CoSMo
Comparative Studies in Modernism
N. 22 • 2023 | 2281-6658

1922/2022: TOTAL MODERNISM Vol. 1

edited by *Andrea* **Brondino**
and *John* **Greaney**

Centro Studi Arti della Modernità
UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI TORINO
ALMA UNIVERSITAS TAURINENSIS

CoSMo Comparative Studies in Modernism
n. 22 (Spring) • 2023

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CONTATTI

sito web: www.ojs.unito.it/index.php/CoSMO
e-mail: centrostudiartimodernita@gmail.com
© 2012 Centro Studi "Arti della Modernità"
ISSN: 2281-6658

SOMMARIO

1922/2022: Total Modernism. Vol. 1
Edited by Andrea Brondino and John Greaney

5 ANDREA BRONDINO, JOHN GREANEY
Total Modernism
Introduction

HEADLINES

15 JEAN-MICHEL RABATÉ
Modernism and Totality

27 PETER NICHOLLS
Rites of Spring
1922 and 1822

FOCUS

41 RAFFAELE DONNARUMMA
Noluntas sciendi*, *voluntas nesciendi
Anthropology of the Modern Character

53 THOMAS MACHO
Debates about the Death Drive
Nosferatu at the Zoo

67 JOSEPH CERMATORI
Seeking the Universal amid Ruins
On Walter Benjamin's Philosophy of Journal Editing (circa 1922)

79 MIMMO CANGIANO
Forma, *Gemeinschaft*, *Kultur*
La rivoluzione conservatrice come via da destra al modernismo

89 ILARIA NATALI
1922-2022: Memory, the Media, and Present-Day Modernism

101 WEI ZHOU
T.S. Eliot and the Return of the Soldier
Re-gendering Nostos *in* The Waste Land

115 ANDREA BRONDINO
Romantic Irony as a Source of Value Judgment in Modernism and New Criticism

127 ROBIN V. HUEPPE
Sorting Debris
Another Look at the Modernist Urbanism Experiment

135 ANTONIO DALL'IGNA
Il lavoro e il lavoratore secondo Ernst Jünger e Simone Weil

147 MARCELLO SESSA, CAMILLA BALBI
Un astrattismo mancato?
Carl Einstein e Clement Greenberg rileggono Kandinsky

PERCORSI

161 RICHARD HARDACK
Total Timescaping
The Modernist Moment in Pynchon's Against the Day

175 PASQUALE FAMELI
Produrre e riprodurre i media
Il modernismo ancipite di László Moholy-Nagy

183 ANDREA PIANA
A Bard in the Trenches
David Jones as an Artist of The Waste Land

CC BY

ANDREA BRONDINO, JOHN GREANEY

TOTAL MODERNISM

Introduction

The 1922 modernist centenary prompts the thematic for this special issue. One hundred years on, we might call the past century the modernist century. And with good reason too. 1922 marks neither the birth of modernism nor its comprehensive scope, yet the aesthetic innovations that occurred a century ago still, for many, feel fresh and vital, a sentiment which extends beyond the academy into mainstream culture. A quick glance at some high-profile public and mass media publications in the UK – where the modernist annus mirabilis remains a feted, if not a mystical, event – reveals as much. On 30 January 2022, *The New Statesman,* with "1922: the Year that made Modernism", re-endowed 1922 with the cultural capital that has long gathered around it: "1922 still looks like the year literature changed, when literature came into its own", writes John Mullan. Later in 2022, the BBC launched a seven-part mini-series, *1922: The Birth of Now,* which took account of a host of the innovations and discoveries from what they dubbed "the crucial year of modernism". Taking a wide-angle view, the series situates Eliot's "The Waste Land" alongside the discovery of the tomb of Tutankahmun, the chilling psycho-drama of blood-lust, *Nosferatu,* as well as Louis Armstrong's move from New Orleans to Chicago. Moreover, in 2022, the *London Review of Books rendered* its homage to 1922 by publishing a collection of essays entitled *That Year Again: Writing about 1922,* which was edited by Tom McCarthy, a writer often labelled as channelling modernism's energies in his "neo-modernist" fictions.

With such awe and reverie facing 1922, we may ask: have become over-enamoured with modernism's defining year? That is to say: have we raised 1922 on a culture industry pedestal that occludes other moments of rich literary production and social and political turmoil? Thus, treading a little suspiciously, we might ask: did 1922 really mark the birth, and constitute the origin, of year 1 of the new (as Ezra Pound suggested in the 1922 spring issue of *The Little Review)*? Does modernism constitute a narrative arc which takes one hundred years into its remit and facilitate its description with certain forms of thinking? Have we fallen prey to the seemingly totalising structures of 'high' modernist fiction – in *Ulysess,* James Joyce, as critics from Hermann Broch to Jean-Michel Rabaté (2015, 4) have suggested, produces as a total reality by producing a universal work of art through a universalized everyday which coheres into a cultural world – by reproducing modernism as a totality which accounts for all artistic experimentation, and in-debts all

future readers, in advance? In turn, we might consider: how, and by what conceptual logic, might we today link modernism with ideas of totality? Moreover, we might conjecture: what does a modernist totality mean in the third decade of the 21st century?

The 2022 *Modernist Studies Association* conference, which took place in Portland Oregon, sought to question the inevitable reverential celebrations of modernism's annus mirabilis. That conference asked: should we enthrone or dethrone 1922 as *the* major modernist moment? More an ambition than an achievement of the conference, this question came on the back of the success of the new modernist studies, which has pushed against the institutionalisation and crowning of a robust and muscular European white-male modernism. Over the last thirty years, since the first publication of *Modernism/modernity* in 1994, the vertical and temporal expansion of the field of modernist studies has softened our gaze on what was, and still is, perceived as a narrow 'high modernism'. The apex of this scholarly initiative was perhaps Susan Stanford Friedman's *Planetary Modernisms: Provocations on Modernity Across Time* (2015), which described modernism as the aesthetic expression of any given modernity. In Friedman's terms, the aesthetic works of Tang Dynasty China and the Mongolian steppe became amenable to the modernist canon. A controversial and feted work, Friedman's *Planetary Modernisms* sought to free modernism from its European trappings. In doing so, however, it replaced one form of modernist totality with another: the labelling of any aesthetic experimentation from anywhere and from any time as modernist.

Similarly, Paul Saint-Amour's 'weak modernism' endeavour, which appeared in *Modernism/modernity,* sought to account for "generations who understood themselves as extending rather than negating the work of modernist forebears" and "whole areas of study that have lately become important in our field, including the everyday, the domestic, the affective, the middlebrow, the infrastructural, the doctrinal" (Saint-Amour 2018, 437). Notwithstanding, Saint-Amour's recommendation of a weak modernism also came with an important reservation. He writes: "When it comes to fields of study, there can be a disquietingly short distance from hospitality to hostile takeover, from 'all are welcome here' to 'all are incorporated here,' even 'all are appropriated here'" (*Ib*., 453). He thus continues: "It would be a terrible irony – and, worse, both intellectually and ethically noxious – if a field expansion made possible by a certain weakness-in theory were to result in a homogenizing triumphalism fed by the annexation of others' intellectual resources, spaces, voices, and rights-of-way" (*Ib*.). In such terms, Saint-Amour warns against replacing one form of totalising modernism with another modernist discourse which accumulates nearly all artistic and cultural production under its banner.

Indeed, this sentiment has long been harboured by many modernist studies scholars. Suspicious of new forms of totality of which modernist studies seems capable in the 21st century, many critics hold to the period 1890-1940 as the quintessential modernist decades. By extension, other literary periods, such as the romantic and contemporary, for example, remain to be understood in and through their own terms. David James and Urmila Seshagiri (2014, 88), for instance, suggest that 'modernism' should still be

understood in historically conditioned and culturally specific clusters of artistic achievements between the late 19th and mid-20th centuries. As they launch their idea of 'metamodernism' – a contemporary literary mode concerned with the reception and reactivation of modernist aesthetics – James and Seshagiri note that "without a temporally bounded and formally precise understanding of what modernism does and means in any cultural moment, the ability to make other aesthetic and historical claims about its contemporary reactivation suffers" (*Ib.*). This gesture, however, does not necessarily come with the enthroning of the 'high modernism' of 1922, or the 'men of 1914', at the pinnacle of the modernist canon. For James and Seshagiri, and for many other modernist studies scholar, the new modernist studies has left an important and indelible mark on the field, prompting us to return again and again to the 1890-1940 modernist window – if it is not now the 1850-1970 window (Charles Baudelaire, of course, remains for many an origin to literary modernism, while Samuel Beckett was still writing throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s) – to rethink its parameters and the received wisdoms, old and new, which dictate its reception.

And so we now find ourselves in a period of flux in modernist studies. As ideology critique is on the wane across literary studies at large, so too are the attendant suppositions of the historicist reading strategies, inspired by Stephen Greenblatt's new historicism and Raymond Williams's cultural materialism, which have constituted the foundation of the research that has been gathered under the umbrella of the new modernist studies. In a moment of methodological proliferation in literary and modernist studies – prompted by the coterminous rise of affect theory, world literature paradigms, ecocriticism, critical race theories, critical future studies, as well as postcritique, amongst others – one specific mode of reading is now unlikely to enjoy the institutional prestige that historicist and postcolonial models have held since the 1990s, and that deconstructive strategies enjoyed before that. As a result, the ideologies of our recently dominant historicist and materialist paradigms have come under scrutiny. Just as historicist critics somewhat misleadingly labelled deconstructive modes as abortive, vapid and without political purchase, so too are we now seeing a questioning of the assumptions of those modes of reading which have been at the forefront of literary studies over the past three decades. One such example concerns the place of formalism in modernist studies. Prompted by the agenda of the new modernist studies, the riposte to formalist modes of textual analysis over the last thirty years has been based on the idea that such methodologies have occluded the cultural, historical and political contexts and gestures of literary texts. In such terms, the New Critics – from I. A. Richards, Cleanth Brooks, Robert Penn Warren and Hugh Kenner – have been denoted as celebrating modernist texts as autotelic forms, autonomous structures and taut unities which maintain an independence from the historical and political world. Formalism, by these lights, becomes an alienated and introspective mode of reading. As per recent criticism, however, such narratives might be specious, if not straw-man arguments. Scholars such as Caroline Levine, David James and Cara Lewis, all working, broadly speaking, under the banner of 'new formalism', have recently considered the fate of, and given new vigour

to, these seeming ghosts of literary and modernist studies. On the fate and place of close reading in modernist studies today, James suggests, in his recent volume *Modernism and Close Reading,* that the unhelpful association of modes of close reading of aesthetics, form, genre and structure with the perceived bourgeois proclivities of New Criticism remains an unhelpful argument in the field, one which, as Douglas Mao (1996, 237) has suggested, "perpetuates the myths of New Critical ontological naïveté and of a direct connection between the hypostatization of the text and antihistoricism". Pertinently, these reconsiderations of the practice and value of close reading and the rise of the new formalist studies have explored the ethical and political currency of the analysis of aesthetics and form, and how form relates to historical and political cultures. Thus, as these critics suggest, forms of close reading remain useful rather than inimical to the analysis of the relationship between (experimental modes of representation) and their historical contexts. Moreover, the recent success of Timothy Bewes's new book *Free Indirect: The Novel in a Postfictional Age* – which has won the USA National Book Critics Circle "Award for Criticism", and which was endorsed as a revolutionary moment in novel theory by prominent critics such as Merve Emre, Jed Esty and Sianne Ngai – would suggest that formalism and aesthetic autonomy, at least in the language that Bewes proposes and presents, are very much back in vogue. And indeed, more radical than Levine, James, Lewis, Bewes does not allow for a link between form and history. His category of postfiction suggests that the universalization of free indirect discourse, which is otherwise known for Bewes as the collapse of the logic of instantiation, marks an escape on the part of literature from the regimes of signification, point of view, and thus criticism itself (106). In such terms, for Bewes, the content of the contemporary novel "is not graspable as an object" (5). Such a shift in criticism returns us to the question of aesthetic autonomy, and thus totality. This issue of *Cosmo* responds to such complex critical heritages by returning to the pairing of modernism and totality. Specifically, it considers modernisms variegated relation to various forms of totality (critical, formal, historical, political, philosophical).

1922 affords a departure point for exploring this difficult association. The central thematic for the *1922/2022 Total Modernism: Continuity, Discontinuity and the Experimental Turn* conference held in Turin in May 2022– from which our investigations began and from which the work collected in these pages grew – raised an important question concerning a total modernism: does 1922 cohere around, and galvanize, a set of forces which might be labelled as the 'the birth of Now', or 'the year that made modernism'? On the latter question, Michael North, in *Reading 1922* (1999), tells us that such a totalising task is easier said than realized. Indeed, how could one account in an all-encompassing manner for the diverse range of important works conceived, written, or completed in that year? A brief list of some of the major artistic and theoretical innovations and interventions published in 1922 reveal the polythetic and disparate concerns encompassed by the umbrella of 'high modernism'. In the literary canon, we read T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land", James Joyce's *Ulysses,* Franz Kafka's *Das Schloss,* Katherine Mansfield's *The Garden Party,* Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*,

Rainer Maria Rilke's *Duineser Elegien* and Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room*. In the visual arts, we can note Paul Klee's *Twittering Machine,* Salvador Dalí's *Cabaret Scene,* Pablo Picasso's *Two Women Running on the Beach,* and Wassily Kandinsky's *Untitled,* which marked his transition from an expressionist to a constructivist aesthetic. 1922 was also the moment of various important philosophical and theoretical works, such as Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus,* Viktor Shlovsky's elaboration of 'defamiliarisation' towards a theory of prose, Sigmund Freud's *The Ego and the Id,* Henri Bergson's *Durée et simultanéité,* Clive Bell's and Roger Fry's development of "significant form", Bronsilaw Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific,* as well as I. A. Richards and C. K. Ogden's *The Foundation of Aesthetics.* Just as importantly, 1922 saw the emergence of other crucial cultural productions that the canon of modernism has been slow, or reluctant, to incorporate, such as cinema, cabaret, dance, popular music. Far from an exhaustive account, the works and initiatives listed here amount to only a minor portion of the cultural works produced in 1922. Synthesizing and totalising 1922, even just with these named works in mind, seems an already impossible task. Indeed, North points out that irreparable omissions occur whenever one sets oneself the task of reading the major and minor works of one calendar year. And, moreover, that one must stretch the limits of the calendar year in question to include relevant examples and questions which its limits can only superficially obscure. Like Joyce's *Ulysses,* which strives for totality without achieving or enacting its form, modernism is more an unfinishable archive than a master form, a vantage point which provides the impetus for the essays gathered in this issue.

The *Headlines* section contains two contributions. Jean-Michel Rabaté's article discusses a wide range of modernist 'texts', spanning Eugène Vigo to Léon Daudet, Hermann Broch as a reader of Joyce to Marcel Duchamp. Intertwining his critical analysis with acute political insights on the material and political conditions of the modernist contexts examined, Rabaté shows how discussions of modernism have radically developed from a 'high versus low' debate about its forms and expressions. In turn, he describes modernism as an unfinishable project, and thus that which can never become a totality.

Peter Nicholls's contribution considers a different timeline of modern literature (1822-1922) by comparing two poems: Giacomo Leopardi's "Alla primavera, o delle favole antiche" (1822) and T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922). Despite their remarkable differences, and Eliot's lack of interest for Leopardi's poetry, these poems share a common concern with the reappropriation of myth, classicism, and romanticism, thus exemplifying a development from 'modern' to 'modernist' works.

Raffaele Donnarumma's article opens the *Focus* section of this issue. Through Freud, Donnarumma analyses how the modernist novel reframes centuries-long epistemological questions concerning the relation between the subject and truth, and the problem of not wanting to know. Donnarumma argues that the modernist character (exemplified by Thomas Mann's Thomas Buddenbrook, Henry James' Lambert Strether, and Italo Svevo's Zeno Cosini) either actively refuses to accept the truths that

unfold in front of them, or metaphorically blinds themselves in order to avoid confrontation with those truths. While Mann's and James's inept protagonists implicitly assign a fundamental weight to truth precisely when they negate it, Zeno's words and (in)actions seem to consider truth as simply useless for life. In Donnarumma's vision, Zeno therefore represents a modernist, and ethically problematic, shift from truth as a fundamental reference for Western epistemology and social life, to a post-Nietzschean nihilism.

Thomas Macho's article starts with a reading and comment on Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and *The Ego and the Id*. Macho highlights the relevance of these Freudian texts for the emergence of the present-day developments of the sub-genre of the vampire story. In doing so, Macho highlights how vampire stories have increasingly played a role in the representation of what one could call a 'political unconscious' of the Western masses, with vampires often standing for a rich, suicidal and decadent capitalist elite, while zombies and/or werewolves allegorize a no longer self-conscious class of proletarians.

