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I

The Making of Modernist Paradigms

THIS CHAPTER does not offer a comprehensive survey of the uses of our concept, but rather a critical inquiry into dominant, paradigmatic conceptions of what constitutes modernism. I shall examine how modernism has been understood and what the concept has been made to signify, or, to put it differently, how we collaborate with historical reality (including texts designated "modernist") in constructing the paradigm called "modernism."

The term itself appears to provide us with a semantic base on which to ground such an endeavor. "Modernism" signals a dialectical opposition to what is not functionally "modern," namely "tradition." But this pivotal characteristic seems to be progressively less prevalent in recent critical discourse, in part because we now often perceive modernist literature itself as a "tradition." Actually, the antitraditional aspects of modernism and their implications were played down at an early stage by writers and critics seeking an aesthetic order in which to ground a modern poetics. Thus, while the rage against prevalent traditions is perhaps the principal characteristic of modernism, and one that has provided it with a name, this feature has always been counteracted by a desire to forestall the anarchistic implications of such a stance. I am not thinking primarily of the attempts of Eliot, Pound, and others to create alternative, often highly personal and idiosyncratic, "tradi-

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tions." This in itself can be seen as just another way of undermining the authority of tradition and unveiling the arbitrariness of the traditions that the modernists felt they were up against. I have in mind, rather, the more strictly formal-aesthetic politics of critics and commentators on modernism (some of whom were also practicing modernists). In their various guises, these approaches constitute a broad and powerful critical paradigm.

The Rage for Order

In his famous essay "Ulysses, Order, and Myth," which appeared in 1923, T. S. Eliot lays the groundwork for a great deal of subsequent criticism and appraisal of modernism. He contends that Joyce's use of Homer's *Odyssey* has the importance of "a scientific discovery," making *Ulysses* not a novel, because "the novel is a form which will no longer serve; it is because the novel, instead of being a form, was simply the expression of an age which had not sufficiently lost all form to feel the need of something stricter." This "something stricter" is the use of myth as "a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history."[1]

Here Eliot strikes a chord that has been sounded in innumerable theories of modernism to this day. Modernism is viewed as a kind of aesthetic heroism, which in the face of the chaos of the modern world (very much a "fallen" world) sees art as the only dependable reality and as an ordering principle of a quasi-religious kind. The unity of art is supposedly a salvation from the shattered order of modern reality. The aesthetics of modernism have been made to look like a solution to Stephen Dedalus's problem in *Ulysses*, when he complains that history is a nightmare from which he is trying to awake. Eliot's aesthetics in fact strongly resembles Stephen's, presented in an ironic manner by Joyce in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*: "The esthetic image is first luminously apprehended as

1. T. S. Eliot, *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich/Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1975), p. 177.

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selfbounded and selfcontained upon the immeasurable background of space and time which it is not. You apprehend it as *one* thing. You see it as one whole. You apprehend its wholeness. That is *integritas*."[2] This organic theory of art, derived partly from classical, partly from romanticist aesthetics, is echoed in different ways in a great number of works on modernism—very often through a reference to Eliot's essay or Joyce's novel—and is frequently taken to constitute the center of the revolutionary *formal* awareness and emphasis that most critics detect in modernist works.

In "Spatial Form in Modern Literature," Joseph Frank says that for T. S. Eliot "the distinctive quality of a poetic sensibility is its capacity to form new wholes, to fuse seemingly disparate experiences into an organic unity."[3] Frank finds that a spatial form of this kind is indeed the distinctive mark of "modern" literature, undermining the "inherent consecutiveness of language" (10) and suspending "the process of individual reference temporarily until the entire pattern of internal references can be apprehended as a unity" (13). In so doing modern literature locks past and present "in a timeless unity" and achieves a "transformation of the historical imagination into myth—an imagination for which time does not exist" (60).

Maurice Beebe relies partly on Frank in defining modernism, which he sees as being distinguished by four features: formalism and aesthetic autonomy; detachment and noncommitment or " 'irony' in the sense of that term as used by the New Critics"; use of myth as a structuring device; and a development from Impressionism to reflexivism, centering its attention upon "its own creation and composition."[4] There is no mention at all of the historical or social relevance of modernist

2. James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), p. 212. As an implied author Joyce is of course not uniformly ironic throughout the novel, but he wields the narrative voice in such a way that there is a fluid play of identification with and distance from the young aesthete. In view of their mode of presentation, it is surprising how literally Stephen's aesthetic theories have been read by critics as the author's forthright statements, if not his manifesto.

3. Joseph Frank, "Spatial Form in Modern Literature," *The Widening Gyre: Crisis and Mastery in Modern Literature* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1963), p. 10.

4. Beebe, "What Modernism Was," p. 1073.

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works, to which Beebe actually refers to as "the closed worlds of Modernist art" (1077).

Such a portrayal of modernism, especially in the Anglo-American context, is clearly influenced by New Criticism, which Beebe does not fail to invoke. Eliot's position of authority, both as poet and critic, is also instrumental in this particular New Critical construction of the modernist paradigm. It is crucial not so much because of Eliot's view of the use of myth as a structuring device[5]—the New Critics were not all that interested in mythology—as because of his persistent emphasis on form as an autonomous vehicle of aesthetic significance. From a certain perspective, modernism, in its rejection of traditional social representation and in its heightening of formal awareness, would seem the ideal example of New Critical tenets and of the New Critical view of the poem as an isolated whole, whose unity is based on internal tensions that perhaps remain unresolved but nonetheless do not disturb the autonomy of the work. Indeed, when critics use the term "modernist criticism" they often seem to be referring to New Criticism, and they appear unaware that there need be no "natural" connection between modernist works and this particular critical or analytical paradigm.

To this day, however, critics persist in reading modernism through the spectacles of New Criticism. Recently this tendency has been apparent in the discussion surrounding postmodernism (see chapter 3), which is frequently seen as rejecting *this particular kind* of "modernism," together with the aesthetics of the organic, unified, autonomous and "pure" work of art. Of course, one might point out another, similar connection between modernist literature and modern criticism and theory, namely that between modernism and Russian formalism, whose emphasis on the autonomy of the literary work—based on an opposition between "poetic" and "ordinary" or "communicative" language—prefigures that of New Criticism

5. As I shall discuss later, Eliot, in his essay on the mythic order of Joyce's *Ulysses*, is actually not at all interested in the interpretive implications of mythological parallels or allusions. He is mainly concerned with securing a structural grid on which to latch the work that can find no such coherent structural means in the chaos of modern history. Hence, myth comes to serve as an aesthetic substitute for the "lost" whole of historical reality.

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as well as that of a great deal of structuralist work. But as we shall see, the implications of Russian formalist poetics are more intricate and productive with respect to modernism than are those of New Criticism.

Outside History

Many modernists have to a great extent shared the "purist" views of formalists and New Critics, and have even forcefully uttered ahistorical notions of poetic autonomy in their essays and other commentaries. But nothing obliges us to take such views as adequately representative of their own work or of modernism in general. Too seldom have literary scholars demonstrated a skeptical view of such auto-commentary, as Mary Louise Pratt does in her criticism of the "poetic language" fallacy. Having shown how formalist/structuralist theories are echoed in the critical writings of modernists like Rilke, Valéry, and Mallarmé, she concludes:

> It is one thing for the poet, or even the poet-critic, to claim that his art exists in a universe of its own and bears no relation to the society in which he and his readers live. It is quite another for the literary analyst to unquestioningly accept such a view as the basis for a theory of literature. The poet's declaration that he no longer wishes his work to be associated with "society" or "reality" or "commerce" or "the masses" is hardly grounds for the critic to decide that the associations have in fact ceased to exist or ceased to pertain to the critical enterprise.[6]

That modernist literature has severed ties with society, reality, or history has indeed been a basic assumption behind a great deal of criticism of modernism—not only criticism that could be labeled formalist or New Critical, but, significantly, also historically minded criticism, in particular a certain brand of Marxist criticism. According to Robert Onopa, for instance, one of the premises of modernism, partly inherited from ro-

6. Mary Louise Pratt, *Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), p. xviii.

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manticism, "is the notion that the *uses* of art are very much like the uses of religion."[7] The use-structure of religion—consisting in salvation from and transcendence of reality, the fallen world—provides modernism with "an escape from history" (364). Onopa does not fail to relate this religious aesthetics to New Criticism:

> Organic theory, Richards' dissociation of poetic use from poetic content, and Eliot's notion of impersonal poetry all were elaborated by New Criticism, perhaps the most complete view that the work of art exists outside of, and should be treated outside of, history, since art is self-contained and generates its own laws. Once outside of history, the work is available as a paradigm of paradise, the antithesis of the fallen world, and, as a product of man, a means for him to transcend the fallen, time-bound world. (372)

Daniel Fuchs states: "The modernist aesthetic invented the New Criticism, in which judgments of form preceded judgments of meaning,"[8] and Robert Weimann goes so far as to label "modernist" the various kinds of formalist criticism that he feels have been dominant in the twentieth century, such as New Criticism and the critical works of T. S. Eliot. "Modernism," in Weimann's vocabulary, seems to stand for a rejection of any objective continuity of literary history in favor of a spatial aesthetic, be it within the literary work itself or on the level of present appreciation of the literature of the past.[9] Modernism, it would seem, like Stephen Dedalus, is striving to escape from the nightmare of history, trying to rule out the dimension of time. Lillian Robinson and Lise Vogel approach this issue from a slightly different angle but reach a parallel conclusion: "Modernism . . . seeks to intensify isolation. It forces the work of art, the artist, the critic, and the audience outside of history. Modernism denies us the possibility of understanding ourselves as

7. Robert Onopa, "The End of Art as a Spiritual Project," *TriQuarterly*, no. 26 (Winter 1973): 363.

8. Daniel Fuchs, "Saul Bellow and the Modern Tradition," *Contemporary Literature* 15 (Winter 1974): 69.

9. Robert Weimann, *Structure and Society in Literary History: Studies in the History and Theory of Historical Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), esp. pp. 71–78, 201–10.

