagine the subject of knowledge or what he calls in a celebrated letter to Edward Garnett "the old stable ego" (292). For Lawrence this critique leads to the recuperation and revaluation of the unconscious, which rationalism and science overlook in their quest for certainty and mastery.

In instituting such a critique Lawrence is a typical modernist writer because literary modernism in general tends to be concerned with the critique of the subject of science, even if it does not always show an interest in the unconscious. In the modernist works of such writers as Gertrude Stein, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf can be seen various attempts to question science's understanding of subjectivity and knowledge, especially as it is extended to the understanding of human culture and society, an effort that has come to be known as "scientism." In particular, each of these writers attempts to move beyond certain realistic literary traditions that attempt to emulate the scientific method. The goal is to rethink the subject of knowledge. A similar development can be seen in many areas of the human sciences in which the subject of science is also critiqued. Walter Benjamin, for instance, critiques the scientific understanding of history, as does Martin Heidegger, but in relationship to philosophy. Such a critique can be seen even in the natural sciences, as in the case of Henri Poincaré's argument for the conventional nature of Euclidean geometry, which was previously perceived to be the self-evident geometry of experience. It is this wide-spread critique of the subject of science—in literary modernism, the human sciences, and geometry—that is the subject of the following chapters. The objectives here

are to trace the emergence of this critique of the subject in literary modernism, to detail some of its consequences, and to establish parallels with certain related developments in the natural and human sciences. A coherent interdisciplinary picture of a certain modern critique of the subject finally emerges—one, as we shall see, that is closely connected to language. At stake is the scientific heritage of the Enlightenment, at least as it came to be understood in the nineteenth century.

What I am suggesting is that the scientific subject under critique in the early part of the twentieth-century has a particular pedigree. It can be seen as a certain nineteenth-century positivist codification and dogmatization of the Enlightenment subject. According to this positivist reading, as Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno explain in Dialectic of Enlightenment (1947), the subject of the Enlightenment, presiding over a "disenchanted nature" (3-4), is assumed to be separated from myth, tradition, culture, and superstition. Through a kind of Cartesian reduction to certainty, the subject is said to observe nature objectively or disinterestedly, seeing nature in-and-of itself. In this sense, positivism assumes that the subject can achieve a certain mastery over nature by virtue of the fact that it can observe nature without prejudice. The basis of this mastery is a positivist reading of the model of reason developed by Newton. Summarizing this dominant understanding of reason in the Enlightenment, perhaps in a reading of his own, Ernst Cassirer writes,

> The eighteenth century is imbued with the belief in the unity and immutability of reason. Reason is the same for all thinking subjects, all nations, all epochs, and all cultures. From the changeability of religious creeds, of moral maxims and convictions, of theoretical opinions and judgments, a firm and lasting element can

be extracted which is permanent in itself, and which in this identity and permanence expresses the real essence of reason. (6)

The function of this universal reason is to produce a general and complete knowledge of things—to reveal the hidden laws of nature—through a methodological process of analysis and reconstruction. As Cassirer further explains, reason

> dissolves everything merely factual, all simple data of experience, and everything believed on the evidence of revelation, tradition and authority; and it does not rest content until it has analyzed all these things into their simplest component parts and into their last elements of belief and opinion. Following this work of dissolution begins the work of construction. Reason cannot stop with the dispersed parts; it has to build from them a new structure, a true whole. But since reason creates this whole and fits the parts together according to its own rule, it gains complete knowledge of the structure of its product. Reason understands this structure because it can reproduce it in its totality and in the ordered sequence of its individual elements. (13-14)

Breaking down its object of study into its component parts, and then uniting them into an intellectual whole, reason produces a complete or general knowledge of nature universally valid for all subjects.

This conception (or interpretation) of the Enlightenment subject, which hinges on the issue of representation, is very much like the positivist interpretation of the eighteenth-century scientific subject, particularly as it is articulated by Auguste Comte, who attempted to extend this subject from the natural sciences to every known field of knowledge. The basis of Comte's positivism, as we shall see later in greater detail, is not

only immediate, disinterested observation or pure intuition, but also what Thomas Kuhn calls "a pure observation-language" (127). In other words, in addition to believing that the scientific subject can neutrally observe nature, Comte also believes that it can accurately represent nature in language. Thus, in this account, positivism hinges on the possibility of both psychological and linguistic representation.

In critiquing these positivist views that influenced so many fields of intellectual inquiry, certain literary modernists and their counterparts in the human sciences appear to have first latched on to the issue of linguistic representation—of a purified, transparent language, a constative language that denotes real objects in the world. What they finally demonstrate about language, in the words of Ferdinand de Saussure, is that it is "a form and not a substance" (122). Such a view is expanded to the point that language is viewed as performative, as founding a world and whatever meaning may be in it. Subjectivity, in turn, is seen as constituted by language, as inhabiting "discourse communities" and employing preexisting linguistic codes and conventions that have already "pre-judged" the world, laying it out according to some anterior schema or classification system. Out of this development emerges a heightened sense of the limits of linguistic and psychological representation that is intended to go beyond positivism and what Horkheimer and Adorno aptly call its "myth of things as they actually are" (x).

What modernists such as James Joyce and Walter Benjamin finally develop are what I call "timely materialisms" or nontotalizing modes of thinking about the world attuned to the constitutive nature of language and the historicity of knowledge. These modernists are materialists because they critique positivism's metaphysical conception of language and subjectivity—in which ideas, mental images, and perception are separated

from the constitutive nature of language, as if thought, experience or ideas could somehow precede their communication in language. Such a conception has been repeatedly called "the metaphysics of presence" by Jacques Derrida, perhaps most famously in his celebrated essay "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences."[1] In contrast to such a metaphysics, the modernists discussed in the following chapters conceive of ideas, thoughts, and subjectivity in general as taking shape in and through language and its changing social and cultural contexts. Such a conception is "materialist" because it attends to the material effects of signification, realizing that language constructs rather than represents its object. In acknowledging the changing forms of language and the worlds to which they give rise, such a conception is also "timely," for it historicizes understanding, seeing it within the context of changing social and cultural structures. It is timely also, as we shall see, because it attends to the destructive influence of the experience of modernity. It should also be noted that this conception can be articulated in a variety of distinct ways, hence my emphasis on the plural in "timely materialisms." In the following chapters, along with tracing the emergence of the critique of the positivist subject, I trace the emergence of such timely materialisms in literary modernism, the human sciences, and geometry, with special attention devoted to Joseph Conrad, Gertrude Stein, Walter Benjamin, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and Martin Heidegger.

In Chapter 1, "Modernism, Materialism, and the Experience of Modernity," I explore the relationship between modernism and modernity. The argument I put forth here at length is that the cognitive and linguistic problems of representation addressed by

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[1]See Derrida, Writing and Difference (1978), pp. 278-293.

the modernist figures discussed throughout Timely Materialisms can be seen as significantly conditioned by the experience of modernity. In support of this historical view I survey the ideas of some noted scholars of modernity as well as some significant figures in the humanities and the human sciences (along with their critics). In addition, I develop a general sense of the timely materialisms that emerge with modernism, contrasting it with positivism's metaphysical view of materialism. In this regard, I discuss the leading ideas of positivism as developed by Auguste Comte. In particular, I focus on Comte's understanding of subjectivity and language. My intention here is to show that positivism can be understood as a metaphysics of identity and presence because its notions of disinterested subjectivity and transparent language lead, as I have already indicated, to what Horkheimer and Adorno call "the myth of things as they actually are." After this discussion of different kinds of materialism, I partly preview my later discussions of Conrad, Stein, Joyce, and Woolf, supplementing it with discussions of additional relevant modernist figures and texts. I conclude, finally, with some discussion of key theoretical texts by Georg Lükács, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Jean-Françoise Lyotard that address the issue of the relationships between modernism, modernity, and time.

In Chapter 2, "The Materialist Perception of Criminal Bodies: Modernism, Realism, and the Crisis of Positivism in Joseph Conrad," I attempt to directly link early modernism and positivism and to reveal an early instance of the crisis of positivism in modernism. After showing the impact of positivism on the literary theory of Émile Zola, I then trace the influence of positivism on early modernism, especially in relationship to the literary and cultural theory of Joseph Conrad, Ford Madox Ford, T. E. Hulme, Ezra Pound, and Wyndham Lewis. Here I show that modernism's interest in realism and

naturalism—two terms that seem to be used interchangeably by the moderns—brings with it a positivist interest in objective observation and transparent language. Finally, I isolate for close examination Joseph Conrad's The Secret Agent (1907), an early modernist articulation of the crisis of positivism. I study this novel in relationship to the criminal anthropology of Caesar Lombroso, whose positivist discourse of criminal degeneracy shapes the physical and psychological portrayal of characters in Conrad's novel. What emerges from my reading of the novel is a sense of how it questions or problematizes the positivist notions of transparent language and objective observation, while attempting to adhere to them nonetheless. The undermining of positivism is viewed here as a crisis, as a cultural tragedy, even as its limitations are clearly seen. I conclude this chapter with a discussion of Conrad's use of the genre of detective fiction as way of showing how he links modernism to the experience of modernity, particularly the experience of the metropolis.

In Chapter 3, "The Conventional Forms of the Material World: Modernism, Geometry, and the Representation of Space in Gertrude Stein," I link the development of literary modernism with contemporaneous concerns in the mathematical field of geometry. In particular, I explore the relationship between the critique of representation that takes place in both literary modernism and geometry, showing how they both go beyond positivism in terms of their "conventional" understanding of language and subjectivity. First, I present an overview of nineteenth-century and early-twentieth century ideas about geometry, focusing in particular on the emergence and effect of non-Euclidean geometries. The purpose of this overview is to show how certain geometers and mathematicians go beyond the positivist equation of geometry and physical space to a unique post-positivist

understanding of the distinction between the two, as most notably exemplified in the views of Henri Bergson and Henri Poincaré. This new understanding is based on the view of the signs and symbols of geometry—of its axioms, postulates, diagrams, and formulas—as being conventional, as opposed to being an accurate representation of nature. Next, after this overview, I survey significant discussions of geometry and space in the literary and cultural writings of modernism, particularly those by Pound, Hulme, Lewis, Conrad, Ford, Joyce, Lawrence, and William Butler Yeats. I attempt to show here that modernists are interested in the subject of geometry, particularly as it relates to the issue of representation, and that this subject figures into the theory and practice of modernism in a significant way. What emerges at this point is the sense of a historical trajectory in which modernists move from a classical, positivist understanding of the relationship between geometry and space to a post-positivist understanding of geometry as convention. Following this survey, I then proceed to a detailed examination of some literary and cultural writings by Gertrude Stein, focusing especially on Tender Buttons (1914). My argument here is that, under the influence of cubism and its critique of classical space, Stein develops a literary practice—a timely materialism—that parallels the contemporaneous understanding of geometry as a convention. In the final section of this chapter, I reveal Stein's understanding of the conventional nature of language as being fundamentally historical. I focus in particular on Stein's understanding of the relationship between modernism and modernity. The point of this last section is to stress again Stein's historicizing of understanding and to further point out how she can be seen to be developing a timely materialism.

In Chapter 4, "That Materialism of History: Time, Narrative, and Citation in James Joyce and Walter Benjamin," I turn my attention to the relationship between literary modernism and historiography, focusing in particular on Walter Benjamin and James Joyce. My argument in this chapter is that both Benjamin and Joyce question traditional narrative forms and develop instead similar writing practices based on citation. In this chapter, I discuss what is known as the crisis of historicism, which is, in part, another version of the crisis of positivism because it entails a questioning of disinterested subjectivity and transparent language. I also show how this crisis is related to the experience of modernity and its sense of discontinuous temporality, continuing my discussion of the relationship between modernism and modernity. Detailed examinations of Benjamin's and Joyce's approaches to citation follow. What finally emerges is a set of striking parallels between Benjamin and Joyce. First of all, both writers forsake the various realist positions inspired by positivism's faith in objectivity and pure observation language for a skeptical or ironic position that focuses on the constitutive nature of language. Also, in place of narrative with it authoritative metalangage outside of quotation marks, both writers prefer to deploy and arrange quotations without quotation marks to undermine the objective and transparent authority of narrators. Thus both writers have a sense of reality as already being textualized; in their view writing involves the citing of preexisting codes and discourses. These striking parallels finally suggest two more instances of a timely materialism intended to go beyond positivism's metaphysical conception of language and subjectivity.

In Chapter 5, finally, "The Finer Materialism of Aesthetic Truth: Language and Subjectivity in Virginia Woolf and Martin Heidegger," I continue and deepen my

discussion of post-positivist understandings of subjectivity and language in modernism and the human sciences. After extending my field of view by surveying relevant developments in linguistics, literary theory, psychoanalysis, and philosophy, I compare Virginia Woolf's novels and Martin Heidegger's philosophy, which has come to be known as hermeneutic ontology because it sees being or the known world as a function of language. Out of this comparison a number of parallels emerge. First, both Woolf and Heidegger view language as constitutive, as founding a world. Second, they see subjectivity as inhabiting or determined by language. Thirdly, they see individual subjectivities as being parts of historically changing discourse communities. Fourth, they both have a keen sense for the destructive influence of time, for the influence of change and death. In effect, finally, they both historicize understanding by situating it in relationship to the changing codes and conventions of language, aetheticizing truth and developing similar versions of a timely materialism.

What finally emerges from this series of chapters is an overall sense of a new understanding of subjectivity and language that can be seen in both literary modernism and the natural and human sciences. The historical significance of this new understanding is that it seems to supplant or at least supplement the Enlightenment understanding of language and subjectivity, especially as they came to be perceived in the nineteenth- and early-twentieth century. In other words, the moment of modernism appears to be marking both the closure of the Enlightenment and the coming advent of what we know today as postmodernism, which, as the following chapters suggest, can be seen as an intensification of the initial developments of modernism. In modernism we see emerge, for the first time, one of the leading subjects for debate in the twentieth century: the fate of the so-called

Enlightenment project. Far from suggesting that this project is incomplete, as Jürgen Habermas does in "Modernity—An Incomplete Project," the modernists suggest that it is exhausted, played out, its ambitions for universality overthrown. With the timely materialisms of modernism we see clearly the early twentieth-century origins of what postmodern theorist Jean-François Lyotard has called the "war on totality" (Postmodern 82).

Chapter 1:

Modernism, Materialism, and the Experience of Modernity

> Aaron was quite dumbfounded by the night's event: the loss of his flute. Here was a blow he had not expected. And the loss was for him symbolistic. It chimed with something in his soul: the bomb, the smashed flute, the end.
>
> D. H. Lawrence, Aaron's Rod (1922)

> To be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world—and, at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are . . . . To be modern is to be part of a universe in which, as Marx said, "all that is solid melts into air."
>
> Marshall Berman, All That Is Sold Melts into Air (1988)

In the pivotal chapter of Aaron's Rod (1922), entitled "The Broken Rod," D. H. Lawrence describes a striking scene in which Aaron and his acquaintances, sitting in a café in Florence, discuss recent socialist unrest in the city. The conversation gravitates toward a discussion of whether socialism is inevitable and, more generally, toward a discussion of what political steps must be taken by Italy and other European countries caught up in the aftermath of World War I. Suddenly, amid all this talk of what the world needs, a bomb is detonated in the café, presumably by an anarchist, as the characters later theorize. The devastation is horrendous; and there ensues, as the narrator notes, "one awful minute of pure shock, when the soul was in darkness" (328). Stunned by the blast, but still alive, Aaron discovers that his flute has been destroyed, and he begins to feel "utterly, utterly

overcome—as if he didn't care what became of him any further" (330). In this agitated state Aaron finally thinks to himself that the moment is "symbolistic" (331), the final blow of a series of blows that began with the onset of World War I. It is "symbolistic" for Aaron because it expresses his central conflict with the state of the modern world. Up to this point in the novel, Aaron's experience has been one of alienation, transience, nihilism, and atomization. Such an experience, linked to the dissolution of "traditional" norms, values, and practices perceived to be natural, has brought Aaron to a crisis of understanding, leaving him ungrounded and disoriented. For Aaron, this episode with the bomb encapsulates that experience and takes it to what he sees as its inevitable culminating point, the death of traditional notions of art or, at least, the death of how he conceived art to be.

What Lawrence does here in this scene from Aaron's Rod, among other things, is point to the material connections between art and the world, to the relationship between art and history. In particular, he suggests that the experience of modernity undermines the seemingly self-evident notions of traditional art. He shows, in other words, that when social conditions change as a result of modernization, art—as a product of society—must also change. As Lawrence suggests in Aaron's Rod, he felt that the modern world was experiencing cataclysmic change on a scale that could not be fully comprehended by traditional art. This change, for him, began with the onset of World War I and was bringing about a fundamental change in world views. As one of Lawrence's narrators in a later novel famously put it, this time in relationship to London, "It was in 1915 the old world ended. In the winter of 1915-1916 the spirit of the old London collapsed, the city, in some way, perished, perished from being a heart of the world, and became a vortex of

broken passions, lusts, hopes, fears, and horrors" (Kangaroo 250). Lawrence's narrator does not specify here what exactly is lost with the old world, but, like the narrator in Aaron's Rod, he does suggest a crisis in understanding arising out of the experience of modernity. This suggestion, moreover, accords with Lawrence's famous letter to Edward Garnett in which he states that "You mustn't look in my novel for the old stable ego" (282). The implication is that a crisis of understanding as well as of art emerges from an encounter with modernity.

Lawrence thus articulates, in his novels and other writings, a version of the crisis of the subject—a fundamental issue, as we will see, for many of the modernist figures discussed in this and the following chapters. In critiquing what he calls "the old stable ego" Lawrence questions reason, objectivity, and disinterestedness, delving into unconscious desires and motivations. In doing so he critiques the self-evident subject of positivism and its desire for the mastery of nature, as seen, for instance, in the character of Gerald Crich in Women In Love, a subject discussed in the Introduction. But such a critique is not simply an intellectual or artistic enterprise. It has a historical basis, for it is grounded in the experience of modernity in which, as Karl Marx famously notes, and as cultural historian Marshall Berman reiterates, "all that is solid melts into air." It is in this matter that Lawrence is not alone. As we will see in this and the following chapters, his own fellow modernists—in the arts as well as in the humanities and the human sciences—made similar connections between the crisis of the subject and the experience of modernity, and so have subsequent scholars of modernism like Berman.

In this first chapter I present an overview of some of these views of the impact of modernity on the psychological subject. I begin with some noted scholars of modernity

and then move to a selection of significant modern figures in the humanities and the human sciences (and their critics). Finally, after a discussion of materialism, I conclude with a discussion of modernist writers followed by a brief discussion of relevant literary theorists. One of the objectives for this chapter is to open a line of inquiry that will be further addressed in subsequent chapters, that is, to consider various ways in which the crisis of the positivist notions of subjectivity and language might be historicized. The argument put forth in this regard is that the cognitive and linguistic problems of representation addressed by the modernist figures discussed in this and the following chapters can be seen as significantly conditioned by the experience of modernity. The second and final objective of this chapter is to develop an initial general sense of the "timely materialisms" that emerge with modernism. This last objective involves distinguishing this sense from the metaphysical materialism of positivism.

Characterizing the Experience of Modernity

Modernity has come to be understood by scholars as a term for the on-going process of modernization (technological, economic, or social) that is usually said to begin at some point in the nineteenth-century. Georg Lukács and David Harvey choose 1848 as their crucial marker because, in their unique ways, they both see the characteristic conflicts of this time between socialism and capitalism as determinants of modern consciousness.[2] For these two writers the experience of modernity is the experience of the instability of the material organization of society caused by this social conflict, a crisis that the very

[2] See Lukács, The Historical Novel (1983), p. 30, and Harvey, The Condition of Postmodernity (1990), p. 28.

dynamic of capitalism perpetually induces, creating a crisis of representation. Stephen Kern and Perry Anderson move forward the decisive moment to the so-called second industrial revolution of the late nineteenth-century.[3] Here the focus is on important technological innovations, including the telephone, radio, wireless telegraph, cinema, bicycle, automobile, airplane, and x-ray. (Anderson, it must be noted, also charts the emergence of modernity in relationship to an older aristocratic ruling class and the growing sense of revolution "in the air" well-justified later by the 1905-1907 Russian Revolution.) In the opinion of these two writers, especially Kern, the experience of modernity is the experience of these sweeping changes in technology that transformed, and continued to transform, people's sense of what is possible, simultaneously shattering and rebuilding their representations of the world (Kern, in a somewhat idealistic manner, allows for autonomous cultural development). As Ronald Schleifer has recently argued in Modernism and Time (2000), the seemingly boundless new world of abundance that followed the second industrial revolution "demanded new ways of making sense out of experience" (36), ways that could account for the complexity of the effects of modernization. The experience of modernity, in other words, exceeded the capabilities of the timeless subject of the Enlightenment and its guiding rules of reason—the principles of Contradiction and Sufficient Reason.

In The Politics of Modernism (1989) Raymond Williams also discusses this revolutionary experience of modernity, but he does not isolate a particular date, as do Lukács and Harvey, nor does he focus on a series of events such as the inception of the

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[3]See Kern, The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918 (1983), p. 1-9, and Anderson, "Modernity and Revolution," pp. 323-326.

second industrial revolution. Instead, he focuses more broadly on the modern experience of ever burgeoning cities, arguing that "there are decisive links between the practices and ideas of the avant-garde movements of the twentieth century and the specific conditions and relationships of the twentieth-century metropolis" (37). In relationship to literature, he notes the rise of the crowd of strangers, the lonely and isolated individual within the crowd, the impenetrable maze of the city, and diversity and mobility through immigration. For modernism, all of this leads to what Williams calls "a community of the medium" (45), or an emphasis on language for its own sake, language considered as a form and not as a vehicle for communication. Modernism exchanges the seemingly self-evident aesthetics of intuition, perception, and content for what might be called a materialist regard for the form of signification. This new formal yet materialist emphasis well-describes the linguistic awareness of the modernist writers discussed in the following chapters, and for Williams it arises out of the disorienting experience of the metropolis, which destabilizes social relations and communal bonds, creating "a new consciousness of conventions" (46) that does not allow for realistic representation.

In contrast to Williams, Henri Lefebvre precisely pinpoints the beginning of modernity: the year 1905. His impressive vision of the emergence of modernity includes not only the previous discussions of abundance, technological development, the metropolis, and the on-going conflict between capitalism and socialism, but also a well-articulated sense of globalization (this sense is certainly not absent in Harvey and Perry, since they too are concerned with the international progress of capitalism, nor is it altogether absent in Williams, with his focus on immigration). In a splendid, almost lyrical

passage in his Introduction to Modernity, Lefebvre explains his reasoning for choosing the year 1905:

> What was happening then? The first great modern technological inventions—electricity, motorcars, aeroplanes—were entering into industrial and social practice. Those were also the first years of cinema, of advertising transformed by new means, of mechanical recording of music and the human voice. Life was changing too, palpably and visibly. The very appearance of towns, of streets, of houses, was being modified. Life seemed to widen out; new and limitless horizons were opening. Images, symbols, signs and signals all merged in unforeseen ways with tactile reality, bringing it a new breadth and dimension; day-to-day reality combined with something "other" than itself. From this explosive mixture were born original ideas about painting and sculpture, about music, about language. At the same time, we have the beginnings of imperialism and international tension; the great wars and the great class struggles are already looming. 1905 is also the year of the first revolution in Russia, the dress rehearsal for the October Revolution. (106)

As this remarkable passage only begins to suggest, Lefebvre's assessment of the transformations of modernization factors in imperialism, global capitalism, and expanding world markets, just as Vladimir Lenin did in his Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism (1917). Fredric Jameson follows suit in this matter. In fact, when he addressed the relationship between imperialism and modernism, Jameson suggested that 1884 is an emblematic date because it is the year in which the Berlin Conference parceled out Africa among the "advanced powers" and codified the modern imperialist world

system.[4] The point is that imperialism, as both Jameson and Lefebvre make clear, sustained in part (and benefited from) the vast economic, social, and technological changes that took place in the West. With the threat of uprisings and unrest and actual conflicts such as the Boer War, it also added further instability and insecurity to an already crisis-ridden process, thus making it increasingly difficult for people to comprehend or represent their position in a world of global networks. As Edward Said has argued in Culture and Imperialism (1993), many of the characteristics of modernist culture, such as the extremes of self-consciousness, discontinuity, self-referentiality, and corrosive irony, are "a response to the external pressures on culture from the imperium" (188).

Whatever the dates or emphases may be, essential to all these descriptions of modernity, I believe, is the attempt to characterize the shifting ground beneath the moderns, to give some sense of the very unstable material conditions of their lives that reconfigured their social relations in a relatively sudden, thorough, and on-going manner. Also common to all of these descriptions is the attempt to characterize the modern experience in materialist terms. In each case the pervasive modernist questioning of the self-evidence of experience, intuition, and perception is seen to arise out of the material conflicts of modernity. A fundamental issue in the study of modernism in general has been what kind of effect did the great transformations of modernization have on the moderns. As all of the above accounts suggest, the experience of modernity is the experience of uncertainty, complexity, abundance, discontinuity, and crisis—the experience, in other words, of the cognitive problems that arose from the unprecedented large-scale social, economic, and technological transformations that provided the material conditions for new

[4]See Jameson, "Modernism and Imperialism" (1990), p. 4.

kinds of experiences. As Marshall Berman has put it, drawing on Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels's Communist Manifesto (1848), the general experience of modernity is the experience of a "permanent revolution" (95) in which all that is solid melts into air. Another way of putting this, as the Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo has argued in The End of Modernity, is that the experience of modernity (which marks the transition from the Enlightenment to Postmodernism) is the experience of the end of metaphysics, the destruction of ontology, or "the 'weakening' of Being" (11). To understand modernism, as Vattimo, Berman, and the others suggest, it is necessary above all to understand it as a phenomenon determined by its material conditions. The implication is that within the material conditions of modernity the self-evident type of cognitive and linguistic representation advocated by positivism becomes a problem. From this perspective, positivism's disinterested subjectivity and transparent language are undermined by the experience of modernity.

The Human Sciences and the Experience of Modernity

What I have suggested above is that in the peculiar discontinuous temporality of the modern world can be found the material basis for the cognitive problems of modernity and the subsequent critique of positivism. That there was some such material basis did not escape the attention of many theorists of the time. In "The Metropolis and Mental Life" (1903), for instance, the sociologist Georg Simmel described the cognitive problems of modernity through a phenomenological analysis of urban life, noting the emergence of onrushing, discontinuous sense impressions, and discriminating them from the more habitualized impressions of rural life. For Simmel "the individual [in the city] has become

a mere cog in an enormous organization of things and powers which tear from his hands all progress, spirituality, and value" (184). The individual's powers of comprehension, in other words, are overwhelmed by the objective conditions of modernity, producing a subjective sense of shock and fragmentation, or a compensating sense of abstraction characteristic of money economies (a form of Marx's commodity fetishism and Lukács's reification). In Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920) Sigmund Freud presented another such account of the cognitive problems posed by modernity, especially in his discussion of the traumatic war neuroses produced by World War I and the "comprehensive general enfeeblement and disturbance of the mental capacities" (10) that they entail. The brunt of Freud's effort is to demonstrate how the psyche masters or copes with the excitation of trauma once its "protective shield" (33) has been breached. Freud focused in particular on the conservative or regressive tendencies of repression and compulsive repetition, the goal of which is to restore an original, inanimate state of things free of excitation.[5] Beyond the Pleasure Principle, consequently, has strong ties with Freud's earlier work The "Uncanny" (1919), since both are concerned with the emergence and reemergence of repressed traumatic experiences and the psychic confusion, fear, anxiety, and pain that they induce. It also has strong ties with Freud's Mourning and Melancholia (1917), for they both attempt to explain how the ego copes with loss and trauma in general. In any case, both Freud and Simmel have an unmistakable sense of how the individual consciousness is overwhelmed by the experience of modernity, thus suggesting the kind of cognitive discord peculiar to the modern world.

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[5]For a literary working out of this Freudian theory, see Samuel Beckett's Murphy (1938), in which the titular character attempts to master his anxiety by rocking back and forth in a rocking chair, the experience of which is likened to a return to the womb.

In "The Storyteller" (1936), Walter Benjamin depicted a similar situation, describing a process in which the traumatic experience of World War I and the transformations of modernity produce experiences that eluded the art of storytelling and communicability in general. In an eloquent passage, Benjamin writes,

> With the [First] World War a process began to become apparent which has not halted since then. Was it not noticeable at the end of the war that men returned from the battlefield grown silent—not richer, but poorer in communicable experience? What ten years later was poured out in the flood of war books was anything but experience that goes from mouth to mouth. And there was nothing remarkable about that. For never has experience been contradicted more thoroughly than strategic experience by tactical warfare, economic experience by inflation, bodily experience by mechanical warfare, moral experience by those in power. A generation that had gone to school on a horse-drawn streetcar now stood under the open sky in a countryside in which nothing remained unchanged but the clouds, and beneath these clouds in a field of force of destructive torrents and explosions, was the tiny, fragile human body. (84)

This vision of the trauma and disorientation of World War I was later reiterated by Paul Fussell, who argues persuasively that "there seems to be one dominating form of modern understanding; that it is essentially ironic; and that it originates largely in the application of mind and memory to the events of the Great War" (1975: 35). In any case, as Benjamin would further explain in his "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" (1939), drawing on both Freud and Simmel, the experience of modernity is the experience of "shock" (163) that follows from the unique conditions of modernity. Such an experience of what might be

called "cognitive discordance," Benjamin further explains, is one of "fear, revulsion, and horror" (174), traits on which Julia Kristeva would later focus in her influential poststructuralist-psychoanalytical version of the formation of the subject in The Powers of Horror (1-2).

What Benjamin, Freud, and Simmel provide, as do the previously mentioned scholarly studies of modernity, is a sense of the unstable material conditions that occasioned the cognitive problems that prompted some modern writers, intellectuals, scholars, and scientists to question the self-evident subject of positivism. All of them, as I have attempted to point out, have a sense of the ways in which the various conditions of modernity pose serious problems for understanding. The fundamental cognitive problems common to all accounts are the post-Enlightenment problems of understanding and comprehension, such as establishing universals or generalizations, achieving a totalizing perspective, and reducing complexity to simplification. The rapid technological, social, and economic changes of modernity occasioned shocking or "uncanny" experiences of discontinuity, making it increasingly difficult for the modern subject to cognitively represent or judge its world. Cognition, after all, is "an instituted activity that always takes place within a network of cultural assumptions, a cultural horizon of the possibilities of apprehension altogether" (Schleifer, Davis, Mergler 2). The experience of modernity is the experience of the breakdown or the reconfiguration of the institutions and cultural assumptions that make forms of cognition possible in the first place. What finally emerges out of the experience of modernity is the sense of subjectivity being shaped by culture and language. The pure subjectivity of positivism—including its pure precepts and intuitive apprehension of the real—is seen to be a cultural form that is made possible through the

forms of language. Out of the experience of modernity emerges the critique of positivism and Williams' "community of the medium."

The point is that the shocking experiences of modernity arose precisely because the great transformations of modernity undermined and continued to undermine the very cultural foundations of understanding, throwing into the foreground the constructed nature of subjectivity. Such experiences of cognitive discordance exceed the dominant criteria of the timeless Enlightenment subject, including its time-honored principles of continuity, sufficient reason, and identity.[6] By all accounts, a kind of dialectic between representation and experience takes place, except that the dialectic is not progressive or cumulative, as in Hegel; it is more like Benjamin's dialectics-at-a-standstill: representations form and reform, but no final identity between language and thing—no accumulation of knowledge—occurs. The experience of modernity is the experience of what has been variously called the other, the abject, the negative, the non-identical, the heterogeneous, or the incommensurable. As such, it is the experience of the very limits of intelligibility, of that which haunts the horizons of the known world, occupying in relationship to the subject a position of non-logical difference. Consequently, the experience of modernity is not a question of the sensible being inadequate to the ideas of cognition, as Kant would have it in his discussion of the sublime, but of the ideas of cognition being inadequate to the sensible. It is not that this inadequacy is unique to the modern world, but that the process of modernization makes it much more noticeable. What becomes increasingly clear to certain modern writers amid the shocks induced by

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[6]See Cassirer, The Philosophy of the Enlightenment (1951), pp. 3-36, and Dorinda Outram, The Enlightenment (1995), pp. 47-62..

massive technological, social, and economic changes is the historical variability of the conditions of understanding. In contrast to the positivists, these modern writers—especially the ones discussed in the following chapters—historicize understanding, situating it in relationship to the forms of language and culture that shape cognition. In doing so, they develop timely as opposed to metaphysical materialisms—a distinction that I take up in the next section.

In philosophy, although they do not provide extended discussions of the transformations of modernity, Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger offer notable Modernist characterizations of the emerging historical view of understanding. In The Birth of Tragedy (1872), for instance, Nietzsche presents the antagonism between the Dionysian and Apollinian arts as a cognitive one in part. For Nietzsche, the Apollinian is representational, depicting clear forms, figures, and images. The Dionysian, on the other hand, is an ecstatic and intoxicating shattering of forms, a fact of modern experience that leads Nietzsche to make his famous nihilistic claim: "it is only as an aesthetic phenomenon that existence and the world are eternally justified" (Birth 52). For Nietzsche, "in all desire to know there is a drop of cruelty" (Beyond 349). As Nietzsche would put it in his The Genealogy of Morals (1887),

> Henceforth, my dear philosophers, let us be on guard against the dangerous old conceptual fiction that posited a "pure, will-less, painless, timeless knowing subject"; let us guard against the snares of such contradictory concepts as "pure reason," "absolute spirituality," "knowledge in itself": these always demand that we should think of an eye that is completely unthinkable, an eye turned in no particular direction, in which the active and interpreting forces, through which

> alone seeing becomes seeing something, are supposed to be lacking; these always demand of the eye an absurdity and a nonsense. There is only a perspective seeing, only a perspective "knowing." (555)

As this passage with its clear critique of positivism suggests, Nietzsche's sense of the difficulties of cognition in the modern world—of the sheer absurdity of the positivist subject—harmonize in part with the ideas of Simmel, Freud, and Benjamin. In other words, what Nietzsche does, just as the others do, is historicize understanding, locating it within the limiting horizons of its social, cultural, and material conditions. In effect, Nietzsche substitutes the uncertainties of aesthetic experience for the clear certitudes of positivist cognition, laying the basis, as Vattimo has argued, for an understanding of "the aesthetic character of the experience of truth" (12). In effect, Nietzsche develops a nihilistic or anti-metaphysical view of truth that recognizes the timely limitations of knowledge—namely, its relationship to culture, society, and history.

The same can also be said of Heidegger. In his characterization of Dasein or human life as "time itself" (Concept 14E), Heidegger introduces "historicity" into the process of cognition, developing a sense of the temporal character of the apprehension of Being. As Heidegger explains, "the Being of Dasein . . . is historicity itself. Philosophy will never get to the root of what history is so long as it analyses history as an object of contemplation for method. The enigma of history lies in what it means to be historical" (20E). Such insights would lead to Heidegger's famous "Letter on Humanism," in which the philosopher would claim that "every humanism remains metaphysical" (226). Under critique here is the ahistorical Enlightenment subject and its metaphysical conception of truth. In contrast to the phenomenological philosopher Edmund Husserl, who attempted

to revive the timeless Cartesian subject of the Enlightenment, Heidegger attempts to situate human understanding within time, just as Nietzsche does. As Richard Rorty has argued in Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature (1980), Heidegger is one of several modern philosophers who mark the emergence of an "anti-Cartesian and anti-Kantian revolution" (7), in which the notion of knowledge as an accurate representation is thoroughly critiqued. As what Rorty calls an edifying rather than a systematic philosopher, Heidegger clearly "want[s] to keep space open for the sense of wonder which poets can sometimes cause—wonder that there is something new under the sun, something which is not an accurate representation of what was already there, something which (at least for the moment) cannot be explained and can barely be described" (370).