Joseph Cermatori's contribution takes into consideration the philosophical relevance of Walter Benjamin's 1922 announcement of a (never realized) journal called *Angelus Novus*. Cermatori's analysis invites us to rethink an allegedly "minor" moment of Benjamin's development as a thinker. In a moment in which Benjamin is involved with the ultimately failed attempt of creating a journal, as well as with the development of his doctoral dissertation, "The Concept of Art Criticism in German Romanticism", Benjamin is developing, Cermatori shows, foundational aspects of his philosophy concerning the role of the editor as a quest for universality, and the broader political and cultural crisis in the West at the time.

Mimmo Cangiano focuses on how a considerable segment of European right-wing culture in the first half of the 20th century abandons its traditional anti-modern positions and rhetoric to find its own way into modernity and modernism. Interweaving analysis of texts by authors such as Louis-Ferdinand Céline, Léon Bloy, Gottfried Benn, and Ernst Jünger, Cangiano offers an original perspective into how European right-wing culture managed to reconcile (albeit in theoretically frail and self-justifying manners) myth with industrialisation and totalitarianism with poetry.

Ilaria Natali shifts the focus of this issue to the Anglophone context by reading Jennifer Egan's 2022 novel *The Candy House* in relation to Joyce's *Ulysses*. Natali argues that Egan's novel not only reframes and reuses modernist techniques (such as the reproduction and integration of technology-based dialogues and rhythms within the literary text), but it also offers critical insight into the relevance of Joyce's *Ulysses* as a repertoire for our contemporary and ever-developing literary canon.

Wei Zhou's article examines how Eliot's "The Waste Land" proves to be a source of remarkable reference for the condition of women and gender imbalances during and in the wake of World War I. By unearthing allusions to soldiers' PTSD and their effects on marital sexual life, as well as to illegal abortions in "A Game of Chess", Zhou shows how

the masculine narrative of *nostos* (with its illustrious classic models) is domesticated and reassembled within the boundaries of the traditionally feminine space of the home.

Andrea Brondino's article focuses on how the reception of romantic irony influences the use of the term "irony" as a key evaluative term in modernism and New Criticism. While authors such as Ezra Pound, André Breton, Walter Benjamin and Thomas Mann closely link irony to artistic intelligence, new critics such as Cleanth Brooks explicitly define irony as an ambiguous, albeit pivotal, sign of value judgment of a literary text. Brondino's argument is that irony, far from being a descriptive or neutral term in contemporary literary criticism, bears evaluative and culturally specific connotations that should raise suspicion about the allegedly impartial position of a critic towards a text.

Robin Hueppe shifts the focus to architecture. Hueppe discusses Berlin and Brasilia as a double, albeit largely unfinished case of modernist urbanism. He argues that beyond its negative connotations, heavily linked to the complex political, economic, and social contexts in which modernist urbanism was born, especially in a 21st-century globalized world afflicted by the problem of rising cost of housing and a growing population, modernist urbanism can still provide a model for present and future city planning.

Antonio Dall'Igna's philosophical essay compares the diverging figures of Ernst Jünger and Simone Weil. Despite different interests and political allegiances, Jünger and Weil share a common philosophical focus around the problem of "work", intended mainly as an exercise in reading, interpreting, and modifying reality. For both authors, Dall'Igna shows, work can lead the subject to a higher epistemological, as well as spiritual degree: while Weil interprets this supreme ascension as a mystical silence, Jünger interprets is as a form of dominion (another chapter, one could say, of the European right-wing culture dissected in Cangiano's article).

Camilla Balbi and Marcello Sessa bring to the fore how Carl Einstein and Clement Greenberg offer an unusual interpretation of Wassily Kandinsky's art by stressing its anti-modernist features (such as Kandinsky's residual and persistent continuation of the figurative tradition). Through a reading of Einstein's and Greenberg's comments on Kandinsky's work, Balbi and Sessa highlight how these critics tackle the orthodoxies and failures of modernism.

The *Percorsi* section contains three articles. In the first one, Richard Hardack analyses Thomas Pynchon's novel *Against the Day* as a form of total modernism that incorporates postmodernism. Taking account of ideas of an ongoing modernism, one which continues into the 21st century, Hardack argues that Pynchon's use of modern(ist) scientific conceptions of time and space make modernism the renewed centre for an after-modernist aesthetics.

Pasquale Fameli's contribution focuses on László Moholy-Nagy's 1922 conceptualization of artistic production and reproduction. Moholy-Nagy thought that the gramophone, cinema, and photography provided unique chances for the reformulation of established formal relations that link artistic representation to a 'realist' reproduction of reality. The artist should, according to Moholy-Nagy, strive for the discovery of the specificity of the medium. However, Fameli argues, later developments

of the European avant-garde provide a counterargument to Moholy-Nagy's claims; namely, that the after-modernist artist is more involved in the overcoming of the specificity of a medium, rather than in the fulfillment of its inherent potentiality.

Finally, Leonardo Piana's article examines the Welsh poet and painter David Jones. A World War One veteran involved in collective artistic endeavours, Jones develops a modernist poetics in his painting and religious engravings. Transformed by the reading of "The Waste Land", read by Jones as a perfect expression of the existential and material disaster of the Great War, Jones publishes an epic poem that brings back Eliot's urban "waste land" to the actual waste land of the trenches. Piana's article reads Jones' literary and figurative works together, provides an intertextual analysis of Jones' poem in relation with Eliot's "The Waste Land", and assesses how the categories of myth and remembrance are reframed and repurposed by Jones.

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HEADLINES

JEAN-MICHEL RABATÉ

MODERNISM AND TOTALITY

ABSTRACT: This article surveys the transformations and permutations of "totality" throughout the cultural and political landscapes of the twentieth century. Specifically, it explores connections between "high' modernism" and totality by focusing on the heritage of this pairing as figured by major thinkers from both the Frankfurt school and structuralist and poststructuralist debates in France. Ultimately, I argue that modernism is an unfinishable archive, one that resists, and will never become, a closed totality.

KEYWORDS: Modernism; 1922; Totality.

I have a hard time believing that 1922 happened a century ago, for today, it seems to me that things that took place in 2018 were a century ago. A more realistic consideration of what is meant by "a hundred years ago" seems to force us to reconsider how we perceive history, more precisely, the history of the new or what we have been used to calling "modernism." Beyond these reminders, we would have to problematize the notion of "progress" in the arts, politics, or culture. This accounts for the subtitle I had chosen for the collection I edited for Cambridge University Press in 2015, *1922: Literature, Culture, Politics.*[1] The war in Ukraine has brought us back to the cold war, that is to years following WWII, and thus we cannot take for granted that history is linear; we might have to accommodate a concept of the "return," even if the term does not entail the ancient idea of cyclical returns. If we cannot help thinking 1952 today, it might be useful to go further back and imagine Europe in 1922.

Post-Versailles treaty Europe presented the sad sight of battered countries attempting to recapture hope for a future after such a huge slaughter and innumerable disasters. At the same time, Europe could perceive that other continents were asserting their independence and finding more autonomy in the aftermath of the conflagration. Some renewed angst came from a realization that the globalization that started at the end of the 19th century did not mean peace and cultural homogeneity, but rather a jockeying for hegemony – the French and the British, for instance, in competition when influencing a "freed" Middle East, Palestine under British control, Lebanon left to the French. Even if we take the most rapid look at 1922, we are nevertheless dazzled by the abundance of masterpieces. Most of them had lain dormant because they were delayed by the war, as was the case of *In Search of Lost Time, Ulysses, The Castle, The Duino Elegies, Wozzeck,* and

[1] Cfr. Rabaté 2015.

The Waste Land. If 1922 offers a good vantage point to redefine the rationale of "high modernism," it leads us to wonder whether we can add the adjective "high" to "modernism," which assumes that 1922 was an unpassable "peak." We have learned to see how misleading the adjective can be if "high" is construed to mean a position of superiority, calling up distinction, elitism, a rejection of popular culture. Such a reproach, which has been leveled at most modernist authors at first, is founded on misguided assumptions.

What distinguishes those 1922 masterpieces from works that came before the war is not an alleged elitism but the sense of a new and important mission. Because of the staggering amount of destruction, writers and artists felt a heightened responsibility, a duty to be as relevant and as affirmative as possible. In other words, thinkers, writers, and artists, all sensed that they were obliged to give birth to something that would approach a totality of experience. Here is why one might want to replace "high modernism" with "total modernism." I would argue that the objective of high modernism had been to shape some form of totality, a totality that keeps different shadings, a totality that we can catch just before it turns into totalitarianism.

One factor to take into consideration when mentioning totality is the wide-spread use of the adjective "total" in connection with the first world war. As Paul Virilio (2006, 90 *passim*) has shown, modern technological inventions beginning with cameras, airplanes, computers, were due to war investments. The same is true of artistic inventions. In the summer of 1914, all the belligerent powers imagined that the war would be a matter of months. When the fronts stalled and turned into machines of mechanized death and attrition, some writers, mostly from the right, started mentioning the concept of "total war." Léon Daudet spread that notion in the pages of the nationalist periodical *L'Action Française* in 1915 and 1916. The phrase was adapted and developed by Georges Clémenceau, the French prime minister, who in 1917 addressed the National Assembly, speaking of a "guerre intégrale," meaning a war both waged at home and on all the fronts. Clémenceau had absorbed Daudet's ideas about *guerre totale.* Daudet symptomatically believed that the idea came from the German side: "We would have been victorious if the conception of total war – as the Germans wage it, as we should have waged it facing them – had been accepted and then realized by our successive governments" (Daudet 1918, 7). Here is how he defines it: "What is total war? It is the extension of the fight, both in its acute and chronic phases, to the political, economic, commercial, industrial, intellectual, legal and financial domains. Not only armies fight one another, but also traditions, institutions, customs, codes, minds, and especially banks" (8).

Daudet believed that Germany had begun earlier an all-over attack, striking France and its allies on all levels at once. His paranoia needed scapegoats. He found one when he pilloried the anarchist Eugène Vigo. Vigo called himself "Miguel Almereyda," (Almereyda was his anagram for "*y'a d' la merde*!" – shit is coming !) – this showed how he wanted to intervene in politics. Vigo had been jailed as a pacifist and anarchist. In August 1917, barely 34, Vigo was murdered in his jail by fellow inmates egged on by the furious denunciations of Daudet.

In 1913, Almereyda had launched *Le Bonnet rouge*, a satirical anarchist publication that was the sworn enemy of right-wing monarchist movements like *Action Française*. *Bonnet rouge* published a few articles at the request of the Minister Joseph Caillaux when Caillaux tried to defend his wife after she had murdered Gaston Calmette, the director of the daily the *Figaro*. Caillaux had been accused by Calmette of being a German agent; the same accusation was repeated for Vigo. Madame Caillaux was acquitted after having shot Calmette to death, but Vigo was murdered with the complicity of the police. The furious attacks against Vigo take up many stale and unpalatable passages of *La Guerre Totale.* Vigo's son, Jean Vigo, who would have a no less short life, nevertheless had time to produce a few cinematographic masterpieces like *Zéro de Conduite* (1933) and *L'Atalante* (1934) before his untimely death at the age of 29. The main point is that "total war" entails an ideological war against the "inner enemy," meaning the pacifists, socialists and anarchists, even much more than on the trenches or on the front. A courageous philosopher like Bertrand Russell, helped by Vivienne Eliot, ended up occupying a similar position in England during the war, and he too was jailed.

This was the context of E. E. Cummings's plight when he was arrested as a spy by the French authorities in 1917 after French censors had intercepted letters criticizing the war effort. Cummings refused to de-solidarize himself from his friend W. Slater Brown. In August 1917, Brown had written letters to his American relatives stating that everyone was sick of the war, and that he foresaw that a revolution was brewing in France. His attack on the French war effort underpins the plot and lovely details of Cummings's *The Enormous Room,* a spirited document, a thorough debunking of the myths and pieties of French nationalist warmongering.

A few years later, Daudet's conception was systematized by the German General Erich Ludendorff, a war hero. Ludendorff explained that Germany had lost the war because of evil agents, destructive elements, those traitors inside. In *Der totale Krieg* (1935) he denounced those who had stabbed in the back the German war effort: Freemasons, socialists and Jewish war-profiteers who had conspired to bring about the downfall of Germany. His scapegoating was instrumental in bringing Hitler into power. For Daudet as for Ludendorff, a moral and spiritual reawakening was an indispensable condition preliminary to victory. The main issue was civilian morale, which implied the need to deploy a strict control over ideology. *Der totale Krieg* argues moreover that a nation's physical and moral resources should be forever mobilized. Peace is an illusion, a simple interval in a never-ending war – there was never WWI followed by WWII, but a single warring continuum.

The notion of "totality" took on a different meaning when it was deployed by the left. In 1922 thinkers re-elaborated the foundations of Marxism, given the success of the Russian revolution, with new work by Georg Lukács and Karl Korsch. "Totality" was the key concept used by a Marxist thinker like Georg Lukács who insisted on the difference between bourgeois thinking and materialist theory: only the latter begins with economic production and class struggle, and deploys a historical dialectic framed by Hegel, Marx, Engels and Lenin. History should be rethought from the point of view of the proletariat

because his class consciousness is the result of an effort to understand the "concrete totality" of the historical process. This allows for the creation of a new subjectivity capable of critiquing capitalistic exploitation.

Having arrived at this point, I needed to mention the surprise that was caused when I saw where my investigations took me. If I go back my schooling in structuralist and post-structuralist philosophy, there was nothing that we hated more than the concept of totality. My generation, which was formed by reading Foucault, Derrida, Lacan, Barthes and Deleuze, was utterly contemptuous of the term. Totality belonged to a time when dialectical thinking was a weak manner of solving all problems, a sort of "anything goes." Roland Barthes concluded his subtle and witty exercise in hyper-narcissism, his *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* of 1975, by rejecting what he called "the monster of totality" (Barthes 1977, 19). Barthes, Lacan, Deleuze and Derrida, in spite of their huge differences, all repudiated Marxist humanism and denounced the facility of an always ready dialectic. A thinker had monopolized the concept of totality at the time: Lucien Goldmann, a disciple of Georg Lukács. He was the author of important books on the sociology of literature; he had been the dissertation supervisor of Julia Kristeva. However Lacan made sport of him in a witty 1968 seminar, evoking Goldmann's joy at seeing students' barricades in the Latin Quarter, and calling him "Mudger Muddle," [2] which betrays the idea of pure mental confusion.

In 1970, one month before his death at the age of 57, Goldmann reiterated his mantra: "The first, principal idea of dialectical thought is the category of totality. This is no accident: a dialectician cannot do the history of ideas outside the history of society […] Totality is the idea that a phenomenon can be comprehended only by first inserting it in the broader structure of which it is part and in which it has a function […]."[3] Indeed, Goldmann had been attacked both by structuralists like Foucault and Althusser and by disciples of the Frankfurt school. Even his colleague Henri Lefebvre thought that Goldmann had "abused the concept of totality taken in itself." [4]

However, the issue is not so simple. We need to take a closer look at the Marxist thesis on totality as presented by Goldmann's master, the Lukács of the 1920s. It was Lukács who, in 1920, posited a number of theses on totality in the chapter on "Class Consciousness" later included in *History and Class Consciousness.* Lukács attacks bourgeois historians who are unable to produce concrete analyses. These historians go wrong because of "their belief that the concrete can be located in the empirical individual of history ('individual' here can refer to an individual man, class or people) and in his empirically given (and hence psychological or mass-psychological) consciousness" (Lukács 1972, 50). His repeated answer is a call for a more inclusive totality: "Concrete analysis means then: the relation to society *as a whole*" (50). Lukács then adds:

[2] Cfr. Lacan 2006, 42. We discover the identity of Goldmann as the object of this barb on page 415, thanks to an end note.
[3] Quoted in Jay 1984, 325.
[4] Quoted in Jay 1984, 329.

> Regarded abstractly and formally, then, class consciousness implies a class-conditioned *unconsciousness* of one's own socio-historical and economic condition. This condition is given as a definite structural relation, a definite formal nexus which appears to govern the whole of life. The 'falseness', the illusion implicit in this situation is in no sense arbitrary; it is simply the intellectual reflex of the objective economic structure. (52)

Lukács was also elaborating his concept of "false consciousness" in an effort to flesh out Marx's and Engels's concept of ideology. There again, a consideration of "totality" is offered as a pre-requisite for the vexed analysis of the mystifed links between ideology and economic truth or material reality. Only the proletariat can establish a "real connection with the totality" (52). In his later analysis of reification, the proletariat is called the "identical subject-object of the historical process," which means that the proletariat is "the first subject in history that is (objectively) capable of an adequate social consciousness" (199). Proletarian consciousness is endowed with a constitutive role in history, without which no genuine social revolution could take place. Lukács emphasizes that in the transformation of bourgeois society "*only the practical class consciousness of the proletariat possesses* this ability to transform things" (205), so as to highlight the concrete interconnectivity of consciousness and practice at the peak of the revolutionary process in the proletariat.