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agents in the material world, for all has been removed to an abstract world of ideas, where interactions can be minimized or emptied of meaning and real consequences. Less than ever are we able to interpret the world—much less change it."[10]

Ironically, it was on precisely such grounds that Ortega y Gasset valorized the "dehumanization of art," the almost complete dissociation of "human sensibility" from "artistic sensibility" that he saw modern art having achieved.[11] Thus, it sometimes appears that the most radically historical and the most radically formalist critics fundamentally agree on the basic characteristic of modern(ist) art and literature, one group condemning what the other celebrates. But while Ortega is, or at least pretends to be, modestly (and aristocratically!) resigned to the subsequent status of art as "a thing of no consequence" (49), critics such as Robinson and Vogel often seem to find this state of affairs immensely threatening: it is as if by being displaced "out of history" we are lifted from a state of security and comfort and put in a bewildering place that defies interpretation, much like Kafka's heroes. It is noteworthy that some critics might want to see this as a thoroughly "historical" experience and argue that such a displacement is a moment of being shocked "into history." The latter notion is one we shall come back to, especially in discussing the theories of Theodor W. Adorno.

History with a Vengeance versus "Pure" Aesthetics

Critics who vehemently attack modernism for being ahistorical, on grounds of its preoccupation with formal order, often open the floodgates of history through their very characterization of modernism. In an essay on expressionism written in 1934, Georg Lukács attacked its abstract, ahistorical, irrational, and mythical forms, claiming that the new fascist powers should find in it a suitable aesthetic to draw on in forming a

10. Lillian Robinson and Lise Vogel, "Modernism and History," *New Literary History* 3 (Autumn 1971): 198.

11. José Ortega y Gasset, *The Dehumanization of Art and Other Essays on Art, Culture, and Literature* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 11.

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new culture.[12] Although three years later the Nazis denounced expressionism as "decadent art," this analogy between modernism and fascism has persistently been drawn, partly because several modernists have actually tended toward, or even openly supported, fascism. In one of the two essays that started the expressionist controversy in the German expatriate magazine *Das Wort* in the late 1930s, Klaus Mann attacked the famous poet Gottfried Benn, arguing that his overemphasis on form reflected the authoritarian order and discipline of the fascist state.[13] It later became a commonplace to elaborate on this formal-ideological connection in generalizing about modernism, well-known examples being Fredric Jameson's *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist*, and Frank Kermode's discussion of modernism in *The Sense of an Ending*. Kermode argues that modernists find in myth and in the "formal elegance of fascism" a means to create closed, immobile aesthetic hierarchies; such form expresses "order as the modernist artist understands it: rigid, out of flux, the spatial order of the modern critic or the closed authoritarian society."[14]

But in light of the eagerness displayed in critically establishing a connection between modernism and fascism, it is baffling how rarely its further historical and formal implications are probed. First, where does this formal-ideological nexus place modernism with regard to the prevalent capitalist-bourgeois culture of the twentieth century? Second, how, and under what conditions, can aesthetically elaborated form (*as form*) become the vehicle of a specific ideology? And third, do readers of modernist works actually or predominantly experience the strict formal elegance that proponents as well as adversaries of modernism so often concentrate on? It is highly significant that while modernism is often accused of being a *cult of form*, it is also (not infrequently by the same critics, such as Lukács)

12. Georg Lukács, "Größe und Verfall des Expressionismus," *Essays über Realismus* (Neuwied and Berlin: Luchterhand, 1971), pp. 109–49.

13. Klaus Mann, "Gottfried Benn. Die Geschichte einer Verirrung," in Hans-Jürgen Schmitt, ed., *Die Expressionismusdebatte: Materialien zu einer marxistischen Realismuskonzeption* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1973), pp. 39–49.

14. Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 114, 111.

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attacked for *formlessness* and for distorted and anarchic representation of society, disintegration of outer reality, and disorderly manipulation of language. It is at this point that the whole notion of modernism moving the communicative act of reading "outside of history" shows itself to be a contradiction in terms, for the very detection of either exaggerated formal maneuvers or distorted representations of reality assumes some kind of "norm," a symbolic and semiotic order that underlies our every act of social communication.

It is not surprising, therefore, that in writings on modernism the theory of aesthetic autonomy frequently appears to coexist with that of cultural subversion, or a questioning of the very foundations of the reigning social order. This, it seems to me, is a central paradox of modernist studies. In an essay in the widely read symposium *Modernism 1890–1930*, Malcolm Bradbury and John Fletcher remark how modernists strive for "that making of pattern and wholeness which makes art into an order standing outside and beyond the human muddle, a transcendent object, a luminous whole."[15] In another essay in the same anthology, written by Bradbury and James McFarlane, modernism is seen to signal "overwhelming dislocations," one of "those cataclysmic upheavals of culture" that "question an entire civilization or culture."[16] This underscores, I believe, the most important task facing modernist studies: we need to ask ourselves how the concept of autonomy, so crucial to many theories of modernism, can possibly coexist with the equally prominent view of modernism as a historically explosive paradigm. This dichotomy, hardly recognized by most critics, is characteristic for the divergent approaches to modernism as, on the one hand, a *cultural force*, and on the other as an *aesthetic project*. But if we refuse, as I think we must, to acknowledge any strict boundaries between the two, then the Dedalian view of the work of art as a "transcendent object" and an isolated aesthetic whole is invalidated as a critical basis for modernist studies; it is an abstract notion that is bound to be unsettled or

15. Malcolm Bradbury and John Fletcher, "The Introverted Novel," in Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, ed., *Modernism, 1890–1930* (Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin Books, 1976), p. 407.

16. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, "The Name and Nature of Modernism," in Bradbury and McFarlane, ed., *Modernism, 1890–1930*, p. 19.

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deconstructed when the work is received and disseminated, when it enters the "human muddle."

Clement Greenberg, in his well-known essay "Modernist Painting," provides us with a good example of how critics often seek to skirt the problem of cultural dislodgment: "The essence of Modernism lies, as I see it, in the use of the characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself—not in order to subvert it, but to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence."[17] Hence, "each art had to determine, through the operations peculiar to itself, the effects peculiar and exclusive to itself" whereby "each art would be rendered 'pure,' and in its 'purity' find the guarantee of its standards of quality as well as of its independence" (102). The effects peculiar to painting lie in its flatness or two-dimensionality, but those of literature would analogously rest in the "materiality" of language or of "the word," as opposed to its communicative function; very much, of course, the argument of the Russian formalists. But Greenberg is caught in a kind of intentional fallacy: he asserts that the modernist self-criticism of each artistic discipline does *not* take place "in order to subvert it," but he fails to provide any arguments or evidence concerning this nonintention, or, more important, concerning its nonsubversive *effect*. Ironically, he would hardly bring up the issue of subversion if he did not consider it a potential result of this self-critical function of modernism.

Despite the obvious weaknesses in his argument, Greenberg's theory has become a standard approach to modernism, thus buttressing an immensely powerful critical paradigm in modernist studies, a paradigm moreover that is now accepted by various less formalistically oriented critics. In fact, this paradigmatic construction is often simply accepted as an objective observation. Thus, Hal Foster, arguing for a "postmodernism of resistance," has no qualms about talking about the modernist striving for "the purity of each art," a purity clearly analogous to and arising from the sanctity of individual modernist works, which he describes as "unique, symbolic, visionary" and as "closed systems."[18] Moreover, this ahistorical pro-

17. Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," in Gregory Battock, ed., *The New Art: A Critical Anthology* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1966), p. 101.

18. Hal Foster, "Postmodernism: A Preface," in Hal Foster, ed., *The Anti-*

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jection seems to have found its way into theories ostensibly approaching modernism from a very different angle. Alan Wilde, in his self-declared phenomenological approach, establishes for the "absolute irony" of modernist works a concept of the "anironic," which is based on a moment of fusion and harmony, a "formal symmetry," a self-contained aesthetic whole that balances out the modernist perception of fragmentation: "Unable to make sense of the world but unwilling to forgo the ideal model of orderliness, the absolute ironist folds back on himself in the sanctuary of his art."[19] This reading of the modernist paradigm is only a thinly disguised reworking of the New Critical approach, according to which the modernist work manages to garner for itself a total aesthetic autonomy in its unresolved ironic tensions, its "equal poise of opposites" (35).

We should now be ready to turn to critics who are less likely to be hampered by aestheticist, formalist, or New Critical theories and who do not turn so blind an eye to the historical significance of modernist aesthetic practices.

Complementing History

R. A. Scott-James notes that "there are characteristics of modern life in general which can only be summed up, as Mr. Thomas Hardy and others have summed them up, by the word *modernism*."[20] Scott-James has in mind a highly self-conscious, bleak mode of sociocultural expression that he sees as being on a threatening rise in the domain of literature. His book, published in 1908, was of course written before the wave of the more radical formal experiments in modernist literature and art, but it significantly prefigures a good deal of critical response to modernism as a historical and cultural force, in contrast to the various aesthetic appraisals that largely limit

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Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture (Port Townsend, Wash.: Bay Press, 1983), pp. x–xi.

19. Alan Wilde, *Horizons of Assent: Modernism, Postmodernism, and the Ironic Imagination* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), pp. 33–34.