Similar attempts to historicize the representational process of cognition are prevalent throughout the arts and sciences in the modern period. As Charles R. Bambach has indicated, at the turn of the twentieth century a modernist attempt to understand history in terms of crisis emerges. Versions of classical historicism, as we shall see in Chapter 3, had dominated historiography previously. As Bambach explains,

> Classical historicism was committed to the ideas of value-free judgment and neutral perspective as the very essence of historical objectivity. But these values were themselves possible only on the basis of a neutral temporality that allowed for another illusion: a causally demonstrable continuum of historical effects. (9)

According to Bambach, a wholesale dissolution of such thinking occurred after the unprecedented experiences of the Great War, "when the carnage brought on by the new technologies had resulted in widespread political chaos, economic collapse, and social dislocation" (7). Out of this experience the modernist view of history as crisis emerges.

"Modernism," Bambach explains, "breaks with classical historicism in that the modern experience of history is acausal, discontinuous, and ironic" (9), marking a new senses of subjectivity, temporality and narrative that clearly emerge out of the experience of modernity. (As I suggest in Chapter 3, one can and should see Walter Benjamin's work as being part of this new sense of history as crisis.) In other words, the modernist view of history breaks with the "ideals of scientific thinking from the early modern era, ideals dominated by Cartesian-Kantian notions of rationality, consciousness, methodological access to truth, and philosophical certitude" (12). (Certain modern novels and poems, as I point out in following chapters, articulate a similar sense of crisis when they attempt to break with the conventions of narrative realism.) For Bambach, Heidegger plays a crucial role in this dawning post-Enlightenment sense of history. As Bambach explains,

> Heidegger discovered that historicist assumptions about truth, objectivity, research practices, temporal distance, and scholarly judgment were derived from the early modern definition of the sciences. By refusing to grasp history simply as a process of sequential development (Geschichte) or as a Fachwissenschaft committed to historicoscientific observation (Historie), Heidegger came to understand history in a new sense as historicity (Geschichtlichkeit), as the temoral-historical happening that we ourselves are (15).

Clearly, in history, as in philosophy in general, a new historical view of understanding emerges at the turn of the twentieth century, one that was born out of the shocking experience of the discontinuous temporality of the modern world.

A comparable development took place in anthropology. As James Clifford has indicated in The Predicament of Culture (1988), alongside the humanism of traditional

anthropology, a kind of ethnographic surrealism emerged in the early twentieth century, undermining universal humanistic notions. According to Clifford, the two presuppose one another, functioning dialectically. As Clifford explains,

> Anthropological humanism and ethnographic surrealism need not be seen as mutually exclusive; they are perhaps best understood as antinomies set within a transient historical and cultural predicament. To state the contrast schematically, anthropological humanism begins with the different and renders it—through naming, classifying, describing, interpreting—comprehensible. It familiarizes. An ethnographic surrealist practice, by contrast, attacks the familiar, provoking the irruption of otherness—the unexpected. The two attitudes presuppose each other; both are elements within a complex process that generates cultural meanings, definitions of self and other. This process—a permanent ironic play of similarity and difference, the familiar and strange, the here and elsewhere—is, as I have argued, characteristic of global modernity. (145-146)

As Clifford describes it, a dialectic takes place between the cognitive efforts of Enlightenment humanism and the defamiliarizing practices of the post-Enlightenment surrealists. In Clifford's view, moreover, such a dialectic between the familiar and the strange, the similar and the different, the same and the other is typical of the experience of modernity, which, as Lefebvre, Jameson, and Said have also noted, is conditioned in part by globalization. In effect, what Clifford is describing is the discontinuous experience of modernity that the other previous theorists, scholars, and philosophers have attempted to describe. For Clifford, the surrealists attempted to historicize understanding, which is precisely what was taking place almost simultaneously in the disciplines of history and

philosophy. Like the others, anthropology's attempt to historicize understanding is grounded in the material conditions of modernity, which ultimately called into question the subject of the Enlightenment, posing serious problems of representation.

A sense of the monumental nature of this critique of the subject is captured by Freud in his Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis (1917). To explain the historical important of his psychoanalytic research into the unconscious and to account for the resistance his theories have met with publicly, Freud situates his critique of the subject within the context of the history of major scientific discoveries that have forced mankind to rethink their position in the world. As Freud explains,

> In the course of centuries the naïve self-love of men has had to submit to two major blows at the hands of science. The first was when they learnt that our earth was not the centre of the universe but only a tiny fragment of a cosmic system of scarcely imaginable vastness. This is associated in our minds with the name of Copernicus, though something similar had already been asserted by Alexandrian science. The second blow fell when biological research destroyed man's supposedly privileged placed in creation and proved his descent from the animal kingdom and his ineradicable animal nature. This revaluation has been accomplished in our own days by Darwin, Wallace and their predecessors, though not without the most violent contemporary opposition. But human megalomania will have suffered its third and most wounding blow from the psychological research of the present time which seeks to prove to the ego that it is not even master in its own house, but must content itself with scanty information of what is going on unconsciously in its mind. (353)

This celebrated passage—in which the psychoanalytic critique of the subject is compared to the Copernican decentering of the earth and the Darwinian decentering of humanity (in relationship to animals)—captures the momentous nature of the general critique of the subject in the arts and the humanities. Later on, Freud's implicit analogy to Copernicus was found to be particularly suggestive by poststructuralist theorists in the social and human sciences who also argued for the "decentering" of the subject, particularly Jacques Lacan and Louis Althusser.[7]

In any case, in one form or another, the previous scholars, writers, and intellectuals that I have discussed are attempting to describe the experience of this "decentering" of the subject, which is significantly conditioned by the shock and discontinuity of modernity. As we have seen, Lukács and Harvey situate the enfeebled subject within the social instabilities of capitalism, while Kern, Anderson, and Schliefer note the transformations in understanding that ensued from changes in technology. Lefebvre, Jameson, Said, and Clifford factor in the problems posed by increasing globalization and imperialism, and Benjamin, Freud, Bambach, and Fussell demonstrate the ways in which the traumatic experiences of World War I overwhelmed the coping abilities of the subject. On a perhaps more purely theoretical level, finally, Heidegger and Nietzsche tie everything together in their general theories of the changing historical conditions of understanding. In each case, the experience of modernity is characterized as one of indeterminacy, shock, discontinuity, trauma, and crisis, an experience that exceeds the cognitive framework of the Enlightenment subject, which, as Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno have argued

[7]See Lacan, Écrits: A Selection (1977), p. 114 and 165, and Althusser, Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays (1971), pp. 218-219.

in Dialectic of Enlightenment (1973), is totalitarian in its attempt to reduce the multiplicity of the world into an immutable table or system of identities (6-7). Out of this special kind of experience, as the above accounts of modernity suggest, a crisis of representation ensues that involves a recognition of the ways in which language and culture shape observation and understanding. As a result, what finally emerges here is the necessity for a historicizing of cognition that goes beyond positivism's metaphysical view of subjectivity and knowledge.

Modernism, Materialism, and Positivism

The emergence of modernism in the arts and sciences, as I have indicated, can be situated in relationship not only to the experience of modernity, but also to the contemporaneous crisis of positivism. In developing what I call timely materialisms modernism can be seen as defining itself in opposition to the metaphysical materialism of positivism. In contrast to the positivists—who stress the self-evidence of intuition, the transcendental nature of subjectivity, the objectivity of knowledge, and the transparency of language—the modernists conceive of subjectivity, experience, and knowledge as fundamentally conditioned by culture, society, history, and, above all, language. The resulting difference, as we shall see, is one between a metaphysical materialism striving for objectivity and absolutes and a "timely" materialism stressing the worldliness or historicity of knowledge. In questioning the self-evidence of positivism the modernists initiated the development of a more sophisticated kind of materialism than the positivist conception. It is this distinction between positivism and timely materialism to which I will now turn.

Usually credited with being the founder of positivism is the French social theorist Auguste Comte (1798—1857).[8] His goal was to extend the scientific method, as developed in classical physics, to every known field of study in the natural and human sciences, toward the ultimate end of discovering the proper social and political structure for the modern world. Motivated by the social unrest of the French Revolution, Comte in effect founded an utopian social movement that sought social renewal and progress through science. Underlying his positivist program, as I have already noted, was a profound commitment to empiricism, to the study of only that which could be observed. This also entailed a commitment to referential language, to the careful unbiased recording of neutral observations. Comte rejected all metaphysical and theological speculation as irrational and meaningless. It was this wholesale rejection of metaphysics and theology, as we shall see in Chapter 2, that influenced the theoretical development of naturalism, realism, and modernism.

Comte's commitment to the seemingly self-evident experience of empiricism is particularly clear in his epistemological and historical theory known as the law of three stages. According to Comte, all societies pass through three phases in their evolutionary development: the theological, the metaphysical, and the positive or scientific stage. The first two stages are characterized, epistemologically speaking, by their repeated attempts to speculate on the hidden nature of things; they fall under the influence of "divine," "idealistic" or "transcendental" models of the world. The last stage sheds these forms of

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[8]My account of positivism is particularly indebted to Leszek Kalokowski, The Alienation of Reason: A History of Positivist Thought (1968); W.M. Simon, European Positivism in the Nineteenth Century: An Essay in Intellectual History (1972); and Scott Gordon, The History and Philosophy of Social Science (1991).

"self-mystification" by staying exclusively and strictly within the realm of the observable. At this positive stage, knowledge is supposedly based solely on what can be perceived. For Comte, this stage marks an advance from subjectivity to objectivity, from meaningless speculation to pure disinterested inquiry. This tripartite theory of social development, Comte argues, appears to be backed by nature, for it is also recapitulated in the individual development of human beings: the theological stage is equivalent to childhood, the metaphysical stage to youth, and the scientific stage to adulthood.

The key assumption behind this positivist theory of social and individual development is that immediate observation—pure intuition—is not only desirable but possible. Comte endorses, in other words, the notion of a disinterested subject grounded in a "common sense" that can empirically but objectively represent the world. Thus, as Leszek Kolakowski explains, "Comte's conception of science is purely phenomenalist, though by no means subjectivist. According to him, the human brain should be a faithful mirror of the objective order, and knowledge of this order serves as the mind's own ordering principle" (57). This phenomenological but objectivist conception of "pure" observation ultimately became the basis of positivist inquiry. As historian William Everdell has pointed out, later positivists, like Comte, "saw the experimenter, or observer, as 'objective'—separate from the material reality he or she observed. Any knowledge you had that looked as if it did not depend on material reality was suspect as 'theological' or 'metaphysical' until you showed that relationship with matter" (35). Such a notion of knowledge can be seen as a dogmatizing of the Enlightenment, which also upheld the objectivity of science against the subjectivity of religion and metaphysics.

The positivist validation of objective observation and its related condemnation of theology and metaphysical speculation finally led to an emphasis on what the historian of science Thomas Kuhn has called "a pure observation-language" (127). The positivist objective in this regard was to carefully separate theory and fact, to use language in such a way that it merely reports a neutral and objective "given." As Katherine Hayles has explained, "The goal of the positivists was to 'purify' language by removing from it anything that could not be empirically verified or logically demonstrated—in short, anything suspected of being 'metaphysical'" (38). Positivists thus distinguished between logical, theoretical, and observational terms, the first two being grounded in the last, which simply reports pure, uninterrupted sensory data. Thus, to the phenomenological conception of objective representation, the positivists added a similar linguistic conception, in which language was conceived as a transparent medium for the communication of what became known as "pure percepts."

The result, as Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno have rightly noted, is that positivism becomes "the myth of things as they actually are" (x): in striving for mastery, reduction, and simplicity, it finally begins to embody the claim that "[p]ower and knowledge are synonymous" (4), although it vehemently denies this connection, claiming objectivity. Ironically, positivism thus lapses into what Jacques Derrida would call a metaphysics of identity and presence that does not take into consideration the role of culture and language in the production of all forms of knowledge. In his early essay "Materialism" (1929), Georges Bataille arrived at a similar kind of insight when he declared that materialism can be seen as "a senile idealism to the extent that it is not immediately based on psychological or social facts, instead of on artificially isolated

physical phenomena" (15). As Bataille suggests, positivism is precisely such a form of senile idealism because it, too, focuses neither on psychological nor sociological determination, but on scientific method, treating objects as individual "isolated" entities with intrinsic identities, positing the pure "presence" of the object. Such a focus, which is based on the notions of subjective immediacy (pure intuition) and linguistic representation (pure transparency), is metaphysical because it posits the existence of absolute knowledge and things.

It is precisely this metaphysical materialism that is called into question in certain areas of the natural and human sciences at the turn of the century. The timely materialisms that emerge are non-metaphysical, non-intuitive, and non-transcendental. As we have already seen, they advocate a worldly understanding of knowledge and subjectivity that historicizes understanding. They see subjectivity and knowledge as conditioned by language, which is viewed as constitutive and performative, not referential or constative. This materialist perspective involves situating subjectivity within the contexts of culture, history, society, and tradition. As would be the case with the emergence of theory in the 1970s, the modernists essentially critique the self-evidence of intuition and what Paul de Man in "The Resistance to Theory" calls "ideology" or "the confusion of linguistic with natural reality, of reference with phenomenalism" (11). Rephrasing J. Hillis Miller's definition of theory as "the displacement in literary studies from a focus on the meaning of texts to a focus on the ways meaning is conveyed" ("Presidential" 283), we might say that these timely materialisms shift attention away from the positivist focus on the essences, identities, laws, and principles of the natural and human worlds to the various ways in which such seeming absolutes are constructed. These timely materialisms thus mark a

shift away from the metaphysical materialism of positivism to a more "materialistic" materialism characterized by a self-reflexive critique of the self-evidence of intuition.

This emergence of a new sense of materialism, as I have indicated earlier, is significantly conditioned by the experience of modernity. Ultimately, in the chapters that follow, I will read certain modernist writers within this context—particularly Joseph Conrad, Gertrude Stein, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf—comparing them to related figures in the natural and human sciences.

Literary Modernism and the Experience of Modernity

As I have suggested, the connection between the critique of the subject and the experience of modernity is also made by the modern writers, novelists, and poets themselves, as well as by some major literary theorists and critics. In each case, a crisis in understanding is said to arise out of the material conditions of the modern world. This crisis involves a recognition of the limits of representation, knowledge, intuition, and language, a recognition that leads to the critique of the principles of positivism, particularly its notions of disinterested subjectivity and transparent language.

In subsequent chapters, we will see two notable examples of modern writers making an explicit connection between the critique of the subject and the experience of modernity, namely, Gertrude Stein and Virginia Woolf. As discussed in detail in Chapter 3, Stein suggests in her essay "Composition and Explanation" a basic connection between knowledge and the activities of the world in her telling statement that "The only thing that is different from one time to another is what is seen and what is seen depends upon how everybody is doing everything" (516). Representation, Stein argues, is bound up with

historical, social, and economic developments, and changes accordingly. In Picasso, furthermore, she suggests a relationship between Cubism and World War I, providing an instance of the relationship between art and modernity, and Stein also suggests that the experience of modernity is the experience of "things [being] destroyed as they have never been destroyed" (50), a view that is comparable to a certain extent with Marshall Berman and Karl Marx's understanding of modernity in which "all that is solid melts into air." All in all, as I shall discuss in detail later, Stein is clear that a crisis in understanding brought about by the experience of modernity has in turn brought about changes in art and literature, changes indicative of the necessity for a new understanding of subjectivity and representation.

In "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," as discussed in Chapter 5, Woolf points to a similar view of the relationship between modernity and the subject in her famous remark that "All human relations have shifted—those between masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children. And when human relations change there is at the same time a change in religion, politics, and literature" (195). Although Woolf isolates the year 1910, her remark is very much similar to Lawrence's equally celebrated remark that "It was in 1915 the old world ended. In the winter of 1915-1916 the spirit of the old London collapsed, the city, in some way, perished, perished from being a heart of the world, and became a vortex of broken passions, lusts, hopes, fears, and horrors" (Kangaroo 250). In both case, a correlation is drawn between the experience of modernity and a crisis in understanding leading to a breakup of one world and the beginning of another. In Woolf's case, it leads to the aestheticization of truth and the portrayal of literary history as a

tradition of various styles that have each constituted and organized the knowledge and values of a particular society.

As I note in Chapters 2 and 4, Joseph Conrad and James Joyce can also be brought into the picture. While they do not explicitly address the connection between the experience of modernity and the critique of the subject in their personal or critical writings, they do certainly imply it in their fiction. Conrad, of course, situates The Secret Agent in the sprawling city of London, which the author repeatedly stresses is an unfathomable maze. Modernity manifests itself here in the form of various political and revolutionary forces seething within the city and the world at large. All of Europe is portrayed as possessing, at best, a precarious political equilibrium. This situation of potential instability and uncertainty contributes, the novel suggests, to difficulties in understanding because it does not allow for a stable ground from which to judge the world. To drive this point home, as we shall see later, Conrad overturns the conventions of the genre of detective fiction. In Ulysses and throughout his work, Joyce situates his characters in relationship to imperialism, and as an author Joyce becomes more and more cosmopolitan in his use of languages. The world Joyce portrays is a modern world not only of imperialism, but of international relationships, immigration, and multiple languages in which borders are traversed and any particular event can be seen from a variety of perspectives. Joyce's linguistic and cognitive relativism arises out of this sense of modern imperialism and cosmopolitanism.

The same could also be said of E.M. Forster's A Passage to India (1924), which critiques the Enlightenment subject by placing it within the context of the conflicting cultural forces of the British Empire in India. In this novel Forster depicts Hindus,

Muslims, and English colonialists talking at cross purposes, attempting to "just connect" but unable to meaningfully communicate across culture borders. What the reader comes away with is a sense of cultural confusion. Before and during the trial, the novel's central scene, the English colonists are possessed by a culturally induced frenzy over a "white" woman being assaulted by a "dark" man. They are absolutely blind to reason, but completely ravished by a cultural logic no less real for them, a logic preempting any kind of individuality, generating a kind of mob mentality. At the trial, moreover, when all the English colonists except Fielding find their way onto the Judge's platform, so that the court room is evenly divided into colonizers and colonized, the self-evident notion of a disinterested, transcendental reason or subject ever existing is seriously called into question. The trial, where a disinterested judgment ought to take place, is treated as a mockery of justice and reason. All of this suggests that cultural biases, stereotypes, and prejudices were built into the Enlightenment concept of reason from the very beginning, a cultural fact attested to in the history of ideas, where the rule of reason is often portrayed as being distinguished from the mental states of children, women, madmen, and savages. And this type of suggestion emerges precisely because of a clash of different cultures that is made possible and common within the modern world.

In addition to Forster, other modernist writers who make this connection between the experience of modernity and a crisis in understanding might be cited and discussed. One might discuss, for instance, Ford Madox Ford's tetrology Parade's End (1924-1928) and its portrayal of the impact of World War I on the main character Christopher Tietjens, a portrayal that focuses on subjectivity and memory, suggesting a transformation of the world on the order suggested by Lawrence and Woolf. Another subject of discussion

might by Samuel Beckett's Murphy (1938) and its portrayal of the relationship between "Murphy's mind" (107) and "the big blooming buzzing confusion" of modernity (4). One might also discuss T. S. Eliot's view of the relationship between myth and "the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history" (177) or William Butler Yeats's portrayal of the decentering of the world in "The Second Coming," with its vision of "Mere anarchy . . . loosed upon the world." This poem in turn might also be compared with Yeats's imaginative memory in A Vision of a beautiful young girl by the sea who "sang with lifted head of the civilisations that there had come and gone, ending every verse with the cry: 'O Lord, let something remain'" (220). All of these examples point to the relationship between modernism and the experience of modernity.

Rather than delving into the works of a wide range of modernist texts and authors, however, I focus instead on Joseph Conrad (Chapter 2), Gertrude Stein (Chapter 3), James Joyce (Chapter 4), and Virginia Woolf (Chapter 5) because these modernist writers can be linked most forcefully to a set of representative academic fields: the human sciences (criminal anthropology), the formal sciences (geometry), history, and aesthetics, respectively. These four writers, as the following chapters make clear, not only allow for a coherent interdisciplinary account of the emergence of various kinds of timely materialisms. They also sufficiently illuminate the relationship between literary modernism and the experience of modernity.

Theorizing Literary Modernism

In terms of literary theory the relationship between modernism and modernity has been well-captured by Georg Lukács, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Jean-François Lyotard.

Lukács and Bakhtin talk primarily about the novel, but their insights into that genre's relationship to modernity might just as well apply to the prose poems of Stein or even modern poetry in general. In his The Theory of the Novel (1920), Lukács argues that the modern novel is "the representative art-form of our age" (93) because it registers the alienating effects of the conditions of modernity, divorcing subjectivity and objectivity, meaning and world. As Lukács explains, "The novel is the epic of an age in which the extensive totality of life is no longer directly given, in which the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem, yet which still thinks in terms of totality" (56). The novel, in other words, is a literary expression of the conditions of modernity and the decentering of the subject that arises in such conditions. The fragmentary and traumatic experiences of modernity noted by Simmel, Benjamin, Freud, and others are precisely the kinds of experiences with which the modern novel is concerned. As such, the modern novel is also concerned with the great social, technological, and economic transformations of modernity that Kern, Anderson, Harvey, Lefebvre, and others have described. All of this is to suggest that in Lukács's conception of the novel as an "an expression of transcendental homelessness" (41) can be found a useful way of linking the modern novel (and modernism in general) to the conditions of modernity and the critique of the subject. The key to understanding this relationship, however, is to focus not only on Lukács's presentation of the cognitive problems that the modern novel expresses, but also on his subtle understanding of how time contributes to those problems. As Lukács explains,

> The greatest discrepancy between idea and reality is time: the process of time as duration. The most profound and most humiliating impotence of subjectivity consists not so much in its hopeless struggle against the lack of idea in social forms

> and their human representatives, as in the fact that it cannot resist the sluggish, yet constant progress of time; that it must slip down, slowly yet inexorably, from the peaks it has laboriously scaled; that time—that ungraspable, invisibly moving substance—gradually robs subjectivity of all its possessions and imperceptibly forces alien contents into it. That is why only the novel, the literary form of the transcendent homelessness of the idea, includes real time—Bergson's durée—among its constitutive principles. (121)

What Lukács is attempting to describe in this passage is the historicization of understanding that Heidegger and Nietzsche addressed. The experience of cognitive difficulties, Lukács is saying, is a consequence of the experience of time, of the temporal-historical happening that we ourselves are, as Bambach puts it. Such an experience is based on the experience of what Lukács terms "alien contents," a version of the irruption of otherness of which Clifford speaks. Since Lukács refers to Henri Bergson, one could argue that Lukács is making a phenomenological argument, but such an approach would overlook the fact that Lukács situates his understanding of cognition within the context of "our age." In effect, Lukács is arguing that the rapidly changing conditions of modernity and the shocking sense of discontinuous temporality that they induce provide the conditions for the kinds of cognitive problems that he discusses. Consequently, Lukács's claim that "the entire inner action of the novel is nothing but a struggle against the power of time" (122) might be slightly reworded with a little help from Berman: the entire inner action of the novel is nothing but an attempt to cope with the permanent revolution of modernity.

Lukács's account of the novel is in this respect in accord with Mikhail Bakhtin's. In other words, both Lukács and Bakhtin have a sense of the ways in which the modern novel expresses the conditions of the modern world and the disorienting experiences endemic to it. As Bakhtin explains in The Dialogic Imagination,

> The novel is the expression of a Gaililean perception of language, one that denies the absolutism of a single and unitary language—that is, that refuses to acknowledge its own language as the sole verbal and semantic center of the ideological world. . . . The novel begins by presuming a verbal and semantic decentering of the ideological world, a certain linguistic homelessness of literary consciousness, which no longer possesses a sacrosanct and unitary linguistic medium for containing ideological thought. (366-367)

Bakhtin's analysis of the decentering of the ideological world in the novel—which so well characterizes a work like Joyce's Ulysses—is similar to Lukács's discussion of the loss of immanent meaning and the inability to totalize. Bakhtin's discussion of the novel also runs parallel to Lukács's views in that they both see the novel as being related to the experience of time or what Bakhtin calls "reality itself in the process of its unfolding" (7). As is the case with Lukács, moreover, the issue here is the "homelessness" of subjectivity. The experience of modernity, Bakhtin and Lukács are arguing, is the experience of the homelessness of subjectivity. Such an experience, as Freud and Heidegger have taught us, is the result of an encounter with the uncanny, the widely used English word for the German word unheimlich, which plays off the related word unheimische or "homelessness." What Bakhtin and Lukács offer is an account of the modern novel that

begins to situate it in relationship to the changing conditions of modernity and the experience of the sublime.

This can all be summarized by way of the French philosopher Jean-Françoise Lyotard. In a helpful way Lyotard has theorized the relationship of literature to the time of the event during which "that which we call thought must be disarmed" (Inhuman 90). The issue for Lyotard is sublimity. For him, the experience of the sublime is the experience of cognitive shock, and such "shock is, par excellence, the evidence of (something) happening, rather than nothing" (100). The experience of the sublime, in other words, is the experience of the event. "The event," as Bill Readings has noted, "is the occurrence after which nothing will ever be the same again. The event, that is, happens in excess of the referential frame within which it might be understood, disrupting or displacing that frame" (57). This understanding of the experience of the event, I believe, well describes the experience of the discontinuous temporality of modernity. As Bambach, Clifford, and the others have indicated, modernity regularly afforded (and still affords) its inhabitants such experiences. In other words, the technological, economic, and social transformations of modernity, as I indicated earlier, repeatedly altered the very foundations of understanding, creating sublime experiences and crises of representation and comprehension. Such experiences of discontinuity and crisis were experiences of the event. As such, they dispensed with the intuitive self-evidence of sequential or developmental notions of time and history. As Readings has explained, "The event is the radically singular happening which cannot be represented within a general history without the loss of its singularity, its reduction to a moment. The time of the event is postmodern in that the event cannot be understood at the time, as it happens, because its singularity is

alien to the language or structure of understanding to which it occurs." (57). The experience of the event is a groundbreaking experience that reorients one's understanding of self and time. Such an experience gave rise to the modern notions of historicity, or the historicization of understanding, as in Nietzsche and Heidegger. What Lyotard offers, consequently, is an understanding of the relationship between the experience of the sublime and the discontinuous temporality of modernity, summarizing, in effect, the theories of the relationship between modernity and cognition that I have presented throughout this chapter.

Lyotard also offers an understanding of modern art in relationship to the sublime, one that can be usefully juxtaposed with Lukács's and Bakhtin's theories of the modern novel. According to Lyotard, "it is in the aesthetic of the sublime that modern art (including literature) finds its impetus and the logic of the avant-gardes finds its axioms" (Postmodern 77). Modern art comes after the postmodern event, the event that disrupts the continuum or homogeneous nature of time, creating a crisis of representation. The modern work of art that addresses this postmodern event is one that testifies to the negative or the incommensurable. It is that which "puts forward the unpresentable 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 unpresentable" (81). The modern work of art, consequently, bears witness to the unpresentable and the radically different, waging a "war on totality." It keeps faith with the event, with what I have called the discontinuous temporality of modernity. Such a conception of modern art runs parallel, in part, to what

Lukács and Bakhtin are saying. All three, in other words, have a sense of the ways in which modern art registers the cognitive problems of modernity in its very form. This sense is a materialist one in that it connects the techniques of modernism with a distinct moment in history.

Lyotard has gone so far as to argue that "the sublime is perhaps the only mode of artistic sensibility to characterize the modern" (Postmodern 93). This statement appears to go a bit too far, but, as part of Lyotard's overall theory about the relationship between modern art and modernity, it does seem to well-characterize many of the modern texts that I examine throughout Timely Materialisms. As I have tried to suggest throughout this chapter, the modern texts that I shall look at—particularly those by Conrad, Stein, Joyce, and Woolf—are focused on the discontinuous events of modernity and the cognitive problems that they entail. They respond to the various conditions of modernity, noting, in Lyotard's terminology, the sublime experiences that arise. One key result is a questioning of the timeless Enlightenment subject and its near relation, the subject of positivism. With the ground continually shifting underneath, it becomes clear that subjectivity is socially constructed, that intuition is not self-evident. Out of this insight emerges the other key insight, namely, that language is a form, not a transparent window onto reality. Language shapes the apprehension and understanding of reality, rather than simply reflecting it. These insights may not be unique to modernism, but they do indeed become forcefully apparent to modernists as a result of the intense experience of modernity, an experience that leads to the critique of positivism. As the above discussion of theorists, scholars, and modernists suggests, perhaps Roland Barthes was correct after all when he made his sweeping generalizing that from "around 1850 . . . the whole of Literature, from Flaubert

to the present day, became the problematics of language" (Writing 3). In this regard, as well as in others, modernism can be seen as an anticipation of postmodernism.

Chapter 2:

The Materialist Perception of Criminal Bodies:

Modernism, Realism, and the Crisis of Positivism in Joseph Conrad

> My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, to make you see!
> Joseph Conrad, Preface to The Nigger of the Narcissus (1897)

> During revolutions scientists see new and different things when looking with familiar instruments in places they have looked before.
> Thomas S. Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (1962)

As historians of science have often noted, many scientists and philosophers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century witnessed what in Science and the Modern World (1925) Alfred North Whitehead called "the patent dissolution of the comfortable scheme of scientific materialism" (157). They bore witness, in other words, to the demise of positivism, the nineteenth century project to codify the scientific method and to extend it to all fields of knowledge. In both the natural and human sciences the two fundamental notions of positivism—the concepts of disinterested subjectivity and pure observation language—came under critique. The general result was a gradual questioning of common sense and of objective observation, as well as a heightened sense of the limits of intuition, representation, language, and knowledge. Consequently, as a recent historian of the human sciences has explained, a "new subjectivity of knowledge" emerged, one based on the growing "recognition that no foundation for knowledge or value exists outside the

meanings that human beings construct for their own purposes" (Ross 2). Out of the dissolution of Whitehead's "scientific materialism" emerged this anti-positivist notion of social constructivism.

Although such a notion took on many different forms, one of its more significant manifestation was formalism, a general movement in the natural and human sciences that critiqued positivism's ocularcentric study of isolated and discrete substances and particles, turning instead to the careful examination of complex cultural systems, arrangements, and configurations. For the formalists, conceptualizations of phenomena depend not upon some kind of passive, disinterested gaze or perception, but upon the way in which objects are formally ordered; and "language," as Ferdinand de Saussure put it, "is a form and not a substance" (122). It shapes the apprehension of phenomena rather than simply referring to them. In its attention to the ways in which human beings make meaning rather than find it, the formalist movement can be seen to mark the emergence of a new, more subtle understanding of materialism, a timely materialism.

A similar trajectory of dissolution and emergence can be observed in literary modernism, as this and subsequent chapters will make clear. In this chapter, I am principally concerned with tracing the emergence of the crisis of positivism in modernism, which, as we shall see, followed an uneven rather than a linear development. As necessary background to this objective, I discuss the influence of positivism on the nineteenth century literary theory of Émile Zola. Next, I point out the influence of positivism—and the related notions of realism and naturalism—on early modernism by surveying the literary theory of some of its major practitioners, including Joseph Conrad, Ford Madox Ford, T.E. Hulme, Ezra Pound, and Wyndham Lewis. The goal here is to highlight the

ways in which early modernism continues the positivist project of the nineteenth century, particularly its preoccupation with neutral observation and language. Finally, I focus on Joseph Conrad's The Secret Agent (1907) as one of the earliest modernist texts to register self-consciously the emergence of the crisis of positivism. Conrad's text is admirably suited for this focus because it is intricately caught up in the positivist principles of criminal anthropology, as developed and popularized by Caesar Lombroso, an ardent positivist. It portrays such an enterprise sympathetically, but ultimately calls it into question, as many contemporaneous criminologists turning toward sociology did, such as Gabriel Tarde. It does so, as we shall see, with implications for the conventional form of detective fiction. As later chapters will demonstrate, the general problem that Conrad's novel sets out—the undermining of positivism—is ultimately the larger context in which certain later works of Modernism—such as Gertrude Stein's Tender Buttons (1914), James Joyce's Ulysses (1922), and Virigina Woolf's Orlando (1928) and Between the Acts (1941)—make sense.

"A Philosophy of the Eye": Naturalism, Realism, and Early Modernism

The two positivist conceptions of subjectivity and language had a decisive if sometimes indirect influence on literary theory and practice, first on naturalism and later on early modernism. The French novelist Émile Zola, who is one of the first theorists of literary naturalism, is a case in point. In his famous essay "The Experimental Novel" (1880), he applies to the theory of the novel the scientific insights of Claude Bernard's positivist treatise Introduction à l'étude de la médecine experimentale, a work very much indebted to the theories of Comte. Not surprisingly, Zola singles out the following key

passage from Bernard on the importance of objective observation in science: "The [scientific] observer relates purely and simply the phenomena which he has under his eyes. . . . he should be the photographer of phenomena, his observation should be an exact representation of nature. . . . He listens to nature and he writes under its dictation" (7). The scientific goal, as Zola infers from this passage and others, is "to know the determinism of phenomena and to make ourselves master of these phenomena" (19), and it is this very same goal that Zola wants to carry over into the novel.

As in positivism at large, this literary objective is bound up not only with the idea of phenomenal immediacy or pure intuition but also with the notion of linguistic representation. As the above quote by Bernard suggests, the positivist merely "dictates" what he objectively sees. Speaking of the contemporary scene of literature, Zola similarly notes, "We are . . . rotten with lyricism; we are very much mistaken when we think that the characteristic of a good style is a sublime confusion with just a dash of madness added; in reality, the excellence of a style depends upon its logic and clearness" (48). Like Comte and the other positivists, Zola is here distinguishing between logical and observational terms. In his attempt to stress the importance of a pure observation language, he also attempts—again like the positivists—to differentiate his scientific view of language from the "Romantic disease" of lyricism whose "idealistic writers . . . always start out from an irrational source of some kind, such as a revelation, a tradition, or conventional authority" (36). This strategy is clearly reminiscent of Comte's earlier attempt to distinguish the positive age from the theological and metaphysical ages. Indeed, Zola cites approvingly Bernard's Comtean idea that "the human mind . . . at various periods of its progress has passed successively through feeling, reason, and experiment" (33), which he equates with

theology, scholasticism, and the study of natural phenomena, respectively. Ultimately, Zola indicates that "We must admit nothing of the occult" (36), and this means that there is no place for the "meaningless" use of language, which Zola terms "Rhetoric" (48). In conclusion, Zola explains, "the experimental method in letters, as in the sciences, is the way to explain the natural phenomena, both individual and social, of which metaphysics, until now, has given only irrational and supernatural explanations" (54).

Zola's high regard for positivist tenets—particularly the affirmations of objectivity and linguistic clarity—was typical of a certain strain of nineteenth-century literature. Similar ideas can be found in the writings of the Goncourt brothers and realist writers like Balzac and Flaubert. As we shall see, these positivist ideas finally filtered into early modernism. Although the influence of positivism and naturalism on modernism was often not acknowledge or realized, it was openly declared in some cases, as in Ezra Pound's frequent references to the Goncourts' famous preface to Germinie Lacerteux (1864), which argues for the scientific basis of the novel.