The emergence of a new subject in the transformation of the social-economic structure of society takes the form of a "leap" (*Sprung*). Interestingly, this is the term Walter Benjamin would use in his later theses on the philosophy of history.[5] For Lukács, paradoxically, such a revolutionary "leap" entailed a lengthy and arduous historical process. The "character of a leap" (*Sprungcharakter*) derives from turning oneself in the direction of the qualitatively new. Thus, revolutionary consciousness accompanies revolutionary practice leading to a transformation of the social fabric.

As Martin Jay has pointed out in his critical genealogy of the links between Marxism and totality, unlike Korsch or Bloch, Lukács restricted his concept of totality to a social and historical whole. Lukács follows Vico's principle of "verum factum" – we can know what we have made and humanity did not make nature. "Man is the measure of all things," Lukács repeats. However Jay does not quote Lukács' subtle analysis of what he terms the "Antinomies of Bourgeois Thought" in *Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat* (1923) when he discusses "the irrationality of existence (both as a totality and as the 'ultimate' material substratum underlying the forms)," that is "the irrationality of matter" (Lukács 1972, 119). Lukács opposes the idea of a creation of content as in mathematics to the philosophical sense of "creation":

> For the philosophers 'creation' means only the possibility of rationally comprehending the facts, whereas for mathematics 'creation' and the possibility of comprehension are identical. Of all the

[5] "Fashion has a flair for the topical, no matter where it stirs in the thickets of long ago; it is a tiger's leap into the past. This jump, however, takes place in an arena where the ruling class gives the commands. The same leap in the open air of history is the dialectical one, which is how Marx understood the revolution" (Benjamin 2007, 261).

> representatives of classical philosophy it was Fichte in his middle period who saw this problem most clearly and gave it the most satisfactory formulation. What is at issue, he says, is "the absolute projection of an object of *the origin of which no account can be given* with the result that *the space between projection and thing projected is dark and void*; I expressed it somewhat scholastically but, as I believe, very appropriately, as the *projectio per hiatum irrationalem*. (119)[6]

With these terms, Lukacs debunks "the grandiose conception that thought can only grasp what it has itself created" (121). Classical thought, in his view, had to strive to find the subject of thought which could be thought of as producing existence without any *hiatus irrationalis* or transcendental "thing-in-itself." This passage had an impact on the young Jacques Lacan who quotes it in his first and last poem, the sonnet "Hiatus Irrationalis," which can be appreciated more when we know that Lacan read essays by philosophers of the Frankfort school when preparing his 1938 essay on the family in his most systematic Freudian synthesis.

In a somewhat different sense, the term of "totality" was used by Wittgenstein when he asserted that "the totality of facts determines what is the case" in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus.* Hence the famous sentence: "2. 04. The totality of existent atomic facts is the world" (Wittgenstein 2001, 9). However, Wittgenstein uses "Gesamtheit" here, which could be glossed as "entirety" – a closed collection. "2. 04. Die Gesamtheit der bestehenden Sachverhalte ist die Welt." For him, the concept of entirety or totality includes an exception to the totality: "2. 05. The totality of existent atomic facts also determines which atomic facts do not exist" (9), which in German reads: "Die Gesamtheit der bestehenden Sachverhalte bestimmt auch, welche Sachverhalte nicht bestehen." As Paul Livingston (2007) has argued, one does not have to wait until the *Philosophical Investigations* to see Wittgenstein launch a critique of totality via the logical structure of the first work, which nevertheless relied on a systematic use of the term.

This stress on totality is also apparent in the intellectual synthesis of modernism provided by May Sinclair, a modernist novelist and a philosopher. Sinclair understood that an expression like "total configuration of the universe" had to replace Hegel's old "absolute." Her 1922 survey of the recent trends in philosophy, the *New Idealism,* dismantles for good Hegel's Absolute, an insight shared by T. S. Eliot in his pre-war poetry and Harvard philosophy papers. Sinclair was hoping that the "new realism" ushered in by Bertrand Russell would not be the only tenable position. On her view, realism would be complemented by a reconstructed idealism capable of reconciling critical pragmatism and a dynamic nature as defined by Alfred North Whitehead. Her "new idealism" also took Freud's unconscious into account. For Sinclair, God can be defined as the sum of what we do not know and as what He might know through us. This mystical point of view, asserted in novelistic form at the end of her most accomplished and autobiographical novel, *Mary Oliver,* is congruent with Wittgenstein's final perspective on "the mystical element" that cannot be erased from life. Accordingly,

[6] Lukacs's own footnote to this passage recites "Die Wissenschaftslehre of 1804, Lecture XV, Werke (Neue Ausgabe) IV, p. 288" [emphasis added].

Sinclair's concept of totality links different viewpoints while gesturing in the direction of a non-dialectical synthesis of the opposites.

Another example of the deployment of totality will be found in Hugo von Hofmannsthal's *Salzburger grosses Welttheater*. In 1919, von Hofmannstahl aimed at providing a counterweight to Wagner's Bayreuth by launching the Salzburg festival. He mobilized an Austrian heritage bridging the gap between the Middle Ages and Mozart, while including a cosmopolitan like Goethe. Salzburg would embody a society defined as a community and an "aesthetic totality," thus "Catholic" in the etymological sense as a response to the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Such a neo-classicism appears modernist in its desire to unite all aesthetic forms, as we see with *Everyman* produced in Salzburg in 1920, followed by an adaptation of Calderon's *The Great Theatre of the World* in 1922. The trope of a microcosm reproducing the macrocosm connects religious and popular features, which sends us back to medieval rituals. Von Hofmannsthal, as much a modernist as Joyce, Proust, Pound, Woolf and Eliot, was intent upon blending archaic rituals and modern cityscapes. The new totality of 1922 was neither formalist nor mystical. It aimed at overcoming the belated Wagnerism of the Symbolists harking after the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. "Totality" was too serious to be subsumed by myth, in spite of Eliot's misguided notion of a "mythical method." Even if Proust, Joyce, Eliot and even Woolf betray a certain reverence for Wagner's operatic synthesis, they wanted to create a different sort of "whole": the "whole" reconciles the everyday and the mythical, encompasses bodies in its obscure organic functions and minds in its dizzying leaps, ushering in flashes of insight, epiphanies and new sorts of neo-Platonic heights. If we agree that the specificity of modernism in 1922 is that it postulates a totality before advancing to the next stage, which would be true totalitarianism, we have to understand how it negotiates with the idea of infinity.

A critical concept of totality was brought to bear on *Ulysses,* the main novel of 1922, by no less perceptive novelist and philosopher than Hermann Broch. Discussing Joyce's masterpiece in 1936, Broch (2002, 94) sketched the features that define a generation, above all the "style of the time," an "expression of an epoch" fulfilling a "historic reality." If the style is to survive its own period, it has to overcome its temporal determinations and look to the future. This is the historical vantage-point that will usher in a "total reality" gathering the concrete lives of multitudes. The writer engaging with the idea of reproducing the "universal quotidian of the epoch" (*Welt-Alltag der Epoche)*, as Joyce did in *Ulysses*, reshapes the *Zeitgeist* by giving it its artistic form. When an artist is able to produce a "universal work of art," then a "universalized everyday" coheres into a cultural "world" that remains with us forever.

For Broch, Leopold Bloom was the hero of a "universal quotidian" taking Dublin as its site, exploring everyday life in such a way that it can be shared by all. What some critics had called a "novel to end all novels" reflects the splits and struggles of a world caught up between organic muteness and the excessive loquacity of universal culture. Broch insists that Joyce's unresolved problem was that he felt he must create a totality without believing in it the idea. In other words, Joyce had shaped a whole world without being a

true Platonician: "[…] the more fundamentally the work of art undertakes the task of totality (*Totalität*) without believing in it, the more threatening the peril of the infinite becomes" (Broch 2002, 94).

As Broch repeated in his essays and novels, the rational and the irrational must blend, fuse into a totality that also includes infinity. Because science cannot provide such a complete statement at once, literature and art assuage our impatience by giving birth to the wished for and anticipated synthesis. Modernist totalities do not necessarily lead to the huge symphonic form deployed with such craft by Proust and Joyce. The concept can underpin a minimalist sense of the absent center, as one finds in the rendering of war desolation by Woolf in *Jacob's room,* or in Sinclair's *The Life and Death of Harriett Frean,* a slim sketch rewriting in the negative of *Mary Oliver,* that, as we saw, was a very long and dense autobiographical novel.

Alain Badiou has reopened the discussion of totality in a Marxist sense. What he does as well is to reject the easy opposition of totality and infinity that underpins the entire logic of Emmanuel Levinas's *Totality and Infinity* from 1961. This is quite clear when Alain Badiou ushers in an original concept of "découvrement" in *The Immanence of Truths*. In the 700 pages of this book, brief chapters devoted to René Char, Victor Hugo, Emily Dickinson, Paul Celan, Osip Mandelstam, Fernando Pessoa, Bertolt Brecht and Samuel Beckett, offer pithy and vibrant analyses interrupting long sections on mathematics and logical theory. These authors would exemplify Badiou's concept of modernist writing, a writing in which finitude is pitted against the infinite. Finally Beckett is adduced to introduce a conceptual binary: "covering over" (*recouvrement*) opposed to "uncovering" (*découvrement).* Badiou defines "covering-over" as a modern, as opposed to classical, form of finitude. His sense of the "modern" is akin to "modernism" (the authors quoted would map out Badiou's modernism). A "covering-over" may try to deny that a revolutionary situation has happened by translating its emergence in the language of the finite. The infinity that had been deployed is thus masked or distorted in order to reinstate a status quo. "Covering-over" conceals the infinite multiplicities or reduce them to constructible multiples. "Covering-over" is a mechanism by which a system's chains of infinities are inverted into finite segments. "Covering-over" refuses anything that would be excessive. It just makes the new look banal, historical, or impossible. The "covering-over" asphyxiates the possibilities contained in the infinities for it doggedly attempts to prevent a new infinity from emerging from any given situation (Badiou 2022, 193-204).

Subjects interested in such of covering-over are defined by Lacan's phrase of the "non-dupes who err" ("les non-dupes errant") (228), those "renegades of infinite potential" (203) trying not to be deceived by reducing any infinity to an enlightened false consciousness. In the end, the non-duped repeat homophonically the "Nom-du-Père," the name-of-the-Father whose function is to keep the symbolic order of culture as a totality under strict control. Beckett is thus called upon to bring about a breakthrough. The "covering-over" in Beckett studies would correspond to the first interpretations of his works that insisted on existential despair, nihilism, the death of God. Even if these readings were produced in the 1960s and have been rejected in our critical consensus,

Badiou does not care about the evolution of Beckett scholarship, for he remembers the "Beckett" myth that marked his generation. For Badiou, Beckett bridges the gap between the 1930s and the 1970s: he is not the "last modernist", but the main modernist.

Beckett's poems testify to a clash between the finite and the infinite. Beckett's poetry shows how the infinite emerge from the finite instead of reducing the infinite to its biographical circumstances, to identity politics, or to historicist framing. Beckett's strong saying pierces through any "covering-over": it "goes straight to the heart of the infinite nakedness of what is true" (Badiou 2022, 206). Badiou shows that Beckett's solution was to reject any fake infinity borrowed from science as a consolation, and opt for dynamism. Rejecting the consolation of great numbers, Beckett chose exile, moved to Paris, and then abandoned Joyce as his model. Badiou argues that the solution for a lasting modernism is to combine totalization and infinity thanks to a constant movement. Thus Beckett never found a "home" and can be contrasted with Kant who never left Königsberg. Badiou comments:

> The evil that is invisible, though caught up in the "how to say," is to be "imprisoned at home imprisoned abroad," which means: imprisoned *tout court,* imprisoned in the finiteness of the "home," whether it is one's own home or that of others. Anyone who shelters in a single home is lost. Every infinity requires wandering. Otherwise, it is pointless to invoke the clichés of the greatness of the past to combat the law of the Father: the imprisoned person will be, simply because they are imprisoned, im-finitudized, defated by the worst. (Badiou 2022, 210)

Badiou's invented verb "en-finitudiser" parallels wandering as errancy and the acceptance of risk and error. This he opposes to "non-duped" subjects who want to remain in their father's homes and never question patriarchy. If one can reach outside, face existential pain and risk, then the "covering-over" of ideology and pseudo-science can be dismantled. One cannot and should not feel at home in Beckett's nature: it cannot offer any consolation, but provided one be ready to reach out for the outside, also face existential pain and risk, then the "covering-over" of pseudo-science is destroyed. Badiou's political notion of infinity bridges the gap between what Hegel called the "bad infinity" of an endless regression and the good infinity of the Absolute. If modernism peaks indeed in 1922, and if we can go back in time to try and assess when it began (some time between Baudelaire and Jarry), one cannot say when ends, a point that can be illustrated by Marcel Duchamp.

Marcel Duchamp had failed to complete his large glass *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even*. The ambitious work consisted of two metal panels holding a double allegory in glass, the bride on top, the bachelors at the bottom, created between 1915 and 1923. Duchamp's focus had moved from the purely machine-like representations of sexual desire to an engagement with time, speed and kinetic devices like the later *rotoreliefs*. In 1923, Duchamp, bored by the world of art and artists, decided to focus on chess. He went back to Paris with the ambition of becoming a chess champion and called

the Large Glass "definitively unfinished." [7] He exhibited it as such. The "nine shots," holes whose location was found when they were shot from a toy cannon, that were to receive "emanations" from the bachelors below, are still today empty.

Duchamp allowed the glass to be exhibited at the Brooklyn Museum in 1926. Badly stored after that show, the two panels being stacked on top of each other, the glass broke. Duchamp discovered this accident five years later. He then came back to the USA and spent two months in the summer of 1936 during which he patiently reassembled the glass pieces, putting the shards and slivers together as if they were an immense puzzle. He finished work on 31 July 1936. By then, he decided to include the *Grand Verre* in a portable box that contained replicas of all his previous works. He also felt that the cracks had improved the work: "There is a symmetry in the cracking […] There is almost an intention here – a curious extra intention that I am not responsible for, an intention made by the piece itself, what I call a 'ready-made' intention […]." [8] Duchamp released his preparatory notes for the "Glass in the Green Box" in 1934.

The happy accident of the shattered glass released an extra dimension that somehow "unfinished" the previous blockage. Duchamp produced an engraving called *The Large Glass completed* in 1965, at the request of Arturo Schwarz. Jean Suquet then published an extensive explanation of what should have been in the work had it been finished according to the "Notes". A big spiral links the bachelors to the bride, anchored by the holes of the nine shots. In the transformation from a "definitive" to an "indefinitive" incompletion, Duchamp invented conceptual art while inserting the fourth dimension of time, with its contradictions and metamorphoses in the work itself. Since time is by definition open and therefore infinite, it follows that in the same way as no completion is definitive, no incompletion can appear as an ultimate end. This incomplete totality open to infinity limns the features of the complex archive we call modernism.

It is an archive that collects all sorts of curios and documents in order to recollect the past; this past is less forgotten than constantly revisited and re-read by the present so as to make newer and better sense of it**.** Thus, we become the curators of an always unfinished and unfinishable archive. This archive I call modernism, an archive that will never become a closed totality. Like modernism, no collection can ever be complete. Discrete objects will form a living encyclopedia. Like Benjamin's *Arcades Project,* it has to remain unfinished, which is the condition for a truly revolutionary awakening. Just as there is no absolute language, there is no absolute collection, therefore no end to modernism. Because the absolute is lacking, the urge of the totality more pressing, the task of the collector, which includes loving all the objects included, objects that will hence be "redeemed," is to keep open a discontinuous history of modernisms in the plural – even if we long for it in the singular.

One can argue that modernism deploys a concept of history that is neither linear nor cyclical in so far as it comes very close to the Freudian idea of deferred action or

[7] This is the title of an excellent collection on Duchamp's work; cf. de Duve 1992.
[8] Quoted in Tomkins 1996, 308.

Nachträglichkeit. If the past can be rewritten by the present, as Eliot surmised in *Tradition and the Individual Talent,* one cannot keep the myth of progress in the arts, as Benjamin had argued against Adorno. Although it is "progressive," modernism does not believe in progress – only Flaubert's bourgeois and vulgar Marxists do. Because of all these features, modernism is now our classicism: we return to *The Waste Land* to read Petronius and Ovid, we return to *Ulysses* to read the *Odyssey* – and this is the only way these ancient texts make sense for us today. Alfred Jarry gave us an insight into this strange chronology when he dated from 1920 his "modernist novel" *The Supermale,* written in 1902, by a simple inversion. Thus, if 1922 was indeed the peak of historical modernism, Jarry would hint that modernism should last until 2192 at least…

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PETER NICHOLLS

RITES OF SPRING

1922 and 1822

ABSTRACT: This paper reads in tandem two major poems: Giacomo Leopardi's *canzone Alla Primavera, o delle favole antiche* ("To Spring, or on the ancient myths") and T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. Composed almost exactly one hundred years apart, the two works display some curious affinities in the "rites of Spring" they ironically enact. Eliot never expressed interest in Leopardi, but both poems meditate on classicism, romanticism, and myth, and both are produced in a period of personal and national turmoil for their writers. Read together they might be taken to dramatize the passage between the "modern" work of 1822 and the "modernist" one of 1922, each legible (as Eliot wrote of Igor Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* and James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*) either "as a collection of entertaining myths, or as a revelation of that vanished mind of which our mind is a continuation."