20. R. A. Scott-James, *Modernism and Romance* (New York and London: John Lane, 1908), p. ix.

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themselves to the formal characteristics and achievements of modernist writing. The former, instead of viewing modernist aesthetics as more or less divorced from history, seeks to inquire into the various ways in which modernism either parallels, interacts with, or reacts to social modernity. Such studies set up modernist paradigms that appear radically different from the formalist ones, although the latter have arguably had the upper hand on the post–World War II critical scene, at least within the Anglo-American sphere.

Naturally, such cultural inquiries do not constitute a uniform approach to modernism. There is, however, widespread agreement as to the constituents of modernity to which modernism is felt to be responding. I have already alluded to some decisive moments in the general historical framework of the so-called modern experience. Its more detailed "physical" signs and symptoms have often enough been enumerated and packed into summaries; I have selected the following pregnant specimen, taken from one of the most spirited books on the issue of modernism, Marshall Berman's *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*:

> The maelstrom of modern life has been fed from many sources: great discoveries in the physical sciences, changing our images of the universe and our place in it; the industrialization of production, which transforms scientific knowledge into technology, creates new human environments and destroys old ones, speeds up the whole tempo of life, generates new forms of corporate power and class struggle; immense demographic upheavals, severing millions of people from their ancestral habitats, hurtling them halfway across the world into new lives; rapid and often cataclysmic urban growth; systems of mass communication, dynamic in their development, enveloping and binding together the most diverse people and societies; increasingly powerful national states, bureaucratically structured and operated, constantly striving to expand their powers; mass social movements of people, and peoples, challenging their political and economic rulers, striving to gain some control over their lives; finally, bearing and driving all these people and institutions along, an ever-expanding, drastically fluctuating capitalist world market. In the twentieth century, the social processes that bring this maelstrom into being,

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and keep it in a state of perpetual becoming, have come to be called "modernization."[21]

The visions and ideals nourished by these "world-historical processes," Berman goes on, have "come to be loosely grouped together under the name of 'modernism.' This book is a study in the dialectics of modernization and modernism." One might feel that "modernism" is in fact used all too "loosely" here, but Berman's study typifies one approach to modernism, namely, a general view of it as a dialectical counterpart of social modernity, partaking of both the fascination and the destruction that characterize modernization. And although Berman's work could not be said to represent an aesthetic "reflection theory," modernism (being a broad and seemingly dominant cultural trend) is for him a kind of mirror image of social modernization.

Several other scholars have elaborated on the dialectics of modernization and modernism. Hugh Kenner points out how modern science has changed the world outlook in art as well as its formal characteristics. He argues that modernist poetry, like modern science, draws on "patterned energies"[22] as well as on qualities of space discovered in the twentieth century. Elsewhere he points out that the radically altered "quality of city life" obligated a "change in artistic means."[23] He mentions the "Machine," the "Crowd," electricity, telephone, new means of transportation, and other aspects of modern technology, and goes on to discuss how these elements influenced the structure of James Joyce's work (and not just his subject matter). "The deep connections between modernism and modern urban rhythms" are nowhere more evident than in *Ulysses*," Kenner concludes (28). Such rhythms and sounds are also prominent in other major modernist novels, some of which followed in the wake of *Ulysses*; one thinks for instance of Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* and Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer*. But the

21. Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), p. 16.

22. Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971), p. 153.

23. Hugh Kenner, "Notes toward an Anatomy of 'Modernism,'" in E. L. Epstein, ed., *A Starchamber Quiry: A James Joyce Centennial Volume, 1882-1982* (London: Methuen, 1982), pp. 4–5.

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structural connections between modernism and modern city life also reach back in time beyond *Ulysses*, and are often traced to Baudelaire's poetry.

Thus, critics have frequently elaborated on the *parallels* between urban life, modern science, and technological progress on the one hand and modernist art and literature on the other. James Mellard notes that when "the new science exploded the world, it exploded with it the novel as well."[24] The problem with modernist paradigms invoked by drawing such direct analogies between modernism and modernity (scientific or more broadly social) is that modernism, and the social experience it utters, assumes the role of a reverberation and even reflection of social modernization. Such an analogy can easily miss the sociocultural and ideological positioning of modernism with regard to social modernity, or can reduce it to a unilaterally reproductive or symbolic act. The latter tendency, in fact, is clearly exemplified by critics who see in the formal fervor of modernism a reflection of fascist discipline or totalitarian ideologies.

One can of course point to several parallels between modernization in social life and in art. It is well known, for instance, that certain modernist groups, in particular the Italian futurists, reveled in the technological aspects of modernity and celebrated in their work modern machinery, the increased tempo of urban life, in some cases even modern warfare. But we must not let such cases obscure the undeniably troubled relationship that generally exists between modernism and modernization. In "What Was Modernism?" Harry Levin asks in conclusion, playing on Stephen Dedalus's famous pledge in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, whether it has not been the endeavor of the modernist generation "to have created a conscience for a scientific age?"[25] "For" may be a misleading preposition here, should it suggest that this conscience is uniformly activated *by* the "scientific age" or by modernization in general. Is this highly disturbed conscience not a critical reaction to modern-

24. James M. Mellard, *The Exploded Form: The Modernist Novel in America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980), p. 30.

25. Harry Levin, "What Was Modernism?" *Refractions: Essays in Comparative Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 295.

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ization, presenting its otherness, its negativity, that which is negated by the prominent modes of cultural production?

Answering this question involves, of course, determining the semantic and significatory status of "modernization," of sociocultural modernity. In the introductory essay to *Modernism 1890–1930*, Bradbury and McFarlane assert: "Modernism is our art; it is the one art that responds to the scenario of our chaos."[26] It is noteworthy that their criterion seems to be that our age indeed constitutes a "chaos." This is arguably a modernist criterion, but risks restricting modernism to a mirroring relationship with this "scenario of our chaos." In fact the authors do go on to draw the kind of analogy discussed above: "It is the art consequent on Heisenberg's 'Uncertainty Principle', of the destruction of civilization and reason in the First World War . . . of existential exposure to meaninglessness or absurdity," to quote but a few items from their list. Later on, however, they seem to eschew this reductive analogy, when they argue that modernism is to some extent centered in "a notion of a relationship of crisis between art and history" (29). Such a relationship of crisis would explain why modernist art can *not* simply be the reflecting counterpart of history, or of social modernization. This relationship, and hence the conscience that modernism may have created for (or against) our scientific age, is clearly too troubled and distorted to be possibly mapped on to classical and mimetic models of the relationship between art and reality.

Mimetic notions, however, have sometimes been used as an apology for modernism. In his seminal anthology of 1919, *Menschheitsdämmerung*, Kurt Pinthus asks about modern poetry: "Must it not be chaotic, like the age out of whose torn and bloody soil it grew?"[27] Later Georg Lukács was to *attack* modernism on mimetic grounds. In his contribution to the expressionist controversy in *Das Wort*, he claimed that expressionism had drastically failed to reflect adequately the "objective totality of reality,"[28] and that like other modern movements of the

26. Bradbury and McFarlane, "The Name and Nature of Modernism," in Bradbury and McFarlane, ed., *Modernism, 1890–1930*, p. 27.

27. Kurt Pinthus, *Menschheitsdämmerung: Ein Dokument des Expressionismus* (Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch, 1959), p. 25 (my translation).

28. Georg Lukács, "Es geht um den Realismus," in Schmitt, ed., *Die Expressionismusdebatte*, p. 198. I find Lukács's formulation important: "Das Problem der

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imperialist era it reflected only the "tattered surface" of capitalist society in an "unmediated" manner (201–202). Thus, expressionism "disavows every relation to reality" and declares a subjective war on all its contents (207). The paradox here is that expressionism supposedly disavows its ties to reality while also reflecting, in its unprocessed rawness, the "tattered surface" of that reality, that is, capitalist society.

The problem lies in Lukács's reflection theory, which appears to assume that "reality" can actually be rendered ("mirrored") without being mediated. But in his early works Lukács had already argued that the reality that people may perceive as being unmediated will generally not appear to have a "tattered surface" (it is no coincidence that in the essay at hand he denounces both his *Theory of the Novel* and *History and Class Consciousness* as youthful, "idealistic" and "reactionary" works [218–219]). In order to survive and reproduce itself, capitalist ideology requires a smooth surface, one which, in the process of its mediation, takes on the guise of a *normal* human condition.[29] In *Wider den mißverstandenen Realismus* Lukács states that in modernist writing everyday life under capitalism, the bourgeois norm, is, to a large extent justifiably, presented as a "distortion" (in terms of petrification as well as fragmentation) of the human character. But, says Lukács, literature must have a clear social-human "concept of the normal if it is to 'place' distortion correctly," see it in its correct context, "that is to say, to see it as *as* distortion."[30]

The concept of the "normal" is central here: it is inconceivable that capitalist reality could be continually "lived" as a distortion, for then the distortion would have no background of normalcy against which it would be recognizable. If, however, the reality of the bourgeois-capitalist era is lived as a more or

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objektiven Totalität der Wirklichkeit." It has been trimmed down to "question of totality" in the English translation: "Realism in the Balance," trans. Rodney Livingston, in Ernst Bloch et al., *Aesthetics and Politics* (London: New Left Books, 1977), p. 33. Subsequent page references are to the German version.

29. Such normalcy, however, is radically ruptured in the case of extended "physical" crisis, especially that of war, which is of course the historical background for Kurt Pinthus's remark quoted above.

30. Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, p. 33. Cf. the German original, *Wider den mißverstandenen Realismus* (Hamburg: Claassen, 1958), pp. 32–33.