The importance of positivism to naturalism, it is now apparent, was that it validated the standards of disinterested subjectivity and referential language. It also did the same for early modernism, but it did so primarily through the influence of the prose tradition of naturalism and realism—two terms which were often synonymous for the modernists. This is not to suggest that the modernists continued the naturalist and the realist tradition point for point: as a whole, they were not as concerned with the portrayal of the "underside" of life, nor did they always overtly buy into the determination of human behavior, a fact which often generates contradictions in their theoretical writings. What the modernists take from naturalism and realism, as I have suggested, is an interest in

objective observation and in what Michael Levenson has called "naturalizing the poetic sign" (110). As we shall see, when they expounded and defended these two ideas, they often did so in language that is strikingly reminiscent of the positivist tradition in science and literature.

Joseph Conrad can be said to be one of the earliest modernists to carry over positivist ideas into the modernist project (as well as one of the earliest to question it, as we shall see in the next section). In his programmatic Preface to his early novel The Nigger of the 'Narcissus' (1897), Conrad focuses on "rendering" justice to the "visible" world, drawing a parallel between the artist and the scientist while defining his art. As he writes,

> art itself may be defined as a single-minded attempt to render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe, by bringing to light the truth, manifold and one, underlying its every aspect. It is an attempt to find in its forms, in its colours, in its light, in its shadows, in the aspects of matter and in the facts of life what of each is fundamental, what is enduring and essential—their one illuminating and convincing quality—the very truth of their existence. The artist, then, like the thinker and the scientist, seeks the truth and makes his appeal (xxxxix).

This appeal, as Conrad implies and later states, is "primarily to the senses" (xli). As in positivism, Conrad combines a concern with objective perception and referential language, or, in Conrad's terms, with rendering the truth of the visible universe. This concern leads Conrad to his famous concluding pronouncement: "My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, to make you see! That—and no more, and it is everything! If I succeed, you shall find . .

. that glimpse of truth for which you have forgotten to ask" (xlii). In this passage Conrad declares his intention to incorporate into the modern novel the positivist conceptions of observation and language, his ultimate goal being, as Ford Madox Ford once noted, "to write a prose of extreme limpidity" (Joseph 88). From this influential declaration would follow an unbroken line of descent that would include Ford, T.E. Hulme, Ezra Pound, and Wyndham Lewis, in whom the interest in positivism would become more and more pronounced and emphatic.

Regarding Conrad as a friend and mentor, Ford essentially agreed with the positivist ideas of Conrad, but he possessed the added virtue of being able to see the larger historical context for his and Conrad's artistic ambitions, namely, the naturalist and realist tradition in literature. In "The Critical Attitude" (1909), for instance, Ford praises writers like Conrad who "stand out as very excellent signposts to mark the difference between the more insular and amateur and the more cosmopolitan and scientific schools of writers" (Critical 36). Writers like Conrad, Ford notes, are, "in the strictest sense, realists" (38). They belong, he explains, to the great tradition of naturalist and realist writers, including "Flaubert, Maupassant, Turgenev, the Goncourts, and the rest" (38). What made these writers valuable, Ford argued, was that they "rendered" rather than moralized. The precedent set by them and modern writers like Conrad led Ford to believe that "You have to render life with such exactitude that more specialised beings than you, learning from you what are the secret needs of humanity, may judge how many white-tiled bathrooms are, or to what extent parliamentary representation is, necessary for the happiness of men and women" (English 97). As Frank MacShane—the editor of Ford's critical writings—

has noted, "after reading Stendhal, Turgenev, Flaubert, and Maupassant" Ford came to believe that "the function of writing was simply to give an objective presentation of actuality; there was to be no attempt on the part of the author to use his work as a vehicle for moralizing or instruction" (x).

T.E. Hulme held essentially the same belief. However, in contrast to both Ford and Conrad, it was backed up with considerably more developed thought. Of the modernists, Hulme presents one of the more sophisticated understandings of positivism's relationship to modernism, developing a theory of the poetic image that would become the basis of Imagism. In "A Lecture on Modern Poetry" (1908) Hulme makes his crucial distinction between direct and conventional language (Collected 55), much as a positivist would. Direct language is the language of poetry: "it is direct because it deals in images" (55). Indirect language is the language of prose: it is indirect because it "uses images that have died and become figures of speech" (55). The first "arrests your mind all the time with a picture" (55), while the second merely presents a type or convention that obscures the genuine experience of the object. The new verse that Hulme calls for in the essay is to strive for new images, to "resemble sculpture rather than music," to "appeal to the eye rather than to the ear" (56). As he would further explain in "Romanticism and Classicism" (1909), "The great aim [of poetry] is accurate, precise and definite description" (Collected 69), all of which, like the positivists, Hulme contrasts with the fuzzy indefiniteness of the romantic aesthetic—a common strategy of certain modernists. Poetry, Hulme argues, shuns both the imprecision of Romanticism and the abstraction of prose "counter language" in an effort "to make you continuously see a physical thing" (70).

The main assumption in Hulme's thinking is that "Images in verse are not mere decoration, but the very essence of an intuitive language" (70). Paradoxically, such an intuitive language—an excellent term for the positivists's "pure observation-language"—requires fresh metaphors and epithets. The poet must wrestle with conventions and trite expressions to arrive ultimately at a visual concrete image of objectivity. Like the positivists, Hulme is attempting to combine the theory of objective perception with the notion of linguistic transparency, toward the ultimate goal of rising above particulars to universals—the literary equivalent of the positivists "piercing through" nature to its laws. Hulme is absolutely clear about this. In "Bergson's Theory of Art" (1911) Hulme declares his intention to develop a theory of aesthetic intuition that would "take life in general for its object just as physical science, following to the end the direction pointed out by external perception, prolongs the individual facts into general laws" (Collected 192). What the poet must strive to overcome is conventionalized forms of perception: as Hulme states, "human perception gets crystallised out along certain lines, . . . it has certain fixed habits, certain fixed ways of seeing things, and is so unable to see things as they are" (192). The ultimate goal of art—and here Hulme's positivist rhetoric really comes out—is "to pierce through . . . the veil placed between us and reality by the limitations of our perception" (193). What the artist finds, Hulme explains, he cannot be said to create (a romantic notion): "art merely reveals, it never creates" (194). This is so because the poet as an artist possesses "a natural detachment, one innate in the structure of sense consciousness, which at once reveals itself by a virginal manner of seeing, hearing, or thinking" (196). As Hulme puts it, artists "perceive just for the sake of perceiving" (196).

They are disinterested. They perceive "the real shape of things" (199) "as they really are" (203).

The entire process begins with a phenomenology of perception and ends with Hulme's intuitive language, just as positivism starts with unmediated percepts and concludes with pure observation-language. The artist, explains Hulme, begins with "some actual and vividly felt experience [of] something seen or something felt" (Collected 200). He then discovers that language as a communal apparatus is inadequate to the communication of that experience and, as a result, invents new ways of stating things. The most important result is the direct communication of the objection of perception. As Hulme puts it, "the important thing is, of course, not the fact of the visual representation, but the communication of the actual contact with reality" (202). This is Hulme's intuitive language. It combines phenomenology and linguistics, but not as structuralism would do, where "meaning" is conceived as the effect or phenomenally felt experience of the various organized levels of language. Meaning, in Hulme's account, is an objective quality of the world which the disinterested poet apprehends. The poet may face difficulties with a conventional language, but ultimately he makes language and his experience coincide. In Hulme's account, experience is already meaningful: it is simply a question of communicating it in language with clarity and precision. The analogy with positivism is clear: they both combine similar notions of objectivity and linguistic transparency.

This combination is also present in the writings of Ezra Pound, whose well-known theory of "imagism," which required the "direct treatment of the 'thing'" and the "use [of] absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation" ("Retrospect" 3), was influenced by both Ford and Hulme. From Ford, Pound derived his belief that "Poets

should acquire the graces of prose" ("Serious" 51). This dictum meant an emphasis on "clarity and precision," which, according to Pound, Ford rightly opposed to "the opalescent word, the rhetorical tradition" (16). As he would later indicate, "all good art is realism of one sort or another" ("T.S. Eliot" 420). Time and again, like Ford, he makes reference to the realist (and naturalist) writers of the nineteenth century, including Stendhal, the Goncourts, Flaubert, Maupassant, and Ibsen. In his early 1914 essay on Joyce, for instance, he praises Joyce for his "clear hard prose" (399) and "exact presentation" (400), declaring him to be a modern day follower of the realists Stendhal and Flaubert because "he gives things as they are" (401).

Significantly, in his 1918 essay on Joyce, Pound not only argues for the validity of the realist novel, but also makes reference to the continuing relevance of the Goncourts' famous preface to their naturalistic novel Germinie Lacerteux, reprinting it in its entirety at the end of the essay. The climactic part of the preface—and the part to which Pound is clearly drawing attention—ties together literature and science:

> Today, when the Novel is growing broader and larger, when it is beginning to be the great and serious form, passionate and alive, of literary study and social inquiry, when by analysis and psychological research it is becoming the moral history of our time, today when the Novel has subjected itself to the study and discipline of science, it can claim the freedom and rights of science. (Goncourt 16)

As Pound would indicate on several occasions, "The serious artist is scientific" ("Serious" 46) because "the touchstone of an art is its precision" (48), specifically in terms of the clarity and simplicity of its language and of the original perceptions upon which it is based. Like a "good biologist," explains Pound, the good artist "will make a reasonable number

of observations of any given phenomenon before he draws a conclusion" (46). As a result, good art is simply that which "bears true witness" (44). If the artist does not achieve this clarity and simplicity, he will be "contemned as we would contemn a negligent physician or a sloppy, inaccurate scientist" (46). In these and other formulations, as in those of Conrad, Ford, and Hulme, the positivist emphasis on immediacy and pure language again comes to the fore.

This emphasis is especially discernible in Pound's extension of Hulme's distinction between pure and conventional perceptions and expressions (Pound claims that he first used the world "Imagiste" in a note that he appended to the 1912 publication of T.E. Hulme's five poems ["Retrospect" 4]). As he notes in his essay "The Wisdom of Poetry" (1912), "the function of art is to strengthen the perceptive faculties and free them from encumbrance, such encumbrances, for instance, as set moods, set ideas, conventions; from the results of experience which is common but unnecessary, experiences induced by the stupidity of the experiencer and not by the inevitable laws of nature" (360). The job of poetry, he claims here, is "to consider the exact nature of things" (360), "to new-mint the speech, to supply the vigorous terms for prose" (361), and, through its "observations," to present "the enduring data of philosophy" (361). These are all reformulations of Hulme's positions, and they reiterate the positivist emphasis on disinterested subjectivity and pure language. Pound's goals, like the positivists, are to strive for the "direct examination of natural phenomena" ("How to Read" 21) and "to keep language efficient" (22).

Appropriately, in his essay on Wyndham Lewis, in which he praises Lewis's novel Tarr (1918), Pound agrees with Tarr's claim that art "has no inside," that it has "nothing you cannot see" (430). In many respects, Lewis represents the pinnacle of positivist

modernism. In his later work Time and Western Man (1927), Lewis summed up his own thinking as "a philosophy of the eye" (392); and in doing so, he conveniently summed up the modernist line of positivist thinking that I have been tracing. While critiquing the so-called "time" philosophy of the modern world, which he perceived to be undermining the "spatializing" process of the mind, Lewis explains that "whatever I, for my part, say can be traced back to an organ; but in my case it is the eye. It is in the service of the things of vision that my ideas are mobilized" (134). "That sensation," he writes, "of overwhelming reality which vision alone gives is the reality of 'common-sense. . . . And it is indeed on that 'reality' that I am basing all I say" (392). According to Lewis, common sense—a key term of the Enlightenment and of the positivist position that emerged out of it—deals in what is "directly in front of all our eyes" (405), and it should be the basis of modern art. For Lewis, both the scientist and the artist should be disinterested. As Lewis explains, "the truly scientific mind is as 'detached,' as we say, as is the artist-mind. . . . From this point of view the true man-of-science and the artist are much more in the same boat than is generally understood" (188). They are all, in Lewis's terms, "realists" who adhere to "the plastic or the visual intelligence" (21). In this regard, like Conrad, Ford, Hulme, Pound, and, indeed, Lewis himself, they both rely on the positivist notions of objectivity and linguistic transparency.

"To Make You See:" Joseph Conrad and the Crisis of Positivism

Joseph Conrad's metropolitan novel, The Secret Agent (1907), is a significant departure from the theorizing of the early modernists that I have just surveyed because it self-consciously registers the cultural-historical transition in the sciences from positivism

to formalism. This key transition, as I indicated at the outset, marked a striking reconceptualization of the various "objects" of scientific inquiry, one in which the reductive simplicity of presumed identities was exchanged for the complexity of systematic relationships.[9] In general, it resulted in a questioning of received modes of positivist representation. The "objective" positivist subject was critiqued and supplanted by multiple, even contradictory frames of reference, as exemplified variously in Friedrich Nietzsche's perspectivism, Niels Bohr's principle of complementarity, and Walter Benjamin's constellations of ideas. Along with this critique of the positivist subject came a critique of the positivist notion of a pure-observation language, as formalists became more aware of the extent to which language shapes the objects it describes. For the formalists, as Saussure would make clear in relationship to the elements of language, "there are only differences without positive terms" (120).

In literary history Joseph Conrad's novel marks a particular intellectual moment when nineteenth-century positivism and twentieth-century formalism intersect. As I argue below, The Secret Agent registers the emergence of formalism, but it views such a development as an unwelcome crisis that disrupts the simplifying and generalizing modes of positivist apprehension. Uneasily situated between positivism and formalism, the novel itself is thus marked by an element of undecidability. It begins under the influence of the positivist ambitions of Caesar Lombroso's (1835—1909) criminal anthropology. In

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[9]On the scientific critique of positivism and its parallels to modern literature, see H. Stuart Hughes, Consciousness and Society: The Reorientation of European Social Thought 1890—1930 (1961), pp. 33—66, 336—391; N. Katherine Hayles, The Cosmic Web: Scientific Field Models and Literary Strategies in the Twentieth Century (1984), pp. 15—28; Jonathan Culler, Ferdinand de Saussure (rev. ed., 1986), pp. 147—150; and Modernist Impulses in the Human Sciences 1870—1930 (1994), ed. Dorothy Ross, pp. 1—25. For similar discussions in relationship to modern philosophy, see the various essays in Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision (1993), ed. David Michael Levin.

particular, the form of the novel begins by striving to imitate Lombroso's tabulations of criminal types, the goal of which is to positively identify the significance of "degenerate" criminal bodies. Less concerned with chronological development than static arrangement, the novel attempts to become a kind of tabular narrative of juxtaposed character portraits drawn from criminal anthropology. But the novel ultimately falters in its depiction of the character Winnie Verloc, a fact that reveals the politics of gender that informs not only modernist literature but also positivistic science. By the end of novel, she emerges as a problem for the ocularcentric methods of criminal anthropology. Consequently, the novel begins to present multiple viewpoints of Winnie, realizing that she exceeds the reductive framework of criminal anthropology and the tabular narrative that it inspires. The characterization of Winnie thus becomes the means by which Conrad depicts the crisis of positivism and the advent of formalism. The result, as I will explain, is a novel formally characterized by an undecidable vacillation between competing epistemological paradigms.

Conrad's novel thus occupies a peculiarly marginal position in relation to the formalist works of such high modernists as Joyce, Woolf, and Stein primarily because it begins with the positivist assumptions of criminal anthropology, especially as it is articulated by its founder, the Italian criminologist Caesar Lombroso. Critics of The Secret Agent have often attended to the recurring references to Lombroso, usually with regard to the character Alexander Ossipon, who serves as the novel's spokesperson for Lombroso's theories. They have even acknowledged the extent to which criminal

anthropology shapes the presentation of Conrad's characters.[10] But it is the novel's critical engagement with the tabular practices of Lombroso's criminal anthropology that finally gives Conrad's fiction its distinctive formal stamp.

Fundamental to Lombroso's positivist project, as it is developed in such influential works as Criminal Man (1876), The Female Offender (1893), and Crime: Its Causes and Remedies (1899), is the empirical tabulation and classification of criminals into "types" according to physical abnormalities or "anomalies" derived from stigmata, signs, traces, marks, and characteristics.[11] For Lombroso the body is an intrinsically meaningful natural sign system that is indicative of mental health, moral sensibility, and "character" in general. Visually, it is to be distinguished from other bodies by comparative and quantitative empirical studies, as is indicated, for instance, in Table 1 of The Female Offender, which attempts, through simple juxtaposition, to differentiate what it terms male criminals, normal women, female thieves, female infanticides, female homicides, and female prostitutes, focusing, in this case, on the percentages of various so-called cranial aberrations or stigmata, which are arranged in columns underneath the name of each

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[10]Previous critical assessments of The Secret Agent and criminal anthropology have focused largely on thematics, not on narrative technique. Generally, they examine the various descriptions of the characters, comparing them to Lombroso types, or they look at the specific references to Lombroso uttered by the character Ossipon. For critical attempts that affirm and demonstrate the direct or indirect influence of Lombroso's theories on The Secret Agent, see Robert G. Jacobs, "Comrade Ossipon's Favorite Saint: Lombroso and Conrad" (1968); John E. Saveson, "Conrad, Blackwood's, and Lombroso" (1974); and Martin Ray, "Conrad, Nordau, and Other Degenerates: The Psychology of The Secret Agent" (1984). For critical accounts that acknowledge the influence of Lombroso's theories but ultimately argue for an ironic or satirical treatment, see Norman Sherry, Conrad's Western World (1971) and William Greenslade, Degeneration, Culture and the Novel 1880-1940 (1994), pp. 114-119.

[11]My account of Lombroso and criminal anthropology is indebted, in part, to Gina Lombroso-Ferrero, Criminal Man (1911); Hermann Mannheim, Comparative Criminology (1965); Brunon Holyst, Comparative Criminology (1982); Stephan Hurwitz and Karl O. Christiansen, Criminology (1983); Stephen Jay Gould, The Mismeasure of Man (1996); and George B. Vold, Thomas J. Bernard, and Jeffrey B. Snipes, Theoretical Criminology (1998).

female type. A positivist to the core, Lombroso attempts to fix the criminal body within a single framework sanctioned by disinterested empirical observation, thus reducing it to an eternally recurring type. With its naïve and reductive notions of objectivity and biological determinism, such an endeavor can be seen as that brand of nineteenth-century positivism that Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer called the "myth of things as they actually are" (x). In its attempt to distinguish criminal and normal bodies, the positivist tabulation of criminal anthropology became a mere laying out of pre-established positive identities, the ordering of bodies that presumably play no part in the revelation of their distinguishing marks. As Lombroso explains, "an honest man [simply] feels instinctive repugnance at the sight of a miscreant and thus signalizes the abnormality of the criminal type" (51; emphasis mine). It might thus be said that for Lombroso tabulation does in fact involve differences but, in contrast to the formalists, always with positive, empirically discernible terms.

The best way to reveal the influence of Lombroso's positivist tabulations on the form of The Secret Agent is to begin with a crucial scene from the second chapter in which a curious exchange of interpretive glances and remarks takes place between Mr. Verloc—the celebrated agent Δ—and his aristocratic employer Mr. Vladimir, the First Secretary of what appears to be the Russian Embassy. Rendered with attention to naturalist detail and realist typology, this scene is important for the novel as a whole not only because it establishes Verloc's secret mission to blow up the Greenwich Observatory, but also because it offers one of the novel's most direct reflections on what I am calling its tabular narrative. At issue for each of the characters throughout the scene, as for the criminal anthropologist, is the psychological or symptomatic significance of the other's body, which is graphically depicted and constantly brooded upon by characters and

narrator alike. For Verloc, Vladimir is an infant, one of a "few hundred imbeciles who aren't fit to take care of themselves" (60). As the unidentified narrator notes, drawing on the discourse of infantilization from criminal anthropology, Vladimir with "his smooth and rosy countenance [has] the air of a preternaturally thriving baby that will not stand nonsense from anybody" (57). Known for his wit, Vladimir is accustomed to the sheltered life of the drawing room, where he entertains high society by "discovering droll connections between incongruous ideas" (57). For Verloc, Vladimir's body is clearly indicative not only of his character, but also of his aristocratic class.

For Vladimir, on the other hand, Verloc is an obese animal whose corpulence threatens to betray his cover as a merchant. When Verloc enters Vladimir's Chesham Square office, Vladimir remarks to his assistant, "You are quite right, mon cher. He's fat—the animal" (57). Such an observation, the narrator explains, is "really of a psychological nature" (56) because the body is somehow indicative of mental health. According to Vladimir, Verloc doesn't have "the physique of [his] profession" (58). Constantly observing the telling "play of [Verloc's] physiognomy" (58), Vladimir reads Verloc's body as if it were a sign of his psychological state. After formulating "disparaging remarks concerning Mr Verloc's face and figure" (62), Vladimir ultimately declares Verloc to be "unexpectedly vulgar, heavy, and impudently unintelligent [like] a master plumber come to present his bill" (63). In Vladimir's mind, Verloc is a member of "that class of mechanic as [he is] the embodiment of fraudulent laziness and incompetency" (63). Throughout this scene, the body for both Verloc and Vladimir is not only symptomatic, but classifiable. In this regard, they both assume the validity of the

positivist principles of criminal anthropology. Also, as I will show later, they establish The Secret Agent's constant focus on the empirical observation and interpretation of the body.

The truly revelatory moment of the scene is reached when Vladimir covertly observes Verloc and himself in a nearby mirror, prolonging his interested gaze. As the narrator explains,

> For some thirty seconds longer Mr Vladimir studied in the mirror the fleshy profile, the gross bulk, of the man behind him. And at the same time he had the advantage of seeing his own face, clean-shaved and round, rosy about the gills, and with the thin, sensitive lips formed for the utterance of those delicate witticisms which had made him such a favourite in the very highest society. (61)

This crucial passage juxtaposes and differentiates the bodies of the two principle characters on the basis of these two body types: Verloc with his vulgar corpulence and Vladimir with his cultured, yet infantile face. The mirror, in particular, presents simultaneously two bodies for the distinguishing gaze of Vladimir, who then appreciates the physiological, and hence psychological, distinctions between him and Verloc, as if he were a "disinterested" criminal anthropologist observing his subjects. The two bodies, in other words, are empirically scrutinized and classified by Vladimir through a process of juxtaposition afforded by the mirror. In effect, the mirror functions like the positivist tables of criminal anthropology, but that is not all. From the perspective of the narrative as a whole, the specular juxtaposition of bodies observed by Vladimir on the level of the scene is a crucial metafictional moment because it is a kind of self-reflexive figure for the work of the novel itself. In other words, by juxtaposing two bodies for comparative

purposes, Vladimir enacts on the local level of the scene what the unnamed narrator performs on behalf of the novel as a whole. Analogous to Vladimir's mirror, the narrative form of The Secret Agent is a highly discontinuous sequence of similar scenes in each of which a pair of characters is foregrounded for comparative purposes. Circumventing chronological development for a static arrangement of characters, the narrative attempts to simulate the positivist tables of criminal anthropology, becoming a kind of tabular narrative or atemporal narrative order.[12]

In other words, The Secret Agent attempts to present a narrative montage of characters in similarly structured scenes without any consideration for temporal development, much like the timeless positivist tables of criminal anthropology, which can assume the form of a montage, as Lombroso indicates in the frontpiece to his Criminal Man, where he presents a collage of his objects of study without reference to any social, cultural, or historical contexts.[13] Regarding the similarly structured scenes, just as Verloc reported to Vladimir in the crucial scene of chapter two, so does Heat report to the Assistant Commissioner in chapter six, and the latter to Sir Ethelred in chapters seven and ten. Constituting a substantial portion of the narrative as a whole, the four scenes are parallel in that in each a subordinate is reporting officially to his superior. Just as Verloc must answer to Vladimir, so must Heat answer to the Assistant Commissioner, and the

[12]One could also use Joseph Frank's well known-term "spatial form," which appears in his essay "Spatial Form In Modern Literature" (1945), now collected in his The Idea of Spatial Form (1991). The virtue of my terminology—tabular narrative—is that it suggests a more cultural and historical basis for the form of Conrad's novel.

[13]For a readily available recent reproduction of Lombroso's frontpiece, see Gould, The Mismeasure of Man, p. 157.

Assistant Commissioner to Ethelred. The structural similarity between these scenes unites them in an atemporal arrangement. Of equal, if not greater, importance in establishing the homologies between each of the scenes is the constant focus on physical attributes. This is the basis on which characters interact in this novel. In the scene between Heat and the Assistant Commissioner, for instance, the latter dwells on the distinctive physiognomy of the former, observing "the bullet head [of the Chief Inspector]; the points of that Norse rover's moustache, falling below the line of the heavy jaw; the whole full and pale physiognomy, whose determined character was marred by too much flesh; [and] the cunning wrinkles radiating from the outer corners of the eyes" (128). As in the scene between Verloc and Vladimir, this scene maintains a constant focus on the significant physical attributes of the characters, the Assistant Commissioner finally concluding that Heat resembles "a certain old, fat and wealthy native chief" (129) that he once knew in a distant colony. As for the scenes between the Assistant Commissioner and Sir Ethelred, the Assistant Commissioner frequently observes the distinct physiognomy of Ethelred, noting, among other things, his "bulk and stature," his "long white face," and his "hooked, aggressive nose" (142). Likewise, Ethelred and his assistant Toodles focus on what "a queer, foreign-looking chap" (199) the Assistant Commissioner is. In each case, all read bodies in the positivist mode.

The similar structure of these scenes suggests that The Secret Agent is formally designed to dismantle the linear chronology of plot in order to establish an atemporal order, the individual scenes of which foreground the attributes of bodies for comparison, much as Lombroso's tables do. Notable examples of the disjunction between chronology and such hypostatic order are the narrative elisions spanning chapters three and four and

seven and eight. The first disjunction is attributable to a sudden forward jump in time, as the narrative proceeds from the bedroom scene between Verloc and Winnie shortly following the paradigmatic scene between Vladimir and Verloc to the underground hall scene between the Professor and Ossipon, thirty days after Verloc received his orders and just shortly after the bombing itself. The narrator omits the entire temporal sequence of events leading up to the failed bombing attempt. The second disjunction is the result of a sudden backward leap in time, for the narrative reaches back almost a month before the bombing, initially confusing the reader's sense of temporality with the reemergence of Verloc, whom the reader had presumed to be dead. Only later in the novel does the reader learn that the narrative has reached into the past and that it was Stevie who died in the bombing, not Verloc. Representative of the narrative as a whole, these two major disjunctions circumvent chronology for the sake of a static arrangement of scenes. Chronologically disarranged and focused on the detailed presentation of character attributes rather than actions, the scenes of the novel taken as a whole have the cumulative effect of a simultaneous collage of bodies.

The form of Conrad's novel thus invites us to read it as if it juxtaposed specimens for our observation. In effect, Conrad's novel imposes a kind of tabular perception upon the reader by privileging the paradigmatic dimension of indices over the syntagmatic dimension of functions.[14] In drawing attention to the various detailed character portraits, such a perception foregrounds the great extent to which the novel's characters are types of degeneration, confirming Conrad's own opinion, stated in one of his letters, that nearly all

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[14]See "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives," Image-Music-Text (1977), pp. 91-97.

of the characters in his novel are "degenerates," whether they are anarchists, revolutionaries, law enforcement officials, "idiots," or political dignitaries.[15] The novel focuses on ten general physical traits: weight, complexion, cranium, lips, nose, ears, eyes, hair, infantilism, and laziness (in the novel, the last two are not always specified and, according to Lomboso, can manifest themselves in many different physical ways). Particular instances include Michaelis's "grotesque and incurable obesity" (121); the Professor's "greasy, unhealthy complexion" (54); Stevie's "deep hollow at the base of his skull" (76); Ossipon's "thick lips [of the] Negro type" (80); and Sir Ethelred's "hooked, aggressive nose" (142). To illustrate the full spectrum of general traits, I should also mention Stevie's "degenerate . . . lobes" (77); Michaelis's "candid infant eyes" (124); Ossipon's "bush of crinkly yellow hair" (75); and Verloc's "indolence" (52). All of these traits are taken from the discourse of criminal anthropology and exemplify or "embody" Lombroso's conception of "degeneration." In reducing the characters to types, the tabular form of the novel clearly shows itself to be sympathetic to the simplifying and generalizing tendencies of positivist tabulation, for they both attempt to reduce phenomena to their visible features and fix them within a single objective framework.

But if the tabular form of the novel draws our attention to character portraits and the concept of degeneration that informs them, it also emphatically foregrounds the fact that Winnie Verloc is a peculiar anomaly. She is positively marked for only one trait, and that trait is really not as specific as the others, nor does it even indicate a type, whether

[15]See Zdzislaw Najder's biography, Joseph Conrad: A Chronicle (1983), p. 324.

"degenerate" or otherwise. As a character-trait inventory[16] indicates (see table 1 below), Winnie is the only one of eleven major characters who does not manifest at least three of the ten general traits of degeneration.[17] She is noted simply for her "massive and shapeless" (174) body, for her large and formless figure, which is then compared to a

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[16]On distinctive feature characterology, see Robert Fowler, Linguistics and the Novel (1977), pp. 33-38, and Michael J. Toolan, Narrative: A Critical Linguistic Introduction (1988), pp. 99-111. For the linguistic basis of this methodology, see Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle, Fundamentals of Language (1956).

[17]The unmanageable "data" for the table is as follows: the characters who are positively identified as obese or grotesquely corpulent are Mr. Verloc with his "fat-pig style" (52); Michaelis with his "grotesque and incurable obesity" (121) and general "monstrosity" (124); Sir Ethelred with his "vast . . . bulk" (142), and, ostensibly, Winnie with her formless body, which, when lying in bed, is said to be "massive and shapeless like a recumbent statue in the rough" (174). In addition, Inspector Heat is said to have a face "marred by too much flesh," (128), thus suggesting corpulence. In terms of marred complexion, Privy Councillor Wurmt has a "pasty complexion" (54); Michaelis a "pale, semi-transparent complexion" (73); Yundt a "wasted face" (80); Ossipon "a red, freckled face" (75); the Professor a "greasy, unhealthy complexion" (88); Inspector Heat a "very white" complexion (104) and a marred face; Sir Ethelred a "long white face" (142); and Vladimir an infantile "smooth and rosy countenance" (57). As for cranial deformities, Stevie is said to have a "deep hollow at the base of his skull" (76), the Professor a "frail skull" (88), and Inspector Heat a "bullet head" (128).

Under the category of anomalous lips, the narrator notes Stevie's "vacant droop of his lower lip" (49), Mr. Vladimir's "sensitive lips" (61), Ossipon's "thick lips [of the] Negro type" (80), and the Professor's "thin, colorless lips" (113). Characters with marked noses are Wurmt with his "blunt, shapeless nose" (54), Ossipon with his "flattened nose" (75), and Sir Ethelred with his "hooked, aggressive nose" (142). In terms of distinguishing ears Stevie has "degenerate . . . lobes" (77), while the Professor has "flat, large ears [that] departed widely from the sides of his skull" (88). In addition to Michaelis's infant eyes already mentioned, other characters with unusual eyes include Verloc with his "naturally heavy" eyes (46); Wurmt with his "shortsighted" eyes (54); Yundt with his "extraordinary expression of underhand malevolence [that] survived in his extinguished eyes" (74); Ossipon with his "allmond-shaped eyes [that] leered languidly" (75); Heat with his "piercing eyeballs" (104); and Sir Ethelred, whose eyes have "puffy lower lids" (142). A character with significant hair, from the racist perspective of criminal anthropology, is Ossipon, as he has a "bush of crinkly yellow hair" atop his head (75). Infantilism, a more general category, is marked in Steve, who has "thin fluffy" facial hair (50); in Vladimir, who is said to be a "preternaturally thriving baby" (57); in Michaelis, who has "candid infant's eyes" (124); and in the Professor, who has a "miserable poverty of thin dark whiskers" (88). Frequently marked for laziness or idleness are Verloc, Michaelis, Yundt, and Ossipon.

The table excludes the Assistant Commissioner. He is globally marked as "foreign" on several occasions, even by himself, but his particular features are not enumerated. I suspect that the reason for this lack of specificity is that Conrad drew on some of his own personal experiences for the characterization of the Assistant Commissioner. On Conrad's personal engagement with the theories of criminal anthropology, see the articles by Jacobs and by Ray. The table also excludes Winnie's mother. Marked for her complexion and weight, she is used primarily as a means of reinforcing the novel's portrayal of Winnie.

"recumbent statue in the rough" (174). In contrast to the detailed symptomatic portraits of the other characters (all, significantly enough, male), Winnie is not really positively

CHARACTERS	POSITIVE PHYSICAL TRAITS									
			Face					Body	General	
	Hair	Cranium	Ears	Lips	Nose	Eyes	Complexion	Weight	Infantilism	Laziness
Verloc	–	–	–	–	–	+	–	+	–	+
Michaelis	–	–	–	–	–	+	+	+	+	+
Ethelred	–	–	–	–	+	+	+	+	–	–
Winnie	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	+	–	–
Heat	–	+	–	–	–	+	+	+	–	–
Wurmt	–	–	–	–	+	+	+	–	–	–
Yundt	–	–	–	–	–	+	+	–	–	+
Ossipon	+	–	–	+	+	+	+	–	–	+
Professor	–	+	+	+	–	–	+	–	+	–
Vladimir	–	–	–	+	–	–	+	–	+	–
Stevie	–	+	+	+	–	–	–	–	+	–

Table 1: Character-trait inventory of The Secret Agent

represented at all because she is simply figured as unfinished or partially formed matter. In a sense, she is not really "visible" within the positivist framework of the novel. Consequently, the truthfulness of Winnie's own saying that "life doesn't stand much looking into"—a remark that conveniently sums up the crisis of positivism—is driven home ironically to the reader because Winnie herself proves to be the novel's leading example of what does not stand much looking into, since she eludes concrete symptomatic visualization.[18] Thus, with forceful rhetorical emphasis, Conrad's novel appears to be

[18]Conrad himself remarked in the Author's Note to the novel that the characters are "grouped about Mrs Verloc and related directly or indirectly to her tragic suspicion that 'life doesn't stand much looking into'" (41). Notice not only Conrad's emphasis on Winnie's saying regarding the possibility of visually apprehending the world, but also his description of the novel itself as a spatial grouping of characters.

foregrounding Winnie as a means of pointing out the problems and limitations of positivistic methodology.

This effort to highlight Winnie's non-signifying condition is particularly evident during one of the key final scenes of the novel in which she learns from her husband Verloc not only that her brother Stevie died in a failed bombing attempt, but also that Verloc himself was responsible for it. This scene also presents only two characters, Winnie and Verloc, who converse with each other while brooding on the significance and meaning of each other's body. It juxtaposes two bodies for comparative purposes, apparently following the predictable pattern of the novel's tabular narrative. In this instance, however, the pattern is not repeated. For Verloc, Winnie remains a "complete, unreadable stillness" (214). Verloc attempts to rationalize what he has done, but to no avail because Winnie is silent and inscrutable. Verloc continues to look for physical signs of Winnie's state of mind, watching "her back as if he could read there the effects of his words" (217), but Winnie simply sits "still under her black veil, in her own house, like a masked and mysterious visitor of impenetrable intentions" (230). In an attempt to make some kind of connection, Verloc suddenly removes Winnie's veil, unmasking her, but all he encounters is "a still unreadable face, against which his nervous exasperation was shattered like a glass bubble flung against a rock" (230). In contrast with his previous encounters with other characters, Verloc can discern in Winnie no distinguishing bodily signs or symptoms at all. To him, Winnie appears to be free of any telling positive physical traits. As such, she is illegible. To further underscore this separation between matter and signification, the narrator describes the speech of Verloc in these terms: "The veiled sound filled the small room with its moderate volume, well adapted to the modest

nature of the wish. The waves of air of the proper length, propagated in accordance with correct mathematical formulas, flowed around all the inanimate things in the room, lapped against Mrs Verloc's head as if it had been a head of stone" (232). Here we find the hollow shell of language side by side with a physical world depleted of significance, including Winnie's own stone-like head.