KEYWORDS: *The Rite of Spring*, Leopardi, T. S. Eliot, Mythology, Spring, Noonday Demon.

In June 1921, T. S. Eliot attended the first London production of Igor Stravinsky's newly choreographed ballet *The Rite of Spring*. He reviewed the performance several months later in one of his "London Letters" for the *Dial* magazine (Eliot 1921, 452-455). As one who had earlier described himself as an exponent of "The classicist point of view," with its "belief in Original Sin" and in "the necessity for austere discipline" (1916, in Moody 1980, 44), Eliot might not have seemed an obvious admirer of the ballet Stravinsky described as "a scene of pagan ritual in which a chosen sacrificial virgin dances herself to death" (Eksteins 1989, 39).[1] He would have known, though, of the first performance of *The Rite* back in 1913 which had been so memorably riotous and unbridled; and, he would also have known that, for many who saw it then, the violence of the dancing and the dissonance of the music had later seemed darkly prophetic of the global violence soon to come.[2]

The Rite that came to London in the early 1920s wasn't quite as wild as that opening performance and some of the Russian color of the original had faded a little, with non-Russian dancers adopting Russian stage names (Taruskin 2017, 435). It remained, though, an early example of the modernist Total Work, "a mixed-media synthesis" that

[1] Craft 1966, 33 observes of the ending that "the elders stand like witnesses at an execution, and extend their hands to the victim as she falls in time with the flute scale."

[2] See Eksteins 1989, xiv. The Rite "with its rebellious energy and its celebration of life through sacrificial death, perhaps the emblematic oeuvre of a twentieth-century world that, in its pursuit of life, has killed off millions of its best human beings. Stravinsky intended initially to entitle his score The Victim."

would have a prominent place in future "histories of dance and stage design, as well as music" (417). Eliot's review certainly showed his responsiveness to the performance - the choreography, he said, was "admirable," and he especially praised the principal dancer, Olga Sokolova (Eliot 1921, 452-455). At the same time, though, Eliot was troubled by a sense of disjunction between the ballet and its music. "To me," he wrote, "the music seemed very remarkable – but at all events struck me as possessing a quality of modernity which I missed from the ballet which accompanied it […] The spirit of the music was modern, and the spirit of the ballet was primitive ceremony." In the ballet, he concluded, "one missed the sense of the present," and he went on to suggest that the work be understood "in two ways," like Frazer's *The Golden Bough*: "as a collection of entertaining myths, or as a revelation of that vanished mind of which our mind is a continuation." In contrast to the "primitive ceremony" of the content, the dissonance of Stravinsky's music struck him as fully modern in its way of "transform[ing] the rhythm of the steppes into the scream of the motor horn," of realizing a "sense of the present" in "the grind of wheels, the beating of iron and steel, the roar of the underground railway, and the other barbaric cries of modern life; and to transform these despairing noises into music." This way of emphasizing the modernism of *The Rite*'s music was not unusual.[3] Indeed, Stravinsky himself would tire of the work's primitive "scenario," and after 1920 he would increasingly prefer concert performances of the piece. The split between ancient and modern that troubled Eliot would thus disappear as Stravinsky recast *The Rite* as a form of "absolute music," as he called it, progressively dissociating it "from its scenic and choreographic ties" and realigning it with post-war neo-classicism rather than with modernism's earlier primitivism.[4]

Primitive and modern might thus be separated as content and form for Stravinsky but for Eliot they were inextricably linked (both, he suggests in his review, are "barbarous" and "despairing"). By 1922, he was conceiving the "vanished mind" less as a tranquil array of existing "monuments" in an ideal order (that was how he had described it in the earlier essay *Tradition and the Individual Talent* (Eliot 1972, 15) than as an expression of a modernity whose disposition to violence and nihilism had hardly been assuaged by the

[3] See, for example, Rosenfeld 1920, 194 for a view of the work's sonic and rhythmic effects as expressing "the whole mad phantasmagoria of the modern city."
Rosenfeld continues "Everything is angular, cubical, rectilinear. The music pounds with the rhythm of engines, whirls and spirals like screws and fly-wheels, grinds and shrieks like laboring metal." (202)
Craft 1966, 35 also recalls "the semblance of mechanisation in the robotic beat" of The Rite that "must have seemed as modern as airplanes in 1913". Cfr. Austin Graham 2016, 147 for the view that in the period "the 'rattle' of machinery was seldom heard in Stravinsky's music."

[4] Van den Toorn 1987, 13. Cfr. Roberts 2016, 158: "Stravinsky's stage works for the Ballets Russes after *The Rite of Spring* chart his journey from Dionysian abandon to his conception of a perennial Apollonian order and measure". On "absolute music", see Stravinsky 1936, 84.
"[M]usic is, by its very nature, essentially powerless to express anything at all, whether a feeling, an attitude of mind, a psychological mood, a phenomenon of nature, etc." (his emphasis). Cfr. Eliot 2015, I, 590-1: "no interpretation of a rite could explain its origin […] the rite may have originated before 'meaning' meant anything at all" (his emphasis).

slaughter of the Great War. His response to *The Rite of Spring* thus exhibits a certain ambivalence. There is the "modern" sense of ancient myth as, now, merely "entertaining," as old stories that have little more than antiquarian relevance to the present, and there is also the more complicated and perhaps guilty sense of the modern mind having to wrestle with its own atavistic residues (as, perhaps, in its fascination with the spectacle of Stravinsky's virgin dancing herself to death). But if modernism were to be shaped by "tradition," as Eliot had already argued it should, what future life could classicism have if its very marrow, the ancient myths, were somehow toxic or at the least irrelevant?

When it comes to thinking about Eliot and modernity, it is usually Baudelaire who provides a point of reference. Eliot spoke of him, after all, as "the greatest exemplar in *modern* poetry in any language, for his verse and language is the nearest thing to a complete renovation that we have experienced" (426; his emphasis). I want to speak here, though, not of Baudelaire, but of another poet, Giacomo Leopardi, who found himself, like Eliot, caught between tradition and modernity, and who, while seeking a poetry responsive to what Eliot called "the sense of the present," found in the modern world none of the intoxication that would offer occasional consolation to Baudelaire.[5] The contemporary world contained for Leopardi no hope of transcendence; modernity appeared to him rather as something already ruined by the failure of Enlightenment values and the French Revolution.

I am not suggesting any kind of influence here – Eliot showed no interest at all in Leopardi and, as far as I know, never mentioned him except to call him "a gloomy cuss" in a letter to Ezra Pound.[6] But one poem of Leopardi's makes for an interesting comparison with *The Waste Land*, the *canzone* called *Alla Primavera, o delle favole antiche*, "To Spring, or about the ancient fables." As it happens, the poems were completed almost exactly one hundred years apart, in January 1822 and January 1922 respectively. Both were triggered in part by their authors' recent psychological and physical breakdowns, and both sought, in Eliot's words, "to transmute [these] personal and private agonies into something rich and strange, something universal and impersonal" (Eliot 1972, 137).[7] Leopardi expressed the same thought, if a little more dramatically: "In its poetic career, my spirit has followed the same course as the human spirit in general," he said, the

[5] See Eliot 1972, 426 "It is not merely in the use of imagery of common life, not merely in the use of imagery of the sordid life of a great metropolis, but in the elevation of such imagery to the first intensity—presenting it as it is, and yet making it represent something much more than itself—that Baudelaire has created a mode of release and expression for other men" (his emphasis).

[6] Eliot 2019, 688, letter to Ezra Pound, 16 October 1937: "I haven't any a priori objection to Leopardi [...] except that he is a gloomy cuss and I like cheerful light reading [...]".

[7] Compare Moody 1980, 80: "He [Eliot] is completing the objectification and analysis of his experience by magnifying it into a vision of the world. If he presents a crisis or breakdown of civilisation, this has to be understood as first of all a crisis or breakdown in himself. If he achieves a cure it will be by reintegrating and transforming himself in poetry".

breakdown of his health in 1819 effectively marking "my passing from ancient to modern" (Leopardi 1997 and Leopardi 2013, 143, 144).

In both cases, personal disaster is taken as symptomatic of some sort of traumatic fall into modernity. That fall, glimpsed in the literal "descent" of *The Waste Land*'s opening lines and in Leopardi's idea of the human spirit "nel dolor sepolte" ("entombed in grief") at the beginning of his, performs a "rite of Spring" that is anything but regenerative.[8] The two poems share a pessimism that regards modernity as immune to fantasies of renewal and to the myths in which these traditionally had found expression. And perhaps not surprisingly, for in 1822 Leopardi's Italy was drifting into a dreary period of "restoration" following the failed insurrections of 1820-21 in Naples and Piedmont. The mission of international politics was now to return to a version of pre-Napoleonic stability (Napoleon had died the year before). Metternich's series of Congresses – Vienna in 1814-15 through to Verona in 1822 – sought to neutralize revolution in Greece and Spain, and to ensure Austrian rule in Northern Italy. Leopardi's country, it seemed, was doomed once more to repartition and to despotic government, and his hometown, Recanati, far from experiencing Springtime renewal, would continue to sleep the sleep of the Papal States, paralyzed by censorship and byzantine travel restrictions. As if to honor this spirit of anachronism, his father, Monaldo, continued to wear a sword around the Palazzo, and Leopardi, age 24, was still not allowed to leave home unaccompanied (not until late in 1822 was he able to make his first escape from Recanati to Rome).

In 1922, Eliot also found himself in a painfully deadlocked world. Having committed to staying in Europe, he was now unhappily settled in London, embroiled in a marriage dogged by anxiety and illness. His doctoral thesis remained unfinished and the aspiring poet found himself toiling away in Lloyds' Bank, his duties requiring him to confront on a daily basis the chaos left by the recent war. The map of Europe was being dramatically redrawn again, this time by the 1919 Treaty of Versailles and its panoply of reparations and peace treaties; the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires were being dismantled and new countries created, including Poland, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, and Austria (Tearle 2019, 83; Tate 2013, 161). Drafting *The Waste Land* three years later, Eliot lamented "the present decay of eastern Europe" and conjured anxiously with the specter of "hooded hordes swarming / Over endless plains" (Eliot 2015, 76, 69). His own breakdown and troubled convalescence on "Margate sands," where he could "connect / Nothing with nothing," seemed intimately if obscurely related to the larger apocalyptic vision of "Falling towers" in the poem's next section (Eliot 2015, 66, 69).

For both poets, then, the conventional tropes of Spring no longer announced jubilant recovery. Leopardi, emerging from the worst period of his 1819 breakdown, wrote to his friend and mentor Pietro Giordani that "I too am fervently longing for fair springtime as the only hope of medicine left for my exhaustion of spirit". But Spring brought to his

[8] For Leopardi's larger handling of this theme, see Nicholls 2023, 32-48. The translation of Leopardi's poem used throughout is Leopardi 2008. The more usual choice would be Leopardi 2010, though the former (by Tim Chilcott) is more generally responsive to the Latinate features of Alla Primavera which are especially relevant in the present context.

mind not thoughts of the future, but rather "certain old images" of antiquity and the age of myth, times of "imagination and enthusiasm" that, Leopardi realized with, he said, "an icy fear," were no longer available to him. He now felt "stiff and withered like a dry reed," preoccupied with a "feeling of nothingness" while "wretched would-be philosophers take comfort in the boundless increase in reason" (Leopardi 1998a, 95; Leopardi 1998b, I. 379-80).

The Waste Land's evocation of a "dull" and sluggish Spring also finds April the "cruellest month" in the false hopes it brings. "Winter kept us warm," the opening fondly recalls, and the specter of the new provokes fear and anxiety rather than optimism. As the character Harry would later say in Eliot's play *The Family Reunion* (1939), "Is the spring not an evil time, that excites us with lying voices?," a question met with Mary's declaration that "the moment of birth / Is when we have knowledge of death / I believe the season of birth / Is the season of sacrifice" (Eliot 1970, 309-310). So, in *The Waste Land*, a vista of burgeoning lilacs abruptly yields to a desert landscape of "stony rubbish" and "broken images, where the sun beats." In both poems, Spring's "cruelty" is evoked in a verse that is strained and intermittently opaque. Like Eliot's desert, the language of *The Waste Land* offers little shelter or relief, instead deforming consolatory tropes of flowering and renewal into motifs of violence and sacrifice. To begin with April in this poem is, unexpectedly, to begin with "The Burial of the Dead."

Leopardi's *Alla Primavera* also inverts the rite of Spring, returning to a visionary, mythopoeic world only to show how it has been disastrously sacrificed to the false enlightenment of what he calls the "dark torch of truth" ("l'atra / Face del ver", lines 12-13).[9] This first stanza, famous for its obstructive Latinate syntax, alludes to an ode by Horace (IV. 7) in which the poet speaks of Spring as the time when "the quickly changing moons recoup their losses in the sky" ("damna tamen celeres reparant caelestia lunae") and Winter's "damage" is "repaired" by the arrival of the new season. But Horace cautions against taking this seasonal recurrence as some sort of guarantee of human immortality: the seasons may endlessly revolve, he says, but the mortal span is fixed; nothing will bring *you* back from death. That, too, will be a dominant motif of Leopardi's poem. Nature and humanity are doomed henceforth to separateness and the old myths now serve only to remind us of a harmony that is lost forever. Note that Leopardi does not share at all the popular 19th century fantasy of a return of the gods; the "fables" to which *Alla Primavera* alludes in stanzas 2 through 4 tell not of harmony, but rather of loss and pain – of Actaeon torn to pieces by his dogs, of Daphne imprisoned in the laurel's bark, of Phaeton hurtling to his death, of Echo doomed endlessly to repeat herself. These tales have always been painful, but once they had seemed to speak to humanity's need, they had "made our sorrows known" to us ("Nostre querele […] insegnava"). Now, however, the immortals have vanished and such experiences have become merely "some trick played by the wind," "vano error de'venti."

[9] Horace's phrase "atra cura" (Odes, III. 1. 40) to which Leopardi alludes is the "black anxiety" that "sits behind the horseman" ("post equitem sedet atra cura").

Even more troubling in this context is the myth of Philomela, a dark and bloody rite of Spring that sits uneasily at the center of both our poems (Philomela is the "musical bird," the "musico augel", of Leopardi's fourth stanza). In Ovid's version of the story – and it is important to Leopardi and to Eliot that this legend is enveloped in the background noise of many other tellings:

> Philomela was raped and her tongue cut out by Tereus, husband of Procne, her sister. In revenge Procne slaughtered her son, Itys, and with Philomela's help cooked and served him to his father for dinner. The sisters in turn were slaughtered by Tereus and turned into nightingale and swallow respectively, and Tereus into the hoopoe, bird of war. (Musa 1999, 691)

This tale is especially striking since, as Leopardi noted on the manuscript of *Alla Primavera*, while Tereus is the very embodiment of evil, the two avenging sisters are also portrayed as both victims *and* perpetrators; only Itys, the sacrificial victim, is innocent.[10] The song of the nightingale has echoed down the ages to recall these multiple acts of "wicked vengeance" ("scellerato scorno") but the unspeakable crimes told in the story, the *antichi danni* of the fourth stanza's last lines, echo the seasonal round announced in the *celesti danni* of the poem's first line, suggesting a perennial recurrence of desire, slaughter, revenge and sacrifice. In *The Waste Land*, the "inviolable voice" of the nightingale endlessly names the one by whom Philomela was so "rudely forc'd" ("Tereu") but to little effect ("and still the world pursues […]"). "The change of Philomel," then, her metamorphosis into the nightingale, has lost its ancient aura and she now sings like any ordinary bird rather than weeping as a mythic character (Carpi 2005, 35). "Grief does not modulate / Your song," Leopardi concludes in the opening lines of stanza 5, "quelle tue varie note / Dolor non forma".[11] As Eliot puts it with an allusion to Edmund Spenser, the "nymphs are departed […] Departed, have left no addresses" (Eliot 2015, 62) .