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less accepted *order*, as "the normal," then Lukács's view of the modernist distortion of life calls forth implications radically different from those he seeks to establish, since modernism can only present society as a place of distortion by working against a dominant concept of the normal. This is a dialectics that Lukács will not acknowledge, since his concept of "the normal" is of a specific ideological order and not the one operative in bourgeois society (although his career can be partly seen as trying to reconcile the two). Lukács is thus in agreement with a host of other critics in taking modernism to task for distorting reality, for failing to adhere to normal conditions of human life, for creating a sense of chaos in its depiction of the world, and for causing a perceptual crisis in the receiver.

Aesthetics of Subversion

Lukács's approach to the issue of modernism is contradictory, but his contradictions are illuminating. They illustrate how the historical conception of a modernist paradigm can (and has tended to) vacillate between mimetic notions of a modern "chaos" reflected in one way or another by modernist works and an understanding of modernism as a chaotic subversion of the communicative and semiotic norms of society.

Not all those who judge modernism critically from the vantage point of social norms are as hostile as Lukács, and some are among the most perceptive commentators on modernism. In what remains one of the most interesting and insightful essays on modernism, "The Brown Stocking" (the final chapter of *Mimesis*), Erich Auerbach brilliantly analyzes Virginia Woolf's novel *To the Lighthouse* as a representative literary approach to, and "realist" reworking of, modern reality. *To the Lighthouse* might seem to be an ideal example of the "aesthetic whole" in modernist art, ending as it does with the boat reaching the lighthouse and with Lily Briscoe's line being drawn in the center of her painting: "With a sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line there, in the centre. It was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought . . . I have had my vision."[31] Auerbach, however, not limiting his interests to

31. Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (London: Panther Books, 1977), p. 192. *To the Lighthouse* has actually been used as an example of a "close alliance" between

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strictly formal matters, finds that the novel tends toward chaos, toward the breaking down of cultural unity or "whole." In this as well as in other works that break with traditional methods of representation, he sees signs of "confusion" and "a certain atmosphere of universal doom" and "something hostile to the reality which they represent."[32]

Another liberal humanist, Lionel Trilling, approaches modernism in a not dissimilar fashion. "On the Modern Element in Modern Literature" describes how wary he was when first offering a course on modern literature to his students, since it seemed to him that its "modern element" entailed quite ominous portrayals of human irrationality and cultural subversion that were obviously hostile to the dominant views of social order of which he and his students were a part.[33] The conservative culture critic Daniel Bell, making the issue more explicitly ideological, claims that for over a century modernism has persisted in "providing renewed and sustained attacks on the bourgeois social structure."[34]

In this respect Lukács, the Marxist, is basically in agreement with Bell. Using Kafka as an archetypal example, Lukács claims that modernists reduce social reality to nightmare and portray it as an angst-ridden, absurd world, thus depriving us of any sense of perspective. We have already seen how Lukács, who constantly argued that Marxist ideology had to build on and critically utilize the bourgeois heritage, claims that literature must have a clear social-human concept of the "normal," and that this is precisely what modernism denounces. Lukács shares with Auerbach and Trilling the notion that as a cultural force modernism leads to the inevitable subversion of traditional humanism (a topic we shall take up again later in this chapter). But what we see in this variety of responses to modernism is significantly the very reverse of Eliot's view of the

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modernism and New Criticism; see Joanne V. Creighton, "The Reader and Modern and Post-Modern Fiction," *College Literature* 9 (1982): 216–18.

32. Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1953), p. 551.

33. Lionel Trilling, "On the Modern Element in Modern Literature," in Stanley Burnshaw, ed., *Varieties of Literary Experience* (New York: New York University Press, 1962), pp. 407–33.

34. Daniel Bell, "Beyond Modernism, Beyond Self," *The Winding Passage: Essays and Sociological Journeys, 1960–1980* (New York: Basic, 1980), pp. 275–76.

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paradigmatic breakthrough achieved by Joyce in *Ulysses*. Whereas Eliot saw Joyce imposing a strict aesthetic order upon the futility and anarchy of contemporary history, these critics judge modernism as an anarchic force attacking and even severely undermining our social order and our habitual way of perceiving and communicating reality.

Crisis of the Subject

Approached from such angles of social norms, modernism is judged not as an aesthetic complement of social modernity, but rather as a vehicle of crisis within the "progress" of modernization. The signs of this crisis are generally felt to reside in a modernist preoccupation with human consciousness (as opposed to a mimetic concern with the human environment and social conditions), and they are perhaps most pronounced in the use of the "stream of consciousness" technique in modernist fiction. Thus, in view of previous literary history, modernism is felt to signal a radical "inward turn" in literature, and often a more thorough exploration of the human psyche than is deemed to have been probable or even possible in pre-Freudian times. But this inward turn is also widely held to have ruptured the conventional ties between the individual and society.

According to Lukács, modernism, aided by contemporary theories of existential philosophy, presents the individual as being eternally and by nature solitary, extricated from all human, and in particular from all social, relations, existing ontologically independent of them.[35] Consequently, by showing the individual as being "thrown into existence," modernism basically negates outward reality, and equates man's inwardness with an abstract subjectivity. This "reading" of the modernist presentation of human individuality consolidated early on into a prominent paradigm. In the words Ortega y Gasset used for the will-to-style of modern art, it is often characterized as the "dehumanization of art." But the dismantling of conventional presentation of individuality has led to a certain dichot-

35. Lukács, *Wider den mißverstandenen Realismus*, p. 16; *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, p. 20.

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omy in modernist aesthetics as well as in theories of modernism. On the one hand, it seems that modernism is built on highly subjectivist premises: by directing its attention so predominantly toward individual or subjective experience, it elevates the ego in proportion to a diminishing awareness of objective or coherent outside reality. It is customary to point to the preeminence of such subjectivist poetics in expressionist and surrealist literature, and more specifically in certain techniques, such as manipulation of "centers of consciousness" or the use of "stream of consciousness" in modern fiction.

On the other hand, modernism is often held to draw its legitimacy primarily from writing based on highly antisubjectivist or impersonal poetics. T. S. Eliot was one of the most adamant spokesmen of a neoclassical reaction against romantic-personal poetry: "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality." Hence, "the progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality," and "it is in this depersonalization that art may be said to approach the condition of science."[36]

In his study of the "genealogy" of English modernism, Michael Levenson has shown how "modernism was individualist before it was anti-individualist, anti-traditional before it was traditional, inclined to anarchism before it was inclined to authoritarianism."[37] But such differences and developments can easily be overemphasized and are sometimes based on misleading notions of the author's "presence in" or "absence from" the work as it is received. In *Ulysses*, for example, it is near impossible to detect a narrator or narrative perspectives that can decidedly be said to represent the author. In that limited sense, the text might be called antisubjective or impersonal (and Joyce was indeed a spokesman of a "poetics of impersonality"), but at the same time we experience in the work radical modes of subjective representation of reality, to the extent that outside reality comes to lose its habitual, mimetic reliability. But so does the "reality" of individual experiences mediated

36. T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," *Selected Essays, 1917–1932* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1932), pp. 10, 7.

37. Levenson, *A Genealogy of Modernism*, p. 79.

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through the text, and in this respect the effect of such "subjective" methods is clearly related to that of the "loss of self" or the "erasure of personality" that exhausts many characters in modern fiction, such as Ulrich in Musil's *Mann ohne Eigenschaften*.[38] This foregrounds a decisive point: what the modernist poetics of impersonality and that of extreme subjectivity have in common (and this outweighs whatever may separate them) is a revolt against the traditional relation of the subject to the outside world.

In one sense, therefore, Lukács is not far off the mark in stating that the ontological degradation of the objective reality of man's outside world (Außenwelt des Menschen) and the corresponding exaltation of his subjectivity necessarily result in a distorted structure of the subject.[39] The problem is that Lukács takes this subject to be an already given, natural entity, whereby he forfeits a critical distance that might elucidate modernist treatments of subjectivity. Gabriel Josipovici, for instance, claims that modernism brings about a deep questioning of the bourgeois self that "was in fact a *construction*. It was built up by impulses within us in order to protect us from chaos and destruction."[40] And this has of course been a basic view of a great deal of recent criticism and theory, much of which has in fact vehemently reinforced modernist deconstruction of bourgeois identity.

It is a widespread notion that chaos and destruction are the only alternatives that modernism has held up for individuality and the traditional bourgeois self. Again, we can look to Lukács for a critical (and highly polemic) "construction" of a modernist paradigm. His views are representative not only because his approach to modernism has assumed a central place in much sociological and Marxist criticism, but also because of his strong ties with traditional bourgeois humanism, the critical branch of which has often reacted with great reserve, if not

38. See Wylie Sypher, *Loss of the Self in Modern Literature and Art* (New York: Vintage Books, 1962), p. 74.

39. Lukács, *Wider den mißverstandenen Realismus*, p. 22; *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, p. 24. Lukács talks about a "Verzerrung" in the "dynamischen Struktur des Subjekts."