Given Conrad's portrait of Winnie, it might thus be said that she is an instance of what Georges Battaille calls base matter. According Bataille, "Base matter is external and foreign to ideal human aspirations, and it refuses to allow itself to be reduced to the great ontological machines resulting from these aspirations" (51). Like Horkheimer and Adorno, Bataille believes that the positivist understanding of matter is mythological. As Bataille explains, "The conformity of dead matter to the idea of science is [a substitute] for the religious relations earlier established between the divinity and his creatures, the one being the idea of the other" (15). In contrast, Winnie, like base matter, is intransigent, resisting both the theological understanding of meaning and the assumed totalities and identities of positivist tabulation. Winnie is thus strikingly comparable to Stevie's obliterated corpse, which the narrator portrays as "a heap of nameless fragments" (107) mingled almost indistinguishably with such matter as "small gravel, tiny brown bits of bark, and particles of splintered wood as fine as needles" (107). In this representation, each body part does not refer to some mythological totality. Instead, they are merely contiguous, serial, completely divorced of intrinsic signification. Stevie's fragmented body, which does not add up to a positive significant whole once it has been decimated, marks the dispersal of matter in defiance of the authority of positivist tabulation. As in the case

of Winnie's formless body, the mythological types of positivist tabulation are exchanged for a kind of non-signifying, negative materialism[19] that resists totalization.

In addition to highlighting her problematic base materiality—a strategy that underscores the well-known cultural linkage between women and matter in the history of science—the novel further differentiates Winnie from the other characters by emphasizing her dynamic, unpredictable character. The most powerful articulation of Winnie's uncertain behavior is the stunning reversal of her character in the final chapters of the novel, as it is viewed by her husband and the criminologist Alexander Ossipon. It is here that the novel moves toward an incipient, if reluctant, sense of the complexity of formalism. Winnie, of course, brutally murders Verloc with a carving knife. It is a shockingly unpredictable occurrence which Verloc himself does not expect because he cannot fathom Winnie's "impenetrable intentions" (230). Of all the characters, as Verloc's surprise and sudden death make clear, Winnie alone is not "static." The other (male) characters are fixed and constant, remaining within their designated roles. While they conform to a predictable type, Winnie displays a kind of unfigurable volatility. In other words, virtually unrepresentable, she is also unpredictable, and thus she falls outside of the positivist framework of criminal anthropology, which focuses on eternally recurring types with consistent behaviors.

The novel emphasizes Winnie's unpredictability by associating her with the destructive forces of time. This portrayal is particularly evident after Winnie kills Verloc,

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[19]On negative materialism in contrast to positivism, see Ronald Schleifer, Rhetoric and Death: The Language of Modernism and Postmodern Discourse Theory (1990), pp. 27-51.

when she gradually becomes "aware of a ticking sound in the room" (235). Perplexed, Winnie seeks out the source of the sound until she lowers her gaze onto her husband's body. There she sees the knife sunk into his chest, blood trickling onto the floor, ticking on impact "like the pulse of an insane clock" (236). Once again, in this representation of base materialism, the body becomes a meaningless material event over which the transformations of temporality preside. Just as the ticking time bomb reigned over Stevie's body, obliterating it into so many nameless fragments, Winnie now presides over Verloc's corpse. It might thus be said that whereas the beginning of the novel is dominated by a concern with the atemporal order of types, the end is concerned with the eruption of time, as represented by the unpredictable behavior of Winnie.

The formal outcome of Winnie's association with base materiality, unpredictability, and temporality is the longest, most significant stretch of linear narrative in the novel, spanning chapters eleven and twelve. During this part of the novel, we see a tightly knit sequence of events focused on Winnie, beginning with her listening to Verloc's rationalizations for killing Stevie and concluding with her being abandoned by Alexander Ossipon, the scientific criminologist known to his revolutionary colleagues as the Doctor. It is a notable departure from the tabular order of the early part of the novel, formally marking the advent of time. But the most striking aspect of this special sequence is that it sets in motion an oscillating set of groundless representations of Winnie that wreak further havoc with the reductive procedures of the novel's positivist-inspired tabular narrative. Particularly important in this regard is when Ossipon meets up with Winnie shortly after she has killed Verloc. Seeing her walk down the street, Ossipon first views her as he tends to view all women, namely, as one of a group of naïve "silly girls with savings-bank

books" (81) of whom he can potentially take advantage. Ossipon, however, entertains very little hope of winning Winnie's favor, since she seems so attached to Verloc. Surprisingly, the initial observation seems to be confirmed for Ossipon because Winnie begins to show him undisguised affection. With growing satisfaction, Ossipon responds that he has been attracted to Winnie "ever since I first set eyes on you" (240). When Winnie makes it clear to him that she has obtained Verloc's money and wants to run away with him, it finally appears to Ossipon that Winnie will be another one of his "amatory speculations" (241).

But Ossipon does not realize that Winnie has murdered Verloc, prompting Winnie to say, "Haven't you guessed what I was driven to do!" (248). Ossipon returns to Verloc's house for confirmation, whereupon he "retched violently" (251) at the sight of Verloc's corpse. The result is a disabled judgment that is "terrified scientifically" (254). As the narrator explains, Ossipon "did not believe the woman, or rather he was incapable by now of judging what could be true, possible, or even probable in this astounding universe" (253). Suspicious, he then begins to fear for his own life, thinking that "He would not have been surprised if she had suddenly produced another knife destined for his breast" (253). His growing sense of terror prompts him now to conceive of Winnie as "a degenerate herself of a murdering type . . . or else of the lying type" (254). In Ossipon's mind, Winnie thus passes from virtuous wife, to gullible girl, to murdering or possibly lying degenerate—a series of ungrounded representations more on the order of delusions, rather than positive identifications. At this point, Lombroso's "instinctive repugnance at the sight of . . . the criminal type" (51) is clearly called into question. As the narrator further explains, Ossipon's "terror [eventually] reached its culminating point, became a

sort of intoxication, entertained delusions, acquired the characteristics of delirium tremens" (254-255). Meanwhile, as a means of contrast, the narrator emphasizes that "Mrs Verloc, veiled, had no face, almost no discernible form" (255). Eventually, Ossipon even goes so far as to "see" Winnie "twined round him like a snake, not to be shaken off" (255), viewing her not just as deadly, but as "death itself—the companion of life" (255), an image that is indicative not only of Ossipon's delusional state, but also, in some sense, of Winnie's negative rather than positive status.

One can certainly see in this portrayal of Winnie the common and well-known tendency in Anglo-American modernism to represent women as manifestations of the Other.[20] Conrad, in particular, joins Ezra Pound, T.E. Hulme, Wyndham Lewis and other reactionary male modernists who typically represent the so-called "feminine principle" in negative terms, using such words as soft, romantic, childish, primitive, subjective, and irrational. In part, Conrad is simply reiterating Pound's infamous claim that "the female / Is a chaos" (Cantos 144). But the issue in this scene between Ossipon and Winnie is not only misogyny, but also the breakdown of the "disinterested" subject of science, which has historically been defined in masculine terms.[21] Throughout this scene, in other words, the narrator makes it a point to repeat in positivist fashion that Ossipon "gazed scientifically" (259) at Winnie, invoking Lombroso "as an Italian peasant recommends himself to his

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[20]For an excellent extended discussion of this issue, see Bonnie Kime Scott, Refiguring Modernism: The Women of 1928 (1995), Vol. 1, pp. 79—180.

[21]On masculine models of reason in the history of science and philosophy, see the essays in Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science (1983), edited by Sandra Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka; Genevieve Lloyd, The Man of Reason: "Male" and "Female" in Western Philosophy (1984); Londa Schiebinger, The Mind Has No Sex?: Women in the Origins of Modern Science (1989); and the essays in Feminism and Science (1996), edited by Evelyn Fox Keller and Helen E. Longino.

favourite saint" (259). What the scene suggests, however, is that Ossipon does not objectively observe Winnie as he believes his patron saint of positivism would do, but instead actively constructs her, representing her in a variety of ways, rather than simply perceiving what simply "is." Positivism's disinterested relationship between the observer and the observed is being problematized, much as it is in the famous psychoanalytic case of Dora, where Freud is similarly baffled and foiled by his "feminine" subject.[22]

More specifically, Conrad is questioning criminal anthropology's conception of the body as an intrinsically meaningful sign system revelatory of character, mental health, and moral inclinations. Consequently, the form of the novel in its final chapters moves away from the repetition of positive static types arranged in tabular order toward the temporal proliferation of view points and perspectives, to the continual configuration and reconfiguration of perceptions of Winnie, who is the novel's real "secret agent," since she ultimately remains unpredictable, her intentions inscrutable, unlike the self-evident psychology of criminal anthropology, supposedly written on criminal bodies for all to see. As the refrain of the last chapter has it, Winnie is an "impenetrable mystery" (266), including her final act of suicide. Ultimately, the novel presents oscillating multiple views of Winnie, recognizing that she exceeds the single, reductive framework of criminal anthropology because she is more like a shifting pattern in a kaleidoscope than a positively defined being. Thus, in The Secret Agent, the characterization of Winnie is the means by which the author depicts the crisis of positivist tabulation and the advent of relativistic formalism, which moves away from assumed positivities and identities toward multiple

[22]See Sigmund Freud, Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria (1905).

frameworks and viewpoints—a movement that proceeds, as Jonathan Culler notes, "from objects to relations" (147).

The difference between Conrad and formalism, however, is that he is clearly not satisfied with multiple frames of reference. He is neither a Neils Bohr who can accept complementary visions of things, as in the dilemma of light being both a particle and wave, nor a Walter Benjamin who can constellate and reconstellate the phenomena of history, creating newly ordered wholes. Nor is he a Ferdinand de Saussure who, in his quest for anagrams cutting across the grain of Latin texts, can envision alternative orders of communication. Endorsing what Nietzsche in The Genealogy of Morals called "perspective seeing" (555), these post-positivists developed new formalist modes of apprehension that recognized the constructed nature of fact and meaning. In contrast to these thinkers, Conrad mourns the loss of that do not seek simplicity and reduction, that recognize the role of the observer in the positivism, even as he perceives its limitations. He sees the necessity for formalism, but he cannot view it as anything other than a chaotic development. This ideological dilemma accounts for The Secret Agent's peculiar formal vacillation between the competing paradigms of positivism and formalism. It also accounts for the novel's reactionary view of women and its general tone of despair and crisis. Thus, between positivism and formalism, between some kind of myth of things as they are and the non-reductive study of complexity stands Conrad, with his skeptical notion of base or negative materialism eluding all fixating signification. His closer ties to positivism are evident in his attempt to put criminal anthropology to work in his novel, in his sense of the tragic division between matter and meaning, in his portrayal of Winnie, and even in his adherence to the notion of base materialism, which is really just another

reductive strategy, just another way of simplifying things, just as reifying, in this sense, as positivism.

Considered in relationship to modernist literary theory, Conrad clearly participates in the positivist program of a certain strand of literary modernism that, following the tradition of naturalism and realism, promulgated the value of objective, disinterested description, usually in gendered terms. As Conrad stated in his famous programmatic statement of 1897, he understood art to be

> a single-minded attempt to render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe, by bringing to light the truth, manifold and one, underlying its every aspect. It is an attempt to find in its forms, in its colours, in its light, in its shadows, in the aspects of matter and in the facts of life what of each is fundamental, what is enduring and essential—their one illuminating and convincing quality—the very truth of their existence. The artist, then, like the thinker or the scientist, seeks the truth and makes his appeal. (Preface xxxix)

Stated here unmistakably is the same positivist ambition to fix phenomena within a single objective framework at work in the tabular strategies of The Secret Agent. The statement reaches its famous crescendo when Conrad declares his task to be "by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, to make you see! That—and no more, and it is everything! If I succeed, you shall find there . . . [a] glimpse of truth" (xliii). Inspired by scientific positivism, such a statement links Conrad's aesthetic to the Imagist project in modernist poetry, with its "direct treatment of the thing," and even to Pound's later fascination with the concrete representational Chinese ideogram.

One could also cite familiar modernist notions such as T.S. Eliot's "dissociation of sensibility" and "objective correlative;" T.E. Hulme's "plastic image" (56) and "dry, hard, classical verse" (69); or even Wyndham Lewis's less well known defense of the "noble exactitude and harmonious proportion of the european [sic], scientific ideal" (110). All of these literary developments, express themselves in the gendered language of positivism. Like criminal anthropology, moreover, they all seek out some kind of instinctive visceral response to sight, some kind of pure intuition capable of reading the face of nature unobstructed by bias or prejudice.

In The Secret Agent, however, Conrad seems to be moving beyond a positivist agenda in so far as he problematizes the conception of disinterested observation upon which it is based, with the comment, however ironic, that "life doesn't stand much looking into." But he has not arrived at the formalist position of James Joyce, whose Ulysses, Hugh Kenner has observed, develops a cultural version of Einstein's theory of relativity in that it breaks down the positivist distinction between the observer and the observed (Ulysses 154). Conrad's questioning of positivism simply does not add up to formalism, because, in marked contrast to Joyce, he finds no delight in "the messiness, the confusion, and the accidental details of existing things" (Hulme 275). To borrow from the young Georg Lukács, we might say that Conrad has written a novel "in which the extensive totality of life is no longer directly given, in which the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem, yet which still thinks in terms of totality" (Theory 56). For this reason, Conrad represents the undermining of positivism as a crisis rather than as an opportunity for experimentation with alternative non-reductive modes of comprehension and analysis.

It is apparent, finally, that the general transition in the natural and human sciences from positivism to formalism is not only the context but also the internal organization of Joseph Conrad's The Secret Agent. This novel's engagement in a larger crisis of meaning explains both the static "types" that Conrad uses to characterize men and the curiously destructive role of Winnie—as the embodiment of an emergent episteme where people and things have no meaning or value in and of themselves but strictly in terms of their formal spatial relation to other things and people. Although Conrad questions the positivist basis of criminal anthropology, he cannot quite accept the emergence of formalism, viewing it as an unacceptable loss of certainty, as a crisis of large-scale proportions, marking, in some sense, the emergence of relativism for science and anarchy for society. Thus he must also question the positivist theories of literature arising out of the naturalist and realistic tradition, but finally falls short of embracing the formal relativism we associate with full-blown modernism.

Conrad, Detective Fiction, and the Experience of Modernity

In Conrad's novel we see the emergence of a timely materialism—of a questioning of pure intuition and language—and this emergence is ultimately linked to the experience of modernity. In particular, it is linked to the experience of the metropolis. Throughout The Secret Agent Conrad presents the city of London in a menacing light, including its inhabitants, particularly the political revolutionaries and anarchists. There is a certain volatility to the city in Conrad's portrait of it, and it creates the effects of irresolvable mystery and enigma. In creating these effects Conrad relies on overturning the conventions of detective fiction, a key urban genre of the nineteenth century that

attempted to account for the mystery of the city. Conrad portrays London as unknowable, and in doing so, he establishes a connection between modernism, the experience of modernity, and the crisis of positivism.

In The Secret Agent Conrad in effect undermines the Enlightenment faith in reason by setting up a parody of the detective genre. As Franco Moretti notes, the detective genre emerges in the mid nineteenth century as a response to a "deep anxiety of an expanding society" over whether or not human activities in burgeoning metropolitan centers are subject to rational analysis (143). "Since Poe," Moretti explains, "the detective has incarnated a scientific ideal: the detective discovers the causal links between events: to unravel the mystery is to trace them back to a law. The point is that—at the turn of the century—high bourgeois culture wavers in its conviction that it is possible to set the functioning of society into the framework of scientific—that is, objective—laws" (144). The detective genre, in other words, is attempting to recuperate and maintain the Enlightenment faith in reason in the face of an increasingly inexplicable world. Speaking of the Sherlock Holmes stories, Catherine Belsey describes what might be taken to be the general course of all detective stories, noting, "The stories begin in enigma, mystery, the impossible, and conclude with an explanation which makes it clear that logical deduction and scientific method render all mysteries accountable to reason" (389).

The Secret Agent, of course, is on one level an urban murder mystery, but it hardly demonstrates a faith in reason to render an account of metropolitan enigmas. At the heart of the novel is Mr. Verloc's failed attempt to blow up the Greenwich observatory. Under the pressure of an unnamed foreign power to influence public opinion in favor of "universal repressive legislation" through a senseless act of terrorism, Mr. Verloc dupes

his brother-in-law Stevie—a young man who is an "idiot" by contemporaneous scientific standards—into carrying a concealed bomb to the observatory (65). On the way to the observatory, however, Stevie trips and falls on an exposed tree root, prematurely detonating the bomb and literally blowing himself up into "a heap of nameless fragments" (107). Chief Inspector Heat—reminiscent of Charles Dicken's Mr. Bucket in Bleak House—finds himself charged with the responsibility of solving the mystery of this difficult case. The case is in fact solved—but not as a result of an impressive Holmesian display of reason. Rather, the case is solved because amidst the fragments of Stevie's body the Inspector discovers a bloody garment tag on which Stevie's sister had carefully scrawled his name and address to insure that, if Stevie ever got lost, someone could return him home with the information. Of course, throughout the novel the impressive sleuthing powers of the Inspector, along with his boss the Assistant Commissioner, are vaunted at every opportunity. On several occasions, before criminals and citizens alike, they even take the Stevie case as an opportunity to congratulate themselves on their extraordinary powers of detection. The overall effect, however, is one of ineptitude and buffoonery not only because no detection was involved in the Stevie case, but also because both the Inspector and the Assistant are comically treated in terms of their appearance, manners, and actions. As a further means of parodying the Inspector and the Assistant, the novel constantly juxtaposes them with a serious representation of a threatening urban landscape. Comparable to Conrad's descriptions of exotic jungles, numerous descriptions of a tenebrous and inexplicable city abound, reducing the laughable efforts of the two detectives to utter absurdity. In the end, the conclusion of the novel explicitly thematizes the victory of mystery over reason. For the world at large, Stevie's sister's committing

suicide due to her brother's death, as well as to her being abandoned by Ossipon, remains a mystery. In the last chapter Ossipon repeats to himself the last line of a newspaper article on Winnie's death that reads "An impenetrable mystery seems destined to hang for ever over this act of madness or despair" (266). In the last chapter, this sentence becomes a refrain not only for Ossipon's sense of guilt, but also for the novel's sense of the futility of reason to cope with the horrors of the modern world. Thus, Conrad undermines his reader's expectations. By demonstrating the impossibility of a scientific or rational account of the criminal activities of a society, Conrad deviates from the norms of the detective genre and, in doing so, ultimately undermines his reader's faith in the Enlightenment understanding of reason, Conrad having a pessimistic, reactionary vision. Like many of his fellow modernist writers, Conrad points to the destructive influence of modernity on positivist knowledge and representation.

Chapter 3:

The Conventional Forms of the Material World:

Modernism, Geometry, and the Representation of Space in Gertrude Stein

> The [mathematical] framework into which we wish to make everything fit is one of our own construction.
>
> Henri Poincaré, Science and Hypothesis (1905)

> There is no delight and no mathematics.
>
> Gertrude Stein, Tender Buttons (1914)

A crucial blow to traditional scientific materialism was the emergence of non-Euclidean geometry, which was first theorized in the nineteenth century by such celebrated mathematicians as Karl Friedrich Gauss, Nicholas Lobatchevsky, John Bolyai, and Bernhard Riemann. In all its various manifestations scientific materialism had assumed unquestioningly that Euclid's geometry was an accurate representation of the very space of the universe. In fact, the success of Euclidean geometry led scientists to identify mathematical reality with physical reality, as Laplace did in his accounts of celestial mechanics. The non-Euclidean geometers, however, questioned the easy correspondence of the two, devising multiple, mutually exclusive geometries. Such questioning led to what math historian Morris Kline has called "the abolition of the truth of mathematics" (Physical 462). The sense gradually emerged, as French mathematician Henri Poincaré noted, that geometry—whatever its form—is a human convention. Even mathematicians and philosophers who attempted to shore up the foundations of geometry had to

acknowledge, along with Bertrand Russell, that "mathematics may be defined as the subject in which we never know what we are talking about, nor whether what we are saying is true" (75). At best, the various forms of geometry were perceived to have particular, not universal, applications, as in the famous case of Einstein's use of Riemannian geometry in his theory of relativity.[23] In effect, the whole question of an objective reality represented by the symbols of a singular and absolute geometry was called into question. The result was a shaking up of the foundations of scientific materialism, whose "nomological" understanding of physical laws was based on the mathematical subordination of nature.

This historical development in mathematics and science—the decentering of Euclidean geometry—is a crucial context for understanding the history of modernism not only because overt and implicit references to geometry abound in modernist writings, but because these references are intricately bound up with the theory and practice of literary modernism. While modernists are by no means geometers, they are nevertheless drawn to widespread popular interpretations of the cultural significance of mathematics. What draws the modernists in particular, not surprisingly, is the issue of representation. Early in the development of modernism—particularly when positivism begins to lose its authority—modernists tend to see classic Euclidean geometry as an analogue to their art because they too wish to subordinate or transcend particulars in order to arrive at a level of universality. They identify, specifically, with the geometrical conception of mimesis in which signs and symbols truthfully correspond or point to an absolute reality. This

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[23]For an accessible discussion of the implications of Einstein's theories for Euclidean geometry, see Werner Heisenberg, "Changes in the Foundations of Exact Science" (1934), in Philosophical Problems of Quantum Physics, pp. 11-26.

identification begins to erode, however, because of the dissemination of non-Euclidean geometries and their successful applications, as in the case of Einstein's theory of relativity. As a result, some modernists cling all the more to classical geometry, spurred on by a sense of cultural crisis; while others, inspired by non-Euclidean geometry, boldly stake out new territory.

What thus emerges here in modernist writings is a historical trajectory very similar to that of the history of geometry, although in a much more compressed form. In other words, just as geometers gradually begin to question the absolute value of mathematical signs and symbols, so too do modernists gradually initiate a questioning of the basis of objective representation. In this chapter, I elaborate on this parallel between modernism and geometry in order to highlight the extent to which modernism charts a course well-beyond the traditional scientific materialism of the time. A sense of the crisis of positivism is articulated here, as it is in the case of Conrad's The Secret Agent, but ultimately a new sense of materialism begins to emerge, a self-reflexive one that goes beyond the metaphysical materialism of positivism toward a recognition of the contingent nature of language, representation, and knowledge in general. In this peculiar development, we see modernism moving toward the development of "timely materialisms," nontotalizing modes of thinking about the world attuned to their own historicity. An early significant indicator of this development is Gertrude Stein's Tender Buttons (1914), a set of prose poems inspired by the Cubist breakup of classic Euclidean space. In this chapter I provide a close reading of this work by Stein, linking it to the above issues, but first I set the context for it by elaborating on the crisis of geometry and by surveying modernist attitudes to geometry.

I conclude with some reflections on the relationship between Stein's work and the experience of modernity.

Geometry and the Demise of Absolute Space

As Morris Kline has noted, when non-Euclidean geometries were first introduced in the nineteenth century, "Euclidean geometry was . . . held to be an exact description of physical space. This habit of thought became so well established over hundreds of years that the very notion of a new geometry failed to make sense. Geometry meant the geometry of physical space and that geometry was Euclid's" (Western 428).[24] Behind this widespread belief in the universality of Euclidean geometry, Kline has suggested, is a complete identification of mathematical and physical space. Euclid's classical geometry, in other words, was believed to be the geometry of experience itself. Its treatment of points, lines, planes, and objects in two and three dimensions was considered to be grounded in "common sense." Moreover, since the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, Euclidean geometry had been the unquestioned basis of modern science and philosophy. Galileo had believed that nature conformed to the laws of Euclidean geometry, and both Descartes and Kant had assumed the universality of Euclidean geometry, each in his own unique way. Most importantly of all, Newton had identified mechanics and classical geometry, creating the influential notion of "absolute space" (Jammer 95). This realistic notion of geometry, in which Euclidean and physical space is identified, eventually became ensconced in

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[24]My presentation of the philosophy and history of mathematics, in this introduction and throughout this chapter, is based on Carl B. Boyer and Uta C. Merzbach, A History of Mathematics (1989); Morris Kline, Mathematics in Western Culture (1953), Mathematics and the Physical World (1959), Mathematics: The Loss of Certainty (1980), Mathematics for the Nonmathematician (1985); Max Jammer, Concepts of Space (1954); and Lawrence Sklar, Space, Time, and Spacetime (1977).

nineteenth-century positivism. In fact, Auguste Comte designated Euclidean geometry his foundational science, assuming its simplicity and self-evidence.

The advent of non-Euclidean geometries, however, led to a widespread questioning of this commonsense view of classical geometry, albeit it very slowly. In effect, the new geometries by Lobatchevsky, Riemann and others severed the identification of physical and Euclidean space, offering multiple, contradictory, but equally coherent views of space. The classical understanding of space became simply one theory among many. In questioning the correspondence between mathematics and nature, the non-Euclidean geometers ultimately called into question the truth value of geometry. In other words, geometry began to be perceived less as an objective account of reality than as a subjective invention of the geometers themselves. In logical terms, Euclidean geometry could not be justified, as idealists had often assumed, because all the various forms of geometry were equally rigorous and consistent in their thinking. Nor could it be justified empirically, as several generations of physicists discovered in their quest to prove the existence of Newton's absolute space (Jammer 125-142). The emerging insight, as Kline has noted, was that geometers "should regard any theory about physical space . . . as a purely subjective construction and not impute to it objective reality. Man constructs a geometry, Euclidean or non-Euclidean, and decides to view space in those terms" (429). The symbols and signs of geometry are not what the positivists especially wanted them to be—a pure observation language that signifies or corresponds to some absolute reality—instead, they are conventional.

At the turn of the twentieth century this new post-positivist understanding of geometry as a human convention—a concept that will prove useful in my later discussions

of modernism—was most famously articulated by Henri Bergson and, especially, Henri Poincaré. In Creative Evolution (1907), as in many of his other philosophical works, Bergson critiqued what he called the spatialization of matter, which he attributed to an overly intellectualized consciousness. "The more consciousness is intellectualized," he claimed, "the more is matter spatialized" (189). In particular Bergson singles out Immanuel Kant, for whom Euclidean "space is given as a ready-made form of our perceptive faculty—a veritable deus ex machina, of which we see neither how it arises, nor why it is what it is rather than anything else" (210). Additionally, Bergson also focuses on the more scientific-materialist understanding of geometry, in which "matter becomes, it seems to us, geometry itself" (217). In response to this view Bergson forcefully counters that he "cannot insist too strongly that there is something artificial in the mathematical form of a physical law, and consequently in our scientific knowledge of things. Our standards of measurement are conventional, and, so to say, foreign to the intentions of nature" (218). Mathematical order, Bergson contends, is not "immanent in matter" (219). Bergson's hypothesis, in other words, is that "mathematical order is nothing positive" (219); it shapes the apprehension of nature, rather than neutrally representing it. Instead of circumscribing nature within ready-made concepts, Bergson would rather see a restoring of the physical world to movement and time; he advocates a more subtle and reflexive form of awareness—a spiritualized consciousness attuned to the flows and transformations of the material world, as well as to limiting human conventions.

In Science and Hypothesis (1905) Poincaré makes a similar argument. Experience, he famously argues, suggests a variety of geometrical models, not simply the Euclidean one. As a result, one must simply select a particular model or theory from the wealth of

ones available since the advent of non-Euclidean geometry. For Poincaré the question "Is Euclidean geometry true?" simply "has no meaning" (50). As he explains, "We might as well ask if the metric system is true, and if the old weights and measures are false; if Cartesian co-ordinates are true and polar co-ordinates false. One geometry cannot be more true than another; it can only be more convenient" (50). The implication is that neither Euclidean geometry nor the other available geometries conforms to the world in a one to one correspondence. For Poincaré there is no absolute space grounded in experience (intuition) or in logic. In an apparently heterogeneous world, all forms of geometry are equally applicable. Poincaré thus concludes:

> Space is . . . a framework which we impose on the world. Whence are the first principles of geometry derived? Are they imposed on us by logic? Lobatschevsky, by inventing non-Euclidean geometries, has shown that this is not the case. Is space revealed to us by our senses? No; for the space revealed to us by our senses is absolutely different from the space of geometry. Is geometry derived from experience? Careful discussion will give the answer—no! We therefore conclude that the principles of geometry are only conventions . . . (xxv).

In this way Poincaré deals a severe blow to scientific materialism's understanding of absolute space. As Lawrence Sklar has noted, "the empiricist account [of Euclidean geometry] is wrong. For, given any collection of empirical observations, a multitude of geometries, all incompatible with one another, will all be equally compatible with the experimental results. . . . One must simply choose the geometry one uses to describe the world, by convention" (89). In addition, Poincaré also easily disposes of the long standing

idealist account of the a priori nature of Euclidean geometry, arguing that it is as much a convention as the empirical account.

In the end, Poincaré's as well as Bergson's views are typical of a new emerging modernist sense of geometry in which physical and mathematical space are sharply distinguished. In this new conception of geometry, classical Euclidean geometry is no longer privileged: the notion of an absolute space has been relativized. This significant intellectual revolution in the history of geometry, as Kline and others have noted, is a direct consequence of the advent of non-Euclidean geometries. In making the notion of the conventionality of geometry a necessary assumption, the emergence of post-classical geometries ultimately initiated the demise of the centrality of Euclidean geometry. It also triggered key developments and insights beyond the world of mathematicians. As Kline has noted, "The importance of non-Euclidean geometry in the general history of thought cannot be exaggerated. Like Copernicus' heliocentric theory, Newton's law of gravitation, and Darwin's theory of evolution, non-Euclidean geometry has radically affected science, philosophy, and religion" (Western 428). It had such a widespread impact because it called into question what other areas of thought had taken to be the model of intellectual inquiry: Euclidean geometry. When the signs and symbols of classical geometry were relativized, when the seemingly self-evident axioms of Euclid were declared "not true," it thus seemed to many that the representational foundations for truth in general were lost—namely, the notions of self-evident intuition and pure observation language. It is within the far reaching wake of this kind of post-positivist thinking that Modernism would find itself.

Modernism and Geometry

It is not surprising that literary modernism should be concerned with geometry because the latter has been intertwined with the theory of language since the earliest times in recorded history. Among the most well-known examples of this linkage is the Bible, especially its various accounts of creation. In it God is said to have spoken the world into existence, to have given a name to every single phenomenon ("Let there be light"), and he is also said to have measured and weighed creation, to have laid it out in well-balanced proportions with ruler and plumb line.[25] In the Greek tradition, similar well-known ideas can also be found. There are, for instance, the mystical Pythagoreans, who believe that "God eternally geometrizes" (Kline Loss: 16), and the idealist philosopher Plato, who speaks of a transcendental world of Forms conceived in both linguistic and mathematical terms, although Plato privileges speech over written language. Most significantly, there is Euclid, whose theory of geometry consolidated previous classical learning and set the standard for much of the world for over two thousand years, combining a regard for self-evident a priori axioms and postulates (language) with a sense of the absolute space of nature (mathematics). The telling key term in the Greek tradition—and later in the Christian tradition, for that matter—is logos, whose play of meanings includes both "word" and "reason," suggesting the intimate linkage between the order of linguistic signs and the order of mathematics.[26]

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[25]The alphabet of the Bible, not surprisingly, is also a numerical system, as the recent Darren Aronofsky film Pi has reminded us.

[26]The modern philosophical, linguistic, and psychological implications of geometry were spelled out by Edmund Husserl in his posthumously published The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology (1954) and by his famous critic Jacques Derrida, particularly in his Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry: An Introduction (1962).

The interconnecting bond that actually unites these various cultural portrayals of geometry and language is the larger issue of mimesis or representation, and that is precisely what links the concerns of modernism and geometry. As I indicated in the previous section, geometers at first assumed that Euclidean geometry is an accurate representation of the material world; in other words, they did not distinguish between mathematical and physical space. To put it in more philosophical terms, the early geometers did not distinguish between the signs and symbols of Euclidean geometry and the phenomenology of perception, which includes such concepts as consciousness, intuition, common sense, and experience. To borrow from Paul de Man, we might say that they succumbed to a kind of seductive aesthetic ideology, "a confusion of linguistic with natural reality, of reference with phenomenalism" ("Resistance" 11). With the emergence of non-Euclidean geometries the mimetic or representational value of all forms of geometry was called into question. The result was an intellectual move from the notion of a "pure observation language" to various notions of conventionalism. A similar, if not quite as linear, trajectory—one that proceeds from aesthetic ideology to anti-mimetic conventionalism—is noticeable in literary modernism, and, appropriately enough, it is frequently bound up with discussions of, or at least references to, geometry.

The key modernists who tend to work with classical assumptions about geometry are Ezra Pound, T.E. Hulme, Wyndham Lewis, and the architect La Corbusier. In an early essay "The Wisdom of Poetry" (1912) Pound draws numerous analogies between poetry and mathematics (and science in general, for that matter). The end of the essay is particularly important. Here Pound declares that "the poet's true and lasting relation to literature and life is that of the abstract mathematician to science and life" (361). For

Pound the poet and the mathematician are similar in that they both communicate through signs and symbols the laws of consciousness and nature, respectively. Sometimes it seems as if their work has no application, but such an illusion is eventually dispelled. As an example, Pound discusses two mathematicians who "developed the function of a certain obscure sort of equation, for no cause save their own pleasure in the work" (361). Pound notes that the "applied science of their day had no use for the deductions, a few sheets of paper covered with arbitrary symbols" (361—362), but without them "we should have no wireless telegraph" (362). The apparently impractical becomes practical. Arbitrary symbols become the language of nature. For Pound, the poet does the same for consciousness, his language also representing absolutes.

Driving his point home, Pound notes that "What the analytical geometer does for space and form, the poet does for the states of consciousness" (362). With this statement Pound asks his reader to consider "the nature of the formulae of analytics" (362), as a means of understanding the nature of poetic language, which for Pound is analogous to the symbols of mathematics. "By the signs $a^2+b^2=c^2$," Pound writes,

> I imply the circle. By $(a-r)^2+(b-r)^2=(c-r)^2$, I imply the circle and its mode of birth. I am led from the consideration of the particular circles formed by my ink-well and my table-rim, to the contemplation of the circle absolute, its law; the circle free in all space, unbounded, loosed from the accidents of time and place. Is the formula nothing, or is it cabala and the sign of unintelligible magic? The engineer, understanding and translating to the many, builds for the uninitiated bridges and devices. He speaks their language. For the initiated the signs are a door into eternity and into the boundless ether. (362)

Here Pound notes approvingly the simplicity of mathematical formulas, which he portrays as rising above particular examples in their expression of universal laws. In answering his question about the nature of the formula of the "birth of the circle," Pound notes that it has practical applications. It provides the laws of building and construction for the engineer, who "translates" the obscure symbols of analytical geometry, applying them to the mastery of nature. Such a feat is taken for granted by many, Pound implies, but the "initiated" few know that the "signs" or "language" of geometry is a "door into eternity." In this passage Pound thus calls forth the original religious and metaphysical connotations of mathematics, even as he links the formulas of mathematics to language. In addition, he dwells on the importance of representation; the signs and symbols of geometry open out onto the absolute. Although he does not explicitly mention Euclid, he assumes the classical view of geometry in his repeated insistence that mathematical formulas express the laws of nature. Like the classical geometers, Pound does not distinguish between mathematical and physical space. Similarly, in comparing poetry and geometry, Pound does not distinguish between language and the "the world's consciousness" (362) that it is said to represent. For Pound poetic language and mathematical language are comparable in that they both represent absolutes.