At the time Leopardi wrote *Alla Primavera*, he was also hoping to publish a volume of his *Canzoni* that would have concluded with this poem. The project was delayed but it has been noted that if *Alla Primavera had* closed the volume, it would have acquired something of the force of a manifesto, announcing the end of one way of being classicist and the beginning of a new one (Italia 2016, 38-41). The old way was clear in the works of Vincenzo Monti, the leading classicist poet of the time and an early mentor of Leopardi. But Leopardi was critical now of Monti, whose poems, he allowed, could be graceful and dignified, but whose deference to the classics left them as "really a cento of pieces from […] Homer, Hesiod, Callimachus, Virgil, Horace, Ovid […]" (Leopardi 2013, 37 and 1997, I. 37). The result, Leopardi continues, is an assemblage of quotations

[10] See Leopardi 2009, I. 212: "Non mi finisce, perchè questo affetto par che si riferisca solam. allo scellerato scorno, cioè al fatto di Tereo, e non a quello di Progne ecc." Carpi 2005, 33 notes that in this story "no one was innocent," while Connor 1998, 221 observes that "Philomela and Procne are the perpetrators as well as the victims of a violation."

[11] See Tateo 1993, 43 for the suggestion that Leopardi associates Philomela with Echo following the passage in Poliziano's *Stanze* where Echo is said to repeat the song of the nightingale.

– of bits and pieces – that simply *refer* to ancient authors rather than adding to what they said.

Interestingly, the authors Leopardi names in this passage are all present in his own "Alla Primavera," but the difference between his way with the classics and Monti's is that they function in his poem as sources of *allusions* rather than as just *references*, as a weave of signs and traces that depart from Ovid's original narrative so as to transform its elements into something new.[12] And this is necessary, says Leopardi, because Ovid's "manner of depiction is enumeration (like modern sentimental or descriptive poets, etc.) [and] leaves almost nothing for the reader to do, whereas Dante, who conjures up an image with two words, leaves plenty for the imagination to do. [...] the imagination conceives that image spontaneously and adds what is missing to the lines drawn by the poet, which are such as almost necessarily to evoke the idea of the whole [...]" (Leopardi 2013, 57 and 1997, I. 57).[13] The poet, then, should not give us the "whole" directly, but should rather evoke it – this is the function of allusion which, unlike direct reference, creates an excess of interpretive possibilities for the reader to pursue.

The ramifications of this idea would be complex, inviting comparison with French Symbolism and with Eliot's later modernist proposal that "the poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning" (Eliot 1972, 289).[14] For Leopardi, allusion and indirectness offer a way of redeeming ancient myth from modern disenchantment by adapting it to his new poetics of the "vague" and the "indefinite," a poetics employing suggestive words (*parole*) rather than abstract terms (*termine*) (see, for example, Leopardi 2013, 109-11 and 1997, I. 109-11).[15] While the word *incerte* appears only once in the *Canti* (in line 29 of *Alla Primavera*, as it happens), Leopardi uses it regularly in the *Zibaldone* to describe the poetic effects of *parole*: "For a scientist, the most appropriate words are those which are more precise and express a barer idea ("più nuda"). For the poet and man of letters, on the contrary, words that are vaguer and express more uncertain ideas ("idee più incerte"), or a great number of ideas, etc." (Leopardi 2013, 1226 and 1997, I. 1226). The "frozen heart" ("Questo gelido cor", l.18) of modernity is

[12] For the distinction between "reference" and "allusion," see Nicholls 2010, 10-24. See also Leopardi 2013b, 144: "we do not have [the Greek fables] in common with the ancients, for they belong to them. We should not usurp others' images, unless we make them our own in some way".

[13] See also Leopardi 2013b, 152.

[14] Leopardi's praise of "vagueness" and "indirectness," may seem to align him with the later Symbolists, but his criticism of Italian Romanticism shows how his own emphasis is in fact quite different. See Leopardi 2013b, 115 "they [the Romantics] wish to make poetry consort with the intellect, and to transplant it from the visible to the invisible and from things to ideas, and to transform it from the material, imaginative, corporeal substance that it was into something metaphysical, reasonable and spiritual."

[15] Cfr. Brose 1983, 54 "Parole. . . do not present a precise idea of a given object or concept, but are polysemic and call up clusters of images that, by virtue of their indefiniteness, suggest the infinite and the sublime." On Leopardi's derivation of the distinction from Cesare Beccaria's Ricerche interno alla natura dello stile, see Nencioni 1981, 71-72.

constantly constrained by "truths," by totalizing ("bare") explanations that restrict an imaginative faculty that would otherwise delight in what is fluid and unfixed.[16] Leopardi's allusions work to create that fluidity, in this case the extended allusion to Horace in the opening lines combining with other echoes of, for example, Petrarch, Virgil, and Ugo Foscolo, and thus preparing for the even more intricate texture of the second stanza. Here idyllic images of home, of nymphs and crystal springs, give way to a landscape starkly devoid of any divine presence: the forbidding mountains and woods are haunted only by the wind, like the "empty chapel," perhaps, in Eliot's "What the Thunder said" that is now "only the wind's home." Later, in Leopardi's final stanza, there is the "blind" ("cieco") thunder that prefigures "the dry sterile thunder without rain" of *The Waste Land* (Eliot 2015, 68). Leopardi's manuscript shows, incidentally, that he was thinking here of images of the Underworld in Virgil and Dante and of "the very home of the living" having become "the seat of death," much as it will later do in Eliot's images of the dead flowing over London Bridge and of the deserted place where the "sun beats, / And the dead tree gives no shelter."[17]

But the second half of Leopardi's stanza 2 takes us back to primordial times, melding together allusions to the dance of the nymphs (from Horace's Ode again, but also invoking lines from Virgil and Homer, and perhaps from Porphyry's Cave of the Nymphs), and to the unfortunate shepherd who espies the goddess Diana bathing. Importantly, it is noon, the hour of *ombre incerte*, of flickering shadows, the "uncertain shade" ("incertas umbras") of Virgil's fifth *Eclogue*.[18] This is the time when the sun is at its highest and when, according to many legends, gods, nymphs and other supernatural beings may appear on earth. It's the so-called "blind hour" when we can't see because there's actually too much light – [19] a disorienting time (later, monks were warned about the "meridian demon" that would overpower them with drowsiness)[20] but also a very dangerous one for any mortal who happens to disturb a god taking a bath at noon.[21] This moment of temporal suspension and sensory confusion is also implied in the shadowless desert landscape of *The Waste Land*'s opening and later in the twilight vision of the "violet hour", another time of "transitions and transformations" (Cole 2012, 74).

Anything is possible at this time of day, and the shepherd in *Alla Primavera* now hears the "shrill piping" ("arguto carme") of many Pans, as, disastrously, he comes upon the

[16] Cfr. Leopardi 2013b, 124 on "the science that opposes it [the imagination], barring every path with truth [...] nor is the harsh light of truth beneficial for that which is a wanderer in nature."

[17] See the marginal notes in Leopardi 2009, I. 215 which refer to Aeneid, VI, 407ff. and Inferno, III, 78. Savarese 2003, 12 notes that while these do not appear in the final version of the poem the motif seems to surface again in lines 20-21 of "Inno ai patriarchi" with their reference to "il disperato erebo in terra."

[18] Eclogues, V. 5, "sive sub incertas Zephyris motantibus umbras." Leopardi 2009, I. 202 notes the allusion: "Sul fervido meriggio. Sul meriggio cocente. incerte. Virg. ecl.5 v. 5."

[19] See Ungaretti 2000, 1494 on "'l'ora cieca' per troppa luce, l'ora dei deliri e dei miraggi."

[20] For a biblical warning, see Psalms, XCI, 6 on "the destruction that wasteth at noonday."

[21] See Ungaretti 2000, 904. Ungaretti planned but did not ultimately publish a book-length dossier of accounts of the Demonio meridiano (1494). The draft can be found in Giuseppe Ungaretti 2010, 1035-1174.

goddess taking her bath.[22] Leopardi acknowledges the mirage-like effect of noonday by departing from Ovid's narrative and grafting several tales together. First, the shepherd boy becomes Actaeon as he advances into the grove with "uncertain step" ("non certis passibus errans", as Ovid puts it). The "uncertainty" describes the boy's gait but it also provides a figure for the way in which elements of the myth are being associatively recombined in a form in which the vision is powerfully evoked but still remains somehow unclear. The boy sees the surface of the pool trembling or shimmering, but he cannot see the goddess herself even though she is tantalizingly glimpsed by us, the readers. And, by analogy, this glimpse triggers other intertextual effects, the phrase "snow-white side" ("Il niveo lato" of the last line) echoed from yet another ode by Horace (III. 27. 25-6) in which the purity of Europa's skin is praised.

All this is "uncertain" as, paradoxically, the light of noonday is ("all'ombre / Meridiane incerte"), and Leopardi makes the whole scene more "vague" (to use his favorite word) by melding together different stories while omitting their protagonists' names.[23] It *looks* as if this is Actaeon seeing Diana, but in Ovid's account, of course, Actaeon is torn apart by his hunting-dogs, not blinded. In fact, this story of the goddess bathing is being elided with an earlier one that Callimachus tells in his *Fifth Hymn*, of the Bath of Pallas in which the goddess is disturbed while bathing by Tiresias.[24] We know of this second allusion because Leopardi deliberately draws our attention to it in the "Annotations" he published along with his poems (like Eliot in his notes for *The Waste Land*, Leopardi was always fond of self-commentary).[25] Tiresias is blinded for his indiscretion but then partially compensated by being given second sight.[26] This will be the Tiresias of *The Waste Land*, though he appears there from yet another story in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (III, 330-38) where he is made to adjudicate a dispute between the gods about human sexual pleasure. With just this metamorphic fluidity, the characters in *The Waste Land*, Eliot explains in one of his notes, "melt" into each other.[27]

I won't continue to read in this kind of detail, but the point I want to make is that Leopardi – and Eliot too, perhaps – after relegating ancient fables to the past, manages in that act of overcoming them to reformulate them elliptically and "uncertainly" in a way that might allow the imagination room to "wander" (in Leopardi's terms, "spaziare")

[22] Compare Jacques Rivière's 1913 account of "the 'panic' terror of the rise of sap" in Stravinsky's The Rite of Spring (Rivière 2017, 145).

[23] A trick learned, perhaps, from Petrarch on whose habit of not naming mythic characters, see Hainsworth 1979, 29.

[24] As noted by, for example, Gavazzeni-Lombardi in Leopardi 2018, 196, the passage also alludes to Ugo Foscolo's use of Callimachus in Hymn III of Le Grazie and in the Ode A Luigia Pallavicini caduta da cavallo.

[25] "Annotazioni alle Dieci Canzoni stampate a Bologna nel 1824," in Leopardi 1987, 193.

[26] Leopardi temporarily lost his sight during his period of ill-health in 1819 and this adds painful nuance to these fables.

[27] Eliot 2015, 74 "Just as the one-eyed merchant, seller of currants, melts into the Phoenician Sailor, and the latter is not wholly distinct from Ferdinand Prince of Naples, so all the women are one woman, and the two sexes meet in Tiresias."

even within the rational constraints of modernity. Hence the importance of the poet's appeal to Nature in the closing lines of the poem to "Rekindle now the ancient flame in me," where the fables of the poem's title ("le favole antiche") are transformed into the flame or spark of inspiration in the present ("la favilla antica"). Traces and signs are valued here above full disclosure, for they are what give the imagination space to move forward, to project a future even when what is most valued seems wholly lost.[28] *The Waste Land* moves in this same zone of uncertainty which, like Leopardi's poem, it acknowledges in a series of hesitations and rhetorical questions. For even uncertainty can have value in a world that seems in each case blankly unresponsive to human misery. Leopardi's poem ends with the hope that nature, even if it no longer has "pity" for humanity, may at least *witness* its suffering – "Pietosa no, ma spettatrice almeno" – while *The Waste Land* relays the commands of the Thunder even though these are heard with "London Bridge [...] falling down" and the plain still "arid behind me." Both express a fundamental pessimism, though the "uncertainty" of poetic expression postpones absolute negation and instead makes these poems places of anticipation, a waiting for rain, as Eliot has it, or, as Leopardi puts it in his notebook, "The primitive and literal meaning of [the Latin word] *spes* was not *to hope*, but *to wait*, for good or ill indiscriminately" (Leopardi 2013, 3751 and 1997, II. 3571).

Both poets would eventually put an end to that kind of waiting, Leopardi by abandoning hope altogether, Eliot, arguably, by surrendering everything to it, but this moment, in 1922 as in 1822, represents a peculiar hiatus when something beyond totality may be glimpsed, and when the poem generates so many layers of allusion that reading feels almost endless. We've seen this exuberantly at work in *Alla Primavera* and it's also a feature of *The Waste Land* that the annotated edition of Eliot's poems by Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue strikingly illuminates. Take as just one example, two lines from Eliot's *The Fire Sermon*, "At the violet hour, the evening hour that strives / Homeward, and brings the sailor home from the sea" (Eliot 2015, 663). Ricks and McCue find allusions here to Sappho, Dante, Milton, Thomas Gray, Whitman, Robert Louis Stevenson, A. E. Housman, John Davidson… The list could probably go on, and if it seems excessive that is because it invites the reader to abandon the apparent certainties of interpretation in favor of what Leopardi calls in the *Zibaldone*, "Variety, uncertainty, not seeing everything, and therefore [being] able to wander ["spaziare"] in one's imagination, through things unseen" (Leopardi 2013, 1745 and 1997, I. 1745). Leopardi and Eliot both tempt us to this "wandering," in part by the allusive texture of their verse but also by the self-commentaries they half ironically supply to their poems. Encouraged by allusion, then, our reading might also become a kind of commentary, moving in unexpected directions and with the promise of an open and perhaps regenerative horizon that conventional rites of Spring no longer afford.

[28] As noted in Squarotti 1996, 153-4, Leopardi will not return to the allegorical classicism of Monti, abandoning that whole apparatus in favor of the "perpetuo canto" of figures like Silvia and Nerina who express the "spark" ("favilla") of original inspiration from which the old mythologies were born.

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FOCUS

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NOLUNTAS SCIENDI, VOLUNTAS NESCIENDI

Anthropology of the Modernist Character[1]

ABSTRACT: Among the many illnesses that literary characters might suffer from, the peculiar relationship with truth that some characters of the modernist novel come to develop is certainly the most alarming. This can manifest itself in two occasionally intertwined ways: on the one hand we have the *voluntas nesciendi*, the deliberate refusal of knowing something understood as truth; on the other hand there is the *noluntas sciendi*, the precautionary dismissal of a dangerous and destabilizing knowledge. It is not a matter of incapacity or impossibility, but rather of choice, one which holds meaning and therefore entails moral consequences. It is the reversal of the ancient Aristotelian axiom by which "all men by nature desire to know": men, Freud argues, just as naturally wish not to know, and thus protect themselves through repression [*Verdrängung*], resistance [*Widerstand*], disavowal [*Verleugnung*], negation [*Verneinung*]. And since "*qui auget scientiam, auget et dolorem,*" we might also be dealing with the paradoxical actualization of the biblically derived imperative not to know. After reading Schopenhauer and learning something new about life and death, Thomas Buddenbrook closes the book in hopes of forgetting what he read. Lambert Strether, the protagonist of Henry James' *Ambassadors*, surrenders to a sort of self-blinding. But Italo Svevo's Zeno Cosini is the hero of this issue, and for this rewarded by his author. Zeno is the final, Nietzschean, and nihilistic outcome of a pathological perspective which is more worrisome than inept, though one which ultimately leads to salvation: truth is pointless for happiness.

KEYWORDS: Modernist Character, Knowledge, Psychoanalysis, Ethics, Nihilism, Thomas Mann, Henry James, Italo Svevo.

I would like to express my gratitude to Paolo Bugliani, Serena Grazzini, Francesco Rossi, Gloria Scarfone for their advice and recommendations, and to Giulio Milone for the English translation.

1. Thomas Buddenbrook, *noluntas sciendi* and *voluntas nesciendi*

Though now successful and fully in his prime, Thomas Buddenbrook is distraught. He is worried about his son's fate. He suspects that his wife is cheating on him. He suffers from poor health, and feels that death is near. One afternoon he picks up a volume from his library, Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation*. While reading, he is filled with "an unfamiliar sense of immense and grateful contentment" (Mann 1994,

[1] Translated by Giulio Milone.

1047). He feels "the incomparable satisfaction of watching an enormously superior intellect grab hold of life, of cruel, mocking, powerful life, in order to subdue and condemn it" (Mann 1994, 104). Thomas does not understand what he is reading, but what he manages to grasp is terrifying: ours is "the worst of all possible worlds" (Mann 1994, 1047), and "every human being" is "a mistake, a blunder" (Mann 1994, 1051). Still, this "truth" that makes him feel "overwhelmed" (Mann 1994, 1048) has a certain touch of grace. He goes to bed, sleeps, and then wakes up "slightly embarrassed by the intellectual extravagances of the night". He wishes he would keep on reading but he also asks himself: are these really "proper ideas for him" (Mann 1994, 1055)?