40. Gabriel Josipovici, *The Lessons of Modernism and Other Essays* (Totowa, N.J.. Rowman and Littlefield, 1977), p. x.

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hostility, to modernism. In dealing with expressionism in the thirties, Lukács was mainly responding to the "formalism" of its poetry, but when he comes to write *Wider den mißverstandenen Realismus* his emphasis is on fiction, and his views are largely shaped and sharpened by his reaction to modernist modes of characterization. He attacks modernism for not creating believable and lasting "types," but instead effecting a fading of characters into shadows or congealment in ghostly irrationality. By reducing reality to a nightmare, possibly in the nebulous consciousness of an idiot, and through its obsession with the morbid and the pathological, modernism partakes in "a glorification of the abnormal," in "anti-humanism."[41]

Again Lukács involves us in an insightful paradox. While he finds modernism to have severed the essential ties between subjective experience and objective reality, he still sees in its portrayal of the human character an *aggressive* social (that is *anti*social) attitude, which he and several other critics have judged to betoken a crisis of humanism. One is reminded again of the words of Robinson and Vogel on how the modernist intensification of isolation undermines our interpretive facilities. Humanist critics are often of the same opinion. Eugene Goodheart finds that the "lesson of modernism" lies in providing "an exacerbated sense of insecurity about the world . . . and if one institutionalizes this lesson in the university, one is getting not moral guidance, but subversion."[42] Like some other critics, Goodheart finds an early sign of this tendency in Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*: "Dostoevsky's underground man violates every rule of moral and intellectual decorum in order to achieve a sense of individual vitality. . . . He regards the moral sense as a disease from which he is trying to purge himself" (10). The nameless (anti)hero of Dostoevsky's work, who begins by stating that he is sick and who seeks to distance himself from all "normal" behavior, is often seen as the prototype of the modernist "hero," in whom heightened

41. Lukács, *Wider den mißverstandenen Realismus*, pp. 63, 31, 29, 32; *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, pp. 58, 31, 30, 32. The English translation is at times inaccurate, and sometimes condenses the text to the point of leaving out relevant things.

42. Eugene Goodheart, "Modernism and the Critical Spirit," *The Failure of Criticism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 10.

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consciousness and social isolation and paralysis go hand in hand, as do the exaltation of individuality and its erasure.

Modernism and Its Discontents

Notes from Underground is among the books Lionel Trilling finds characteristic for the "modern element" that he sees as socially subversive, hostile to the positivism and the "common sense" of our bourgeois era. Trilling comes to the conclusion that characteristically *modern* literature, and the "freedom" it seeks, are incompatible with our society.[43] Several humanist critics have highlighted the discontent of modernism at the hands of social order, the extraordinarily bleak view of modern culture and society they find embodied in modernism. According to Richard Poirier, "modernism is associated with being unhappy."[44] Part of the fame of Eliot's *Waste Land* springs undoubtedly from the fact that its title is felt to be typically evocative of the pessimistic view of modern culture often associated with modernism (which its adversaries sometimes call "wastelandism"). Modernist writing—and here it is often felt to be greatly influenced by Nietzsche—in its preoccupation with "alienation, fragmentation, break with tradition, isolation and magnification of subjectivity, threat of the void, weight of vast numbers and monolithic impersonal institutions, hatred of civilization itself" (these are, according to Daniel Fuchs, the "general characteristics of modernism"[45]), would seem to be the music played to the imminent decline of Western culture.

Other critics, elaborating on the dark vision that modernism is felt to usher in, lay more stress on how it opens the gates to the forces of the irrational, and some lament the concomitant destruction of reason. The modernist interest in human consciousness was not least directed at the recently "discovered" subconscious layers of the life of the mind. It is noteworthy that

43. Trilling, "On the Modern Element in Modern Literature," p. 433.

44. Richard Poirier, "The Difficulties of Modernism and the Modernism of Difficulty," in Arthur Edelstein, ed., *Images and Ideas in American Culture: The Functions of Criticism* (Hanover, N.H.: Brandeis University Press, 1979), p. 125.

45. Fuchs, "Saul Bellow and the Modern Tradition," p. 75.

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Lukács, in discussing the modernist obsession with the pathological, sees in it a tendency conspicuously analogous to Freud's psychological theories.[46] Several modernists were of course influenced by Freud, and we can no doubt extract from modernist studies various significant aspects of a "Freudian" theory of modernism. But modernist explorations of the darker regions of the mind frequently go hand in hand with the kind of cultural and historical revolt often associated with Nietzsche. This approach to modernism is perhaps most forcefully presented not in a piece of academic criticism, but by Thomas Mann in *Doktor Faustus*, which is indeed a book about music composed for an era of decline and destruction.

Doktor Faustus although a novel, is one of the most important books *about* modernism, written by an author who was continually contemplating the cultural implications of modernism in art and literature (whether Mann was himself a "practicing" modernist is by no means as obvious as some critics seem to think; his whole relationship with aesthetic modernity is extremely complex). In *Doktor Faustus* he amalgamates his views of modernism into a novel whose "hero" is both a modernist artist and a kind of reincarnation of Nietzsche, whom Mann considered the preeminent cultural precursor of modernism. I believe we can find in this novel a rich melting pot of paradigmatic notions about modernism.[47]

In the composer Adrian Leverkühn we find, first of all, a familiar *biographical* image of the modernist artist. Leverkühn typifies the isolation of the artist from modern society. He suffers from "Weltscheu," as he calls it; in a way he symbolizes the separation, so often associated with modernism, of the world of art from the "real" or "outside" world. Not only does he ignore a public audience, "because he altogether declined to imagine a contemporary public for his exclusive, eccentric, fantastic dreams,"[48] but he seems to have only scorn for the

46. Lukács, *Wider den mißverstandenen Realismus*, p. 29; *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, p. 30.

47. I am not the first critic to note the relevance of Mann's novel for the whole debate around modernism. Gabriel Josipovici states in the preface to *The Lessons of Modernism* that his book is "the result of a long struggle to come to terms with . . . Thomas Mann's Dr. Faustus" (p. ix).

48. Thomas Mann, *Doctor Faustus: The Life of the German Composer Adrian Leverkühn as Told by a Friend*, trans. H. T. Lowe-Porter (New York: Vintage Books, 1971), p. 165.

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outside world: "He wanted to know nothing, see nothing, actually experience nothing, at least not in any obvious, exterior sense of the word" (176). His aesthetic views are characterized by the subjective-impersonal nexus mentioned above. He refuses to discuss his music as a personal expression, yet his art is said to arise from "his exclusive, eccentric, fantastic dreams" (165). His biographer, Serenus Zeitblom, finds a perfect expression of this paradox in Leverkühn's last work: "The creator of *'Fausti Wehe-klage'* can, in the previously organized material, unhampered, untroubled by the already given structure, yield himself to subjectivity; and so this, his technically most rigid work, a work of extreme calculation, is at the same time purely expressive" (488). Zeitblom experiences a kind of solution of the paradox we have already mentioned: how modernist works often seem to involve an interplay of spontaneous reactions of subjective faculties and a "distancing" effect caused by elaborate formal mediation. This becomes a central issue for the dichotomy of order and chaos that runs through the novel.

Already at the beginning of his career Leverkühn finds Western culture a wasteland. He wonders whether epochs that really experienced *culture* could have known the concept itself. For unconscious presence, "naiveté," may be a prerequisite of culture.

> What we are losing is just this naïveté, and this lack, if one may so speak of it, protects us from many a colourful barbarism which altogether perfectly agreed with culture, even with very high culture. I mean: our state is that of civilization—a very praiseworthy state no doubt, but also neither was there any doubt that we should have to become very much more barbaric to be capable of culture again. Technique and comfort—in that state one talks about culture but one has not got it. (59–60)

Leverkühn's music can be seen as a search for this barbarism that would bring back "Kultur" into a decadent modernity. It is significant that Zeitblom's biographical task, as he sees it, is very much like that of many students of modernism, that is, he is seeking to reestablish the "lost" connections between the world of art (in this case the art of Leverkühn) and the world of history: "The subject of the narrative is the same: 'the outer

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world,' and the history of my departed friend's connection or lack of connection with it" (397). But Zeitblom's own sense of history and the world around him is inextricably tied up with a strong tradition from which he is unable to distance himself. Leverkühn might actually be alluding in part to Zeitblom when he says that "the nineteenth century must have been an uncommonly pleasant epoch, since it had never been harder for humanity to tear itself away from the opinions and habits of the previous period than it was for the generation now living" (25).

Leverkühn, however, being almost painfully self-conscious of the habitualized modes of existence (and this awareness is in itself often considered a major characteristic of modernism), revolts against the aesthetic traditions of the nineteenth century. While still a student he asks why "almost all, no, all the methods and conventions of art today *are good for parody only*?" (134). In reporting on one of Leverkühn's works, Zeitblom notes: "There are altogether no thematic connections, developments, variations. . . . Of traditional forms not a trace" (456). But what troubles Zeitblom more than Leverkühn's formal innovations is the fact that they carry with them, in his major works, a deep questioning of prevalent notions of human existence, indeed, a radical decentering of man. Leverkühn wants his music to depict a universe in which modern man is peripheral, while the elemental and the primal dominate; he describes for Zeitblom his fascination with outer space and the depths of the ocean with its monstrous creatures, which he would like to bring to the surface (269–70). The psychological implications are unmistakable, and Zeitblom, in his "allegiance to the sphere of the human and articulate" (269), is frightened by the kind of intellect he finds in Leverkühn, which "stands in the most immediate relation of all to the animal, to naked instinct" (147). Thus, Leverkühn's sophisticated and self-conscious aesthetics is not to be severed from the totemic and the cultic or the most primitive levels of human consciousness, and Zeitblom must acknowledge that aestheticism and barbarism are intimately related (373). But as the two coalesce, Zeitblom realizes that they also negate traditional aesthetics and the humanism that has formed its bedrock and that is the foundation of his own view of life. To Zeitblom, who describes

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himself as "by nature wholly moderate, of a temper, I may say, both healthy and humane, addressed to reason and harmony" (3)—indeed an archetype of "the normal" as promoted by Lukács—Leverkühn's aesthetics and art is the threatening "other," the demonic (a key word in the novel), a Faustian expression of forbidden desires that lead Leverkühn into a pact with the devil. (We seem indeed to have traveled to the "other" side of the notion of modernist art as religious sanctuary!)