A similar kind of comparability is asserted by T.E. Hulme, particularly in the later writings on art that leave behind his earlier concerns with authentic imagery in poetry. In "Modern Art and Its Philosophy" (1914), for instance, Hulme distinguishes between two different kinds of art, what he calls "geometrical and vital" (Collected 269), privileging the former over the later. For Hulme, vital art is a kind of naïve realism or naturalism that does not penetrate to the essence of things; its lines are "soft" (272) and living. In this

regard Hulme thinks of the humanism of Greek and Renaissance art. Such art for Hulme does not represent absolutes; it seems to dwell on "the varied confusion and arbitrariness of existence" (273). In contrast, geometrical art translates the human and natural world into abstract forms expressing austerity and bareness, but also structure and permanence. "In the [geometrical] representation of natural objects," Hulme explains,

> there is an attempt to purify them of their characteristically living qualities in order to make them necessary and immovable. The changing is translated into something fixed and necessary. This leads to rigid lines and dead crystalline forms, for pure geometrical regularity gives a certain pleasure to men troubled by the obscurity of outside appearance. The geometrical line is something absolutely distinct from the messiness, the confusion, and the accidental details of existing things. (274—275)

Hulme notes that "one might be pardoned if one felt no particular interest in the eternity of a cube; but if you can put man into some geometrical shape which lifts him out of the transience of the organic, then the matter is different" (283). In finding a geometrical form for the human body, the artist rises above the messy particulars of things to a representation of the absolute. Like Pound, Hulme is concerned with the classical view of geometry as a representation of timeless laws. And like Pound, moreover, Hulme recalls approvingly the religious connotations of geometry. This is particular evident in his appreciation of ancient Egyptian, Indian, and Byzantine arts, "where everything tends to be angular, where curves tend to be hard and geometrical, where the representation of the human body, for example, is often entirely non-vital and distorted to fit into stiff lines and cubical shapes of various kinds" (272). In this regard he joins modernist sculptors like

Brancusi and, especially, Gaudier-Brzeska, both of whom had a high regard for the geometrical forms of "primitive" art.[27]

Much like Hulme, Brancusi, and Gaudier-Brzeska, the French architect Le Corbusier also had an appreciation for austere primitive art forms, particularly ancient temples "governed by elementary mathematical calculation" (70). In Towards a New Architecture (1923), Le Corbusier celebrates Hindu and Egyptian temples, among others, noting that what makes each a great work of architecture is that "The plan is at its basis" (48). Ancient architecture, Le Corbusier notes approvingly, is highly regulated and ordered; and it achieves it rigorous planning through "the unity of the geometric principle" (48), taking no account of superfluous "styles."[28] According to Le Corbusier, ancient architects are drawn by instinct "to right angles—axes, the square, the circle," and "all these things . . . are geometrical truths, and give results that our eye can measure and recognize" (72). Without the plan grounded in geometry, Le Corbusier argues, "there would be only chance, irregularity and capriciousness" (72). In a telling summary statement, Le Corbusier declares,

> Architecture is the first manifestation of man creating his own universe, creating it in the image of nature, submitting to the laws of nature, the laws which govern our own nature, our universe. The law of gravity, of statics and of dynamics, impose

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[27]Pound, it should be noted, wrote approvingly of Brancusi and Gaudier-Brzeska. See, for instance, "Brancusi" in Literary Essays of Ezra Pound (1968), pp. 441—445.

[28]It is interesting to note that Le Corbusier dismisses style in architecture much like modernist writers dismiss rhetoric in poetry and fiction; the sense of getting at some underlying material reality is behind both dismissals. In this effort to distinguish between style and substance can be seen the long standing influence of the Enlightenment and its attempt to separate fact and fiction, nature and culture, etc. This effort also points to the fact that what modernism may be a response to is a crisis in Enlightenment values.

> themselves by a reductio ad absurdum: everything must hold together or it will collapse. . . . A supreme determinism illuminates for us the creations of nature and gives us the security of something poised and reasonably made, of something infinitely modulated, evolved, varied and unified. . . . The primordial physical laws are simple and few in number. The moral laws are simple and few in number. (73-74)

In this passage, as in Hulme and the others, cognitive absolutes blend with moral absolutes in a religiously tinged theory of geometry grounded in classical representation; as Le Corbusier aptly puts it, "Geometry is the language of man" (72).

In Time and Western Man (1927) Wyndham Lewis develops a similar notion about space and its significance, but, more interestingly, he does so in explicit opposition to Henri Bergson's critique of classical geometry and to "the non-plastic, illusory, Alice-in-Wonderland world of post-einsteinian philosophy" (406). As a result, Lewis writes with a peculiar sense of urgency and crisis, a sense that finally distinguishes him from Hulme and Pound. In his discussion of the blending of the categories of space and time in the theory of relativity, for instance, Lewis rails against the contemporary critique of classical space, seeing Einsteinian physics as yet another example of a pervasive time philosophy that is undermining the perception of the objective world. Realizing that he is not a mathematician, Lewis declares that in this case he must limit himself "to stimulating the mathematicians to seeing if they cannot discover the parallels in the mathematical theory of what all of us must eventually come to see in the philosophy—namely, that it is romantic, 'primitivist,' and open to the same objections as other sensational, overcoloured, marvellous and too exclusively emotional things" (405). Here Lewis uses the word

"primitive" to mean subjective and irrational; it's a word, apparently, that can be used by modernists both positively and negatively, as the occasion requires. In any case, Lewis is trying to preserve the classic conception of space against a non-Euclidean conception, which Lewis believes to be not only irrational and subjective but also immoral. He also links modern literature with science and mathematics, showing how they are both animated by a new decadent sense of space. Lewis is calling for a return to the classical philosophy of space, which he hopes to see reflected in both the arts and the sciences. In a tautly written passage contrasting his views with those of Bergson, Lewis clarifies his position, writing,

> the Time conception of Bergson seems to us entirely to misrepresent the role of Space, and, as it were, shuffle and transpose their respective "realities." So what we seek to stimulate, and what we give the critical outline of, is a philosophy that will be as much a spatial philosophy as Bergon's is a time-philosophy. As much as he enjoys the sight of things "penetrating" and "merging," do we enjoy the opposite picture of them standing apart—the wind blowing between them, and the air circulating freely in and out of them: as much as he enjoys the "indistinct," the "qualititative," the misty, sensational and ecstatic, very much more do we value the distinct, the geometric, the universal, non-qualitied—the clear and the light, the unsensational. To the trance of music, with its obsession of Time, with its inalienable emotional urgency and visceral agitation, we prefer what Bergson calls "obsession of Space." If the painter's heaven of exterior forms is what above all delights you, then the philosophy of Time, with its declared enmity for "spatializing" mankind, will, if you understand it, please you as little as it does me.

> You will prefer the world of greek philosophy, the pagan exteriorality, to the world of music, or to the time-mathematics, or mathematics of events or "durations," the mathematics of motion, which is temperamentally associated with that. (416-417)

Here Lewis celebrates classical geometrical space, claiming it to be universal. For Lewis it is the proper form of space that is to be assumed by the arts as the well as the sciences. Underlying all this is a faith in the ability of the signs and symbols of both language and mathematics to represent space: it is a faith in a pure observation language. The coming under critique of this faith in modern times is a sign of social and cultural crisis for Lewis. For others, like Gertrude Stein, it will be a critique of aesthetic ideology, of what de Man called "a confusion of linguistics with natural reality, of reference with phenomenalism" (11).

As might be expected, the earliest signs of literary modernism's sense of crisis in regard to geometry appeared in the writings of Joseph Conrad, where a movement away from the ideology of classical geometry is clearly noticeable. In The Secret Agent Conrad makes several significant references to the young Stevie spending "His spare time . . . occupied by drawing circles with compass and pencil on a piece of paper" (50). On a particularly important occasion the narrator draws out the symbolic significance of Stevie's labors, drawing an analogy between art and geometry: when Verloc opens the door to the kitchen, notes the narrator, he

> thus disclosed the innocent Stevie, seated very good and quiet at a deal table, drawing circles, circles; innumerable circles, concentric, eccentric; a coruscating whirl of circles that by their tangled multitude of repeated curves, uniformity of

> form, and confusion of intersecting lines suggested a rendering of cosmic chaos, the symbolism of a mad art attempting the inconceivable. The artist never turned his head. (76).

In this passage an incomprehensible collage of geometrical lines is said to be attempting to render or represent an already incomprehensible "chaotic" cosmos—a goal the narrator declares to be inconceivable. The modern split between mathematics and nature, signs and physical space, is evident here; and the anxiety over it is clearly evident in the heavy handed rhetoric.

An even more telling example of this anxiety about space is evident in the early Conrad-Ford collaboration, The Inheritors, a novel that strangely mixes mystery and science fiction. In the opening chapter the narrator, Arthur Granger, meets a strange woman who claims to be from the "Fourth Dimension" (6). According to her, she and the Dimensionists, her fellow kind, are destined to "inherit the earth" (6). The narrator does not subscribe to the notion of a fourth dimension—what he calls "a mathematical monstrosity" (7)—let alone anybody living in it, and yet he apprehensively contemplates the sky above Bell Harry, feeling it to be "an unrealized, an unrealizable infinity of space" (8). Arthur feels as if he were "listening to a parody of scientific work recited by a phonograph" (9), but his visual sense of the known world is shaken, as he continues to listen to the "strange" and "new" woman. In a telling summary statement, Arthur notes,

> I heard the nature of the Fourth Dimension—heard that it was an inhabited plane—invisible to our eyes, but omnipresent; heard that I had seen it when Bell Harry had reeled before my eyes. I heard the Dimensionists described; a race clear-sighted, eminently practical, incredible; with no ideals, prejudices, or remorse; with

> no feeling for art and no reverence for life; free from any ethical tradition; callous to pain, weakness, suffering and death, as if they had been invulnerable and immortal. She did not say they were immortal, however. "You would—you will—hate us," she concluded. The power of her imagination was so great that I fancied myself face to face with the truth. (9-10)

What emerges clearly at this moment is that the Dimensionists are the authors' reactionary means of representing the social, cultural, and economic forces shaping the modern era and separating it from the past. With the advent of the Dimensionist, the narrator notes, "We—our whole social system—would break as a beam snaps, because we were worm-eaten with altruism and ethics" (13). The narrator seems to be particularly concerned about the New Woman movement and globalism: as the narrator says to the mysterious woman, "You must belong to one of the new nations. You are a foreigner. . . . you are of a new nation that is beginning to find itself" (5-6). Here, in any case, the break up of classical Euclidean space is also bound up with a sense of the breakup of a traditional (and illusory) social space. The narrator's "reeling" sense of perspective is portrayed as a sign of crisis of large scale proportions, much like Ossipon's "reeling" sense of Winnie in The Secret Agent. The ability to represent geometrical as well as social space is being undermined here, and it is a source of great anxiety for the narrator (as well as for the authors).

Modernism later moves beyond this sense of crisis toward a post-classical view of space, numerous examples of which could be cited. In James Joyce's novel Ulysses, for instance, this emerging view is thematized in Stephen Dedealus' recurring concern with "the ruin of all space, shattered glass and toppling masonry, and time one livid final flame"

(20). This preoccupation with the breakup of space on the part of Stephen is in turn joined to a formal fragmentation of realistic perspective that reflects a post-classical view of space as convention. As Edmund Wilson once observed, "Like . . . Einstein's world, Joyce's world is always changing as it is perceived by different observers and by them at different times" (221-222). In D.H. Lawrence's various novels, the rationalization of society—the quantification and mechanization of labor and work— comes under critique. Lawrence is particularly concerned with what he calls in The Rainbow "the great, mathematical colliery" (346), which reduces human beings to automatons, ruling with them with, and reducing them to, abstractions. Ultimately, Lawrence's concern with interior life and the flux of experience can be favorably compared to Bergson's focus on durée. His compositional strategy of "continual, slightly modified repetition" (Women 486) enacts a complicated post-positivist approach to apprehending phenomena that may be characterized under the category of the "reenchantment" of science. Significantly, the poststructuralist philosopher Gilles Deleuze referred approvingly to this Lawrentian approach as "rotative thought, in which a group of images turn ever more quickly around a mysterious point" (48).

As another brief example of an emerging post-positivist view of geometry in modernism, consider the modernist poet William Butler Yeats' A Vision (1925). In this work Yeats develops his great abstract "geometrical symbolism" (19), but, in a move similar to Henri Poincaré's in mathematics, he tends to view it merely as a rhetorical convention, not as some kind of primordial or depth symbolism pointing to a transcendental reality. As Yeats explained the matter in his Introduction,

> Some will ask whether I believe in the actual existence of my circuits of sun and moon. . . . To such a question I can but answer that if sometimes, overwhelmed by miracle as all men must be when in the midst of it, I have taken such periods literally, my reason has soon recovered; and now that the system stands out clearly in my imagination I regard them as stylistic arrangements of experience comparable to the cubes in the drawing of Wyndham Lewis and to the ovoids in the sculpture of Brancusi. They have helped me to hold in a single thought reality and justice (25).

It is notable that Yeats here refers to Lewis and Brancusi. The work of all three, as Yeats suggests, are comparable in that they both attempt to find or bring order to their experience of the world. But what clearly distinguishes Yeats from the others is his assertion that his abstract symbolism is simply stylistic. In contrast to the others, Yeats argues for a rhetorical view of his work in which he distinguishes between symbols and reality, much like geometers distinguish between mathematical and physical space. Yeats' way of doing justice to reality is not to reduce it to simplicity, to some kind of idealistic form, but to conceive of it in multiple, contradictory ways, as more than evidenced by his many poems. In this regard, he recognizes the conventional nature of his various poetic representations; his geometrical symbolism is thus more akin to the post-positivist view of geometry than it is to the classical, Euclidean view. They both question the basis of representation and provide multiple models of reality rather than one. Yeats always presents a tension in his views, as when he writes, "Will some mathematician some day question and understand, as I cannot, and confirm all, or have I also dealt in myth" (213). This kind of ironic approach to things—a kind of dialectical playing out of opposed

positions—is precisely how Yeats does justice to reality through rhetorical technique—an approach that is comparable to Joyce's fragmentation of perspective and Lawrence's use of repetition with difference.

Later instances of the impact of the conventional view of geometry can be seen in the work of Samuel Beckett and Aldous Huxley. In Murphy (1938), for instance, Beckett's narrator describes the main character as being "a missile without provenance or target, caught up in a tumult of non-Newtonian motion" (112-113). More significantly, in Point Counter Point (1928), Huxley satirizes how the Marxist materialist view of space, which is resolutely classical, responds to the new modern view of space as convention. He does so through the character of Spandrell, who mocks the scientific views (and anxiety) of the communist character Illidge, saying,

> Poor Illidge! He's sadly worried by Einstein and Edington. And how he hates Henri Poincaré! How furious he gets with old Mach! They're undermining his simple faith. They're telling him that the laws of nature are useful conventions of strictly human manufacture and that space and time and mass themselves, the whole universe of Newton and his successors, are simply our own invention. The idea's as inexpressibly shocking and painful to him as the idea of the non-existence of Jesus would be to a Christian. (153)

In this passage Huxley shows not only how much the idea of conventional space eventually pervaded modernism, but also how classical materialism—whether Marxist or otherwise—had become a kind of metaphysical substitute for religion. For Illidge and others like him, "space, time, and mass" have been elevated into "fundamental realities"

(153). It is inconceivable for them that space can be conventional, but such a proposition is considered axiomatic by modernists such as Huxley.

But preceding Huxley, Beckett, Joyce, Lawrence, and Yeats in this matter is Gertrude Stein, the subject of the next two concluding sections. Her cubist-inspired compositions are among the earliest significant attempts to reflect a post-positivist approach to the representation of space in literary modernism. It is to her work that we now turn.

Gertrude Stein and Cubism

Following the lead of the post-impressionist painter Cézanne, who recommended that painters "deal with nature in terms of the cylinder, the sphere, the cone" (qtd. in Macleod 195), Picasso and Georges Braque invented Cubism, one of the most significant and influential modern departures from the history of representational art in the Western tradition. Particularly important was Picasso's Les demoiselles d'Avignon (1907), which marked the beginning of Cubism. This iconoclastic painting depicted the traditional female nude, but it did so within what Glen Macleod has called "a new kind of pictorial space" (200). It was characterized by a juxtaposition of jagged planes and fragmented forms in which realism was replaced by abstraction, depth perspective by multiple perspectives, and vanishing lines by surface and two-dimensionality. It thus presented a startling breakup of the traditional homogeneous Euclidean space characteristic of art since the Renaissance.[29] Many modernists saw this development as analogous to, or

[29]See Kern, pp. 143—148, and especially Harvey, pp. 244—249.

influenced by, the emergence of non-Euclidean geometries (see Kern 145, 147) because, in presenting a striking collage of heterogeneous spaces and disjointed perspectives, Picasso's painting and Cubism as a whole were calling into question the traditional hegemony of Euclidean geometry. But even more importantly, Picasso and the Cubist movement, like modernist geometers, were also calling into question the basis of representation or mimesis. In severing art from its relationship to any kind of model or exterior object, Picasso and the Cubists were following a line of development similar to the scientific critique of the notion of a pure observation language. It is within this context that Gertrude Stein's work first emerges.

As is well known, Stein was a close friend of Picasso, whose painting of Stein, "Portrait of Gertrude Stein" (1906), revealed some of the earliest signs of the emergence of Cubism, which are particularly noticeable in the subject's asymmetrical eyes and the mask-like quality of her face. Stein viewed Picasso's work, as well as the work of his predecessor Cézanne, as revolutionary, as a complete break with traditional art forms and modes of thought. Drawing inspiration from the "Portrait of Gertrude Stein" and Cubism in general, Stein attempted to develop literary techniques comparable in effect to the artistic techniques of Cubism, to bring Cubism to literature. What Stein learned from Cubism emerges clearly in her critical work Picasso (1938), especially in an interesting passage that discusses the reasons for "the making of . . . cubism" (12). Here Stein indicates that there are three reasons for the rise of Cubism:

> First. The composition, because the way of living had changed the composition of living had extended and each thing was as important as any other thing. Secondly, the faith in what the eyes were seeing, that is to say the belief in the reality of

> science, commenced to diminish. . . . Thirdly, the framing of life, the need that a picture exist in its frame, remain in its frame was over. A picture remaining in its frame was a thing that always had existed and now pictures commenced to want to leave their frames and this also created the necessity for cubism. (12)

Stein's first reason regarding a change in the way of living in the twentieth century is a significant observation that Stein returns to often in her writings. It suggests a materialist or sociological basis for the emergence of Cubism that I want to return to in the next and last section of this chapter. But what is most significant to note at this point is that Stein's first reason points to the importance of montage, a composition in which no one element is centralized, in which "each thing [is] as important as the next" (12). This interest in montage—shared, as we shall see, by Walter Benjamin—shows Stein's concern with a heterogeneous, post-Euclidean space.

Stein's next reason also shows a similar concern, for it points to the importance of Cubism's critique of perspective, and this critique Stein explicitly links to a decreasing belief in science, to a lack of faith in what the eye sees. Here, in critiquing objective representation, Stein quite clearly shows herself to be a post-positivist. Unlike Conrad, who in The Secret Agent sees the undermining of positivism as a cultural crisis, Stein easily assumes, and accepts, the demise of the occularcentrism of positivism. For this reason, Stein will explore multiple, contradictory perspectives, preferring heterogeneity over homogeneity, multiplicity over reduction. Stein's last reason, which is linked to the two previous ones, points out the importance of Cubism critique of the "framing" of subjects. As Stein observes, Cubism clearly abandons the depth perspective of traditional art, with its vanishing points, and in doing so it abandons traditional Euclidean space,

developing a new kind of pictorial space, as Macleod puts it, a space reflective of the multiplicity of geometrical models available since the advent of non-Euclidean geometries.

What finally emerges in Stein's discussion of Cubism in Picasso is a constant concern with the issue of representation, as demonstrated in her various accounts of montage, perspective, and framing. This issue is precisely the one that links Cubism to modern geometry, and, as we have seen already, it is also the one that concerns various modernists who refer to geometry in their critical writings, including Ezra Pound, T.E. Hulme, and Wyndham Lewis. Modern geometers, Cubist painters, and literary modernists are all interrelated in that they refer to each other and, more importantly, critique their respective traditional modes of representation. Cubist painters and modernists critique realistic representation in the arts, while modern geometers critique the notion of a pure observation language, distinguishing sharply between mathematical and physical space. In isolating the issue of representation in relationship to Cubism and science, Stein gets to the very heart of the issue. Not surprisingly, when Stein attempts to theorize her own literary practice, it is to this very issue that she returns.

For instance, in a well-known essay on her various literary methods, "Composition as Explanation" (1926), Stein repeatedly stresses the importance of the relationship between composition or representation and the apprehension of natural phenomena. For Stein composition shapes the apprehension of the world; the former is to be distinguished from the latter, much like mathematical space is to be distinguished from physical space. Different compositions express different apprehensions of the world; and these representational differences become especially noticeable over time. As Stein explains,

> The only thing that is different from one time to another is what is seen and what is seen depends upon how everybody is doing everything. This makes the thing we are looking at very different and this makes what those who describe it make of it, it makes a composition, it confuses, it shows, it is, it looks, it likes it as it is, and this makes what is seen as it is seen. Nothing changes from generation to generation except the thing seen and that makes a composition. (516)

In this passage Stein points out that the very "being" of what is seen depends on the organization and order of artistic compositions. A thing "things" or takes on its thingly nature precisely in so far as it is part of a composition. In other words, a thing exists—in so far as it is apprehended— within a representational scheme, which, as Stein puts it, "makes what is seen as it is seen." In this regard, Stein resembles the "later" Heidegger, who, in relationship to language, also theorizes the dependence of things on representations. But with Stein this relationship between thing and composition is much more explicitly tied to historical and social developments—it has a material basis which, as it changes, brings about alterations in modes of apprehension. For Stein changes in composition take place over time with each succeeding generation, and the modern generations of the early-twentieth century are no exception. Thus, time is not an abstract category for Stein, but a material reality, one that affects the production of art forms. In this regard, parallels could be drawn between Stein and Virginia Woolf, who in Orlando and Between the Acts has a similar view of the relationship between passing generations and changing modes of artistic composition.

To this subject of Stein's materialist understanding of art, I will return in the next section, as I will return to Woolf and Heidegger in a latter chapter. For now it is important

to note that Stein is preoccupied with the nature of representation much like modern geometers and Cubist painters. As with the others, Stein distinguishes between representational and "natural" space. Rather than naively accepting a realist aesthetic, she develops alternative modes of representation appropriate to modern times, modes that reflect the influence of Cubism and, by extension, the critique of Euclidean space by modern geometers. At first, Stein relies on what she calls "a continuous present and using everything and beginning again" (518). This fictional technique is particularly evident in Stein's early work, Three Lives (1909), where the linear development of story is exchanged for a kind of stream-of-conscious technique that builds up through repetition different planes of awareness and temporality, creating an endlessly reorganized montage of fictional elements. Stein renders here in fictional terms precisely what Bergson was describing in relationship to philosophy and psychology, a complex internal temporality (durée) that does not work within the Euclidean space that Kant accepted as an absolute category. In this regard, Stein's education under William James probably helped her to conceive the fictional technique of Three Lives, as James developed ideas about the flow of consciousness similar to those of Bergson. Three Lives, in any case, was a major departure from realist modes of representation, reflecting a new fluid non-Euclidean awareness about space that foregounded the importance of what Stein called "the time in the composition" (520).

An even more significant departure from traditional modes of representation was Stein's Cubist-inspired Tender Buttons (1914), a series of prose poems that attempt to render literary effects comparable to the fragmented still lives of Cubism. Stein still relies on the various fictional techniques that she developed for Three Lives—the continuous

present, beginning again, and using everything—but in this case she breaks down the grammar of sentences, dislocating subject and object. The discontinuity of montage present in the narratives of the three stories in Three Lives now extends itself to the linear logic of syntax. Her prose poems become an arrangement of words, phrases, and clauses that occasionally coalesce and cluster into meaningful sentences but that often simply work against each other, creating dissonance as much as harmony, discord as much as concord. The result, as Edmond Wilson astutely observed, is "a pattern of assorted words . . . analogous to a Cubist canvas composed of unidentifiable fragments" (242).

That Stein is dispensing with realistic representation is clear not only from her breakdown of syntax but also from her manner of applying titles to her prose poems. Typically, the title of a Stein poem is a word or phase associated with some common everyday object, as in "A Piano," "A Box," "A Plate," "A Chair," and "An Umbrella." What usually follows is a poem that has little or no apparent relationship to its title. In "A Piano," for instance, Stein writes,

> If the speed is open, if the color is careless, if the selection of a strong scent is not awkward, if the button holder is held by all the waving color and there is no color, not any color. If there is no dirt in a pin and there can be none scarcely, if there is not then the place is the same as up standing.
>
> There is no dark custom and it even is not acted in any such a way that a restraint is not spread. That is spread, it shuts and it lifts and awkwardly not awkwardly the centre is in standing. (9).

In this prose poem, which is presented here in its entirety, Stein nowhere mentions the word "piano," nor does she provide any kind of descriptive words or phases that might be

taken as referring to a piano. While the poem builds up some kind of rudimentary sense of grammatical coherence with its series of six dependent clauses beginning with "if," it works against this sense with its nonsensical predication, as in "the speed is open" and "the color is careless." The result is a convoluted prose poem with no clear relationship to its title. The title refers to the poem, but it is not clear to what the poem refers. In obscuring its object or referent, "A Piano" ultimately undermines realistic representation.

In place of a denotative language referring to some kind of exterior object—a piano, in this case—Stein's prose poem substitutes a dense, opaque language that draws attention only to its own internal workings. The repetition of six similar dependent clauses contributes to this self-referential quality that the poem has, as does the repeated use of "there is," but equally important is the use of assonance and alliteration. Phrases such as "in a pin" and "the selection of a strong scent" stress the importance of the linguistic relationships between consonant and vowel sounds. In addition, the poem also plays with various forms of the same word, as in "awkward" and "awkwardly," "be" and "is," and "holder" and "is held"; it also foregrounds slight paradigmatic differences between words, as in the case of "speed" and "spread," making the reader acutely aware of the few but meaningful sound differences between words that allow them to be audibly distinguished. As a result of these various literary strategies, the poem prevents the reader from looking through the words to some kind of object, piano or otherwise. The reader is forced instead to shuttle back and forth between the words of the poem itself. Language here is as cut off from its natural referent as modern geometry is from its. As if to stress all the more this negative relationship to an outside referent, the poem repeatedly resorts to negation; the words "no," "not," and "none" are used a combined 10 times (in a poem of a

105 words), creating through repetition their own internal relationships between each other. In some cases, the poem affirms only to negate, as in "awkwardly not awkwardly" and "there can be none scarcely."

Perhaps the most telling indication of this negative textuality in Stein's "A Piano" is the repetition of the key words "centre," "act," "spread," and "custom." Throughout Tender Buttons these words recur numerous times, like musical motifs within an intricate symphonic score. Thus "A Piano" not only draws attention to its own internal linguistic relationships; it also reveals itself to be imbedded within the larger textuality of Tender Buttons as a whole, stressing all the more the anti-representational bent of the poem as well as the work of which it is a part. But that is not all. In their various contexts these four key words—centre, act, spread, and custom—are caught up within a kind of ever turning linguistic kaleidoscope of alternately meaningful and meaningless syntactical constructions that obliquely suggest and enact the larger concerns of Tender Buttons as a whole. In the context of "A Piano" the four key words do not make much sense: "There is no dark custom and it even is not acted in any such a way that a restraint is not spread. That is spread, it shuts and it lifts and awkwardly not awkwardly the centre is in standing" (9, emphasis mine). Other such examples of the nonsensical use of these key words could be cited, with each case exhibiting a different linguistic configuration or pattern. But other occurrences of these four words grope toward a syntactical order or harmony, as in "The difference is spreading" (3), "What is the custom, the custom is in the centre" (26), "Act so that there is no use in a centre" (43), and "It is not very likely that there is a centre" (46). At such moments of more meaningful linguistic coherence, the self-consciousness of the poem reaches a point where it is about to thematize its effort to stress textuality over

reference. It here appropriately stresses or at least suggests the importance of another of the poem's key terms "difference"—appropriate since Tender Buttons draws attention to its own internal relationships—and it also stresses or suggests the absence of a centre to govern the act of writing, which, in Stein's case, has no clear referent or object, being "intransitive," to use Roland Barthes' terminology. The poem also suggests here a powerful correlation between "centre" and "custom," implying the conventional nature of representation, which was the focal point of Stein's discussion of Cubism in Picasso. In linking these two words Stein in effect is suggesting a claim similar to the ones made by Poincaré, Bergson, and other modern mathematicians and philosophers: namely, that signs and symbols are only conventional, that the space of representation is different from the space of the material world. But, of course, these statements and other such statements in Stein's Tender Buttons are ultimately dissolved and undermined by the kaleidoscopic nature of the poem as a whole, whose repetitions of key words in alternately meaningful and meaningless contexts enacts the centerless composition of Cubism that Stein consciously strove to emulate. In referencing four of the key words of Tender Buttons "A Piano" finally opens itself up to the larger, all encompassing negative textuality of the poem as whole, thus marking in a grand fashion the breakdown of realistic representation.

Ultimately, in "A Piano" and in Tender Buttons as a whole, as in most of Gertrude Stein's work, can be seen the literary equivalent of what Morris Kline calls the "abolition of the truth of mathematics." Influenced by Cubism, Stein's work shows itself to be intimately connected, in theory and practice, to the critique of representation initiated by modern mathematicians and geometers as a result of the displacement of Euclidean

geometry by non-Euclidean geometries. In a move analogous to the development of modern geometry—and, in a way, to Derrida's critique of Husserl—Stein's work progresses beyond the aesthetic ideology of realism, with its "confusion of linguistic with natural reality, of reference with phenomenalism," toward a thoroughgoing formalism that distinguishes sharply between symbols and nature, signs and referents. As Shari Benstock has indicated, "Stein's writings give evidence of a move toward the independence of the word from prescribed and coded meanings, a move from the easy equation of sign and substance [that] breaks entirely the assumed connection between word and world" (161). This break of which Benstock speaks is precisely the kind of break that can be observed in modern geometry and mathematics in general, both of which sharply distinguish between mathematical and physical space.[30] In going beyond realism, Stein's work finally moves beyond the many literary attempts to emulate scientific materialism's faith in objective observation and pure observation language, including Conrad's The Secret Agent.

In breaking with scientific materialism, however, Stein does not lose altogether a sense of material "reality." In fact, one can see in her work a new kind of materialism, one attuned to the mechanisms and effects of language, not to some kind of objective reality. Such a materialism, which traces out the intricate work of textuality, is a reflexive one that finally goes beyond the metaphysical materialism of positivism toward of recognition of

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[30]In "Mathematics and Metaphysicians" Bertrand Russell provides an excellent summary of the break from nature in geometry: "It was formerly supposed that Geometry was the study of the nature of the space in which we live, and accordingly it was urged, by those who held that what exists can only be known empirically, that Geometry should really be regarded as belonging to applied mathematics. But it has gradually appeared, by the increase of non-Euclidean systems, that Geometry throws no more light upon the nature of space than Arithmetic throws upon the population of the United States. . . . Whether Euclid's axioms are true is a question as to which the pure mathematician is indifferent; and, what is more, it is a question which it is theoretically impossible to answer with certainty in the affirmative" (92).

the ways in which discursive representations condition the production of knowledge. For Stein in particular, the issue is the discursive temporality of language. As she points out, in both theory and practice, language itself is structured by differences and repetitions that set in motion a kind of temporal play among its elements, creating linguistic effects, rather than drawing attention to some kind of extra-linguistic object or referent. (In this regard, Stein can be compared to the structural linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, who also draws attention to the differential relationships of language.) This temporal play, as we saw in the negative textuality of Tender Buttons, is characterized by a kaleidoscopic alternation of order and disorder, sense and nonsense. In attending to and foregrounding this unique temporality of language, Stein undermines totalizing modes of thinking about the world, developing instead what might be called a "timely materialism."

Gertrude Stein, Cubism, and the Experience of Modernity

In Stein's view, the critique of Euclidean space in Cubism and in her Cubist-inspired writings is not simply an intellectual or artistic trend. It is intimately related to the unique material conditions of the modern world, to the experience of modernity. Stein often suggests this view in an abstract way, particularly when she makes such claims as "The only thing that is different from one time to another is what is seen and what is seen depends upon how everybody is doing everything." Here Stein simply posits a theoretical relationship between the composition of what is seen and the everyday lived experience of "everybody." In Picasso, however, Stein gets more specific about the material basis of Cubism, suggesting yet another way in which her work may be considered a timely materialism.

In particular, she links Cubism to the disorienting experience of World War I. In a well-known anecdote, Stein talks about Picasso and her seeing camouflage for the first time and about how Picasso saw it as an instance of Cubism. At this point, after suggesting the relationship between Cubism and modern warfare, Stein proceeds to develop the connection further, writing,

> Really the composition of this war, 1914-1918, was not the composition of all previous wars, the composition was not a composition in which there was one man in the centre surrounded by a lot of other men but a composition that had neither a beginning nor an end, a composition of which one corner was as important as another, in fact the composition of cubism (11).

In this passage, Stein draws a significant parallel between Cubist compositions and the logistics of command and troop movement in World War I. The key point of the analogy is that both "compositions" lack a controlling centre, that is, both are organized along the random lines of montage. In this comparison, Stein points to a reason why Cubism may be considered unique to the twentieth century: it responds to the unique modern experience of fragmentation that manifested itself in World War I in terms of decentralized command.

Implicitly linking this experience to the experience of technology (which allows for the decentralization of which Stein speaks), Stein makes herself explicitly clear on this matter at the conclusion of Picasso. Talking about the importance of the airplane, Stein writes,

> One must not forget that the earth seen from an airplane is more splendid than the earth seen from an automobile. The automobile is the end of progress on the

earth, it goes quicker but essentially the landscapes seen from an automobile are the same as the landscapes seen from a carriage, a train, a wagon, or in walking. But the earth seen from an airplane is something else. So the twentieth century is not the same as the nineteenth century and it is very interesting knowing that Picasso has never seen the earth from an airplane, that being of the twentieth century he inevitably knew that the earth is not the same as in the nineteenth century, he knew it, he made it, inevitably he made it different and what he made is a thing that now all the world can see. When I was in America I for the first time traveled pretty much all the time in an airplane and when I looked at the earth I saw all the lines of cubism made at a time when not any painter had ever gone up in an airplane. I saw there on the earth the mingling lines of Picasso, coming and going, developing and destroying themselves, . . . yes I saw and once more I knew that a creator is contemporary, he understands what is contemporary when the contemporaries do not yet know it, but he is contemporary and as the twentieth century is a century which sees the earth as no one has ever seen it, the earth has a splendor that it never has had, and as everything destroys itself in the twentieth century and nothing continues, so then the twentieth century has a splendor which is its own and Picasso is of this century, he has that strange quality of an earth that one has never seen and of things destroyed as they have never been destroyed. So then Picasso has his splendor. . . Yes. Thank you. (49-50).

In talking about the importance of the airplane Stein dwells on the unique kind of perspective on the twentieth century that it offers to artists. Such a perspective, Stein notes, reveals already the lines of Cubism, proving that artists are a part of their time. But

what it shows in particular, Stein stresses, is the difference between the twentieth century and the nineteenth century, and that difference lies in the fact "that everything destroys itself in the twentieth century." In Stein's brief portrait of modernity, "nothing continues," and "things [are] destroyed as they have never been destroyed." For Stein, the experience of modernity is precisely the experience of the transient and ephemeral nature of things. It is the shocking experience of discontinuous temporality and change on a large scale, and the structure of space itself is not exempt from this kind of experience.