> He never managed to give the book another glance, despite the treasures buried inside — let alone to buy the other volumes of that magnum opus. The nervous pedantry that had taken control of him over the years devoured each new day. Harried by five hundred pointless, workaday trifles — just tending to them and keeping them all in order was a torment—he found himself too weak-willed to arrange his time reasonably and productively. And about two weeks after that remarkable afternoon, he had arrived at the point where he abandoned the whole idea and told the maid to fetch a book that for some reason was lying in the drawer of the garden table and put it back in the bookcase.
> And so Thomas Buddenbrook, who had stretched his hands out imploringly for high and final truths, sank back now into the ideas, images, and customary beliefs in which he had been drilled as a child. (Mann 1994, 1055-1056)

But not even his forefathers' principles can offer him solace. Later, after leaving the dentist's office, Thomas feels dizzy while walking on the street, hits his head on the ground, and dies.

Why was Thomas repelled by the act of reading Schopenhauer? What kind of character does this refusal make of him? Which narrative situation are we dealing with? Thomas experiences truth, but truth would not help him much in real life — in the same way in which finding out if (or rather, *that*) his wife is indeed cheating on him with Lieutenant von Throta would not. It is as if two very distinct attitudes were conflating in his persona, where knowledge and will are at odds with each other. In the first instance, Thomas does not want to know (more): in Schopenhauer's pages he has seen the truth, about the world and about himself. However, he decides to shut his eyes and switch off that drive for truth from which he had been invested. In the second one, there is a willingness *not* to know: he could look into it, and maybe he should, but in the end, he simply prefers not to. In the former there is a *noluntas sciendi*; in the latter, a *voluntas nesciendi*. In both cases, Thomas is "too weak-willed," but the temporal relationship between will and knowledge is inverted: in the first instance, truth is positively gained, almost epiphanically so, and without actively looking for it (would Thomas be able to, though?). In the second instance, truth should be chased, but it is better to steer clear of the risks and pains of any discovery. *Noluntas sciendi* is a matter of *not more*; *voluntas nesciendi* is a matter of *not yet*. Thomas exemplifies how profoundly intertwined these two stances are, and though distinguishing between the two is possible, one can already entertain the thought that instances of confusion and overlapping between the two are even more visible in other literary characters.

Thomas considers truth dangerous and unsettling: it would compel him to make stark choices, and, ultimately, to change. Even before than being an enemy of his happiness, truth is detrimental to his tranquility; his moral stature gets already compromised. *Buddenbrooks* are indeed a traditional novel; but a crack has appeared. If the Romantic character (Faust, for instance) was a hero of knowledge, will, and action, the Modernist character will be an anti-hero who rejects knowledge, who is weak-willed, and who prefers not to act.[2]

2. Two conflicting anthropologies…

Noluntas sciendi and *voluntas nesciendi* challenge Aristotle's solemn assertion at the beginning of his *Metaphysics*, which reads: "all men by nature desire to know" (*Met.* 980a). They take one of the earliest and best established anthropological tenets of Western culture, and turn it upside down.

However, there is another Western anthropological principle, drawn from Hebrew culture: as Kohelet proverbially posits, "qui auget scientiam, auget et dolorem" (*Ecc* 1, 18). If these are the stakes, it is better not to know. And indeed the Bible opens with a ban on knowledge, which the Devil promptly exhorts to break ("Scit enim Deus quod in quocumque die comederitis ex eo [the tree at the center of the Garden of Eden], aperientur oculi vestri, et eritis sicut Deus scientes bonum et malum") (*Gen* 3, 5). This ban does not fit well with Greek culture, which understands knowledge not merely as the every man's natural instinct, but as a proper duty. *Gnothi seauton*, the famous inscription on the Temple of Apollo in Delphi, affirms the very same thing and outlines a specific task — one which Thomas Buddenbrook backs out of.

How many philosophers or historians of ideas would be needed to retrace (in Western, and mostly Christian culture) the secular history of these two different needs and, more generally, of two completely different anthropologies? Which is better: knowing or limiting knowledge? Believing that happiness equates with knowledge ("felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas," as Vergil asserts in *Georg.* 2, 489), or accepting that one cannot simply know everything, and should rather stay away from an impossible and potentially dangerous project? Is it better to chase truth, or come to terms with the fact that, though being the *summum bonum*, truth is not attainable through reason only?

Biblical anthropology tells us that men must not want to know everything, and, contrary to the Greek one, it further suggests that they are not even properly equipped for knowledge. We are now dealing with both gnoseology and ethics, for some of the questions we are dealing with certainly are: what can we know? What should we know? Both the Hebrew and the Greek worlds present us with another problem, which could be described as psychological: what is the relationship between human nature and knowledge? Aristotle and the Bible seem to agree on this, in that men are instinctively

[2] On modernist character see Stara 2004, 139-169.

curious. What they disagree on, though, is how to evaluate such tendency: as the highest virtue in one case, as a vice to be corrected in the other (*vana curiositas*, as Augustine will later say).

Thomas Buddenbrook, however, seems to deviate altogether from these paradigms. Surely he *is* curious — he would like to know what is going on between Gerda and von Throta, he avidly reads Schopenhauer — but he also displays signs of resistance, weariness, defenses, excuses — in other words, a wish *not* to know. This ambivalent attitude towards knowledge represents a shift in the anthropological paradigm, whose most prominent theorist, operating in the very same period as when *Buddenbrooks* was published, is obviously Freud.

3. …and an anthropology of ambivalence

There is a strong connection between desiring to know, refusing to know and psychism. Freud links intellectual curiosity and creativity to the primal scene, that glimpse of truth that the subject finds both interesting and dreadful, both willing and unwilling to know. Oedipus himself is a hero of knowledge: he solves the Sphynx's riddles, and acrimoniously investigates the causes of the Thebes plague. His ignorance of Laius' and Jocasta's identities will eventually doom him, but at the same time he is undeniably driven by an extreme hunger for knowledge.

Now, Freud provides us with a wide range of instances of this refusal to know. These instances are always psychological, and that is probably the most prominent innovation in his anthropology. Many are in fact the pertinent psychoanalytical notions. First there is *repression* [*Verdrängung*], both a specific mechanism and a model towards which all the others refer; *resistance* [*Widerstand*], an individual reaction against whatever therapy unearths, as well as a collective stance towards what psychoanalysis itself represents; *disavowal* [*Verleugnung*], which unlike repression concerns the external reality and engenders a split in the ego where contrasting thoughts coexist without influencing each other; *negation* [*Verneinung*], a logical formation which, quite paradoxically, "tak[es] cognizance of what is repressed" (Freud 1953-73, XIX 235); *suppression* [*Unterdrückung*] which differs from repression in its being conscious, suppressed items being stored in the preconscious rather than the unconscious; *censorship* [*Zensur*], the basis of repression; the *undoing of what has been done* [*Ungeschehenmachen*], that is trying to erase the past; and we could easily go on.

These are heterogenous notions in terms of their extension and the criteria upon which they are formulated: some are general mechanisms; others, such as negation, are just rhetorical figures of the psyche. We should also keep in mind that Freud himself changed and reformulated these notions over the years. Yet, we could easily present them all under one comprehensive category, that of *defense* [*Abwehr*].

What exactly are we defending ourselves from? Perhaps from something that threatens the ego (or rather its equilibrium, which does not coincide with its actual

health), and that can come from anywhere: the external and the inner world, reality and imagination, truths and ghosts, what happened, as well as what could have happened. According to Laplance and Pontalis, "however great the differences may be between the various modalities of defensive process in hysteria, obsessional neurosis, paranoia, etc., the two poles of the conflict are invariably the ego and the instinct" (1988, 105). However, as it happens with Freud and as both Laplance and Pontalis know quite well, defense is not merely a pathogenic process; and if the intrapsychic battle really is between the ego and the instincts, the theatre of war is much wider. Defense is a constitutive aspect of the ego, in the same way in which repression establishes the unconscious. Simply put, all these processes are not accidental; they ultimately make humans what they are. They do not represent an anomaly or an unusual reaction; they are primal, originative, foundational.

Ancient Greek culture understands the notion of rejecting truth as a comical mistake. One can deceive and be deceived in turn, or even be so clueless as not to see what is in front of them. It is probably unimaginable for a Greek to see the truth and reject it *because* it is the truth. According to Hebrew culture, we cannot and we do not have to know everything, which is another way of highlighting men and their limits, both as natural and ideal beings. With Freud, on the other hand, the refusal to know is naturalized: one does not deliberately decide not to know. It is not a choice, it is not the observance of a ban and it is not being virtuous, but it is rather an automatism, a mode of preservation, fear. Most often, one does not even decide or choose not to know. And because it is so innate to every man, the refusal to know is exempted from both intellectual and moral negative judgment — it is not an expression of comic stupidity, and it is not even a proof of cowardice or impiety, as any attempt to cross the limits of knowledge is seen in Hebrew and Christian cultures.

The manifold Freudian ways of shielding oneself from knowledge do not exactly fit with *noluntas sciendi* or *voluntas nesciendi*; mainly because, for Freud, either will is not in action, or is not the real problem. We could try and pair *voluntas* with suppression (both being conscious activities), and *noluntas* with repression (both inhibiting a desire or an instinct). But *voluntas* and *noluntas* are categories spoiled by the very ethical assessments that Doctor Freud does not concern himself with. They trigger a judgment, in the characters' world, in the narrator's stance, in the readers' reactions. Or rather, they make it so that formulating a judgment about them becomes a problem. With his willing refusal to acknowledge the truth, Thomas Buddenbrook represents a case study for a novelist, rather than a psychoanalyst.

4. Strether, or the fear of ideas and of oneself

There is a certain irony at work in *Buddenbrooks* — one that is more dramatic than tragic. Even more ambiguous, though, is the case of Lambert Strether in Henry James' *The Ambassadors*, whose story ends "with a certain philosophic humor" (2011, 690).

Thomas Buddenbrook avoids the universal truths disclosed by Schopenhauer, as well as the truth about his marriage. Strether, on the other hand, in his age of maturity too, is only preoccupied by affairs that concern him directly.

James frames the problem of knowledge in strictly psychological and moral terms, though employing a wider range of tones than Mann. Having been sent to Paris to find out why young Chad Newsome is not willing to come back home, Strether soon entertains the possibility that the boy is having an affair with Madame de Vionnet. It turns out that he is not mistaken, but the protagonist dismisses the idea for a variety of reasons: to begin with, Chad and Madame de Vionnet lie to him; not even his friend Maria Gostrey reveals him everything she knows; finally, Strether himself does not want to see the truth, seduced as he is by the young compatriot, the charming Frenchwoman, and the way in which Paris sparks in him a belated sense of youth.

Strether is therefore a character who is deceived by others, but also by himself. If the latter condition provides an example of *voluntas nesciendi* (since the truth was first guessed and then pushed away), the former makes him a mockable character — and indeed James makes great use of comic undertones, which are absent in Mann, but which we will encounter again in Svevo.[3]

As a result of the psychological complexity of the character and the predominantly internal focus of the narration, the ridicule to which "poor Strether" (as he is often affectionately referred to) is exposed does not undercut his stature; on the contrary, it adds further depth to his story as a man who considers himself "a perfectly equipped failure" (James 2011, 101) and who experiences true melancholy.

Strether has a mental activity that is both brisk and insufficient: he thinks a lot, but his reasoning gives way to an excessive imagination which ultimately disengages him from reality. He is curious and his reactions range from amazement to perplexity. "He but half knew at the time" (James 2011, 630) that he is living in an uncertain, muffled state of consciousness where, if anything, he perceives the sense of things "at the back of his head, behind everything" (James 2011, 316).

James' use of psychology here is particularly perceptive — though obviously pre-Freudian, since there is no trace of unconscious in the novel (we could, at best, speak of *pre*conscious).[4] This is exactly what sharpens the moral and existential drama, made all the more intense because Strether's authenticity, honesty and, even paradoxically, intelligence (or at least his human sensibility) are not actually erased by his incomprehension of things and people.

As the story reaches its conclusion, Strether finds out what he should have known immediately. In keeping with one of the most ancient traditions, this particular form of blindness is the result of those ever-changing passions which are responsible for the character's exhibited and self-aware "inconsequence" (James 2011, 568). Beyond the

[3] For the most convincing interpretation of James through a theatrical lens, see Peter Brook's analysis of his "melodrama of consciousness" (1995, 157 and ff.).

[4] Ellmann 2010 reads instead James through Freud. On James' actual knowledge of Freud, see Rivkin 2007.

mood swings, though, there is something else — almost an essential trait. That is why Strether ultimately claims *voluntas nesciendi* and *noluntas nesciendi*: "I never think a step further than I'm obliged to" (James 2011, 656), he declares (even though he should not be trusted), thus setting the limits of his knowledge. And when Maria Gostrey asks him if he is in love with Madame de Vionnet, he candidly replies: "It's of no importance I should know [...]. It matters so little — has nothing to do, practically, with either of us" (James 2011, 594). Shortly after, he adds: "What I want is a thing I've ceased to measure or even to understand" (James 2011, 599). Finally, on the last page: "I have no ideas. I'm afraid of them. I've done with them" (James 2011, 696). Strether chooses to be what he really is: a man "afraid of himself" (James 2011, 416), a man who cannot help but refusing the truth. But wheareas Thomas is, in a way, narratively punished with death, Strether is instead rewarded with a second youth — though only for being eventually overwhelmed by it.

Noluntas sciendi is also dictated by social manners and comfort, as is the case when Strether surprises Chad and Madame de Vionnet on a romantic trip, and the three spend all the time trying to ignore the awkwardness of the situation. Strether is "at that point of vantage, in full possession, to make of it all what he could" (James 2011, 631): he must finally come to terms with the fact that he was the victim of "simply a lie" (James 2011, 631). But is it really a consolation to find out that the truth is our mistake? That we have been deluded and deceived by a "performance" (James 2011, 631)? What if, then, ignoring oneself were the only way to happiness, to life? Actual wisdom is not, as Socrates would have put it, knowing that we do not know; rather, it coincides with the awareness that we do not *want* to know.

5. Zeno Cosini, on leave from the truth

If Thomas lives in a state of dramatic irony and Strether, in turn, of narrative ambiguity, the case of Zeno Cosini is more compromised by irony, as well as more resolute in declaring war on knowledge. In addition to that, while Thomas was perfectly conscious, and Strether found himself in a wavering mental state where knowledge is acquired late, Zeno ushers in the Freudian unconscious. The realm of consciousness is thinning: the character is escaping from himself. Before modernism, characters who would not know were ridiculous because they were codified as fools. Now, not only is Svevo a master of goofines, but he also resorts to irony as a destabilizing tool.

At the end of the *Conscience*, Doctor S. tells Zeno that he suffers from Oedipus complex. The patient reacts with sarcasm: his affection towards his parents has always been pure and unbound, so the psychoanalyst must be just "another hysteric" (Svevo 2003, 633) who projects his own perversities onto his patients. This anger, however, sends Zeno into a spiral of contradictions. First, he states that he will get violent with the doctor. Then, feigning an air of superiority, he declares not to be angry with him anymore. He writes: "The best proof that I never had that sickness is supplied by the fact

that I am not cured of it" (Svevo 2003, 617), with that "it" clearly nodding to the fact that he is indeed sick. Shortly after, as if nothing happened, he proclaims himself "healthy, absolutely" (Svevo 2003, 661). He also turns down the accusation of having always hated his brother-in-law Guido and explains that he was absent from his funeral because he was "intent on his labor of love, saving Ada's fortune" (Svevo 2003, 632) — thus admitting that he never stopped pining after his sister-in-law, and was still trying to seduce her. Zeno desperately wants us to believe him, and he humorously admits that "a confession made by *him* in Italian could be neither complete nor sincere" (Svevo 2003, 632).

Some may still have doubts about this, but if there were an Oedipal character in the history of the novel, that would be Zeno. The ironic rigmarole of his contradictions is the definitive proof of it, as if all the other signs were not already there — his troubled relationship with his father, as well as with any other fatherly figure; his neurosis and all its symptoms; his dreams, his fantasies, his entire history of completed or failed acts. Yes, deontologically speaking Doctor S. is a horrible physician: to say that his methods are unorthodox would be an understatement, not to mention that he publishes Zeno's memoirs for revenge. However, as a diagnostician, Doctor S. is right, because he confronts Zeno with the truth. The narrator's unreliability, about which there has been quite a lot of misunderstanding, could not work if this degree of certainty were not there in the first place.

Zeno lies, in the sense that he consciously alters the truth — to other characters and, obviously, to his doctor. It is a detail of the utmost importance because, together with others, it makes him a morally reprehensible character, unlike Thomas and Strether. Yet, paradoxically enough, Zeno is sincere with us readers: he tells us that he lied because he knows that that is how he can have us on his side, against the doctor, and all his other enemies. In short, Zeno may be a lying character, but he is not a lying narrator: with all due respect to Epimenides, who admits that having lied is in fact not lying at all. Liars knowingly manipulate what they believe to be the truth — an act for which we do not even need to resort to Freud. Zeno instead engages with *noluntas sciendi* and *voluntas nesciendi*: he rejects the truth of his Oedipism that his whole story hints at, and that we, Svevo and Doctor S. all know of. Or to put it better, Zeno's conscience rejects the truth that his unconscious harbors, and it reveals it in ways that escape him.