In seeking the connections between Leverkühn's music and the turbulent age, Zeitblom is acutely aware of his friend's perception of historical ruptures, aware that World War I signaled for him "the opening of a new period of history, crowded with tumult and disruptions, agonies and wild vicissitudes," and that "on the horizon of his creative life . . . there was already rising the '*Apocalypsis cum figuris*' " (315), an apt name for his magnum opus.

From his own perspective (which incidentally closely resembles that of Stefan Zweig in *Die Welt von Gestern*), Zeitblom also sees the world undergoing an apocalypse; the world of yesterday, a world that had seemed to point toward unequivocal progress in every sphere of life, is disintegrating:

> I felt that an epoch was ending, which had not only included the nineteenth century, but gone far back to the end of the Middle Ages, to the loosening of scholastic ties, the emancipation of the individual, the birth of freedom. This was the epoch which I had in very truth regarded as that of my more extended spiritual home, in short the epoch of bourgeois humanism. And I felt as I say that its hour had come; that a mutation of life would be consummated; the world would enter into a new, still nameless constellation. (352)

Zeitblom is unwillingly but inexorably pulled toward drawing an analogy between the worldly powers, principally fascism, that are shattering the bourgeois-humanist world and the art of the friend he holds in such high reverence; an art that so obviously is also hostile to the products of that succumbing world. Mann has placed the question of the ideological role of modernism in a blatant, although ambivalent, historical context. Zeitblom appears to commit one version of the reflection

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fallacy discussed earlier, but he does so in a way that reverses the alleged modernist reflection of the "closed," rigidly hierarchized order of the fascist state. For Zeitblom, Leverkühn's modernism is the musical accompaniment to the brutal, chaotic, barbaric attacks launched on bourgeois humanist order in the "practical" sphere of life.

What prevents Zeitblom from seeing beyond this mirror relationship is not least his inability to view critically the ideological implications of those powers of reason which he associates with humanism. He sees no continuity, only schism between Western capitalist society and the emerging forces of fascism, and he is also unable to fathom the resilience and survival of Western capitalism and of the bourgeois humanist subject that is so ineluctably tied up with that social form. All he sees is its imminent destruction and the total lack of any viable alternatives. Mann's own perspective is of course to be dissociated from that of his biographer-narrator, Mann's very example of the surviving bourgeois subject, indeed of "the normal," and it is only against the background of Zeitblom that we can appreciate the "abnormality" or subversion of Leverkühn's art and life. Mann's dialectics is strikingly incorporated into the structure of the novel: he has a traditional humanist-realist narrator filter and mediate the norm-breaking art and aesthetics of a radical modernist. Thus, Mann places himself at a distance from Leverkühn, while to a certain extent he also treats Zeitblom with Leverkühn's methods of irony and parody, showing, for instance, that Zeitblom's relation to history is no more "innocent" than that of Leverkühn. Despite all his humanist values, Zeitblom is prone to the kind of nationalist fervor and desire for social order from which Nazism tapped so much energy.

Discontent as Negation

I do not want to try to determine what Mann's total depiction of modernism in *Doktor Faustus* amounts to, rich and ambivalent as it is. But from the way he plays his two "heroes" against one another, Mann appears to concur with the observation, which modernists are often felt to play out in their works, that

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humanism has entered an era of deep crisis; that in a capitalist world of increasing economic conflict, social strife, and war, the heritage of bourgeois humanism and all the values it was taken to ensure are evidently at sea. While modernists have repeatedly been attacked for antihumanism in their portrayal of a fragmented subject in an estranged or morbid universe, they have often seen their aversion from traditional humanism as necessitated by a historical development that called this subject and its values into question. Hermann Broch called the final chapter of *Die Schlafwandler* "The Breakdown of Values" (Zerfall der Werte), and in a commentary on the novel he describes this topic in the following terms:

> At the center of this final volume is the "breakdown of values," the historical and epistemological portrayal of the four-century-long process which under the guidance of rationality dissolved the Christian-platonic cosmology of medieval Europe, an overwhelming and terrifying process, ending in total fragmentation of values, the unleashing of reason together with the eruption of irrationality in every sense, the self-laceration of the world in blood and suffering.[49]

Broch significantly points out the double-edged relation of modernism to the whole program of the Enlightenment. Modernism is arguably both an heir to the project of the Enlightenment and a revolt against its historical process. This ambivalence is variously manifest in the presentation of the modern "subject." Modernism cannot really make the "loss" of the bounded bourgeois subject and the breakdown of its values a part of its discourse without in the first place invoking the validity, however tentative, of that subject and those values. To quote Terry Eagleton:

> The contradiction of modernism in this respect is that in order valuably to deconstruct the unified subject of bourgeois humanism, it draws upon key negative aspects of the actual experience of such subjects in late bourgeois society, which often enough

49. Hermann Broch, "Der Wertzerfall und die Schlafwandler," pub. in an appendix to Paul Michael Lützeler, ed., *Die Schlafwandler: Eine Romantrilogie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1978), p. 734 (my translation).

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> does not at all correspond to the official ideological version. It thus pits what is increasingly felt to be the phenomenological reality of capitalism against its formal ideologies, and in doing so finds that it can fully embrace neither. The phenomenological reality of the subject throws formal humanist ideology into question, while the persistence of that ideology is precisely what enables the phenomenological reality to be characterized as negative.[50]

Modernism thus invokes the bourgeois subject, but it does so more through negation than affirmation. Hence—and this sums up the various aspects of the crisis of the subject discussed above—modernism can be seen as the negative other of capitalist-bourgeois ideology and of the ideological space of social harmony demarcated for the bourgeois subject. This appears to cohere with the historical theory of what Matei Calinescu has termed "the two modernities," according to which modernism is judged in the light of its opposition to the "progress" of social modernity. We have already seen how such a dualism characterizes some critical approaches to modernism whereby modernism is seen as subverting and negating the cultural and ethical heritage of traditional bourgeois society. According to Calinescu:

> At some point during the first half of the nineteenth century an irreversible split occurred between modernity as a stage in the history of Western civilization—a product of scientific and technological progress, of the industrial revolution, of the sweeping economic and social changes brought about by capitalism—and modernity as an aesthetic concept. Since then, the relations between the two modernities have been irreducibly hostile, but not without allowing and even stimulating a variety of mutual influences in their rage for each other's destruction.[51]

Critics who emphasize how modernism negates the cultural "contents" of bourgeois society as well as the status of its

50. Terry Eagleton, "Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism," *Against the Grain: Essays 1975–1985* (London: Verso, 1986), p. 144.

51. Matei Calinescu, *Faces of Modernity: Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), p. 41.

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subject—Trilling will serve as an example—often do so in terms of thematic, ethical, sociological, psychological, philosophical, and ideological issues. The question remains whether this is an appropriate basis on which to ground such a negation and hence a modernist paradigm. Surely we can imagine a traditional realist text that fulfills the thematic requirements of such a negation. It seems, therefore, that in order for us to begin finding the edges of modernism, we have to relate the above issues to modes of presentation, to language and formal mediation, winding our way back to the question of "modernist form."

In the above-quoted article, Hermann Broch goes on to say of his *Schlafwandler* trilogy: "While 'Pasenow' still holds on to the style of the old family novel (although forged into a thoroughly modern one), 'Esch' already shows signs—in strict parallel to the historical process of disintegration in the forms of life—of the disintegration and blowing-up of narrative art which reaches an extraordinary breakthrough in 'Huguenau' " (734–35). Broch thus draws a "strict parallel" between his narrative and the historical process of the disintegration of life. This constitutes one more variant of the reflection theory: in the "explosion" of narrative forms we are to see reflected the dissolution of bourgeois forms of life. What is involved here, however, is not a reflection of the prevalent perceptions of the "progress" of social modernity, but rather a "reproduction" of its negative or its "other"; that is, of social experience that contradicts the "official" ideology of coherence and progress that is interwoven with technological and capitalist-economic development. This cultural negation, moreover, is manifested in the revolt against traditional narrative modes. Hence, while in cultural terms modernism can be seen as constituting the "other modernity," this cultural function, by necessity as it were, entails a negation of prevalent literary and aesthetic traditions.

A powerful instance of such a negation occurs toward the end of *Doktor Faustus*. Zeitblom notes of Leverkühn's last work, *Fausti Weheklag*: "He wrote it, no doubt, with his eye on Beethoven's Ninth, as its counterpart in a most melancholy sense of the word. But it is not only that it more than once formally negates the symphony, reverses it into the negative" (490), for Zeitblom also finds a reversal of the "Watch with me" of Geth-

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semane; Faustus does not want anyone to stay awake with him or tempt him to be saved, not because it is too late, "but because with his whole soul he despises the positivism of the world for which one would save him, the lie of its godliness" (490). Leverkühn's work is a negation not only of Beethoven's paradigmatic symphony but of society's general "positivity," which is annulled by its negative reversal. Once one knows that Theodor W. Adorno was Mann's musical advisor in writing *Doktor Faustus*, it is hard not to think that he had a hand in Mann's formulation of negativity. Indeed, this seems to be confirmed in "Zu einem Porträt Thomas Manns," in which Adorno describes how he "rebelled" against Mann's original description of *Fausti Weheklag*: "Not only in view of the overall situation of Doctor Faustus's lamentation, but with regard to the novel as a whole, I found the heavily loaded pages too positive, too uninterruptedly theological. They seemed to lack what was called for in the decisive passage, the force of a determinate negation as the only permitted sign of the other."[52] He then relates how Mann changed the text to the liking of his advisor.