In this regard, Stein can be said to anticipate the findings of late twentieth-century cultural theorists of modernity. In The Production of Space (1974, tr. 1991), for instance, Henri Lefebvre describes the breakup of classical space much like Stein and the Cubists, grounding it in larger social and economic transformations. In a key paragraph Lefebvre writes,

> 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 thitherto enshrined in everyday discourse, just as in abstract thought, as the environment of and channel for communications; 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. Such were the shocks and onslaughts suffered by this space that today it retains but a feeble pedagogical reality, and then only with great difficulty, within a conservative educational system. Euclidean and perspectivist space have disappeared as systems of reference, along with other former "commonplaces" such as the town, history,

> paternity, the tonal system in music, traditional morality, and so forth. This was truly a crucial moment. Naturally, "common-sense" space, Euclidean space and perspectivist space did not disappear in a puff of smoke without leaving any trace in our consciousness, knowledge or educational methods; they could no more have done so than elementary algebra and arithmetic, or grammar, or Newtonian physics. The fact remains that it is too late for destroying codes in the name of a critical theory; our task, rather, is to describe their already completed destruction. . . . (26)

In this passage Lefebvre presents a highly developed understanding of the relationship between the breakup of Euclidean space and modernity. While certainly more detailed, wide-ranging, and theoretical than Stein's expository writings, this understanding is essentially similar to Stein's. In other words, both Lefebvre and Stein see Euclidean space as a human construct or representation that at first pervades social practice but that finally shatters under the pressure of changing socio-economic and political conditions.

This view has been echoed by many subsequent cultural theorists, most notably by Stephen Kern and David Harvey. In The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918 (1983) Kern argues that "From around 1880 to the outbreak of World War I a series of sweeping changes in technology and culture created distinctive new modes of thinking about and experiencing time and space" (1). Similarly, in The Condition of Postmodernity (1990) Harvey argues that the modern world has been, and is continuing to be, transformed by "time-space compression," or socio-economic "processes that so revolutionize the objective qualities of space and time that we are forced to alter, sometimes in quite radical ways, how we represent the world to ourselves" (240). What Kern and Harvey are

attempting to characterize in these well-known studies is the general experience of modernity, what Marshall Berman, drawing on Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, has called the experience of "permanent revolution" (95) in which all that is solid melts into air, even the most common sense conception of space, Euclidean geometry.

It is precisely this sense of permanent revolution that Stein is trying to capture in her theoretical writings and, more importantly, in her fiction and poetry. For Stein, as we have seen, modernity is the experience of destruction in which "nothing continues," in which "everything destroys itself." It is this experience that she conveys through the fragmentary forms of her prose poems in Tender Buttons. Stein can thus be seen to be concerned not only with the temporality of language but also with the temporality of history, whose influence, Stein repeatedly argues, is continuously registered by the arts. Stein's work can thus be seen to be a timely materialism in that it attends to the ways in which the discontinuous and destructive temporality of modernity shapes the production of space and art. Such a focus, as we have seen, was anticipated by Conrad in The Secret Agent, where the destructive and revolutionary forces of time (bombs and political parties) are played out against the backdrop of urban environments and the famous Greenwich Observatory; but Stein, of course, is less reactionary and conservative about the changes that are taking place.

Chapter 4:

The Materialism of History:

Time, Narrative, and Citation in James Joyce and Walter Benjamin

> Then Mr Cape and his printers gave me trouble. They set the book with perverted commas and I insisted on their removal by the sergeant-at-arms.
>
> James Joyce, on problems with French translation of Ulysses, Letter (1924)

> This project must raise the art of quoting without quotation marks to the very highest level. Its theory is intimately linked to that of montage.
>
> Walter Benjamin, on methodology of the Arcades Project, "N" (1928-1940)

Another area of inquiry in the natural and human sciences to experience a foundational crisis in the late-nineteenth- and early twentieth-century is the discipline of history, including the fields of historiography and philosophy of history.[31] The "crisis of historicism," as it was known, was yet another version of the more general crisis of positivism, like the decentering of Euclidean geometry in mathematics. As historian Hayden White has explained, nineteenth-century historians followed the scientistic trends of their day by striving to place the study of history on an equal footing with scientific materialism. In the early part of the century they attempted to counter the Enlightenment's ironic conception of history with various kinds of theory and practice

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[31] My summary of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century developments in historiography, here and throughout this chapter, is based on Hayden White, Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe (1973) and Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism (1978); and Charles R. Bambach, Heidegger, Dilthey, and the Crisis of Historicism (1995).

grounded in "empathy." This initial Romantic attempt to achieve some kind of objectivity in the study of history was taken up by more scientifically-minded historians, who, from around 1830 to 1870, "were inspired by the hope of creating a perspective on the historical process that would be as 'objective' as that from which scientists view the process of nature and as 'realistic' a[s] that from which the statesmen of the period directed the fortunes of nations" (White Metahistory 39). Among the key historians of this phase were Jules Michelet, Leopold von Ranke, Alexis de Tocqueville, and Jacob Burckhardt. The result of their efforts, however, as White has shown, was only "a number of competing realisms" and a steady "descent into Irony which was to characterize the historical consciousness of the last phase of the historical reflection of the age, the so-called crisis of historicism which developed during the last third of the century" (Metahistory 40). Just as the proliferation of Non-Euclidean geometries undermined the conception of mathematical objectivity, so too did the development of different realistic methodologies subvert the notion of historical objectivity. As White neatly summarizes, "The consistent elaboration of a number of equally comprehensive and plausible, yet apparently mutually exclusive, conceptions of the same sets of events was enough to undermine confidence in history's claim to 'objectivity,' 'scientificity,' and 'realism'" (41). The attempt to develop a realistic science of history, including "man," society, and culture, resulted only in a "historicization of the very concept of objectivity itself" (280) and a questioning of narrative accounts of history and their various generic modes (tragic, comic, etc.).

This crisis of historicism abated a little as it was carried over into the early twentieth century, but it was exacerbated again by the tragic experience of World War I,

joining the more general sense of crisis endemic to the experience of modernism as a whole. As historian Charles R. Bambach has noted,

> It was not until after the Great War, when the carnage brought on by the new technologies had resulted in widespread political chaos, economic collapse, and social dislocation, that there occurred a wholesale dissolution of historicist thinking. Following the "catastrophe of 1918" in Germany, Oswald Spengler's Decline of the West (1918) and Theodor Lessing's History as the Bestowal of Meaning on the Meaningless (1919) echoed the generational mood of lost faith and expressed in exemplary fashion the crisis-mentality of modernism. (7)

The classical scientific historicism of the nineteenth century had assumed that time was successive, continuous, linear, and unified, that it was a "natural temporality that allowed for . . . a causally demonstrable continuum of historical effect" (9). For this reason, it had found various modes of "realistic narrative" suitable for historical representation, as it too shares the same, essentially Enlightenment assumption about time. Such an assumption, however, could not survive the cataclysmic events of World War I. A wholesale questioning of time and narrative followed. In fact, as Bambach argues, modernism itself "signifies a new understanding of time and narrative. In modernist time, events no longer cohere; their unity is disrupted by a break in the line of history" (7). What emerges out of the experience of World War I—and modernity, more generally— is the "modern experience of history [as] acausal, discontinuous, and ironic" (9), and this experience does not lend itself to traditional narrative organization. "For the modernist," as Bambach explains, "the text of history reads more like a newspaper divided into unrelated columns than like a unitary narrative" (9). To the modern historian the grand nineteenth-century

master narratives of universal history no longer seemed possible in the light of the modern experience of fragmentation and destruction.

Along with this modernist critique of narrative (and language) comes an equally important critique of historicism's scientific claim to "value-free judgment and neutral perspective" (9). As Bambach indicates, "historicism was completely dependent on ideals of scientific thinking from the early modern era, ideals dominated by Cartesian-Kantian notions of rationality, consciousness, methodological access to truth and philosophical certitude" (12). Following the experience of World War I, such ideals seemed metaphysical rather than scientific; in fact, they were the ideals of positivism, whose faith in objectivity and a neutral observation language had previously pervaded the natural and human sciences. These ideals, which assumed the possibility of realistic representation, were thoroughly critiqued until, by the time of Martin Heidegger's Nietzsche lectures of the 1930s, "historicism had ceased to be a viable cultural force" (15).

As these introductory remarks on historiographical theory and practice in the nineteenth century and early-twentieth century make clear, the modern development of the study of history parallels the development of literary modernism. In effect, they both move from a realist position inspired by positivistic beliefs in objectivity and pure observation language to an ironic skepticism about representing "reality" at all. Along the way, they also develop a similar distrust of linear temporality and realistic narrative techniques, particularly traditional modes of emplotment. In this chapter, as an example of the extent to which modern historiography and literary modernism can parallel each other, I examine the work of two extraordinary modernists, Walter Benjamin and James Joyce. What makes these two worth studying together is that not only do they both critique

positivist assumptions about objectivity, representation, narrative and time, but they also do so through a similar interest in disrupting the traditional relationship between quotation marks and discourse, creating compositional forms as discontinuous as the columns on the page of a newspaper.

As traditionally understood, a discourse outside of quotation marks assumes the authoritative position of a metanarrative or metalanguage that fully explains and accounts for the discourse within quotations marks, which has been taken out of context. Such a view is typical of realistic narratives, which distinguish between the authoritative, all-knowing voice of the narrator/historian and the dialogue or thought of characters or historical personages. Both Benjamin and Joyce reject this particular view of the relationship between discourse and quotation marks. While they both rely on quotations in their work, their quotations are "quotationless" quotations. Joyce always insisted on the removal of "perverted commas," while Benjamin in his Arcades Project—a study of nineteenth-century Paris—had hoped to "raise the art of quoting without quotation marks to the very highest level." In effect, they both renounced the authority of metanarratives; instead, they preferred a heterogeneous montage of arranged discourses or what Roland Barthes aptly calls "a tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centres of culture" ("Death" 146). The implication, as we shall see, is that the objectivity and pure observation language of positivist representation is not possible, nor is realistic (positivist) narrative and the notion of linear, causal temporality that informs it. As was the case with Gertrude Stein, language and its peculiar temporality comes to the forefront in the views of Benjamin and Joyce. Rather than attempting to represent accurately people, places, things, and events once and for all, Joyce and Benjamin critique identity thinking and the

transparency of the sign, realizing the extent to which language and generic or discursive conventions shape the apprehension of the world. They attend to the relationships between contending discourses, preferring a heterogeneous montage of quotationless citations that creates a semantic open-endedness. Marking the eclipse of traditional narrative, their views are ironic, and as we also shall see, they were both made possible by the new modern experience of time as discontinuous.

Walter Benjamin and the Crisis of Historicism

Much of Benjamin's later work revolves around his fundamental distinction between historical materialism and historicism. Frequently, Benjamin identifies his work as a historical materialist approach to history, and time and again he indicates that his primary opponent is historicism's historicist. A study of the significance of historical materialism and historicism in the later work of Benjamin will yield an understanding of Benjamin's constructive and revolutionary approach to history, including his understanding of narrative, time, quotations, and montage, and it will lay the groundwork for a comparative analysis with Joyce's similar aesthetic.

In Konvolut N, first of all, a collection of notes for the Arcades project that was intended to provide the foundation for an epistemological armature, Benjamin outlines, in contradistinction to historicism, a historical materialist approach to apprehending history, one that is quite compatible with much of Benjamin's later work, such as "Central Park," "Eduard Fuchs," "The Storyteller," "Theses on the Philosophy of History," and "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire." Such an approach is also compatible, as we shall see, with Benjamin's earlier important study, The Origin of German Tragic Drama (1928)—a work

that, in my mind, joins Nietzche's The Birth of Tragedy (1872) and Lukács' The Theory of the Novel (1920) as exemplary philosophical statements of the emergent post-positivist modern attitude. Compatibility aside, the prime objective of Benjamin's historical materialist approach is "the dissolution of mythology into the space of history" (45). For Benjamin, mythology is the product of a certain mode of apprehension which Benjamin calls historicism or "vulgar naturalism" (48). Historicism, the academic opponent of historical materialism, binds "the enormous energy of history" in the "'once upon a time" of classical historical narrative," a type of narrative that shows things "as they really were" (51). This type of narrative, Benjamin explains, is based on "reconstruction" and "empathy," in that the historicist believes that he can identify with the historical event and that he can objectively portray it (60). Thus, in apprehending the historical event in-and-of-itself, in its purity, so to speak, historicism endorses, whether consciously or unconsciously, its chief doctrine, namely, that "if you want to relive an epoch, forget that you know what happened since" (62).

In other words, historicism claims to be a disinterested mode of historical apprehension, one which produces accurate representations and narratives of the past; and thus, as Benjamin explains in "Theses on the Philosophy of History," "Historicism rightly culminates in universal history," which provides an eternal image of the past, or a type of Hegelian narrative involving origins, linearity, and teleological development (263). Universal history, as Benjamin explains, is additive, in that it tells "the sequence of events like beads of a rosary" (263). The sequence of events, moreover, forms a causal series, or a continuity, and thus, universal history is closely aligned with narratives of progress and

decline, which, according to Benjamin, are really "two sides of one and the same thing" ("N" 48).

In the end, what the historicist produces is a history in his own image. For the historicist, all of history is but a prelude to the rise of the social relations he inhabits, a naturalized state of affairs which he perceives to be the end of history. The end result is what Benjamin calls homogeneous empty time, or the eternal recurrence of the same, the model of which is the calendar, which is not simply a means of preserving a certain mythic understanding of history. As Benjamin explains, after a great revolution a new calendar is always introduced. "The initial day of a calendar," Benjamin remarks, "serves as a historical time lapse camera. And, basically, it is the same day that keeps recurring in the guise of holidays, which are days of remembrance" ("Theses" 261). As an eternal recurrence of the founding day of the state, the calendar is a manifestation of mythical time, the basis of which is repetition. Through empathy, furthermore, the historicist identifies with the victors of history, synchronizing the calendar with the past. Thus, the historicist also collaborates with the rulers of his society. As Benjamin explains,

> [A]ll rulers are the heirs of those who conquered before them. Hence, empathy with the victory invariably benefits the rulers. Historical materialists know what that means. Whoever has emerged victorious participates to this day in the triumphal procession in which the present rulers step over those who are lying prostrate. ("Theses" 256)

The result of all this homogenization of history is a mythic conformity akin to Fascism. In other words, all of history, as it is viewed from the perspective of historicism, is a

progressive preparation for the state, and thus, through identification with the past, the state achieves mythic status.

Given such an oppressive union between politics and history, it is no wonder that Benjamin is so adamant about debunking mythologized history. As Benjamin indicates in a short note to himself, "reason must clear the entire ground and rid it of the underbrush of delusion and myth" ("N" 44). It is clear, therefore, as Richard Wolin indicates, that Benjamin regards this emergence of myth in modernity to be a social regression to prehistory, as it marks a return to the notion of cyclical time (174). But why, specifically, must myths be debunked? In The Dialectics of Seeing Susan Buck-Morss provides an elaborate answer, explaining,

> Within myth, the passage of time takes the form of predetermination. The course of events is said to be predestined by the gods, written in the stars, spoken by oracles, or inscribed in sacred texts. Strictly speaking, myth and history are incompatible. The former dictates that because human beings are powerless to interfere in the workings of fate, nothing truly new can happen, while the concept of history implies the possibility of human influence upon events, and with it, the moral and political responsibility of people as conscious agents to shape their own destiny. (78)

Myth, in other words, in portraying the present as unavoidable, obscures the fact that society is the product of human labor and social relations, and thus it teaches resignation and renunciation before the status quo. The "political point," concludes Buck-Morss, "is that when temporality is conceived under the mythic sign of predetermination, people are convinced that the present course of events cannot be resisted" (79). In the end, with its

naïve but politically potent notions of narrative, representation, and unmediated apprehension, historicism produces a positivist mythology that justifies and naturalizes the state, toward the ultimate goals of reproducing social relations and promulgating or interpellating a consciousness of resignation and acquiescence.

In "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" Benjamin discusses this modern experience of mythic consciousness. According to Benjamin, "the blinding age of big-scale industrialism" is an environment of traumatic shocks that change the pattern or structure of experience (157), producing what Benjamin calls a complimentary or second nature, or what Marxism calls false consciousness. Adapting Freud's theories from Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920), Benjamin indicates that this false consciousness serves as a protection or shield against stimuli or experience, such that the "shock [of modernity] is . . . cushioned [and] parried by consciousness" (162). Such a consciousness, as Benjamin further explains, is a consciousness of repetition, automation, and mechanization, and thus, to a certain extent, it is a symptom of the growing rationalization and taylorization of society. As an experience of the eternal-recurrence-of-the-same, as an experience of synchronic simultaneity, such a consciousness is also one from which the experience of death is excluded, the result of which is an experience of time that resembles "the miserable endlessness of a scroll" (185). Those who inhabit such a mythic time, according to Benjamin, are the "dry dwellers of eternity," who "have never been touched by death" ("Storyteller" 94). Thus, in the end, historicism and mythic consciousness are intimately connected, in that they are both an expression of repetition, as well as of social and material relations.

To sum up things so far, for Benjamin historicism's universal history is mythological or metaphysical because it fails to realize the limitations of the naïve narrative models to which it conforms.[32] In other words, universal history reduces the complex, overdetermined field of history to a simple, linear sequence of events or what Benjamin calls "the 'Once upon a time' of classical historical narrative" ("N" 51). Lacking the critical self-consciousness to realize the naïve aesthetic assumptions behind its practice, such an historiographical approach establishes a simple "causal connection between various moments in history," adding up the sequence of events, as if they were "the beads of a rosary" ("Theses" 263). Universal history, consequently, privileges the "continuity" of plot at the expense of discontinuity ("N" 64). It is clear, therefore, that universal history, as a narrative, is no more than an expression of the linear temporality of the Enlightenment. At best universal history is a kind of "vulgar naturalism" ("N" 48) that assumes the transparency of the sign. At worst it is a Hegelian master-narrative involving origins and teleological development, where all the manifold differences of history and culture are assimilated by the economy of a World Spirit that progresses toward its final goal, the manifestation of the State. Such a narrative has its aesthetic equivalent, too, for in attempting to bring an "epic element" ("N" 65) to history, it conforms to the epic genre, which, as Bakhtin has indicated (Dialogic 3-40), is properly concerned with the foundation of the state. In either case, for the historicist all of history is but a providential, linear prelude to the social relations he inhabits, a naturalized, and thus mythologized, state of affairs that he perceives to be the end of history.

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[32]For a similar critique of the metaphysical concept of history, see Jacques Derrida, Positions (1981), pp. 56-60.

In addition to being mythological because it reduces the complexity of history to linear realistic narratives, historicism is also mythological because it claims to have access to a disinterested mode of historical apprehension, a positivistic but finally transcendental point of view which is none other than that of the Enlightenment subject. For Benjamin this objective mode of perception is associated with the nineteenth-century historian, Leopold von Ranke, who believed that his scientific approach to history could depict it "the way it really was" ("Theses 255). Through "empathy," Benjamin explains, historicists like Ranke believe that they can observe historical events in-and-of-themselves, in their purity, so to speak ("N" 60). Thus, historicists believe that they can reconstruct historical events and "relive an epoch" as it actually happened ("N" 62). The result of their disinterested, unmediated apprehensions, Benjamin explains, is "an eternal image of the past" or a fixed representation of events that excludes interpretive possibilities as well as alternative perspectives. Such an image not only prevents critical reassessment of the past, but also usually invalidates the study of certain aspects or dimensions of history that historicists deem unhistorical, such as everyday life or popular culture. Ultimately, what historicists such as Ranke fail to realize, Benjamin argues, is that they identify exclusively with the victors of history and that their "empathy with the victor invariably benefits the rulers" of the present ("Theses" 257). As in the case with linear narratives, in positing the existence of an Archimedean perspective on history, historicists fail to perceive the ideological dimension of their practice; in other words, they fail to perceive the extent to which their knowledge of history is structured and determined by power.

As a means of combating historicism, as a means of producing an experience that will crack the hard shell of false consciousness and release pent up energies for

revolutionary ends, Benjamin develops his historical materialist approach to history. In "Eduard Fuchs, Collector and Historian," after praising Engels' critique of linear, progressive history, Benjamin provides a fundamental statement on historical materialism, saying,

> Historicism presents an eternal image of the past, historical materialism a specific and unique engagement with it. The substitution of the act of construction for the epic dimension proves to be the condition of the engagement. In it these powerful forces that lie bound in the "once-upon-a-time" of historicism are set free. The task of historical materialism is to set to work an engagement with history original to every present. It has recourse to a consciousness of the present that shatters the continuum of history. (352)

In place of the eternal epic or mythic image of the past, the basis of which is unmediated, disinterested apprehension, linear progressive narratives, and the notion of representational or positivistic identity; in place of empathy, reconstruction, and the once-upon-a-time of historicism, Benjamin substitutes a non-narrative approach to history, one involving an ever-renewed constructive engagement, rather than detached scientific contemplation. Such a constructive engagement recognizes the historical situation of the historian himself, the discursive limitations involved with his work, and the multiple possibilities for interpreting or reading history, which are in the hands of the reader as much as the historian. Rather than claiming to occupy a transcendent, disinterested relationship to history, as historicism does, Benjamin claims to occupy nothing more than an immanent relationship to history. As Richard Sieburth notes, Benjamin renounces "the panoptic presumption of traditional historicism [and] places himself at the eye- or street-

level of history" (29). In other words, Benjamin recognizes that he is not outside history, looking down on it objectively, but within history, occupying the same common field as everyone else, a field of adjacent often competing discourses, each of which constituting a world of values unto itself. As Benjamin argues, such a field of disparate discourses—in which both the historian and the historical object reside—cannot be adequately represented by linear narratives and its mastering narrators because they reduce the complexity and diversity of that field.

As a means of representing history in a more open-ended manner, historical materialism relies on montage and quotation. As Benjamin indicates in his notes for the Arcades project, "The project must raise the art of quoting without quotation marks to the very highest level. Its theory is intimately linked to that of montage" ("N" 45). Noting on another occasion that his method is "literary montage," Benjamin clarifies his remarks, indicating that he "need say nothing. Only exhibit" (47). In order "to carry the montage principle into history," Benjamin realizes that he must produce constellations, configurations, or what he calls "dialectical images" (48). Such a technique, which depends upon the arbitrary but significant relations among disparate discourses, rather than on chronological arrangement, blasts the object in question from the reified continuum of history and thus produces a "dialectical experience" that alters mythic consciousness and "dissipate[s] the appearance of things always being the same" (63). As Theodor Adorno explains in "A Portrait of Walter Benjamin,"

> Benjamin's intention was to eliminate all over commentary and to have the meanings emerge solely through a shocking montage of the material. His aim was not merely for philosophy to catch up to surrealism, but for it to become

> surrealistic. In One-Way Street he wrote that citations from his works were like highwaymen, who suddenly descend on the reader to rob him of his convictions. He meant this literally. The culmination of his anti-subjectivism, his major work was to consist solely of citations. (239)

Here, at this moment in Benjamin's philosophy of constructive engagement, as characterized by Adorno, the Enlightenment and Post-Enlightenment meet; for, on the one hand, Benjamin believes in emancipation, ideology, and false-consciousness, all of which are Enlightenment notions; while, on the other hand, Benjamin subscribes all the more to such Post-Enlightenment notions as Surrealism, the emphases of which are irrationality, anti-representationalism, and the unconscious. Thus, what Benjamin provides is, as Margaret Cohen has indicated, a kind of Gothic Marxism, or a form of critique that attends to the ghosts that haunt Enlightenment categories, as historical materialism attends to the fissures in the narratives and representations of historicism. In other words, Benjamin provides the basis for a quasi-Enlightenment critique, the goal of which is "to win the energies of intoxication for the revolution" ("Surrealism" 189). As one who prepares a "banquet for the past" and who "invites those who are departed to the table," the historical materialist, bringing the forgotten past and the reified present into conjunction, reveals what has been excluded from historicism's universal history, disrupting its narratives and representations, and thus calling into question its objectivity, and revealing new possibilities formerly masked by mythic repetition ("N" 74).[33]

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[33] In this respect Benjamin's work is connected to Jacques Derrida's Specters of Marx and Fredric Jameson's "Marx's Purloined Letter," both of which discuss the political significance of Messianic experience.

The success of this quasi-Enlightenment critique, in any case, is rooted in Benjamin's radical and complex application of montage, which Richard Wolin has aptly defined as a "juxtaposition of disparate elements, in which no one element takes precedence over another" (xliii). For Benjamin, in other words, the montage technique can liberate or redeem the historical object from its coerced position within the narratives and representations of historicism, for montage is based not on the privileged and ultimately spurious subjectivity of the observer and the transparency of the sign, but on the fluctuating and divergent discursive representations of the objects themselves. Such a montage institutes a dialectical, rather than a chronological, temporality. As Benjamin explains, "Historical materialism strives neither for a homogeneous nor for a continuous presentation of history" (60), both of which assume the validity of Enlightenment temporality. Instead, historical materialism strives for a "dialectical presentation" in which "historical evidence always polarizes into fore- and after-history in a new way, never in the same way" (60). Such a presentation, which Benjamin terms dialectics at a standstill because it accounts for the play of historical differences without placing them within a linear narrative of universal history, is a "force field" (60) of discursive tensions that constantly reconfigures itself. This act of semantic reconfiguration that montage makes possible is a temporal act, but it is not chronological or linear. It is dialectical, as it is concerned with the shifting lateral relationships between discourses rather than the progressive unfolding of time. Thus, in a paradoxical way, Benjamin's dialectical method accounts for both the autonomy and the overdetermination of the historical object. Objects are autonomous in that they can be endlessly interpreted, and thus they maintain a certain inviolability or resistance. But objects, like dreams, are also overdetermined in that

they must always signify, and can only signify, within ever-shifting contextual relationships.[34] This distinction is significant because, in the end, Benjamin is not advocating a nihilistic relativism; on the contrary, Benjamin is advocating a critical understanding of the ways in which the present organizes or represses the objects of history. For Benjamin, "The materialist presentation of history leads the past to place the present in a critical condition" ("N" 60). Benjamin's goal, in other words, is political, not nihilistic, as he is seeking to shock the dry dwellers of eternity, to shatter their mythic world of false consciousness, and, through this estrangement, to induce a dialectical experience that releases "the unforgettable" and sets in motion a montage or "a sequence of images," as if the inhabitants of eternity were experiencing death ("Storyteller" 94).

In the final analysis, Theodor Adorno's characterization of Benjamin's atonal or centerless compositional technique clarifies the significance of the montage method and thus clearly distinguishes Benjamin's method from the historicist's:

> The internal composition of Benjamin's prose is . . . discomfiting in the way the ideas are linked . . . . For the Benjaminian idea in its strict form excludes not only fundamental motifs but also their development and elaboration, the whole mechanism of premise, assertion, and proof, of thesis and result. Just as in its most uncompromising representatives modern music no longer tolerates any elaboration, any distinction between theme and development, but instead every musical idea, even every note, stands equally near the center, so too Benjamin's philosophy is "athematic." It is dialectics at a standstill in another sense as well, in that it allots

[34] For Freud's important use of this term, see his Interpretation of Dreams, pp. 316-319.

not time to internal development but instead receives its form from the constellation formed by the individual statements. ("Introduction" 229)

Benjamin's method, as Adorno explains, is athematic, in that it is not content oriented; that is, it is not based on the transparency of the sign, identity-thinking, or realistic representation. Instead, Benjamin's method is based on performance, presentation, and construction, or on what is called darstellung, the philosophical mode of representation that mediates each element through the totality of elements, no one element taking precedence over another. Providing a useful metaphor for Benjamin's method, Adorno further explains that "The rebus is the model of [Benjamin's] philosophy" ("Portrait" 230). Here Adorno draws on Freud's influential description of a dream as a "picture-puzzle" in The Interpretation of Dreams (1900).[35] What Adorno is trying to get at is that disparate elements, meaningless in-and-of-themselves, may signify in different ways depending on their context or on how they are ordered or arranged. For Benjmain, Adorno is saying, meaning is strictly speaking a question of the relationships between various elements, not a question of essences, identities, signifieds, or quiddities. This linguistic fact must necessarily leave the representation, narration, and interpretation of history open-ended, and this semantic open-endedness is precisely what Benjamin's heterogeneous montage of quotations is supposed to achieve.

In his late historical work it can thus be seen that Benjamin returns to his earlier thinking on language and knowledge in the Origin of German Tragic Drama. In this study

[35] See pp. 311-312. Another interesting aspect of Freud's comparing a dream to a rebus is not that he suggests that each of the pictorial images in dreams should be translated into words, but that he leaves out the element of syntax. Precisely how these "translated" images are to relate together in a syntactic whole is left out. This aspect of Freud's thinking leaves his interpretative method necessarily open-ended.

of the German Baroque trauerspiel, Benjamin distinguishes between knowledge and truth much like he later distinguishes between historicism and historical materialism. As Benjamin explains, "Knowledge is possession. Its very object is determined by the fact that it must be taken possession of—even if in a transcendental sense—in the consciousness. The quality of possession remains. . . . For knowledge, method is a way of acquiring its object" (29). Here we have clearly stated the positivist conception of knowledge in which the subject apprehends the object as it is in-itself. This conception assumes the possibility of "concepts" that can accurately represent the world, and this conception in turn assumes a "symbolic" understanding of language in which sign and thing coincide. It assumes, in other words, the possibility of positivism's (and historicism's) pure observation language. Truth, on the other hand, "bodied forth in the dance of represented ideas, resists being projected, by whatever means, in the realm of knowledge" (29). For Benjamin, "Truth is the death of intention" (36). It is not, in other words, the possession of a subject. It rejects the possibility that the subject can apprehend the world objectively, and thus it also rejects "empathy" (42). Instead of concepts, truth produces ideas, which are to be related to the phenomena that they represent, but not to be completely identified with them. "Phenomena," Benjamin explains, "are not incorporated in ideas. They are not contained in them" (34). Instead of possessing phenomena like concepts, they are a kind of contingent "virtual arrangement" of phenomena (34). As Benjamin famously explains, "Ideas are to objects as constellations are to stars. This means, in the first place, that they are neither their concepts nor their laws. They do not contribute to the knowledge of phenomena, and in no way can they later be criteria with which to judge the existence of ideas" (34). Unlike in concepts,

objects in ideas achieve a certain kind of autonomy, as do the stars in the sky, for just as the stars can be endlessly constellated, so too can objects be endlessly configured, as no one object, detached from the rest, takes precedence over the others, organizing them into a final pattern. In this understanding of the concept, in which temporal reconfiguration plays an important role, significance is not to be equated with the intrinsic properties of the object in question, but with the way in which they are constituted and organized in language.

Such a view of epistemology, according to Benjamin, assumes an allegorical view of language.[36] Unlike the symbolic view, which assumes the transparency of the sign, the allegorical view assumes a fundamental and insurmountable division between language and its object. This division, moreover, has everything to do with history as well as with the aesthetics of the trauerspiel, just as the symbolic view has to do with historicism and its empathic, positivist narratives. For Benjamin, the trauerspiel is a particular kind of aesthetic representation of history that focuses on the failure of language to represent reality. It holds an allegorical or ironic view of history in which the transparency of the sign is critiqued. As Benjamin famously explained,

> Everything about history that, from the very beginning, has been untimely, sorrowful, unsuccessful, is expressed in a face—or rather in a death's head. . . . This is the heart of the allegorical way of seeing, of the baroque, secular explanation of history as the Passion of the world; its importance resides solely in the stations of its decline. The greater the significance, the greater the subjection

[36] For a similar view of allegory and symbol, see Paul de Man's "The Rhetoric of Temporality."

> to death, because death digs most deeply the jagged line of demarcation between physical nature and significance. But if nature has always been subject to the power of death, it is also truth that it has always been allegorical. (166)

In this almost poetic passage Benjamin makes it clear that the allegorical view of language assumes a "jagged line of demarcation between physical nature and significance" (166) because "Any person, any object, any relationship can mean absolutely anything else" (175). In terms of the trauerspiel, this view of language leads the writer to "pile up fragments ceaselessly, without any strict idea of a goal" (178), that is, simply to arrange discourses and to foreground the "constructed quality" of their representations (179). In philosophy, as just indicated, it leads to the construction of constellations or "mosaics" (28) of discourses in which individual parts have the ability to participate in changing patterns of significance—a kind of non-linear kaleidoscope of meaning.

In all of this can be seen an anticipation of Benjamin's later views of historical materialism. That Benjamin was still thinking about allegory late in his career is testified to in his "Central Park," a collection of notes on Baudelaire and nineteenth-century Paris in which Benjamin states "What is to be demonstrated is the antidote to myth in allegory" (46) and "Allegory is the armature of the modern" (49). But this kind of specific connection is not needed because the analogy between constellations, mosaics, and montages is clear enough. If anything distinguishes the early Benjamin from the later Benjamin, it is the latter's emphasis on politics as well as redemption. The early Benjamin focuses on redeeming the objects of history from an almost religious belief in the unrepresentability of things, a kind of negative theology. The later Benjamin joins this early view to a kind of political anarchism. What is clear, in any case, is that Benjamin's

historical method is anti-subjective, non-representational, and non-narrative, whether it is seen in the context of his study of the trauerspiel or historical materialism. For Benjamin, the people, objects, and events of history exceed these categories, just as the sublime exceeds the rationality of the Enlightenment. In the end, Benjamin's revolutionary method is a historical materialist one, as it is based on a shocking montage of quotationless quotations free of all commentary or metalanguage, the result of which, as the later Benjamin hoped, is a political and utopian experience that transcends the limited and limiting categories of historicism, an experience of the non-linear temporality of meaning.

James Joyce and the End of Realism

Although James Joyce and Walter Benjamin differ in many ways—the latter, for instance, is more obviously a politically committed writer than the other—they both adopt similar methods to their respective fields of interest. Both writers, in other words, critique the use of quotation marks, avoid simplistic narratives, and prefer deploying arrangements of discourses as opposed to expressing themselves directly. They also critique and discard traditional realistic modes of representation and the traditional notions of objectivity that go along with them. In short, they shun the use of metalanguages and the authoritative linguistic frames that they institute. Instead, they substitute the temporal play of competing discourses, quotationless quotations, providing a heightened awareness of the extent to which language shapes and constitutes the objects of our world. In the case of Joyce, as we shall see, this play of quotationless quotations is evident in Dubliners (1914), A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (1916), and Ulysses (1922), all of which move beyond the narrative realism of the nineteenth century.

Joyce, of course, critiqued what he called "perverted commas" and chose not to use them in any of his works, from Dubliners to Finnegans Wake (1939).[37] While he gave no specific indication as to why he left out quotation marks in his writings, the results of their absence are clear: a profusion of competing discourses and a lack of objectivity. Different kinds of discourses inhabit Joyce's works without any single one taking precedence over the others. They all occupy the same immanent plane, merely following each other in random succession. As Colin MacCabe explains, "Joyce's texts, without inverted commas, lack any final and privileged discourse within them which dominates the others through its claim of access to the real . . . . The text works paratactically, simply placing one event after another, with no ability to draw conclusions from this placing . . . a process through which the possibility of a metalanguage is systematically ruined" (27-28). Thus, as MacCabe concludes, Joyce's work as a whole, "in its refusal of a discourse which will explain everything, resists the reduction of the various discourses to one discourse shared by author and reader" (30). In other words, Joyce's work lacks a privileged authorial view, just as Benjamin's Arcade project would have been free of authoritative commentary. It thus moves beyond what MacCabe calls the "classic realist text" (15), the defining feature of which is the presence of a metalanguage established by quotation marks.