The hypothesis that Zeno could be a liar can be approached from a twofold perspective: on the one hand, one which considers, according to a 20th-century *topos*, every confession as untruthful (if so, where would the Freudian specificity of the *Conscience* lie?); on the other hand, one which claims to verify local lies in the novel, mistakenly interpreting Italo Svevo's oversights — a writer who notoriously was often inattentive — for a refined (and a bit paranoid) literary construction.[5] These claims, brilliantly argued for, would require space to be deconstructed: but they both marginalize

[5] The most consistent theorist of Zeno as a liar is Lavagetto 1986 and 1992: support to his claims can be found in Vittorini 2004. Svevo's oversights as a writer are revealed and acutely examined by Carrai 2010, 57-79.

the import of Freud's lesson, one that Svevo, on the contrary, had brilliantly assimilated. The ploy was indeed very well performed: as we have seen, Zeno claims he lied because he comes from Trieste, and he is not fluent in Italian. Such a *Witz*'s geniality is confirmed by the fact that many have been deceived by it. Is it really possible that Zeno's trustworthiness is dependent on a linguistic problem? How are we to overlook the fact that here we are witnessing the umpteenth form of resistance to the analyst, and an attempt to deactivate the truths that our hero has unwillingly let slip?

Zeno is most certainly misfit. This designation (which we actually owe to Svevo himself and which had an extraordinary success), however, might distract us from the most disturbing aspect of his personality. I am not referring here to the fact that, as everyone knows, Zeno is ultimately a winning misfit, a Darwinian animal capable of adapting to ever-changing circumstances. The misfit condition is, rather, an incapacity or inadaptability to adjust to life, which manifests itself, above all, in the practical and social spheres. The point here is that misfit characters might potentially have an even higher intelligence than commoners (as would be the case of Myskin, or the narrator of the *Recherche*). When it comes to Svevo's characters, not only are Alfonso Nitti and Emilio Brentani, the protagonists of *A Life* and *As a Man Grows Older*, essentially defeated, but they also live in false consciousness. Or in other words: poetic justice punishes them because they live in self-deception. Things get more complicated with Zeno, because his rejection of the truth strengthens as his morality becomes more ambiguous, and the wisdom he manages to acquire in the last pages of the novel, with the famous apologue on the end of maladies and of humanity, is completely foreign to Alfonso and Emilio. As if all this were not enough, he is also rewarded at the end of the novel.

Upon closer inspection, Zeno wins not because he rejects the truth that psychoanalysis revealed to him about himself, but because he gets rid of truth altogether. We can (and we must) read this behavior through Freud, that is by retracing in him instances of defense, from repression to resistance, and from negation to disavowal.[6] But the real level of discourse still pertains to *noluntas sciendi* and *voluntas nesciendi*, that is, the moral implications of this rejection of knowledge from a character who claims to tell us how to make meaning of the world at the cost of self-blindness. The final musings on life at the end of the *Conscience* must be taken seriously: Zeno understands that truth does not lead to a healthy and happy life — not because it is harmful, but because it is simply useless. In the preface, Dr. S. says that the memoir contains "many truths and many lies" (Svevo 2003, 40), but this warning does not function only as a pledge to the common, pre-Freudian language, but also to its moral perspective which, as I said, cannot be removed from the story. However, Zeno too is right when, while explaining that he related dreams he never had, he says that "inventing is a creation, not a lie" (Svevo 2003, 619) — and indeed, in those dreams does he limit himself to appease the analyst,

[6] Recently, Gigante 2020 has brought critical attention back to Freudism in the Conscience.

confirming his interpretation, or does he reveal something more profound about his own instincts?

When dealing with Freudian logic, one can never really escape the truth: dreams, symptoms, lapsus, missed acts, wit — all of which could be taken as mistakes or details of no importance in daytime logic and conscience, but that still say something essential about us.[7] But from Zeno's point of view, truth is useless. Translated into our individual unconscious, the great tragedy of Oedipus becomes a domestic parody ("An illustrious sickness, whose ancestors dated back to the mythological era!"; Svevo 2003, 617). There is no terrible solemnity that cannot be laughed at, and there is no myth that cannot be turned into farce. This depreciation of truth is a "device" implanted in our consciences — a device even more dangerous than the one that, one day, a bespectacled man "a bit sicker than others" will place at the center of the earth (Svevo 2003, 790). Zeno arrives where Thomas and Strether could not, and where not even Schopenhauer and Freud could: he arrives where Nietzsche did.[8] Zeno's laughter is a Nietzschean laughter over the ruins of the world: on Europe hit by WWI, on the failure of Western values, on a planet threatened by total destruction in its final apologue.

If characters who live in *noluntas sciendi* and *voluntas nesciendi* are relatively infrequent in the history of the novel, it is because, as Zeno reveals, they are the most dangerous. Thomas and Strether are still afraid of the truth, and therefore reject it. Knowing that Gerda and von Throta are lovers, or drawing the conclusions from reading Schopenhauer, or acknowledging the relationship between Chad and Madame de Vionnet: any of these acts would compromise their lives too much. Be that as it may, they take truth seriously, and are therefore committed to avoiding it. But not Zeno. Zeno laughs. Is it because he is sick? Are we not all, by the way? Did he really want to possess his mother and kill his father? He did not do it — but then again, who has not dreamed of it? Sure, truth does exist, of course, but it is of no use for life: it is worth nothing. Thomas has been rightfully described as an example of passive nihilism (Crescenzi 2007, 26). But the final destination of *noluntas sciendi* and *voluntas nesciendi*, which overturns centuries of Western thought, is full nihilism.

[7] Saccone 1991, 9 already highlighted it.

[8] On Nietzsche's influence on Svevo, see Mariani 2009.

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THOMAS MACHO

DEBATES ABOUT THE DEATH DRIVE

Nosferatu at the Zoo[1]

ABSTRACT: Between 1920 and 1923 Sigmund Freud revised his drive theory: first in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), later in *The Ego and the Id* (1923). Since then, he spoke of Eros and Thanatos, of life and death drives. The concept of the death drive has been hotly debated – in psychoanalytic societies, journals, and at congresses. Outlines of this debate are presented and commented on; but they are also confronted with the premiere of an important silent movie: on 4 March 1922 – on the eve before Pier Paolo Pasolini's birtht – Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau's *Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror* premiered in the marble hall of the Zoological Garden in Berlin.

KEYWORDS: Modernism, Freud, Death Drive, Nosferatu, Vampire Films

Modernity (*Die Moderne*)[2] can be variously characterized as the era of industrialization, as the age of Enlightenment and its scientific and technical progress, the age of economic globalization, or as the age of secularization and a new thinking on the question of human mortality. Already in 1796, in his novel *Siebenkäs*, Jean Paul (1992, 179-183) portrays a mountain-dream set in the Alps, in which Jesus himself appears, lamenting God's absence: "I traversed the worlds, I ascended into the suns, and soared with the Milky Ways through the wastes of heaven; but there is no God. I descended to the last reaches of the shadows of Being, and I looked into the chasm and cried: 'Father, where art thou?' But I heard only the eternal storm ruled by none, and the shimmering rainbow of essence stood without sun to create it, trickling above the abyss". And even, when the dead children awake in the church and ask: "Jesus! Have we no father?" he answers, streaming with tears: "We are all orphans, I and ye, we are without a father" (Jean Paul 1992, 182). Towards the end of the 19th century, Friedrich Nietzsche had his "good man" ("*tollen Menschen*") appear in the marketplace holding a lantern. He looks for God but cannot find him: "Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us? Do we not need to light lanterns in the morning? Do we hear nothing as yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we smell nothing as yet of the divine decomposition? Gods, too,

[1] Translated by Giuliana Ferreccio.

[2] As in German there is no generally accepted term for Modernism, I chose to translate "die Moderne" as "Modernity" although the latter does not quite correspond to the former; NdT.

decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him" (Nietzsche 1974, 181).

Modernity is an age of death, of wars that grow more and more brutal, and since the 14th century, it has also been the age of steadily recurring epidemics and natural catastrophes. Therefore, it cannot come as a surprise that, already in the early 1920s, thinking about death, mortality, and suicide have dominated the scene. As soon as the first World War came to an end, it was followed by a devastating pandemic, the so-called "Spanish Flu", which had exacted a possibly higher death toll than the whole of the war years.[3] In the following three sections, I will first shortly dwell on Freud's conception of the death drive (and its controversial reception), then move on to the original presentation of Friedrich Wilhem Murnau's film *Nosferatu* in the *Marmorsaal* of the Berlin Zoo on 4 March 1922, the very eve of the day Pier Paolo Pasolini was born. In the end, I will enquire into the original performance of the play "*Věc Makropulos*" by Karel Čapek which took place in Prague on 21 November 1922.

Death Drive

A few months after the beginning of the first World War, Sigmund Freud published his essay "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death" in the first issue of the journal *Imago* in 1915. He wrote: "It is indeed impossible to imagine our own death; and whenever we attempt to do so we can perceive that we are in fact still present as spectators. Hence the psycho-analytic school could venture on the assertion that at bottom no one believes in his own death, or, to put the same thing in another way, that in the unconscious, every one of us is convinced of his own immortality" (Freud 1957, 289). Five years later – and soon after the end of the first World War and the scare of the "Spanish Flu" – Freud revised his thesis, and in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle", he developed the concept of a death drive, which, as we know, is biologically founded on a tendency of the cells themselves to achieve preservation through a standstill, and at the same time, to revert to an earlier stage of inorganic life. Stones and metals are more apt to be preserved than plants, animals, or men. Eros and Thanatos: the drives to life and death produce an antagonism that is maintained during the whole of one's life.

The concept of a death drive, which until today has been considered one of the most controversial of Freud's ideas, sets at opposition various analysts coming from Freud's school. Here, I mention only Otto Fenichel (1954) and his essay "Towards a Criticism of the Death Drive" published in *Imago* in 1935, or Wilhelm Reich and his study on the masochistic character, which was published in the *Internationalen Zeitschrift für Psychanalyse* XVIII and shortly after revised in his *Charakteranalyse* (1933). There, Reich suggested that Freud's assumption that a "*primary biological* tendency toward self-

[3] Cfr. Spinney. 2017.

destruction, a *primary* or erogenic masochism", could not be verified: "The exponents of the theory of the death instinct made every effort to support their assumptions by calling attention to the physiological processes of decomposition. Yet a convincing substantiation was nowhere to be found" (Reich 1984, 229). In the year 1938, the year before Freud, in his London exile, would ask his friend and doctor Max Schur to help him with his suicide as he had promised – the psychiatric analyst Karl A. Menninger published an exhaustive research on *Man Against Himself*. His research deals with a theme which Freud had neglected in his metapsychological writings: suicide. The first chapter already bears the title "Eros and Thanatos", and on the second page, Menninger asks:

> Men fly above ancient and beautiful cities dropping explosive bombs upon museums and churches, upon great buildings and little children. They are encouraged by the official representatives of two hundred million other people, all of whom contribute daily in taxes to the frantic manufacture of instruments designed for the tearing and ripping and mangling of human beings similar to themselves, possessed of the same instincts, the same sensations, the same little pleasures, and the same realization that death comes to end these things all too soon. This is what one would see who surveyed our planet cursorily, and if he looked closer into the lives of individuals and communities he would see still more to puzzle him; he would see bickerings, hatreds, and fighting, useless waste and petty destructiveness. He would see people sacrificing themselves to injure others, and expending time, trouble, and energy in shortening that pitifully small recess from oblivion which we call life. And most amazing of all, he would see some who, as if lacking aught else to destroy, turn their weapons upon themselves. Whether, as I suppose, this would perplex a visitor from Mars, it surely must amaze anyone who assumes, as perhaps we all do at times, that human beings want what they say – they want life, liberty, and happiness. (Menninger 1938, 4)

Jacques Lacan has not quite rejected the death drive, but he has got rid of Freud's biological-evolutionary argument and has drawn from the symbolic order. He argues that:

> Whatever the significance of the metapsychological imagining of Freud's which is the death instinct, whether or not he was justified in forging it, the question it raises is articulated in the following form by virtue of the mere fact that it has been raised: How can man, that is to say a living being, have access to knowledge of the death instinct, to his own relationship to death? The answer is, by virtue of the signifier in its most radical form. It is in the signifier and insofar as the subject articulates a signifying chain that he comes up against the fact that he may disappear from the chain of what he is. (Lacan 1992, 295)

Slavoj Žižek recalls in his study on *The Parallax View* (2006):

> This is why we should not confuse the death drive with the so-called '*nirvana* principle', the thrust toward destruction or self-obliteration: the Freudian death drive has nothing whatsoever to do with the craving for self-annihilation, for the return to the inorganic absence of any life-tension; it is, on the contrary, the very opposite of dying – a name for the 'undead' eternal life itself, for the horrible fate of being caught in the endless repetitive cycle of wandering around in guilt and pain. The paradox of the Freudian 'death drive' is therefore that it is Freud's name for its very opposite, for the way immortality appears within psychoanalysis, for an uncanny *excess* of life, for an 'undead' urge which persists beyond the (biological) cycle of life and death, of generation and corruption. The ultimate

> lesson of psychoanalysis is that human life is never 'just life': humans are not simply alive, they are possessed by the strange drive to enjoy life in excess, passionately attached to a surplus which sticks out and derails the ordinary run of things. (Žižek 2006, 62)

Thus, should the death drive also be designated as a "drive to immortality"?
Let us go back to the year 1922. In the early 1920s, Benjamin starts translating from Baudelaire. At the same time, he writes "Sonette",[4] also as an act of mourning and remembering his friend Fritz Heinle, who had taken his life together with his girlfriend Rika Seligson, on 8 August 1914, shortly after the Germans occupied Belgium:

> Although some interpreted this as the last act of a doomed love, Benjamin and their other close friends saw it as the most somber of war protests. The couple had chosen the rooms rented by the student groups for their meetings as the site for their suicide, and Heinle sent off an overnight letter to Benjamin to tell him where he would find their bodies. The immediate effect on Benjamin was several months of depression, and withdrawal from most of his former friends. But the shock of this loss never wholly left him: well into the 1930s, he continued to integrate images of Heinle's death into his work. (Benjamin 1996, 498)

It is no coincidence that Benjamin still engages in Baudelaire's reflections on suicide in his own essay:

> Modernity must stand under the sign of suicide, an act which seals a heroic will that makes no concessions to a mentality inimical toward this will. Such a suicide is not resignation but heroic passion. It is the achievement of modernity in the realm of the passions. In this form, as the *passion particuliere de la vie moderne*, suicide appears in the classic passage devoted to the theory of the modern. The voluntary suicide of heroes in the ancient world is an exception. (Benjamin 2003, 45)

Afterwards, he further refers to more suicides committed by workers: "Suicide appears, then, as the quintessence of modernity" (Benjamin 1999, 360)

Nosferatu and the Suicidal Vampires

The year 1922 could be seen as a sort of echo of another year, more than four hundred years earlier. In the year 1516, two noteworthy books were published, already depicting a farewell to immortality: Thomas More brought out his playful, fictional report about life on the island of *Utopia* – with a friendly support by Erasmus of Rotterdam's work – but, at the same time, the *Tractatus de immortalitate animae* by the Italian philosopher and humanist Pietro Pomponazzi came out as well. In this treatise, in contrast with the Neoplatonists of the Renaissance, Pomponazzi rejected the belief in the immortality of the human soul. He thus openly contradicted Pope Leo X who, for the first time, had condemned the doctrine of the mortality of the soul precisely at the 5th Lateran Council of 1513. Pomponazzi's work was publicly burned in Venice in 1562 and, as a

[4] Cfr. Benjamin 1989.

consequence, the author himself had barely avoided trial by the Church Tribunal. In his *Vorlesungen zur Philosophie der Renaissance*, Ernst Bloch remarked that Pomponazzi's treatise may "have 'worked' as an enormous, anti-ideological blow", as the power of the church consisted in its arrogant presumption of holding the keys to Heaven and Hell. The keys are precisely depicted in the emblem of the earthly representative of Christ. The power of the church essentially consisted in its ruling over the unlikely transcendental fear, which tormented mankind way into the eighteenth century, and cast a black shadow on their life. Man did not fear the first death, but the second one: "hell" (Bloch 1972, 19). Pomponazzi's critique to immortality also applied to the fear of hell, that central tool for the church's dominion. Not by chance, in his *Utopia* did Thomas More himself stress that, on the newly discovered island, it may be allowed to choose a voluntary death as a possible exit:

> Everything possible is done to mitigate the pain of those suffering from incurable diseases; and visitors do their best to console them by sitting and talking to them. But if the disease is not only incurable, but excruciatingly and unremittingly painful, then the priests and public officials come and remind the sufferer that he is now unequal to any of life's duties, a burden to himself and others; he has really outlived his own death. They tell him he should not let the pestilence prey on him any longer, but now that life is simply torture, he should not hesitate to die, but he should rely on hope for something better; and since his life is a prison where he is bitterly tormented, he should escape from it on his own or allow others to rescue him from it. (More 2016, 82)

The point is no longer a discussion about heaven or hell, but rather, on the contrary, about epidemics and contagion. As it happens, More actually speaks of the plague, but, at the beginning of the 16th century several epidemics of exceptionally contagious nature and deathly kinds of illness broke out in the English kingdom. These epidemics were called "English sweating sickness" whose possible viral etiology remains unclear up to the present.