Adorno's Aesthetics of Negativity

So far we have traced several modernist paradigms as they have been constructed by critics and scholars in the context of twentieth-century literature—first those that, in a mode strongly related to New Criticism, judge modernism on the basis of strictly formal aesthetics, according to which modernist works are characterized by a largely nonreferential discourse and an ahistorical formal autonomy. Touching on certain Marxist readings of such an "escape" from history, we then moved through approaches to modernism as a historical counterpart of social modernity on to various readings of it as a culturally subversive enterprise that revolts against dominant notions of the bourgeois subject or of bourgeois-capitalist historical development.

Jochen Schulte-Sasse claims that "the two most prevalent

52. Theodor W. Adorno, *Zur Dialektik des Engagements: Aufsätze zur Literatur des 20. Jahrhunderts II* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1973), p. 144 (my translation).

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(and also most interesting) theories of modernism [are] those proceeding from Adorno and from French poststructuralism."[53] This is a rather surprising statement. Rightly or wrongly, although in many cases it can and should be approached as a theory of modernism, poststructuralism (especially in the Anglo-American sphere) has been discussed mostly in light of theories of postmodernism, with which it is more or less contemporary. Adorno's work, especially outside German-speaking countries, has hardly been at the forefront of the discussion surrounding modernism. His theories certainly deserve to be placed at the center of that debate, however, not least since they focus acutely, within a coherent aesthetic framework, on important ideas and problems that are often more loosely expressed by others.

Adorno's theories of art, in particular his *Ästhetische Theorie* (1970), are shaped by—are indeed almost concomitant with—his approach to modernism. I have chosen to ignore in this context how this undermines the generality of his aesthetic theory, for instance with regard to premodernist art. The most fruitful way to look at *Ästhetische Theorie*, this most significant, although unfinished, work of Adorno's ripe years is to read it as a theory of modernism. Also, before proceeding, I would like to note that Adorno's term "die Moderne," is clearly equivalent to our use of "modernism,"[54] its first signs being visible at around the mid-nineteenth century, especially in Baudelaire's work, although it reaches its heights only in the twentieth century and is still fully in the foreground in Beckett, who is one of Adorno's chief examples of "die Moderne."

In his opening chapter Adorno states that the communication of works of art with the outside world, from which they

53. Jochen Schulte-Sasse, "Foreword: Theory of Modernism versus Theory of the Avant-Garde," in Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. xv.

54. On at least two occasions, Adorno actually uses the concept "Modernismus" for a kind of epigonal, imitative modernism; he clearly assumes it to be a rather pejorative term. See *Ästhetische Theorie*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970), p. 45; *Versuch, das Endspiel zu verstehen: Aufsätze zur Literatur des 20. Jahrhunderts I* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch, 1973), p. 167. The same use of the term can be found in Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Gerald Fitzgerald (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), pp. 216–18.

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"blissfully or unhappily" seclude themselves, takes place through noncommunication, and this is how they manifest their fragmentation.[55] This view of artworks as fractured and communicating through noncommunication obviously points to features of modernist art, a view that is substantiated when Adorno seeks to pinpoint the social nature of art. He sees art as being social neither solely through its mode and state of production nor through the social derivation of its material content. "Rather, it is social primarily because it stands opposed to society." This function is facilitated through the autonomy of art, for by crystallizing its autonomous qualities "rather than obeying existing social norms and thus proving itself to be 'socially useful'—art criticizes society just by being there. Pure and immanently elaborated art is a tacit critique of the debasement of man by a condition that is moving toward a total-exchange society where everything is a for-other." The asocial aspect (das Asoziale) of art "is the determinate negation of a determinate society."[56]

We see here pivotal elements of Adorno's view of the sociocultural function of art. Its social context is that of an ever-expanding, monolithic capitalist society, moving toward a system of total exchange as well as total rationality, which is equivalent to absolute reification in matters of social interaction. It is a system in which the very notion of meaning has become wholly contaminated with the capitalist ideology of total exchange. In the face of this human debasement, art's basic mode of resistance is in a sense that of opting out of the system's communicative network in order to attack it head on from the "outside." In one of his essays Adorno even goes so far as to say that "the topical work of art gets a better grip of society the less it deals with society."[57]

Adorno's complex dialectics, however, by no means rests on a one-sided purism, for the qualities of art that promote its "autonomy" also arrange themselves in such a way that they *reflect* social conditions. This happens through a process of nega-

55. Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. C. Lenhardt (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), p. 7; cf. *Ästhetische Theorie*, p. 15.

56. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 321; cf. *Ästhetische Theorie*, p. 335.

57. Adorno, "Voraussetzungen," *Versuch, das Endspiel zu verstehen*, p. 115 (my translation).

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tive mimesis, not unlike that discussed in the context of Broch and Mann. Adorno states in *Ästhetische Theorie* that modern art has no interest in a direct reflection of the social surface; it does not "want to duplicate the façade of reality," but "makes an uncompromising reprint of reality while at the same time avoiding being contaminated by it." Kafka's power as a writer, he adds, is precisely that of this "negative sense of reality."[58] In a separate essay, Adorno rejects any attempt to see in Kafka's work the physical reflection of a modern bureaucratic society. Rather, the shabbiness depicted in Kafka "is the cryptogram of capitalism's highly polished, glittering late phase, which he excludes in order to define it all the more precisely in its negative. Kafka scrutinizes the smudges left behind in the deluxe edition of the book of life by the fingers of power. No world could be more homogeneous than the stifling one which he compresses to a totality by means of petty-bourgeois dread; it is logically air-tight and empty of meaning like every system."[59]

Here we can observe another dialectical twist in Adorno's theory: by arguing that modernists like Kafka present the "negative" of society (presenting what Adorno in fact sometimes calls "the negative of negativity"), he hands meaninglessness over to the "logically closed" capitalist system. In this society, logic and rationality have turned into their opposites. In *Ästhetische Theorie* Adorno notes that the fact that mimesis is practicable in the midst of rationality, employing its means, manifests a response to the base irrationality of the rational world and its means of control. For the purpose of rationality, of the quintessential means of regulating nature, "would have to be something other than a means, hence a non-rational quality. Capitalist society hides and disavows precisely this irrationality, whereas art does not." Art holds forth the image, rejected by rationality, of its purpose and exposes its other, its irrationality.[60]

While we may not agree with Adorno's pessimistic view of the inevitably destructive social process of human rationality, which he saw as being typically represented by the Enlighten-

58. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 28; *Asthetische Theory*, p. 36.

59. Theodor W. Adorno, "Notes on Kafka," *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1981), p. 256.

60. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 79; *Ästhetische Theorie*, p. 86.

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ment, his is a compelling explanation of the "irrational" element in modernism, an element that some critics can only blindly reject. (On the other hand, one might also note that his pessimism—appearing more radically in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which he coauthored with Horkheimer—runs parallel with the bleak view of the modern human situation that critics, particularly traditionally humanist critics, see as prominent in modernist literature).

The modernist reversal of society's rational negativity, according to Adorno, finds an authentic expression in the objectification of a subjective experience of society. This experience, as Eagleton puts it in the above quote, does "not at all correspond to the official ideological version" of bourgeois society, but is in fact its negative "reflection." Such objectification, therefore, must not take on the shape of the ostensibly objective portrayals of subjective experience in realist representation, for, as Adorno notes in discussing Beckett, the negativity of the subject as a true objective gestalt can only manifest itself in a radically subjective configuration (Gestaltung). It cannot emerge in an "allegedly higher objectivity."[61] If I understand Adorno's typically dense formulation correctly, it provides us with the most elaborate illustration yet of the subject-object nexus in modernist representation. While subjective experience is to be mediated through objectification, that is, as an objective gestalt (and it is at this level that Adorno discards the relevance of the author's personality), this objectification, in order to express the negativity of the experience, must be constructed in a radically "subjective" manner—it must not take on the shape of "rationalized" objective representation to which as social beings we are accustomed. Thus, on one level of representation, for instance in Kafka's work, the outside world is forcefully objectified through all the surface elements familiar to us, but on another level this objectification does not concur with our habitualized perception of the "objective" world, and hence takes on the shape of a radically subjective construct. This subjective "Gestaltung" effects the erasure or

61. "Die Negativität des Subjekts als wahre Gestalt von Objektivität kann nur in radikal subjektiver Gestaltung, nicht in der Supposition vermeintlich höherer Objektivität sich darstellen." Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, p. 370; cf. *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 354.

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explosion, discussed above, of the bourgeois subject, while at the same time reflecting, in a "negative" manner, its social enchainment.

It follows that Adorno is perhaps the most prominent representative of the view that modernism, in Fredric Jameson's words, is not so much "a way of avoiding social content . . . as rather of managing and containing it, secluding it out of sight in the very form itself."[62]

The Function of Form

Adorno has sought a solution to a paradox mentioned earlier in this chapter; he has gone far toward reconciling the oppositional conceptions of modernism as, on the one hand, an autonomous aesthetic practice and, on the other, a historical-cultural force. But on at least one level, it seems to me, this solution may have been bought at too high a price. While Adorno's outright rejection of intentionality and the validity of authorial-subjective expression may be justified, he goes too far in erasing the notion of any kind of *social consciousness* behind the creation of the work. Artists and writers, according to Adorno, should not think of themselves as critical agents, they should concentrate on formal matters, for what is socially determinant in works of art "is content that articulates itself in formal structures."[63] Through the socially unconscious wielding of form, history would find its way into works of art, since it is an inherent part of them, whereby the works constitute themselves as an unconscious historiography of their age.[64] There is a sense in which this certainly holds true, but as a general rule it borders on an essentialist reflection theory, and even though we may agree that form, in one way or another, is

62. Fredric Jameson, "Reflections in Conclusion," in Ernst Bloch et al., *Aesthetics and Politics* (London: New Left Books, 1977), p. 202.

63. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 327; *Ästhetische Theorie*, p. 342: "Gesellschaftlich entscheidet an den Kunstwerken, was an Inhalt aus ihren Formstrukturen spricht."

64. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, p. 272: "Sie sind ihrer selbst unbewußte Geschichtschreibung ihrer Epoche; das nicht zuletzt vermittelt sie zur Erkenntnis." Cf. *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 261.

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always historical, we do not have to share Adorno's rejection of artists and writers, such as Brecht, who self-consciously use their formal constructions as vehicles of more "obtrusively" foregrounded social issues.

Adorno's theory of form, aside from the function of form as a vehicle of the negative historiography of the age, shares a good deal with that of the Russian formalists, even though they have more obviously contributed to the construction of other modernist paradigms. Like the formalists, Adorno distinguishes between aesthetic or "poetic" language and the language of everyday communication. Adorno says of aesthetic language that its purposefulness, divested of practical purpose, lies in its language-semblance, in its purposeless conceptual lack, its difference from significatory language.[65] Antisignificatory language is of course part and parcel of Adorno's very concept of form, which designates a pronounced confrontation of art and empirical life.[66]

The antithesis in Adorno's writings between aesthetic and significatory language need not, however, stem from the formalists, for in his aesthetics this antagonism is a fundamental element of social negativity. But as such it does play the role of a kind of "defamiliarization," to use a formalist concept that has been prominent in the theoretical discourse surrounding modernism. Modernist writing, through its autonomous formal constructions, places us at a "distance" from society, making it strange, whereby we come to see its reverse, but true, mirror image, its negativity.

Hence, Adorno's aesthetics of negativity, by linking artistic autonomy to a dialectical social mimesis, seeks to reconcile the two major functional implications of the formalist theory of defamiliarization. Victor Shklovsky, in his seminal essay "Art as Technique," notes that "habitualization devours works, clothes, furniture, one's wife, and the fear of war," and states that art, through its defamiliarizing practices, "exists that one may recover the sensation of life."[67] This formulation would

65. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, p. 211; *Aesthetic Theory*, pp. 202–3.

66. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, p. 213; *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 205.

67. Victor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," in Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis, ed., *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), p. 12.

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appear to have significant social bearings; indeed, defamiliarization could be seen as a major arsenal of devices to be directed against reified ideologies. It is precisely this aspect of the defamiliarization theory, as Peter Bürger points out in discussing its inherent duality, that Brecht developed further in his "Verfremdungstechnik."[68] But Shklovsky immediately adds: "The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar,' to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged" (12). Shklovsky is here under the sway of the general formalist tenets of aesthetic autonomy and the separation of poetic from "ordinary" language. It is of course this "purist" side of defamiliarization, according to which "making it strange" only means ensuring the total separation of the work from social affairs, that one can then trace throughout the methodologies of twentieth-century literary criticism, and nowhere as clearly as in Anglo-American New Criticism. We have already discussed how such aesthetics of sanctity and wholeness have been projected onto the emergence of the modernist paradigm.

But the Russian formalists' broad significance for critical approaches to modernism is by no means limited to issues of defamiliarization. They were among the first literary scholars to realize the significance of Saussure's dissociation of "natural" links, within the sign, between the signifier and the signified. Thus, they helped initiate a period of semiotic inquiry into the relationship between the levels of reference and meaning, an inquiry that has also been carried out, in a different way, by modernism in art and literature. But despite the fact that the formalists had intimate ties with the literary experiments of contemporary Russian futurism, we must be cautious in drawing self-explanatory parallels between modernist literature and modern literary theories or critical methodologies. The Russian formalists can certainly be judged as instigators of a semiotic revolution, but what they inquired into at a theoretical (analytical and metalinguistic) level regarding production and

68. Peter Bürger, *Vermittlung—Rezeption—Funktion: Ästhetische Theorie und Methodologie der Literaturwissenschaft* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch, 1979), p. 98.

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function of meaning in literary language is more immediately acted out as a *crisis* of meaning in the realm of modernist literature, as is apparent when its site of troubled signification is observed in the context of social norms of language use.

From this perspective one could argue that it is only with the emergence of poststructuralist activities that theory "catches up with" the literary practices of modernism in this performative sense. Modernism could certainly be seen as the aesthetic embodiment of the "crisis of representation" that structuralists, and particularly poststructuralists, have greatly elaborated on recently and to some extent "performed" themselves. While Anglo-American advocates of poststructuralism have frequently taken it to be a part of a postmodernist revolt against the burden of a modernist tradition, some of them have acknowledged the often blatantly modernist tendencies in the methods and language-play of poststructuralist critics. Gregory Ulmer, for instance, states that "the break with 'mimesis,' with the values and assumptions of 'realism,' which revolutionized the modernist arts, is now underway (belatedly) in criticism, the chief consequence of which, of course, is a change in the relation of the critical text to its object—literature."[69] And a consequence of that change is our difficulty in determining to what extent poststructuralist practices present us with a theory of modernism, or a construction of a modernist paradigm—for to some extent the borders between theory and practice have been erased.

At the risk of oversimplification, however, we can extract from the variety of poststructuralist work two major concerns that relate to the issues we have been discussing in terms of modernism: the crisis of language and representation and the crisis of the subject. The source of these two manifestations of crisis, which poststructuralists generally see as being intimately related, is frequently sought through modernist texts. Julia Kristeva, for instance, using early modernist texts as her examples, demonstrates how an archaic, instinctual, incestuous, maternal process of "signifiance" in norm-breaking liter-

69. Gregory Ulmer, "The Object of Post-Criticism," in Foster, ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic*, p. 83. See also Ronald Schleifer, "The Poison of Ink: Modernism and Post-War Literary Criticism," *New Orleans Review* 8 (Fall 1981): 241–49.

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ary works violates the authorized codes and the symbolic function of social signification, allowing the subject to slip out from under "the constraints of a civilization dominated by transcendental rationality."[70] Kristeva also notes that this process is dangerous for the subject and must be "linked to analytical interpretation" (145), but other poststructuralists—perhaps none more than Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus*—valorize a total release of the subject from repressive rationality.

Similarly, it would be possible to approach Jacques Derrida as a theorist as well as a practitioner of modernism, and to see modernism in its totality as a deconstructive practice in the Derridian sense. Thus, we could read texts such as *Ulysses* (not to mention *Finnegans Wake*), *The Waves*, *The Sound and the Fury*, and *Das Schloß* with an emphasis on how they undermine the human desire for stable centers of representation by constantly displacing signifiers, frustrating immediate "presence" of meaning, decentering the subject or whatever constitutes a production of convention-bound reference, and dispersing it in the linguistic field. Modernist texts present elaborate witness to the notion, so basic to Derrida's endeavors, that "the verbal text is constituted by concealment as much as revelation."[71] (This notion, differently formulated, constitutes the foundation of Adorno's theory.)

Here one might object that a possible result of this approach—and here we are touching on *one* of the reasons for Derrida's large following in the United States—would be determining the central thrust of modernism to be an incessant language game, playing one skittish signifier against another. This makes modernist studies risk reverting to the New Critical idea of the work as a self-bounded whole, vibrating with unresolved internal tensions. Another problem is that according to a radical deconstructive philosophy of language, not only modernist works are characterized by the various implications of "différance," but indeed every verbal text. This might seem

70. Julia Kristeva, "From One Identity to an Other," *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, trans. T. Gora, A. Jardine, and L. S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p. 140.

71. Gayatri C. Spivak, "Translator's Preface," in Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. xlvi. Cf. the quotation from Jameson on how modernism frustrates our detection of social content, at n. 62 above.

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ultimately to deconstruct any possibility of establishing a theoretical framework for a modernist paradigm, or even of registering literary-historical paradigms at all.

On the other hand, one can argue that what makes modernism "different" is the way in which it is aware of and acts out the qualities of "différance." The emergence of a modernist paradigm could then be judged in terms of a break in the historical attitude toward language and communication as evinced in literary texts. According to another poststructuralist, Michel Foucault, literary modernism has a central place in demarcating historical paradigms, or "epistemes," as he calls them. When language, in the nineteenth century, had been thoroughly instrumentalized as an object and vehicle of knowledge, Foucault sees it "reconstituting itself elsewhere, in an independent form, difficult of access, folded back upon the emigma of its own origin and existing wholly in reference to the pure act of writing."[72] Questions concerning the very nature of language and literature "were made possible by the fact that, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the law of discourse having been detached from representation, the being of language itself became, as it were, fragmented; but they became inevitable when, with Nietzsche and Mallarmé, thought was brought back, and violently so, towards language itself, towards its unique and difficult being" (306).

It is appropriate to end this chapter on such a note, for modernism does, after all, seek a break with tradition, a fact that is emphasized in varying degrees (or at least tacitly assumed) by all the different constructions of the modernist paradigm discussed above. This basic characteristic needs to be more comprehensively pursued in the light of the continuity of history that modernism sets out to explode. The next chapter, therefore, undertakes a critical examination of how modernism has been positioned in the context of literary history and how it has fared in the ceaseless process of canonization.

72. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), p. 300.

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