Even the ostensibly realistic or naturalistic short stories of Dubliners lack the expected objectivity associated with the genre. They, too, are montages of discourse, albeit on a much simpler level than A Portrait and Ulysses, the last obviously being the

[37] See Letter to Harriet Shaw Weaver, dated 11 July 1924, in James Joyce, Letters, ed. Stuart Gilbert, pp. 99-100.

most sophisticated example. In "The Dead," for instance, the narrator famously begins, "Lily, the caretaker's daughter, was literally run off her feet. Hardly had she brought one gentleman into the little pantry behind the office on the ground floor and helped him off with his overcoat than the wheezy hall-door bell clanged again and she had to scamper along the bare hallway to let in another guest" (190). This passage seems to be a typical example of realistic narration in which events are objectively described, but in truth, as Hugh Kenner has shown, the separate discourses of the narrator and of the character Lily tend to merge into one, as no quotation marks are used to demarcate the two (Joyce's 15-16). The phrase "literally run off her feet" is the most important instance of this merging. To be "run off your feet" is a figurative expression, but here it is nonsensically qualified by the word "literally." The implication is that this phrase is not the language of the educated narrator but of the uneducated caretaker's daughter. What the narrator employs here is free indirect discourse in which the boundary between the language of the narrator and those of the characters is undermined, thanks to the absence of quotation marks. It thus becomes difficult to arrange the discourses hierarchically and thus to explain them in the light of an authoritative metalanguage. The discourse of the narrator and that which he is reporting tends to become identified, and this phenomenon is a frequent occurrence in "The Dead" as well as throughout Dubliners. The overall result is to place the process of interpretation and evaluation into the hands of the reader, who must make sense of things without the aid of the narrator.

Another example of this confusion of discourses can be seen in "Clay." In Rhetoric and Death Ronald Schleifer points out a particularly interesting passage in this short story:

> Maria thought he was a colonel-looking gentleman and she reflected how much more polite he was than the young men who simply stared straight before them. The gentleman began to chat with her about Hallow Eve and the rainy weather. He supposed the bag was full of good things for the little ones and said it was only right that the youngsters should enjoy themselves while they were young. Maria agreed with him and favoured him with demure nods and hems. He was very nice with her, and when she was getting out at the Canal Bridge she thanked him and bowed, and he bowed to her and raised his hat and smiled agreeably; and while she was going up along the terrace, bending her tine head under the rain, she thought how easy it was to know a gentleman even when he had a drop taken. (114, qtd. in Schleifer, 67-68)

In this passage free indirect discourse is again used to render both the thoughts of the main character Maria and her conversation with the "gentleman." We see the presence of Maria's language in such phrases as "colonel-looking gentleman" but especially in the word "nice," a word that, as Schleifer notes, "recurs eleven times in seven pages" (68). How one is to evaluate and judge this passage is not clear, as the two discourses of the character and narrator are not distinct. It is not self-evident, for instance, that the man to whom Maria is speaking is a "gentleman." The hermeneutic difficulties are further intensified by the fact that the narrative relies on simple sentences and coordination, providing no prioritized levels of significance. As Schleifer notes, "The sentences here

move along, subject-verb-predicate, without any privileging of their elements. There is no syntactic hierarchy, and consequently little semantic hierarchy. Joyce, or rather this text, does not call attention to any element as crucial to interpretation" (68). What Schleifer describes here is the paratactic literary technique that MacCabe describes, the technique of simple juxtaposition without metalanguage. The result, as Schleifer accurately notes, is " a metonymic constellation of details, of things, none more or less important than any of the other details of this discourse. It is up to the reader to make sense of this chaos, to make it 'hang together,' as Rorty says, rather than to discover its hidden meaning" (68).

This type of hermeneutic chaos created by the paratactic technique and by the confusion of the discourses of the narrator and characters continues in A Portrait. In fact, the text seems to be governed by what Hugh Kenner in Joyce's Voices has called "The Uncle Charles Principle" (18). What Kenner is referring to is how the narrator takes on the idiom and manner of the character being described. His principle example is how the narrator uses Uncle Charles' actual words without quotation marks when he is describing him and his actions, words such as "salubrious," "mollifying," and "repaired" (305-306). For Kenner this is just one example of how Joyce's "fictions tend not to have a detached narrator, though they seem to have," as one cannot clearly separate the discourse of the narrator from the discourses of the characters (15). As Kenner explains, Joyce's "words are in such delicate equilibrium, like the components of a sensitive piece of apparatus, that they detect the gravitational field of the nearest person" (16). The result, Kenner concludes, is that "the narrative idiom need not be the narrator's" (18). This identification of the discourse of the narrator with that of the character is precisely what is seen in Dubliners, and it creates the same type of confusion regarding objectivity and

representation, engendering a constellation of fragmented discourses, of quotationless quotations.

A Portrait, however, takes this constellating of discourses even further than Dubliners. First of all, as the main character Stephen Dedalus ages from infancy to adulthood, the general style of the third person narration in the novel changes. Rather than depict things in a neutral, objective manner, the novel tends to employ the diction and syntax that Stephen would use at the moment. The novel thus begins with its famous opening of baby talk:

> Once upon a time and a very good time it was there was a moocow coming down along the road and this moocow that was coming down along the road met a nicens little boy named baby tuckoo. . . .
>
> His father told him that story: his father looked at him through a glass: he had a hairy face. (245)

The language of this passage is the language of Stephen as an infant, not the language of the narrator. As Stephen matures, the syntax and diction employed by the narrator become more mature and complex. In the next section of the novel, a few years later in Stephen's life, we read the following passage, noting as we do the developing style:

> His mother had told him not to speak with the rough boys in the college. Nice mother! The first day in the hall of the castle when she had said good bye she had put up her veil double to her nose to kiss him: and her nose and eyes were red. But he had pretended not to see that she was going to cry. She was a nice mother but she was not so nice when she cried. (247)

In this passage can be seen another mutation in style, along with more examples of free indirect discourse, such as "Nice mother!." Because of these global changes in style on the part of the narrator, it is difficult to gain any sense of objectivity; the reader is faced with a succession of styles that are essentially quotationless citations of Stephen's language.

When the adolescent Stephen later falls under the influence of romantic literature, another corresponding change in style occurs. In one representative passage we see Stephen poring "over a ragged translation of The Count of Monte Cristo" (308) and making an image of the splendid island cave in the novel out of materials he found around the house, only to grow tired of such physical images. As the narrator explains,

> When he had broken up this scenery, weary of its tinsel, there would come to his mind the bright picture of Marseilles, of sunny trellisses and of Mercedes. Outside Blackrock, on the road that led to the mountains, stood a small whitewashed house in the garden of which grew many rosebushes; and in the house, he told himself, another Mercedes lived . . . and in his imagination he lived through a long a train of adventures, marvelous as those in the book itself, towards the close of which there appeared an image of himself, grown older and sadder, standing in a moonlit garden with Mercedes who had so many years before slighted his love. (308-309)

In this passage can be seen an advance in syntax and diction, along with a romantic tone. For the first time we notice complex relative clauses and participials, as well as elegant (if clichéd) diction. Once again the narrator uses the language of the character to represent the character, blurring the distinction between narrator and character.

One more instance of this blurring in A Portrait should be considered, because it will lead to a very important point about the composition of the novel, pointing toward the compositional method of Ulysses itself. Still later in the novel, when an older Stephen begins to fall under the influence of the Catholic church, he hears at a retreat a sermon on the Last Things by Father Arnell that prompts him to reflect on his sins. As the narrator explains,

> Every word of it was for him. Against his sin, foul and secret, the whole wrath of God was aimed. The preacher's knife had probed deeply into his diseased conscience and he felt now that his soul was festering in sin. Yes, the preacher was right. God's turn had come. Like a beast in its lair his soul had lain down in its own filth but the blasts of the angel's trumpet had driven him forth from the darkness of sin into the light. The words of doom cried by the angel shattered in an instant his presumptuous peace. The wind of the last day blew through his mind; his sins, the jeweleyed harlots of his imagination, fled before the hurricane, squeaking like mice in their terror and huddled under a mane of hair. (368-369)

In this passage the narrator again employs the language of Stephen, blurring the distinction between the two of them. In this case, the narrator exchanges the earlier romantic rhetoric for the apocalyptic rhetoric of a Catholic sermon. The narrator does so because the discourse of Catholicism permeates and shapes Stephen's consciousness. In a sense, it can be said that Stephen "cites" the discourse of Father Arnell's sermon, just as the narrator cites Stephen's "own" discourse. A chain of citations are involved here, and this situation is further complicated by the fact that Father Arnell's sermon, as Joyce critics have demonstrated, is based on Hell Opened to Christians, To Caution Them from Entering

into It (1688, trans. in Dublin 1868), written by the Italian Jesuit Giovanni Pietro Pinamonti (1632-1703).[38] Father Arnell's sermon is thus a citation of a previous text as well; and this text in turn is part of a recognized Catholic genre treating the Last Things, death, judgment, heaven and hell. It thus cites the conventions of a preexisting body of works. A labyrinth of quotationless citations much more complicated than free indirect discourse is thus involved here: the narrator cites Stephen, who cites Father Arnell, who cites Pinamonti, who cites a Catholic devotional genre. The passage in question is a weave of quotations in which any sense of an originating voice, pristine vision, or objectivity is lost.

This example illustrates a very important principle of A Portrait and Ulysses, namely, that there is no zero-degree language, no metalanguage, only the citing of preexisting discourses or codes, for narrator and character alike. The novel itself, as we have seen, begins with the citation of a text, a children's story (just as Ulysses begins with the citation of the Catholic mass): "Once upon a time and a very good time it was there was a moocow coming down along the road and this moocow that was coming down along the road met a nicens little bow named baby tuckoo" (245). What is more, Stephen identifies with this text, as he identifies with the text of Father Arnell's sermon. According to the narrator, Stephen thinks that "He was baby tuckoo" (245), as he later thinks that he is a "sinner." This identification with baby tuckoo is immediately followed by Stephen's identification with the lyrics of a song: "O, the wild rose blossoms / On the little green

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[38] For more on Joyce's borrowing from Pinamonti's text, see Don Gifford, Joyce Annotated: Notes for Dubliners and A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (2nd ed., 1981), pp. 177-178, and James R. Thrane, "Joyce's Sermon on Hell: Its Sources and Its Backgrounds," A James Joyce Miscellany: Third Series (1962), ed. Marvin Magalaner, pp. 33-78.

place" (245). For Stephen, the narrator notes, "That was his song" (245). What this introduction to the novel suggests—as does Stephen's identification with the sermon—is that Stephen's sense of identity takes shape within the discourses around him. As if to underscore that point, the introduction presents Stephen dancing to the music that his mother plays on the piano. The implication is that Stephen is enmeshed in cultural discourses. Indeed, he not only later identifies himself with Father Arnell's sermon, conceiving of himself as a sinner, but also with the discourse of romanticism, especially Alexnder Dumas' novel The Count of Monte Cristo (1844). In particular, he identifies with the main character of Dumas' novel, the Byronic Edmond Dantes, acting out the novel's situations in his imagination and overlaying its story and characters on the people and events in his own life. Stephen continuously sees his life through the available discourses around him, right up to his college years, when his mind and speech is filled with the words of Gerhart Hauptmann, Cardinal Newman, Guido Cavalcanti, Ibsen, various Elizabethan lyrics, and especially Arisotle and Aquinas. In effect, Stephen is always citing and being constituted by the discourses around him.

It must thus be seen that A Portrait, to borrow from Roland Barthes again, is "a tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centres of culture" ("Death" 146). It rejects the positivist notions of objectivity and pure observation language and substitutes a montage of discourses presented as quotationless quotations without a metalanguage. For Joyce there is no reality to be realistically portrayed but only preexisting codes that shape the apprehension of reality. Like Barthes, Joyce knows that "the 'realistic' artist never places 'reality' at the origin of his discourse, but only and always, as far back as can be traced, an already written real, a prospective code, along which we discern, as far as the

eye can see, only a succession of copies" (S/Z 167). Joyce takes this preexisting condition of realistic writing and foregrounds it all the more in his writings, creating a constellation of competing discourses that places responsibility for interpretation and evaluation in the hands of the reader. In this regard, he is precisely like Benjamin. Both view reality as a textualized construct and see the individual as necessarily having to cite preexisting discourses, rather than creating their own. Both also set into play a heterogeneous collection of citations as opposed to writing strict linear narratives; and rather than authoritatively interpreting them, they allow the reader to do the work, to discern the possible relationships among the competing discourses and their antecedent sources and contexts. Thus, it can be seen that a set of striking parallels do indeed exist between Benjamin's modernist historiography and Joyce's modernist aesthetics in A Portrait.

This parallel between Joyce and Benjamin is even more evident in Joyce's Ulysses, which takes the art of citation even further than Dubliners and A Portrait. Significantly, Ulysses itself begins with meditations on the nature of history. In the first episode (Telemachus) the issue is first brought up with Haines' remark that "It seems history is to blame" (17) for Ireland's present troubles with what Stephen calls the "imperial British state . . . and the holy Roman catholic and apostolic church" (17). But it is the second episode (Nestor) that really explores the issue—appropriately enough since, according to Joyce's schema of the novel, the particular art on which the episode is focused is in fact "history" (Gilbert 108). The episode begins with Stephen teaching history to a group of young students at Mr. Deasy's school. Stephen is catechizing the class on the subject of Pyrrhus (318-272 B.C.) and his battles on behalf of the Tarrentines against the Romans, particularly the battle of Asculum in 279 B.C. The students are having a difficult time

providing the "factual" answers to Stephen's questions: who, what, where, when, and why. In response to their hesitant, incomplete, and inaccurate answers to his questions, Stephen thinks to himself "Fabled by the daughters of memory. And yet it was in some way if not as memory fabled it" (20). Here Stephen recalls that the muses are the daughters of Mnemosyne, a mythic formulation that, in his mind, distinguishes between the arts (the muses) and memory (Mnemosyne), fiction and fact; but after hearing the types of "historical" answers that his students give him, Stephen conflates the two, suggesting that memory constructs fables rather than remembers things as they are. What his students remember, Stephen suggests, if they remember anything at all, are fictional narratives and representations of the past, textualizations of history. This notion is immediately born out by Cochrane. After Stephen supplies the right answer "Asculum" to one of the questions, Cochrane responds, "Yes, sir. . . . Another victory like that and we are done for" (20). Here it is seen that Cochrane remembers little else but a famous saying, a witty epigram that says more about rhetoric and the genre of epigrams than about the historical event to which it refers. It is a saying that has been repeated countless times in one form or another, and Cochrane cites it again, as if it were knowledge of history. Cochrane's response prompts Stephen to think "That phrase the world has remembered. A dull ease of the mind" (20).

In this opening sequence of the second episode of Ulysses the relationship between history, language, and citation is thus raised. In search of the facts of history, Stephen is simply given an epigram that has been cited so many times that it has become a cliché. Knowledge of history, the episode seems to suggests, is determined by the preexisting conventions of discursive genres, in this case the epigram. The relationship between

history and genre in this episode is further emphasized by the fact that Stephen and his students drop their history lesson and begin to read John Milton's "Lycidas" (1638). This poem is meant to commemorate the actual death of Milton's friend, Edward King, who drowned. Its occasion is thus a real historical event, but this event is filtered through the time honored conventions of the pastoral elegy. It is a rigidly stylized poem in which little trace of any historical event can be discerned. Readers often find the poem to be impersonal and formal. In effect, Milton lets the conventions of his genre supplant his "individual" voice; he "cites" the rules of a genre going back to antiquity rather than giving personal voice to his grief over the Death of King. This inclusion of Milton's poem is yet another instance of this episode pointing to the way in which preexisting genres or discourses determine the apprehension and understanding of history. It is these discourses that are "cited" as knowledge of history, not history in-and-of itself.

The second episode proceeds to another interesting moment that has implications not only for the relationship between citation, language, and history, but also for the composition of the novel as a whole. Following the classroom scene is a scene between Stephen and Mr. Deasy himself in which Stephen receives his pay, talks with Deasy about Irish history, and waits for him as he finishes a letter on the foot-and-mouth disease for the press, which Deasy later gives to Stephen to take to some editors that he knows. Critics have long known that Deasy's memory of Irish history is far from accurate and creates the same kind of humor that Joyce's early short story "Grace" does about Catholics remembering their religious history. Deasy's clichés about, and misrepresentations of, history continue the episode's concern with the relationship between citation and history, but what is truly remarkable is the letter that Deasy writes. After finishing it he hands it to

Stephen, telling him to read it. Stephen goes over it in his mind, breaking its sentences down into clauses and fragments, presenting it in a disjointed manner. Stephen's interior monologue thus proceeds:

> May I trespass on your valuable space. That doctrine of laissez faire which so often in our history. Our cattle trade. The way of all our old industries. Liverpool ring which jockeyed the Galway harbour scheme. European conflagration. Grain supplies through the narrow waters of the channel. The pluterperfect imperturbability of the department of agriculture. Pardoned a classical allusion. Cassandra. By a woman who was no better than she should be. To come to the point at issue
>
> —I don't mince words, do I? Mr Deasy asked as Stephen read on.
>
> Foot and mouth disease. Known as Koch's preparation. Serum and virus. Percentage of salted horses. Rinderpest. Emperor's horses at Mürzseg. Lower Ausria. Veterinary surgeons. Mr Henry Blackwood Price. Courteous offer a fair trial. Dictates of common sense. Allimportant [sic]question. In every sense of the word take the bull by the horns. Thanking you for the hospitality of your columns. (27).

In this passage can be seen the rhetoric, clichés, and discursive conventions that shape the production of Deasy's "ideas," from classical allusions about Cassandra to such phrases as "take the bull by the horns" and "dictates of common sense." Much like Roland Barthes' S/Z, in which Balzac's story Sarassine is similarly broken down into fragments shaped by various codes, this passage allows the reader to see the conventions that structure Deasy's writing about history and the present. Deasy's mind is here shown to be a hodgepodge of

fragments cited from preexisting discourses, including his Christian, Hegelian saying that would have met with Benjamin's scorn: "All history moves towards one great goal, the manifestation of God" (28).

This insight into Deasy's mind through his letter is precisely the kind of insight that the reader gains from all the monologues throughout Ulysses: they are collections of quotationless quotations derived from Barthes' innumerable centers of culture, including the everyday world of advertisements and newspapers. Stephen's monologues, for instance, are chockfull of quotations and references to theological, historical, and literary texts, while Bloom's monologues are filled with references to popular knowledge regarding science as well as advertisements. Instances of the presence of quotationless quotations in the monologues could be greatly amplified, as the many source books on Ulysses—such as Don Gifford's Ulysses Annotated (2nd ed., 1988)—easily suggest. The point, not surprisingly, is that Joyce's novel is a patchwork of quoted materials without quotation marks. There is no objective referential language in Ulysses attempting to represent realistically people, places, things, and events once and for all. Like Benjamin, Joyce critiques the transparency of the sign, pointing out the extent to which language shapes the apprehension of the world.

Perhaps the most telling indication of this critique of objectivity and pure observation language is the fact that the styles of the various episodes of the novel proceed from a realistic or naturalistic style through a variety of numerous other styles, so that the "realistic " style becomes just one style among many (in any case, it too is shaped by various codes, as we have already seen). Thus, the manner and language of the novel itself become more and more important, as one style after another is cited, much like in A

Portrait, where the style changes with Stephen's development. With the seventh episode (Aeolus) Joyce begins to mutate his original style, inserting sixty newspaper-article titles throughout the episode, which takes place at the Freeman's Journal and National Press. The titles, written in journalistic style, ironically comment on the course of the action in the episode, reducing the narrative to the discontinuous form of a newspaper sheet composed of discrete, juxtaposed articles. Episode twelve (Cyclops), going beyond the juxtaposition of two different styles in episode seven, juxtaposes the first person narration of a newly emerged but unidentified narrator who speaks colloquially and informally with twenty-seven interspersed accounts of the action by a series of unnamed narrators who use a variety of styles. David Hayman has usefully classified the many "asides" of this episode, "most of which parody nineteenth century adaptations of earlier styles" (274). Among the many ones that he identifies are legalese (the language of contracts), Irish revival, romance revival, nineteenth-century Homeric, theosophical, gothic revival, medical journalese, human interest and public affairs journalese, cultural reportage, polite novelese, nursery rhyme, parliamentary, sports reportage, social reportage, Irish archaeology, graffiti, Renaissance revival, epic revival, scientific reportage, and Old Testament.[39] As a whole, the episode presents a multitude of quoted and pastiched styles from which to observe its action, privileging none. Significantly, Joyce himself referred to the many styles of episode twelve as an "exaggeration of things previously given" (qtd. in Hayman 274).

[39] For a catalogue of all the asides keyed to the 1961 corrected and reset edition of Ulysses, David Hayman, "Cyclops," James Joyce's Ulysses: Critical Essays (1974), ed. Clive Hart and David Hayman, pp. 274-275.

Another instance of this proliferation of styles occurs in episode fourteen (Oxen of the Sun), which presents a series of prose styles from Anglo-Saxon to the early twentieth century, apparently recreated with the help of Saintsbury's History of English Prose Rhythm, W. Peacock's English Prose: Mandeville to Ruskin (1903), and the New English Dictionary.[40] After some Latin phrases apparently modeled on the styles of Roman historians Sallust and Tacitus and medieval Latin prose chronicles, the episode then proceeds to an imitation of the styles of Anglo-Saxon rhythmic alliterative prose, Middle English prose, John of Burgundy's Travel's of Sir John Mandeville (c. 1336-71), Sir Thomas Malory's Morte d'Arthur, late-sixteenth- and seventeenth-century prose (including the styles of John Milton, Richard Hooker, Sir Thomas Browne, and Jeremy Taylor), John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, seventeenth-century diarists John Evelyn and Samuel Pepys, Joseph Addison and Richard Steele's periodical essays, Oliver Goldsmith, Edmund Burke, Richard Brinsley Sheridan's political oratory, philosophical historian Edward Gibbon, Horace Walpole's gothic novel The Castle of Otranto, Charles Lamb, Thomas De Quincey, Walter Savage Landor, Thomas Babington Macaulay, Thomas Henry Huxley, John Henry Cardinal Newman, Walter Pater, John Ruskin, Thomas Carlyle, and finally a jumble of fragments of modern dialect and slang.[41] As in previous episodes, these styles play off of each other, subverting any notion of a metalanguage.

Many more of the different styles in Ulysses could be discussed. One might discuss, for instance, the romance style of the thirteenth episode (Nausicaa), the scientific

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[40] See J.S. Atherton, "Oxen of the Sun," James Joyce's Ulysses: Critical Essays (1974), ed. Clive Hart and David Hayman, pp. 315-316.

[41] This information on the various styles of the fourteenth episode of Ulysses is summarized from Don Gifford and Robert J. Seidman, Ulysses Annotated (2nd ed., 1988), pp. 408-449.

style of the seventeenth episode (Ithaca), or even the attempt to imitate the movement of music with linguistic leitmotifs in the eleventh chapter (Sirens). But the point is sufficiently made: Ulysses is a montage of cited and parodied discourses. It subverts the notion of the transparency of the sign and the notion of a pure observation language (zero-degree language). It does not offer an authoritative point-of-view on the text, some kind of objective perspective that would interpret everything, putting it in its place. For Joyce all uses of language are shaped by preexisting codes and conventions that prevent realistic representation. All one can do, in Joyce's universe, is cite antecedent discourses. Rather than be limited by one form of discourse, Joyce employs many, playing them off of each other in an ironic montage of quotationless quotations that creates connections and disjunctions between discourses in a curious kind of linguistic temporality. As Hugh Kenner has indicated, Joyce seems to have realized that he could only take credit for the "arrangement" of languages in Ulysses (Ulysses 157). The result is a semantic open-endedness that places responsibility for interpretation and evaluation in the hands of the reader.

The parallel with Benjamin is thus evident. Both writers approach their respective subjects through a critique of quotation marks and the metalanguages that they institute, renouncing the notion of the author that seems to have arisen with the use of quotation marks at the beginning of the Enlightenment.[42] As a result, they avoid reductive narratives and their generic forms, and they critique the transparency of the sign, realizing the extent to which reality is always-already textualized. They achieve their ends through

[42]For an informative historical and theoretical discussion of this issue, see Claudette Sartiliot, Citation and Modernity: Derrida, Joyce, and Brecht (1993), pp. 3-33.

discontinuous arrangements of discourses that suggest the possibility for a semantic open-endedness. In effect, both writers can be seen as critics of positivism, especially as it plays out in the closely related areas of historicism and realism. Both critique the supposed objectivity of the subject in their renouncing of a metalanguage, and both critique the notion of a pure observation language through their method of citing competing discourses. In short, they both critique identity thinking—the belief that subjects can apprehend things in-and-of themselves—and realistic representation. Their works substitute a play of languages for a supposed window onto reality. Thus, in the theory and practice of Walter Benjamin and James Joyce can be seen a set of striking similarities between the modernist study of history and literary modernism that suggest some ways in which modernism and history can be linked.

What finally conditions the work of both writers is the experience of modernity. As Marshall Berman has noted, the experience of modernity is the experience of a "permanent revolution" (95) in which all that is solid melts into air. It is the experience of a discontinuous temporality that creates a sense of shock and fragmentation and a great deal of cognitive problems. It undermines the sense of narrative progress and continuity in history and the Enlightenment notion of temporality that it assumes, creating a self-consciousness about language, representation, and knowledge. What becomes increasingly clear to the modern world amid the shocks induced by warfare and massive technological, social, and economic changes is the historical variability of the conditions of knowledge. Constant and striking change, in other words, "historicizes" understanding, foregrounding the limiting horizons of its social, cultural, and material conditions. In the case of Benjamin and Joyce, this historicizing of understanding leads to the arrangements

of discourses with no metalanguage, arrangements as discontinuous as the temporality out of which they emerge. These arrangements can be seen as examples of a new kind of materialism, a timely materialism that historicizes the production of knowledge by foregrounding its changing discursive conventions. They achieve what Mikhail Bakhtin claims the novel achieves, "a verbal and semantic decentering of the ideological world, a certain linguistic homelessness of literary consciousness, which no longer possesses a sacrosanct and unitary linguistic medium for containing ideological thought" (367). Such a decentering, in the case of Benjamin and Joyce, arises out of the sense of "crisis" that Bambach talks about, "the modern experience of history [as] acausal, discontinuous, and ironic" (9). Such an experience, as we have seen, can be seen in relationship to Conrad's A Secret Agent and Gertrude Stein's Tender Buttons, and it is one to which we will have the occasion to return in the next and final chapter.

Chapter 5:

The Finer Materialism of Aesthetic Truth:

Language and Subjectivity in Virginia Woolf and Martin Heidegger

> Hamlet or a Beethoven quartet is the truth about this vast mass that we call the world. But there is no Shakespeare, there is no Beethoven; certainly and emphatically there is no God; we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself.
>
> Virginia Woolf, A Sketch of the Past (1939-1940, first pub. 1976)

> In the current view language is held to be a kind of communication. . . . But language is not only and not primarily an audible and written expression of what is to be communicated. It not only puts forth in words and statements what is overtly or covertly intended to be communicated; language alone brings what is, as something that is, into the Open for the first time.
>
> Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art" (1935, 1936)

In the three previous chapters I have traced out the gradual dissolution of positivism in relationship to modern criminal anthropology, geometry, and history, making connections to, and drawing parallels with, the theory and practice of literary modernism. In particular, I have focused on the modern critique of positivism's two fundamental notions, namely, disinterested subjectivity and pure-observation language. The result of this critique, in general, is a heightened sense of the limits of knowledge and representation. Behind this heightened sense is a new understanding of language as constitutive rather than referential. Positivism, as we have seen, conceives of language as

a transparent window onto reality, and thus it succumbs to what theorist Paul de Man terms aesthetic ideology, the "confusion of linguistic with natural reality, of reference with phenomenalism" (Resistance 11). In contrast to this view of language as phenomenally referential, the post-positivist view is that language is a form that shapes the apprehension and understanding of phenomena, conditioning the observation, cognition, and notation of objects and people in the world. For certain figures in the natural and human sciences that I have discussed, it is this view of language that finally forces the displacement of the positivist notions of objective observation and the transparency of the sign, ushering in a new distinctively modern view of the sciences, particularly of the human sciences.

In literary modernism the emergence of this post-positivist view of language can be seen in Joseph Conrad's The Secret Agent, which critiques criminal anthropology's view of the body as an intrinsic sign system revelatory of character, mental health, and moral inclination, separating signifier and signified, language and world. With Gertrude Stein's Tender Buttons referential language and its extra-linguistic object or referent are replaced altogether by an intense concern with textuality and the general workings of language. In place of customary modes of realistic representation, Stein focuses on how language is structured by differences and repetitions that create temporal play among linguistic elements, as well as linguistic effects. In James Joyce's Ulysses, finally, the discursive conventions of language come to the forefront. For Joyce all uses of language are shaped by the citation of preexisting genres or codes that shape the apprehension and understanding of the world. In these varied works by Conrad, Stein, and Joyce can be seen a progressive dissolution of realism or naturalism that corresponds to the dissolution of positivism in the sciences.

As I have suggested in previous chapters, what really falls with the dissolution of both realism and positivism are decidedly metaphysical conceptions of language and subjectivity. Both realism and positivism, in other words, succumb to what Jacques Derrida calls the metaphysics of presence, the notion of a transcendental signified present to a universal subject and capable of being communicated or translated through language to other such subjects. This idealist view of the sign privileges the immediacy of voice and consciousness, separating ideas, mental images, and perception from the constitutive nature of language, as if thought, experience, or ideas could somehow precede their communication in language. For this reason the cultural theorists Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno defined positivism as "the myth of things as they actually are." In any case, out of the dissolution of this metaphysical conception of language and subjectivity emerges a materialist conception. From this modern perspective, ideas, thoughts, and subjectivity in general are seen to take shape in and through language and its changing social and cultural contexts. Such a conception is materialist because it attends to the forms and structures of signification, realizing that language constructs rather than represents its object. It is also materialist because it situates language and subjectivity within society and culture. For these reasons, such a conception might also be called a "timely" materialism, for it takes note not only of the temporal play of language and its effects, but also of the historical dimension of language and the changing genres, codes, and conventions that shape its use.

This materialist conception of language and subjectivity can be worked out in a variety of distinct ways and with different points and emphases, and it can be seen not only in geometry and history but throughout the human sciences. In linguistics, for instance,

Ferdinand de Saussure made the famous claim that "language is a form and not a substance" (122). Language, for Saussure, was a set of values emanating solely from a linguistic system in which there were no positive terms but only relationships between linguistic elements. Meaning emerges only within this synchronic system, which is periodically altered, creating a diachronic (or historical) dimension of superannuated meaning systems. Influenced by this groundbreaking view of language, the Russian Formalists and early structuralists like Roman Jakobson applied these insights to the study of literature, reading texts synchronically and diachronically. Dispensing with notions of realism, these critics showed how texts draw attention to their own linguistic mechanisms as well as employ and work against preexisting forms, conventions, and genres, creating new ones in the process. For the Russian formalists, content becomes a function or effect of form. Even the so-called "defamiliarization" of habitualized modes of perception and expression must assume a linguistic form. In aesthetics Mikhail Bakhtin made a similar point about the constitutive nature of language, although he stressed the sociological dimensions of language much more than the Russian Formalists did. In psychology Sigmund Freud essentially located this determining influence of language in the unconscious, as Jacques Lacan and Roman Jakobson later realized. In The Interpretation of Dreams (1900), while describing the dream-work, Freud compares a dream-thought to a "picture-puzzle" that can be translated into words without syntactical organization (312). Moreover, in describing the processes of "condensation" and "displacement" by which latent dream contents become manifest contents, Freud in effect develops a

rhetorical view of the unconscious (312-315, 340-344).[43] Throughout his career Freud stresses the influence of language on the subject, whether he is talking about the working of the "mystic writing-pad" as a model for the perceptual apparatus or whether he is portraying psychoanalysis as the "talking cure."

In philosophy, finally, important materialist views of language and subjectivity were developed by Friedrich Nietzsche and his admirer Martin Heidegger, the latter of whom founded what has come to be known as "hermeneutic ontology."[44] In The Birth of Tragedy (1872) Nietzsche famously proclaimed that "it is only as an aesthetic phenomenon that existence and the world are eternally justified" (52). With this controversial statement Nietzsche gave memorable expression to the "nihilistic" view that the world cannot be cognitively known in-and-of itself, but only aesthetically apprehended. Such a view is a non-metaphysical, non-positivistic conception of truth, for it suggests that whatever is known about the world is constructed by the knower and subject to differing and changing interpretations. With Heidegger—a central figure of this chapter—this idea of the aesthetic apprehension of truth becomes linked primarily to the role of language in shaping understanding. In his long lecture-turned-essay, "The Origin of the Work of Art" (1935, 1936), Heidegger claims, much as Nietzsche had, that "Art is . . . the becoming and happening of truth" (71), by which he means that art founds the world as it is known by the knower. But he stresses the importance of poetry and in particular language, for as he

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[43]See Jacques Lacan, Écrits (1977), pp. 156, 159-160; and Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle, The Fundamentals of Language (1956), p. 95.

[44]One could also cite here Ludwig Wittgenstein, Benedetto Croce, and Ernst Cassirer, in spite of their differences with Nietzsche and Heidegger and their obvious differences among themselves. All three, in their unique ways, attend to the influence of language on understanding.

puts it, "Language, by naming beings for the first time, first brings beings to word and to appearance" (73). For Heidegger "Language itself is poetry in the essential sense" (740), for it inaugurates or constitutes the world as it is perceived and understood. For this reason, Heidegger formulated his famous aphorism: "Language is the house of being" ("Letter" 217). What finally emerges out of Heidegger's post-metaphysical thinking about language is what Heideggerian philosopher Gianni Vattimo calls the "weakening of Being" (11), a phrase used to designate the dissolution of the metaphysics of Western ontology. Not only are the world and truth itself seen to be constituted by language; they are also seen to be historical, subject to change and transformation in time. They are historical because Heidegger views art itself as historical. Heidegger even goes so far as to claim that art "grounds history" ("Origin" 77). History thus becomes art history, the temporal succession of modes of art, each of which founding, through language, a distinct world and subjectivity.

In this chapter I would like to read some of Virginia Woolf's novels and writings within the context of this turn toward a non-intuitive, materialist conception of language and subjectivity, primarily focusing on the philosophic line of aesthetic thinking developed by Heidegger. In her many works Woolf shows herself to be constantly concerned with the relationship between language and subjectivity. In fact, like Heidegger, she conceives of language as constitutive, as founding a world. She also sees the subject as inhabiting and determined by language, and she sees history as a succession of artistic styles or modes, as a linguistic tradition that founds and shapes communities. Like Heidegger, Woolf aestheticizes truth, moving beyond the metaphysical, positivistic view of language toward a materialist conception of language. Before I turn to an examination of some of

her works, however, I would like to give a more detailed presentation of the materialist conception of language in the human sciences, focusing in particular on Heidegger. This presentation will allow for a better understanding of Woolf's works while also permitting another parallel to be drawn between the human sciences and modernism.

Materialist Views of Language and Subjectivity in the Human Sciences

As I have already indicated, materialist views of language and subjectivity can be seen throughout the human sciences at the turn of the twentieth century, including linguistics, literary criticism, psychoanalysis, and especially philosophy. These views can differ in a number of important respects, but to some degree they all share a fundamental concern with how language shapes subjectivity and human understanding. They move beyond positivism's metaphysical faith in objectivity and transparent language to a post-positivistic understanding of language and subjectivity in which the influence of time plays a crucial role. They all effect, or begin to effect, what can be called a "historicizing" of understanding in that they situate the latter within modes of language subject to continual change and transformation. In doing so, they replace the Kantian transcendental subject of the Enlightenment with a time-bound subject decidedly embedded within language, culture, society, and history. In this section I look briefly at linguistics and literary criticism and then move on to a more detailed presentation of philosophy, focusing on the hermeneutic ontology of Heidegger, whose aestheticization of truth can be seen as taking the influence of language on subjectivity to its extreme.

In linguistics, first of all, the trend towards understanding the constitutive nature of language begins with Saussure, who views "language [as] a form and not a substance." In

his view, language is a system of structural relationships organized into different levels. Phonemes are organized into morphemes, morphemes into words, words into sentences, and so on. Each level is characterized by an opposition of elements, so that, considered as whole, language is a self-enclosed system of differential relationships rather than a nomenclature for designating objects in the world. This system of values (relationships) rather than identities (individual elements) shapes human understanding to a certain extent, although Saussure certainly does not go as far as Heidegger. As Saussure explains, "Psychologically our thought—apart from its expression in words—is only a shapeless and indistinct mass. . . . Without language, thought is a vague, uncharted nebula. There are no pre-existing ideas, and nothing is distinct before the appearance of language" (112). Bringing form to vague thoughts, language sets up relationships between elements, creating value or meaning through opposition and contrast. This linguistic fact governs the production of concepts in language, for as Saussure notes, "concepts are purely differential and defined not by their positive content but negatively by their relations with the other terms of the system. Their most precise characteristic is in being what the others are not" (117). In this conception language provides the form of concepts, establishing the linguistic relationships that allow concepts to be defined in the first place. As Saussure summarizes, "in language there are only differences without positive terms" (120). In other words, a single morpheme, word, idea, or concept does not signify in-and-of itself, but only in relationship to other morphemes, words, ideas, or concepts. These elements are part of a structure or form that organizes them into patterns of significance.

At any given moment of time, however, these patterns are part of a "language state" that is subject to change. According to Saussure, while language is a form, it is not

immutable. It is tied to a community of speakers whose individual utterances gradually modify the system of language over time, creating the diachronic dimension of language or a succession of language states brought about by purely random change. As Saussure summarizes, "there are no unchangeable characteristics [of language]. Permanence results from sheer luck; any characteristic that is preserved in time may also disappear with time" (230-231). As a consequence, language must not only be considered as a form (synchronically) but as a succession of language states (diachronically). All in all, such a dual view of language can be seen as a questioning of positivism's understanding of language and subjectivity. Language here is a form, not a window onto reality. It is arbitrary and subject to transformations in time, so it cannot be considered some kind of transcendental schema. In this account also subjectivity is conditioned in part by language. It does have the power to alter the form of language over time, but only against the great weight of social convention, and even then only to constitute another language state through a mere rearrangement of elements. At each point subjectivity seems caught up within the codes and conventions of language, rather than objectively observing the world, a position that Emile Benveniste would begin to develop further beginning with his writings in the 1930s, which have been gathered in Problems in General Linguistics (1971).[45]

Inspired by this Saussurean line of thinking, the Russian formalists and the Prague linguistic school developed similar notions in regard to literature. In "Standard Language

[45]I am thinking in particular of "The Nature of the Linguistic Sign" (1939) but also the later essay "Subjectivity in Language" (1958). In addition to Benveniste, one could also cite other linguists who in some sense recognize the linguistic determination of consciousness, especially the American linguists Edward Sapir and Benjamin L. Whorf.

and Poetic Language" (1932), for instance, Jan Mukařovský makes his celebrated distinction between "automatized" forms of standard language—the habituated preexisting categories and definitions of communicative language that shape and schematize our perception of the world—and the creative "distortion" of poetic language, which "deautonomatizes" the preexisting norms of standard language, foregrounding the medium of language instead. In this distinctly modern formulation the everyday forms of standard language are seen as linguistic conventions that shape and dull apprehension, to the point that they seem "natural." Poetic language exposes these conventions through a process of "defamiliarization" that "place[s] in the foreground the act of expression, the act of speech itself" (19). For Mukařovský poetry, like Saussurean linguistics, draws attention to the formal mechanisms of language, dispelling the illusion of any kind of extra-linguistic signified. Such an account of poetry characterizes the most representative works of modernism, particularly those of Gertrude Stein, James Joyce, and—as we shall see—Virginia Woolf. Such an account, as Mukařovský explains, also involves a historical or diachronic dimension, for the creative distortions or innovations of poetry become conventions themselves, requiring defamiliarization in turn. In effect, what Mukařovský ends up describing is a historical process of the ongoing formation and dissolution of conventions that always remains within language. The history or tradition of poetry becomes one of outmoded codes, conventions, and forms of expression, much as the history of languages in Saussurean linguistics becomes the history of language states.

Realistic art, moreover, is not exempt from such a history. As Roman Jakobson argues in "On Realism in Art" (1921), realism itself is a convention (as well as a term not carefully used by critics). "We call realistic," Jakobson explains, "those works which we

feel accurately depict life by displaying verisimilitude" (20). This commonsense understanding, however, is conditioned by the late-nineteenth century understanding of realism, which, Jakobson claims, has been elevated to the status of a self-evident ideal. The truth of the matter is that there have been many "realisms." As Jakobson explains,

> Classicists, sentimentalists, the romanticists to a certain extent, even the "realists" of the nineteenth century, the modernists to a large degree, and finally the futurists, expressionists, and their like, have more than once steadfastly proclaimed faithfulness to reality, maximum verisimilitude—in other words, realism—as the guiding motto of their artistic program. (20)

In short, there is a history of "realisms" governed by conventions that were not perceived to be such at the time. Even the present understanding of realism, Jakobson argues, is a convention. As Jakobson puts it, "verisimilitude in verbal expression or in a literary description obviously makes no sense whatever" (21). Drawing an analogy between painting and understanding verbal or literary expression, Jakobson concludes, "It is necessary to learn the conventional language of painting in order to 'see' a picture, just as it is impossible to understand what is said without knowing the language" (21). As this passage suggests, in Jakobson's account of realism, the codes and conventions of language always shape the apprehension of reality. In realism it is always a question of forms, not perception.

This attention to the way in which language shapes the observation and understanding of reality is an implicit critique of positivism, and it is taken to the fullest extreme in the philosophy of Martin Heidegger. In his writings of the 1930s, particularly "On the Essence of Truth" (1930), "The Origin of the Work of Art" (1935, 1936), and

"Hölderlin and the Experience of Poetry" (1936), Heidegger "aestheticizes" truth, critiquing what might be taken as positivism's conception of knowledge and language. In "The Essence of Truth" he characterizes the "usual" conception of truth as, above all, statements in "accordance" with reality. As Heidegger explains,

> we call true or false our statements about beings, which can themselves be genuine or not with regard to their kind, which can be thus or otherwise in their actuality. A statement is true if what it means and says is in accordance with the matter about which the statement is made. Here . . . we say, "It is in accord." Now, though, it is not the matter that is in accord but rather the proposition. (117)

Truth, in other words, as it is usually understood, is "the correspondence of knowledge to the matter" (118), and this knowledge takes the form of statements. The basis of this conception of truth, to borrow from philosopher Richard Rorty, is "the notion of knowledge as accurate representation" (318), which assumes the possibility of a pure, genuine act of cognition—the kind assumed by positivism. As Heidegger puts the matter in "The Origin of the Work of Art," this conception of truth is defined in terms of "correctness in representation" (52). Such a conception assumes the ability of the subject to represent accurately or mirror the world at large.

As the above account suggests, this conception of truth is closely related to a particular conception of language in which signs point to preexisting thoughts about things. As Heidegger explains in "Origin," "In the current view, language is held to be a kind of communication. It serves for verbal exchange and agreement, and in general for communicating" (73). Such a view assumes that language is a nomenclature, that it merely designates a preexisting signified, translating thoughts into words. In this account,

as Heidegger notes in "Hölderlin," "Language serves to give information" (565). This instrumental conception of language, which comes increasingly under attack in the subsequent writings of Heidegger,[46] assumes the possibility of phenomenal linguistic reference. It assumes, in other words, the pure observation language of positivism. For Heidegger this account of language and its attendant concept of knowledge are metaphysical. They view knowledge as transcendent and timeless. They assume, in other words, that truth is simply discovered by a disinterested subject and communicated to other similarly disinterested subjects through the neutral medium of language.

In contrast to this positivistic (and metaphysical) view of language and knowledge, Heidegger believes that subjectivity is fundamentally shaped by language and that knowledge is thoroughly historical. Language, for Heidegger, is constitutive: it founds the world as it is known by the knower. As Heidegger explains in "Origin,"

> language is not only and not primarily an audible and written expression of what is to be communicated. It not only puts forth in words and statements what is overtly or covertly intended to be communicated: language alone brings what is, as something that is, into the Open for the first time. . . . Language, by naming beings for the first, first brings beings to word and to appearance. Only this naming nominates beings <u>to</u> their being <u>from out</u> of their being. (73)

For Heidegger, as this passage suggests, whatever appears to be communicated through language is already constituted by language. Thus, according to Heidegger, language

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[46]I am thinking in particular of Heidegger's later essay "The Nature of Language" (1959), in which he distinguishes his view of language from those scientists and philosophers attempting to produce "metalanguages." In this essay Heidegger sees in science, technology, and philosophy a certain "technicalization of all languages" that he brands metaphysical. See p. 58.

founds or inaugurates the phenomena of the world. As Heidegger further explains in "Hölderlin,"

> the essence of language does not consist entirely in being a means of giving information. This definition does not touch its essential essence, but merely indicates an effect of its essence. Language is not a mere tool, one of the many which man possesses; on the contrary, it is only language that affords the very possibility of standing in the openness of the existent. Only where there is language, is there world. (565)

In place of the metaphysical referential language of positivism Heidegger adopts a materialist understanding that attends to the ways in which language constructs a foreknowledge of the world, pre-determining the apprehension and understanding of phenomena. For Heidegger human beings inhabit or dwell in language, and what they know of themselves and the world is an effect of language. As Heidegger formulates it in "Hölderlin," "the being of men is founded in language" (566).

This special kind of dwelling in language, moreover, is linked to art and, in particular, to poetry. In effect, Heidegger breaks down the Enlightenment distinction between fact and fiction, reality and romance, truth and beauty, cognition and aesthetics, all fundamental oppositions that contributed to the formation of the subject of positivism.[47] Heidegger essentially aestheticizes the apprehension of truth. One implication of this aestheticization is that truth is not a stable objective entity of some kind, but an effect of language. The world takes shape in and through language. Another

[47]As Bruno Latour suggests in We Have Never Been Modern (1993), the Enlightenment distinctions were always false distinctions, never really working in practice.

implication is that subjectivity and communities in general are constituted by the linguistic traditions bequeathed to them. What is known is a function and effect of these traditions, which are rather like Saussure's language states and the Russian formalists' history of outmoded poetic styles. Far from accepting the Enlightenment's fundamental distinctions between reason and tradition, experience and culture, Heidegger asserts that it is within tradition and culture that human beings come to know themselves and their world; for him, as Vattimo notes, the work of art "is the act by which a certain historical and cultural world is instituted, in which a specific historical 'humanity' sees the characteristic traits of its own experience of the world defined in an originary way" (66). One other key implication of the aestheticization of truth is that truth is not some kind of timeless, immutable idea or structure but an event, an unfolding. Truth is subject to time; it is as mortal as human beings are, having a fundamental relationship to death.

In his philosophical writings of the 1930s, Heidegger often states and reiterates these three implications. In "Hölderlin," for instance, he clearly states that "our existence is fundamentally poetic" and that "poetry is the inaugural naming of being and of the essence of all things—not just any speech, but that particular kind which for the first time brings into the open all that which we then discuss and deal with in everyday language" (568). The result, as Heidegger indicates in "Origin," is that "the nature of poetry . . . is the founding of truth," where founding is understood in a threefold sense: "founding as bestowing, founding as grounding, and founding as beginning" (75). The world itself, Heidegger stresses, is a horizon constituted by language in its poetic, creative mode, and truth is an effect of that horizon. Poetry is thus a kind of "projective saying" (74), and this

saying, as it works out in language, constitutes not only the individual subject, but also communities. As Heidegger puts it, "Actual language at any given moment is the happening of this saying, in which a people's world historically arises for it . . . . In such saying, the concepts of an historical people's nature, i.e., of its belonging to world history, are formed for that folk, before it" (74). Here Heidegger clearly develops an early notion of the discursive community, anticipating similar notions in the later work of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Thomas S. Kuhn. For Heidegger tradition constitutes communities; and tradition, as Vattimo notes, is understood as "the transmitting of linguistic messages that constitute the horizon within which Dasein is thrown as an historically determined project: and tradition derives its importance from the fact that Being, as a horizon of disclosure in which things appear, can arise only as a trace of past words or as an announcement that has been handed down to us" (120). In this conception of tradition, as it is developed in "Origin," a historical community arrives at its understanding of truth through the aid of tradition. Such a conception of truth, however, as Heidegger also makes clear in "Origin," is not metaphysical. For Heidegger, truth is not timeless but fundamentally temporal. "Art," as he famously declares in "Origin," " is the becoming and happening of truth" (71). Here, truth is understood to be not only an effect of language but also a subject of time. In this "nihilistic" conception of epistemology truth has no metaphysical ground at all. Like human beings, it is subject to birth and death; it comes into existence and then passes away. Thus, as Vattimo notes, "truth is . . . understood [by Heidegger] as an event or, that is to say, as the ever new and different determination of regulative structures of experience, written in the mutable languages of man" (75).

Throughout his writings of the 1930s Heidegger repeatedly argues for this aestheticization of truth, claiming that the world is founded or inaugurated by language, that truth is an effect of language, that subjectivity and communities are constituted by language and tradition, and that truth is not timeless but historical. In this argument can be seen an extreme materialist view of language and subjectivity that goes well beyond the metaphysical views of positivism. Rather than endorsing scientific objectivity and the transparency of the sign, Heidegger effects an historicizing of understanding, locating subjectivity within language, culture, society, and history. In the end, like Saussure and the Russian formalists, Heidegger views language as a form, not as a substance. Like them, he also sees history as a succession of "language states" and codes, but he takes such a position to its furthest extreme in a kind of linguistic but thoroughly historical view of ontology and subjectivity. It is this view, as we shall now see, that has significant parallels with the work of Virginia Woolf.

Virginia Woolf and Aesthetic Truth

As with Heidegger's work, Virginia Woolf's writings are centrally concerned with a post-positivist understanding of the relationships between subjectivity, language, and the world. They contribute to the contemporaneous critique of realism and naturalism, articulating a materialist understanding of language and subjectivity. For Woolf, as for Heidegger, language constitutes the world as it is perceived and understood, and truth itself is an effect of language. Woolf also views truth as historical, rather than timeless, and she sees subjectivity and communal identity as a function of language and tradition. In every way, as we shall see, Woolf aestheticizes truth, articulating a timely materialism that

parallels the work of Heidegger and others. In other words, she attends to the forms and structures of signification, situates language and subjectivity within society and culture, and finally takes note of the historical dimension of language and the changing codes and conventions that shape its use.

A good place to begin a discussion of Woolf's materialist understanding of language and subjectivity is with her late posthumously-published memoir "A Sketch of the Past" (1939-1940, first published in 1976), for this work offers an important statement of Woolf's "philosophy." This famous statement appears early in Woolf's narrative when she is discussing her susceptibility to "sudden violent shocks" that disrupt the stretches of "non-being" in her life. These shocks, which can be prompted by such things as the experience of violence, beauty, or death, are followed by a need for explanation and a vague sense of potential meaning that does not become fully realized until it has been written down. As Woolf explains it in a key passage,

> a shock is at once in my case followed by the desire to explain it. I feel that I have had a blow; but it is not, as I thought as a child, simply a blow from an enemy hidden behind the cotton wool of daily life; it is or will become a revelation of some order; it is a token of some real thing behind appearances; and I make it real by putting it into words. It is only by putting it into words that I make it whole; this wholeness means that it has lost its power to hurt me; it gives me, perhaps because by doing so I take away the pain, a great delight to put the severed parts together. Perhaps this is the strongest pleasure known to me. It is the rapture I get when in writing I seem to be discovering what belongs to what; making a scene come right; making a character come together. From this I reach what I might call

> a philosophy; at any rate it is a constant idea of mine; that behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we—I mean all human beings—are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art. Hamlet or a Beethoven quartet is the truth about this vast mass that we call the world. But there is no Shakespeare, there is no Beethoven; certainly and emphatically there is no God; we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself. And I see this when I have a shock. (72)

What Woolf describes in this passage is a compositional process through which she arrives at some kind of sense of meaning or significance from her shocking experiences. During this process she moves from an initial sense of confusion and disorganization to a sense of order, pattern, and wholeness. She likens this process to an act of revelation in which some real thing behind appearances becomes manifest. The terms of her description thus appear at first to be metaphysical, as they recall the language of both religion and positivism ("piercing the veil"), but Woolf soon makes it clear that this is not the case at all. Whatever sense of order, pattern, and wholeness she may experience is a function of her experience with language: as Woolf says of her experience of shock, "It is only by putting it into words that I make it whole." The revelation that Woolf speaks of, then, is a manifestation of the form and structure of language. It is an experience of language itself as a linguistic mechanism that inaugurates meaning, founding the subject as well as its world.

Like Heidegger, Woolf ultimately develops an aesthetic sense of truth. The pattern that she speaks of becomes equated with a work of art, and human beings are said to inhabit this work of art which founds their world. As Woolf puts it, "the whole world is

a work of art . . . and we are parts of the work of art. Hamlet or a Beethoven quartet is the truth about this vast mass that we call the world." In referencing Shakespeare and Beethoven Woolf is quick to point out that she does not mean to suggest that there is some kind of writer-creator-god above and beyond the effects of language—some kind of pure, all knowing subjectivity detached from culture. As she clearly indicates, "there is no Shakespeare, there is no Beethoven; certainly and emphatically there is no God; we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself." Woolf proposes here a thoroughly materialist view of the subject as an effect of the constitutive nature of language, much as Heidegger does. For Woolf the subject and its world are formed in and through language, as is truth itself. Truth is seen here to be an effect of language, not its referent. Interestingly enough, in this passage Woolf also points toward the importance of literary tradition as well as musical tradition, recalling works by William Shakespeare and Ludwig van Beethoven. As we shall see, although developed only partially here, this reference is highly significant when set in the context of her novels, especially Orlando (1928) and Between the Acts (1941), where Woolf shows herself to be concerned with the formative influence of literary tradition on subjectivity and communities. Again as Heidegger does, Woolf suggests that truth is historical, that it emerges within cultural traditions and the discursive communities that they found.

Overall, what finally emerges from the above passage taken from "A Sketch of the Past" is a post-positivist sense of language and subjectivity. In contrast to positivism, Woolf does not hold the metaphysical view of language as referential. Rather than seeing language as a window onto reality or some kind of transparent medium, she views language as constitutive, as founding the world as it is perceived and understood.

Language here does not accord with reality, nor does it represent, mirror, or correspond to it. It is conceived instead as a form that shapes and molds the apprehension and understanding of the world. Woolf thus goes beyond the positivist notion of a pure observation language. She also goes beyond the positivist notion of the disinterested subject because she sees subjectivity as fundamentally constituted by language and tradition. In effect, Woolf is attempting to historicize understanding and knowledge by seeing them as determined by language. This attempt is only suggested or hinted at in "A Sketch of the Past," but it is particularly clear in her novels, where her post-positivist understanding of language and subjectivity is particularly evident.

As a novelist, of course, Woolf defined herself in opposition to the realist tradition, a fact that points to her particular understanding of subjectivity and language.[48] For Woolf, the accepted conventions of realism should be, and were being, critiqued in her time, and this process was part of a more general "smashing and . . . crashing" of received literary forms ("Bennett" 209). As she explains in her celebrated essay "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" (1924), "we hear all around us, in poems and novels and biographies, even in newspaper articles and essays, the sound of breaking and falling, crashing and destruction. It is the prevailing sound of the Georgian age" (209). Interestingly enough, in the same essay, Woolf also indicates that this critique of realism has a sociological basis; it arises from what she sees as large-scale transformations in "human relations" (195). As she explains, "All human relations have shifted—those between masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children. And when human relations change there is at

[48]I am thinking especially of Woolf's celebrated essays "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" (1924) and "Modern Fiction" (1925), both of which single out in particular the realist conventions of such novelists as H.G. Wells, Arnold Bennet, and John Galsworthy.

the same time a change in religion, politics, and literature" (195). Woolf suggests the year 1910 as a key date marking the beginning of significant changes, perhaps because of the post-impressionist exhibition in London, an important cultural event in England marking the critique of realism in painting. But what is important here is not just the date but that Woolf sees her work as at least partly conditioned by the experience of change endemic to modernity. Like many of her fellow modernists and subsequent theorists and scholars of modernity, Woolf sees that material changes bring about cultural changes. In effect, Woolf historicizes forms of literature and modes of representation, much as Gertrude Stein does in Picasso when she draws parallels between cubism, modern warfare, and "airplane" perspective. This will lead Woolf in her novels, as we shall see, to a view of literary history as a sequence of modes, genres, and styles constituting distinct subjects and worlds. From this historical perspective, realism is just one linguistic mode among other modes.

In critiquing realism Woolf also draws attention to the way in which realists attend mainly to the representation of the exterior world, to the exclusion of the representation of the subjectivity of their characters. Woolf would rather have the novelist turn inward, to focus—like James Joyce in Ulysses with his interior monologues—on the movements of consciousness, "the flickerings of that innermost flame which flashes its messages through the brain" ("Modern" 288). Such a focus would seem to suggest a psychological or phenomenological view of character, as if there is some kind of essential psychic life to be described apart from culture, but Woolf does call attention here to "messages," suggesting a relationship between language and subjectivity. More importantly, she refers to James Joyce, whose interior monologues are clearly filled not with real thoughts, ideas, or

emotions but with fragments of discourses drawn from the innumerable centers of culture of which Roland Barthes speaks. Woolf thus implies here what she fully states in "A Sketch of the Past," that there is no subjectivity apart from language, that "we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself." She also suggests the need in fiction for a finer kind of materialism than that of the realists, one that attends to the constitutive nature of language and its role in shaping the subject's apprehension and understanding of the world.

This finer kind of materialism is fully realized by Woolf in many of her novels in a variety of ways. One key way in which she does so is by foregrounding the aestheticization of truth. Like Heidegger, her concern is with the relationship between art and life, with how art inaugurates the world. Again, as with Heidegger, this concern usually takes the form of a concern with the relationship between language and subjectivity. In To the Lighthouse (1927), for instance, Woolf's preoccupation with this relationship can be seen in the novel's central scenes in which the Ramsey family and their friends come together one evening for a dinner party. As the party progresses, all the individuals begin to feel as if they are beginning to participate in some kind of order or composition that seems to make them momentarily immune to the fluidity and change of time. They begin to come together as a group on some kind of unconscious level that they cannot articulate, but then suddenly their vague experience of connection becomes clear as a result of Mr. Ramsey reading a poem out loud, and it is Mrs. Ramsey herself who has the greatest insight into the nature of their experience and its relationship to the poem.

At first she notes that the poetic recitation has the feel of a ritual, in particular of "men and boys crying out the Latin words of a service in some Roman Catholic cathedral"

(166). Then, listening to the intoned lines—"Come out and climb the garden path, / Luriana Lurilee. / The China rose is all abloom and buzzing with the yellow bee" (166)—Mrs. Ramsey suddenly has an insight into its language and its relationship to the group's experience. As the narrator explains, from the perspective of Mrs. Ramsey,

> The words (she was looking at the window) sounded as if they were floating like flowers on water out there, cut off from them all, as if no one had said them, but they had come into existence of themselves.
>
> "And all the lives we ever lived and all the lives to be are full of trees and changing leaves." She did not know what they meant, but, like music, the words seemed to be spoken by her own voice, outside her self, saying quite easily and naturally what had been in her mind the whole evening while she said different things. She knew, without looking round, that every one at the table was listening to the voice saying:
>
> I wonder if it seems to you,
>
> Luriana, Lurilee
>
> with the same sort of relief and pleasure that she had, as if this were, at last, the natural thing to say, this were their own voice speaking. (166-167)

In this passage it becomes clear to Mrs. Ramsey that the experience of the group at the dinner party is an aesthetic experience, that the poem being read is the underlying form of that group experience. Thus, the experience is neither personal nor psychological. In fact, Mrs. Ramsey has the distinct sense of being outside of herself, as if the voice of the poem were her own voice. The voice of the poem seems to be her true voice, and yet it is also the true voice for each one of the members of the group, and that voice is also simply

"words . . . cut off from them all." Woolf thus shows here in her novel what she emphatically states as axiomatic in "A Sketch of the Past," namely, that "we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself." Here the sense of self—subjectivity in general—is seen to be a function of language, while the truth of experience is aestheticized. Here also group identity—the sense of belonging—is also seen to be a function of language and art. It thus suggests the concept of discourse community, which, as we shall see, Woolf explores in more detail in her later novels.

This aestheticization of subjectivity and truth can also be seen in Orlando: A Biography (1928). As the subtitle suggests, this work is intended by the author to be viewed as a biography, but it clearly is also a work of fiction. Its fictional nature is apparent from the fact that the lifetime of its central character, Orlando, reaches from the Renaissance to the early twentieth century. Another telling sign that the novel is a fiction is the apparent switch in gender that Orlando suddenly undergoes early on, passing from man to woman. All of these fictional touches in the novel are counterpoised not only by the book's subtitle but also by the pictures of Orlando herself. Two of the five "illustrations" of Orlando in the "biography" are taken from related historical sources—blurring the distinction between history and fiction—but, even more importantly, three of the pictures are of Woolf's lover, the multitalented Vita Sackville-West, to whom Woolf dedicates the novel. Like the poem in To the Lighthouse, this juxtaposing of different elements from biography and fiction ultimately attempts to break down the distinction between life and art.

Consequently, what Woolf appears to be doing in Orlando is showing the necessarily aesthetic nature of subjectivity. The lengthy time span of Orlando's life and

the multiplicity of styles drawn from the history of English literature can be explained as the aesthetic elements of a psychological history of Sackville-West. As the narrator explains early in the novel, there is a distinction between "time on the clock and time in the mind" (98). Time on the clock is steady and uniform, the duration of its measurements never growing or contracting. In the mind, however, removed from the exterior world of time on the clock, one can live a hundred years in a day. In this regard, speaking of Orlando, the narrator says, "It would be no exaggeration to say that he would go out after breakfast a man of thirty and come home to dinner a man of fifty-five at least. Some weeks added a century to his age, others no more than three seconds at most" (99). The narrator is being playful, to be sure, but s/he is also establishing a very important principle upon which the novel is founded, one that accounts for the longevity of Orlando, namely, that there is a distinction between clock time and psychological time. With these thoughts in mind, Orlando can be read as the internal history of Sackville-West. When reading Orlando, in other words, we are not in the world of time on the clock, but in the aesthetic world of time in the mind. Each era depicted in the novel—along with its distinct use of language and related world view—be it the Renaissance, the Reformation, or the Romantic period, is an individual self within Orlando. In this regard, speaking of Orlando, the narrator says, "She had a great variety of selves to call upon, far more than we have been able to find room for, since a biography is considered complete if it merely accounts for six or seven selves, whereas a person may have as many thousand" (309). The narrator, of course, enumerates many of these selves, each in his or her particular time and place.

These selves, moreover, are not naturalized or essentialized. They are viewed as aesthetic, as a function of language and culture; and, as the narrator often indicates, they are like garments that reflect "the fashion of the time" (13). Clothes imagery thus becomes very important in Orlando, as it captures Woolf's aesthetic sense of subjectivity, and it can be traced up to this key explanatory passage:

> Vain trifles as they seem, clothes have, they say, more important offices than merely to keep us warm. They change our view of the world and the world's view of us. . . . Thus, there is much to support the view that it is clothes that wear us and not we them; we may make them take the mould of arm or breast, but they mould our hearts, our brains, our tongues to their liking. (187-188)

In having her narrator point out, as s/he does here, that clothes essentially constitute the subject, Woolf once again points out that "we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself." In articulating the thought that "clothes wear us" Woolf also develops an idea similar to Heidegger's famous formulation that language "speaks," not man.[49] In this instance, as she does throughout Orlando, Woolf clearly develops an aesthetic view of subjectivity in which the self is viewed as constituted by language; and again like Heidegger, she connects all of this to poetry, as she does in To the Lighthouse. This connection is especially clear in the case of Orlando's autobiographical poem "The Oak Tree." Orlando carries with her the manuscript of this poem for most of her life (until she publishes it in the twentieth century). It chronicles her experiences, but it is also an

[49]See Heidegger's ". . . Poetically Man Dwells . . ." (1954), pp. 215-216.

aesthetic form, and that conjunction or rather conflation of aesthetics and experience is finally what Orlando as a novel/biography achieves.

This foregrounding of the aestheticization of truth and subjectivity can also be seen in Between the Acts (1941), but on a much grander scale. The central scene of this novel is the performance of a play on a June day in 1939. The play is a pageant of the history of England written by the character Miss La Trobe. Composed partly in verse, it consists of scenes based on historical events and personages, as well as scenes taken from plays or at least based on literary works, moving from England in the time of Chaucer, through the Elizabethan period, right up to the Victorian period and the very present moment of the play itself. Different styles and world-views are presented, as once again Woolf chips away at the distinction between aesthetics and reality until there is only aesthetics. As a final means of indicating this aestheticization of the world and truth, Woolf has Miss La Trobe bring her troupe out onto the stage during the last scene to hold up looking-glasses of different sizes and shapes to the audience. At this point, the "fourth wall" between the aesthetic world and the "real" world is completely broken down, as the audience becomes part of the play. As one audience member notes, the intention of the play seems to be that "we all act" (199). The suggestion, in other words, is a Heideggerian one, that human beings dwell in art, that they inhabit the linguistic and cultural traditions of England, that they are constituted as a community by discourse. And indeed, Miss La Trobe herself feels that, as an artist, she creates and recreates the world itself, founding whatever order or meaning may be in the world. As she notes, "she was not merely a twitcher of individual strings; she was one who seethes wandering bodies and floating voices in a cauldron, and makes rise up from its amorphous mass a re-created world" (151). Here

Mrs. La Trobe articulates the post-positivist view of language as constitutive, as founding the world as it is perceived and understood.

But if language inaugurates being, constituting the subject as well as its world, it is also subject to change and transformation. For Woolf, in other words, art not only grounds history; it is historical. This condition is apparent in the literary tradition that Woolf presents in Between the Acts, as well as in Orlando. And it is a condition that is based, as in Heidegger, on a fundamental experience with death and mortality. This experience of language being subject to the limitations of time is constantly foregrounded in most of Woolf's novels. In Between the Acts, for instance, Mrs. La Trobe, as director, has to contend continually with the destructive influence of nature on the performance of her play. The wind, in particular, is especially destructive, being so severe as to regularly deafen the audience to the dialogue of the play, creating textual gaps in the novel itself. Over and over again, we are told by the narrator that "the words were blown away" (78), and the text of Between the Acts is studded with ellipses and elisions. At particularly intense moments of interference by the wind, Mrs. La Trobe thinks to herself, as she does on one occasion, that "This is death, death, death . . . when illusion fails" (180). Language here, as in Heidegger, has to contend with death, and this experience does not necessarily have to be through nature. It can be through the experience of the changing modern world itself. Woolf suggests as much when twelve World War II fighter airplanes fly overhead, interfering with the words of Reverend Streatfield, who sermonizes on the moral of the play following its performance. As the narrator describes it, "The word was cut in two. A zoom severed it. Twelve aeroplanes in perfect formation like a flight of wild duck came overhead" (193). This passage recalls Woolf's suggestion in "Mr. Bennet

and Mrs. Brown" that art is historical, that it is conditioned by changes in the social and material base of society. In any case, in Between the Acts Woolf shows the mortality of art.

She does the same in The Waves (1931). In this highly-stylized novel, which reads more like poetry than prose, the main character Bernard is a poet who is constantly preoccupied with the effects of death on language. In fact, the central event of his life, as well as of his friends' lives, is the death of his childhood friend Percival. The whole novel centers on how Bernard and his friends cope with this loss, and Bernard frequently muses on the inability of language and poetry to represent death, concluding the novel with his pointed statement that "Death is the enemy" (297). Similarly, in To the Lighthouse the central event is the death of Mrs. Ramsey during the second of three sections in the novel, appropriately entitled "Time Passes." Death, loss, and change emerge here again, and they are juxtaposed with the inability of art to finally and completely comprehend it, as demonstrated in the novel's portrayal of the artist character Lily Briscoe, who in the third section of the novel broods on the loss of Mrs. Ramsey as she attempts to complete a painting of her from memory. In Mrs. Dalloway it is Septimus who brings in the note of death. Having experienced the horrors of World War I, he is indelibly scarred, suffering from a sever case of what Freud in Beyond the Pleasure Principle termed "traumatic neurosis" (10). His psychotic life and eventual suicide—all the result of a unique experience with modernity—is juxtaposed with the aesthetic sensibility of Mrs. Dalloway and the elegant party that she pulls off at the end of the novel. Both Mrs. Dalloway and Septimus are subsumed within the passage of time as marked throughout the novel by the periodic ringing of Big Ben. All of this brings to the foreground the inevitability of death,

time, and change. In Orlando, the main character early on thinks "All ends in death" (46), and the theme of mutability is sounded throughout the novel. As the narrator proclaims on one occasion, "Change was incessant, and change perhaps would never cease" (176). It is death, finally, that fuels the transformations in language and culture presented in the novel, reminding us, as J. Hillis Miller has recently put it, that "all storytellers speak in the shadow of death" (Reading 228).

In this regard, Woolf's novels can be seen to parallel the philosophy of Heidegger in a number of ways. As with Heidegger's work in hermeneutic ontology, Woolf's writings are centrally concerned with a post-positivist understanding of the relationships between subjectivity, language, and the world. They contribute to the contemporaneous critique of realism and naturalism, articulating a materialist understanding of language and subjectivity. For Woolf, as for Heidegger, language constitutes the world as it is perceived and understood, and truth itself is an effect of language. Woolf also views truth as historical, rather than as timeless, and she portrays subjectivity and communal identity as a function of language and tradition, developing an early notion of discourse community. Woolf essentially aestheticizes truth, articulating a timely materialism parallel to the work of Heidegger. Like the German philosopher, she attends to the forms and structures of signification, situates language and subjectivity within society and culture, and takes note of the historical dimension of language and the changing modes and conventions that shape its use.

In noting the historical dimension of language Woolf links modernism to the experience of modernity, a link that I have explored throughout the previous chapters. In effect, she suggests a sociological reading of modernism, as many of her fellow modernists

do. In her novels and essays, as we have already seen, she draws attention to a sense of changing social relations, to the experience of World Wars I and II, and to the experience of living in cities. As a result, her work tends to deal with the sense of perpetual discontinuity and shock that is endemic to the experience of modernity. It is this sense that is finally behind her materialist view of language and subjectivity. The implication is that the destructive experience of modernity disrupts the social relations that institute language and subjectivity. Such an experience not only reveals the socially constructed nature of knowledge, but also propels language and subjectivity towards new formations. Woolf's use of the interior monologue—the presentation of discontinuous thoughts and ideas in motion—can be seen as a literary attempt to capture this sense formally. In a number of ways, Woolf's technique parallels the common sociological view of the time about the turning inward and the atomization of human beings as a consequence of living under the material conditions of the modern world—a view often associated with Georg Simmel's "The Metropolis and Mental Life" (1903). In this historicizing of understanding implied in her technique and suggested throughout her novels and essays, Woolf develops a timely materialism that goes beyond the positivist view of subjectivity and language, linking modernism with the experience of modernity. In this regard, Woolf—together with Stein and Joyce—anticipates the advent of postmodernism and its war on totality in the arts and the natural and human sciences.

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