On the evening of 4 March 1922, the silent film *Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror* was originally presented at the *Marmorsaal* of the Berlin Zoo. This Marble Hall had been built from 1910 to 1912: it was one of the largest dance halls in Berlin and was located in the central building of the complex of guesthouses on the southeastern side of the Zoo area; it was also used as a tavern and a film theatre. The ball of the official government press was often held there in the 1930s. However, during the second World War, the hall was destroyed and never rebuilt. Was Murnau's silent film associated with the Zoo? In *Nosferatu* various animals appear: spiders and live flies which the estate-broker Knoch catches and gobbles when in the lunatic asylum, wolves that at first look a little like hyenas, bats and so on. Also fascinating is the film's end, which was supposed to be eliminated due to a lost lawsuit started by Bram Stoker's heirs in 1925, but which nonetheless survived in numberless abridged versions, and is now available in several restored versions. Ellen, Thomas Unters's young wife, played by Greta Schroeder, lies on her bed. She is planning to offer her life in sacrifice to the vampire, who is now eagerly observing her, through the window. Count Orlok, alias Nosferatu, played by Max

Schreck, sneaks into the room, drinks Ellen's blood, but while caught in his act of lust, he fails to notice the first glimpses of light of the day. The first sunbeam falling into the room turns him into smoke. Eros and Thanatos, each at the same time, reach the aim of their drive in a love-death of the undying; with Ellen's sacrifice, the plague leaves the city in the end.

Already in the Gothic literature of the 19th century, vampires appeared as animated monsters, blood-sucking revenants, who could strengthen their life-force with the blood of their mortal contemporaries and lengthen it at will. Their most celebrated representative was Count Dracula in Bram Stoker's novel (1897). His dark figure has also grown to dominate the screen: from *Nosferatu* up to Werner Herzog's remake with Klaus Kinski in the main role (1979), or up to Francis Ford Coppola's *Dracula* (1992). These Dracula films were developed by relying on numberless vampire films that took part in the myth, without citing him explicitly or modifying him. As essential frames of the story, one could regularly count on a haunted castle, the vampire's incapacity to have a reflected image, his aversion to the sun, garlic, silver charms, and crucifixes, his possible death being caused by driving a wooden stake into his chest, or anything that could recall the favourite, grim art of execution, which the Rumanian Wpiwode Vlad III, called Tepes the "Impaler" (1431-1477), a possible historical prototype for Dracula, may have practiced; plus, of course, the bloody kisses planted by long and sharp canine teeth. Besides Vlad, the roots to the vampire myth were connected to reports of burials of seemingly dead men, or with bats, which the vampire would turn into in his nightly outings. A significant break within the genre came about in 1994 at the latest, when Neil Jordan filmed Anne Rice's novel and conquered film theatres with *Interview With the Vampire*. The film's success was not only due to the opulent casting – with Brad Pitt, Tom Cruise, Christian Slater, Antonio Banderas, and Kirsten Dunst – but to the narration itself. The presentation of the sensitive vampire Louis de Pointe du Lac (Brad Pitt), who, off and on, not only gives up kissing out of compassion for his victim, feeding instead on mice, but also, during an epidemic in Louisiana, literally clasps to his heart the orphan Claudia (Kirsten Dunst), who is assisting her dying mother – their hearts spontaneously beating in the same tempo – and so to speak, he adopts her. His master, his companion, and opponent, Lestat de Lioncourt (Tom Cruise), transforms the girl into a vampire, however, with the result of causing Claudia to spend her whole eternal life as a child. Together with Louis, she takes her revenge by slitting de Lioncourt's throat, without actually killing him. Two scenes are particularly interesting: the attempt at suicide which Louis undertakes by setting fire to his house in Louisiana in order to die in the fire, and the melancholy felt by the slimmed-down vampire Lestat in New Orleans, who can ultimately barely stand his undead life in the Postmodern, and flees from the sunrise seeking refuge in a film theatre.

The new vampires are sensitive, prone to compassion and love, polite, urbane, and considerate, respectful, melancholy and inclined to suicide. This trend, which already began with Munrau's *Nosferatu*, has continued into the 21st century. Exactly in the

critical year 2008 – a few weeks after the Lehman's bankruptcy (17 November 2008) – the first film of the *Twilight Saga* appeared on screen, showing the love story between Bella Swan (Kirsten Stewart) and the vampire Edward Cullen (Robert Pattison). This film ended with a paradoxical return to the classical vampire-love: Bella is bitten by another vampire, but Edward sucks the poisoned blood out of her wound in order to prevent her from becoming a vampire in turn. His kiss works as a substitute for a curative salvation, as a rationalised hand-kissing, or as a kind of reanimation or vaccine: "I must bite you in order to shield you from the destiny of becoming as I am". A key role is played by Edward's father, Dr. Cullen, who presents him with the alternative of either saving Bella and thus of restraining his own greed for blood, or transforming her into a vampire. Two months earlier, on 7 September 2008, the first sequel to the tv series *True Blood* was broadcast, in which the vampires mostly settle for synthetic blood. At the beginning, at the heart of *True Blood* there is also a love story: the relationship between Sookie Stackhouse (Anna Paquin) and the vampire Bill Compton (Stephen Moyer). By the time *Twilight* was released, seven episodes of this series had already been filmed. Likewise, in the year 2008, the premiere of the Swedish film by Tomas Alfredson *Låt den rätte komma in* (literally, "Let the Just Enter", the German version took the title *So Finster die Nacht*, i.e. *So Dark the Night*) was celebrated, much praised and bestowed with sixty film awards. Again, the subject was a love story between a human and a vampire, this time between the pensive Young Oskar (Kåre Hedebrant) and the androgynous girl-vampire Eli (Lina Leandersson). At the end of the film, Oskar and Eli flee on a train. In the midst of the luggage, coming out of a chest in which Eli is transported, we hear signals in Morse alphabet for the word "Kiss". Kisses have replaced bites forever, and in addition, the vampires have become eternal children, as Claudia had already showed in Neil Jordan's film. The new vampires grieve over an unhappy love and their immortality, as did Klaus Kinsky in Werner Herzog's *Nosferatu* remake (1977). Also, Jim Jarmush's film *Only Lovers Left Alive* (2013) once more tells the love story between two vampires, who are named after the first man and woman: Adam (Tom Hiddleston) and Eve (Tilda Swinton). They do not feed, certainly, on synthetic blood, but on cans of blood coming from a hospital, whose content they drink from elegant sherry glasses. At times their weariness of life seems to overcome even their century-long love, as, for instance, early in the film, when the musician Adam plans his suicide with the help of a wooden ball – instead of the compulsory stake —which he wants to shoot into his heart. To be sure, love triumphs over doubt: in the end, Adam and Eve are still forced to sacrifice another loving couple for their own survival. "Pardon me?" Eve asks nevertheless, before she jabs her teeth into the neck of the girl she is going to kiss, which we never get to see, as the film remains as discreet as its heroes. Besides, Tom calls mortal men "Zombies"; he prepares the plan for his suicide in front of Eve, as a response to the rise of the "Zombies" and their kind, aimed at ruling the world. His comment gives a hint on possible background ideas for the vampire's melancholic suicidal bent: the new vampires have suffered a ruthless competition in biting by the zombies and werewolves, who already in

Twilight Saga and *True Blood* figured as proletarian opponents to the melancholy aristocrats, steeped in consumer habits. Zombies and werewolves do not settle for blood: like hungry wild animals, they tear their victims apart and even eat their flesh.

What transpires in this short, sketchy, civilizing process the vampire undergoes? Is it an anachronistic view of the class struggle, in which a postmodern consumer class encounters nearly extinct representatives of an aristocratic class, who impose themselves through good manners, melancholy and temporary moderation? Do the capitalists, stock-exchange agents, and financial go-betweens belong now to the class of the biting wolves who, neither by a higher level of self-awareness nor by rapacity, distinguish themselves from the unaware, ignorant Zombies? Thus, has the vampire risen to the transfigured romantic and regretful *topos* of the nostalgia for a decayed culture? In *Only Lovers Left Alive*, the vampires are the last bohemians, intellectuals, such as Christopher Marlowe (played by John Hurt), who not only may declare that he wrote under Shakespeare's pseudonym, but also provides the circle of his friends with fresh blood supplies. While we can easily identify with these vampires who elicit sympathy, the zombies are becoming more and more inimical images *par excellence*: dumb, greedy, brutal, yet – as opposed to the vampire – easy to kill. The civilizing development of the vampire can be assessed in the light of social and economic developments; a perspective bringing back to the fore the change in our attitude with regards to the lengthening of life seems to me more important. A lengthened life is a value whose significance becomes all the more relative, the more men have to come to terms with the possibility of reaching an older age. And this change concerns vampires too: their kisses become all the more tender the more we learn to fear the loss of teeth coming with age, the terror of an all too long life and eternal life.

The Makrupoulos Secret

In 1922, the same year in which Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau presented his *Nosferatu*, the first performance of *Věc Makropulos*, a drama conceived as a novel by the Czech author Karel Čapek, was held in one of Prague's theatres. Leoš Janáček also saw it and set the piece to music as an opera (with Max Brod's libretto). The dark comedy and the opera deal with the boredom of eternal life, a gift of life's elixirs, and the melancholy of a being to whom no limits are set. What is *Věc Makropulos* about? Emilia Marty is not only divinely beautiful, but she is also a great singer. She has the whole world at her feet, and she masters her art – and also the art of seduction – so completely that she is left with nothing to long for anymore. In short, life, her life at least, is boring. However, her tedium increases her charisma tenfold. Her audience, mainly men, now and again storm the stage out of enthusiasm, tearing their idol's clothes from her body. Moreover, Emilia Marty is 337 years old – she was born in the year 1585 under the reign of Emperor Rudolf II. Daughter of a magician, at the age of sixteen she was made to drink a life elixir which

would grant her a time span of three hundred years of life. Not everyone who tasted of the elixir survived the experiment, and Emilia too struggled against death for a whole week. However, afterward she lived several lives, changing her names, which always fitted with the initials E. M.. Thus, in the same century, she can enter a fight over an inheritance, or start an affair with a far descendant, who, however, will commit suicide out of unrequited love. E. M. plays with the frequent changes of name, so that she could both caricature and belie what is imposed on women on many levels of married life. E. M. always remains herself. What the drama deals with is exactly what E. M. is *not* interested in: the genealogical order of descendants, an undying by engendering a progeny, who will fight over their inheritance. In contrast to Janáček, Čapek is not concerned with the paradoxes of the philosophical concept of immortality, but with the still topical question of the right to lengthen our life. What he concretely shows is a fight against the exploitation of children by their parents, of the future by the past, or against the process of turning the desire for a longer life into an economic business. It is not coincidental that E. M. is a woman, whose fear of death is immediately removed by the recipe of the elixir; at the end, she laughs: "The end of immortality! Ha, ha, ha! [*She laughs hysterically, breaking off sharply in the middle. Then quietly she raises her arms in a welcoming gesture as though to embrace Death*]" (Čapek 1925, 165). For the Gestapo, Karel Čapek was the public enemy number 2, after the president Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, with whom he was a close friend. Masaryk, who had received his doctorate from the University of Vienna with a study on *Selbstmord als sociale Massenerscheinung der modernen Civilisation* in 1878,[5] died on 14 September 1937, whereas Čapek died a year later, on 25 December 1938. According to statistics by the Wiesbaden government offices, life expectancy around the end of the French-Prussian war of 1871 – but also during that century of wars and murdering of peoples which Hobsbawm characterized as *The Age of Extremes* —[6] steadily more than doubled. The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse – on the white horse rides war, on the red horse, power, on the black horse, hunger, and on the pale horse, epidemic and fear – have actually not withdrawn during the twentieth century. Yet, neither have they stopped the demographic change, the oft-cited *Methusalem-Komplott.*[7] Even the farther reaching life expectancy – the average number of living years – will have more or less doubled by 2050, if we compare it with 1900, although the men and women who are sixty should still wait to be counted up. While sixtyyear-old men could count on thirteen more years, by 2050, they will live almost 24 years more. By then, sixty-year-old women will have lived 28 years more, instead of their previous 14 years (therefore in average, up to their 88th birthday). Already today in Japan, as Prag Khanna (2021, 70) remarks, more adult diapers than baby diapers are sold. Life span has increasingly lengthened, and almost no one needs a "prolonging" of their life. Under these

[5] Cfr. Masaryk1881.
[6] Cfr. Hobsbawm 1994.
[7] Cfr. Schirrmacher 2004.

circumstances, cases of surprising deaths have become rarer, and the once acceptable representations of a desirable death have even turned into their contrary. In past centuries, sudden death meant a misfortune, while a slow death was considered a good death, which allowed for putting earthly and heavenly things into order. Today on the contrary, long-drawn out dying is a misfortune which must be forestalled, prevented with the help of testaments and the patient's instructions, while a sudden death is almost considered a lucky death.

The abandonment of religious hopes for an eternal life and personal immortality, even from the longing for a life as long as possible, characterises the process of modernity. Like the remote year 1516, the year 1922 holds a key position in this sense. Starting from this year, we can now take into consideration a number of philosophical or literary works which came out in the following years and decades: Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* (1927), Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (1928), the works of Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre, as well as Simone de Beauvoir's novel *Tous les hommes sont mortels* (1946). While Virginia Woolf portrays a kind of voyager through time, who changes his/her gender, like Parsifal in Hans-Jürgen Syberberg's film rendering of Richard Wagner's opera (1982), Beauvoir tells the story of Count Raimon Fosca, in the 13th century, the lord of the North Italian city of Carmona, who drinks an immortality potion. The Count, now immortal, grows more and more powerful, yet not happy: his undying is like a curse. All his friends, women and children die like flies, while he must always go on living. He leaves Italy and from then on, he slips into new roles, one life after another. He becomes a counsellor to Emperor Charles V, when he still hopes to create a paradise on earth; he becomes a foreigner in an indigenous lineage, and an aristocratic sadist in absolutist France, or a revolutionary in the French revolution of 1830. However, as he forfeits all the companions who surrounded him, he decides, in the middle of the 19th century, to fall asleep in a wood and, after he is found there, he must spend a few years in an asylum. After that, in Paris in the 1930s he meets Regine, whom he also again forsakes, after a brief affair. The undying are alone: Čapek's Makropulos, Woolf's Orlando, Simone de Bauvoir's Fosca are tormented by boredom and loss of relationships. They resemble a parody of the "*Eigentlichkeit*", the individuality of the "*Sein zum Tod*", which Heidegger depicted in 1927.

Yet, laughing about these parodic effects could essentially lead us astray, seeing as a series of research institutes in Silicon Valley, with funding available in the count of billions, are searching for methods to overcome aging and death. Recently, on 23 November 2019, an issue of the German news magazine *Der Spiegel* came out with the telling title: "Dying? Without me" (Grolle 2019) As Yuval Noah Harari also explains in his bestselling book *Homo Deus* (2016, 25), the quest for immortality is a top project on the agenda of the 21st century. In Harari's words, the maxim of the quest for immortality reads as follows: "The writing is on the wall: equality is out – immortality is in" (Harari

2016, 39).[8] This program and these promises certainly address a small group which is on the verge of disappearing: Ray Kurzweil, leader of technical development with Google, or Peter Thiel, co-funder of Pay-Pal, with an estimated private net worth of 2.2 billion US dollars, masters behind the electoral campaigns for Donald Trump. However, do the gurus of Silicon Valley know what they wish for? In her debut novel, *The People in the Trees*, Hanya Yanigara (2013) tells the story of a doctor who, with two ethnologists, carries out research on an isolated population on a (fictional) island in the South Seas. In the process, he comes across the traces of a secret way to prolong life. The doctor becomes famous, adopts numberless neglected children whom he brings up in his home in the US, but then he is accused of abusing the children. The novel draws on the life of the American Nobel Prize winner, Daniel Carleton Gadjusek. The point of the novel is that the longevity of the indigenous inhabitants of the island goes along with an increasing loss of consciousness and radical dementia. A longer-than-normal life can apparently lead toward the lasting curse of numberless losses which are either brought to light or provoked. Stephen King (2013) also tells a similar story in the sequel to his world-famous novel *Shining*, of which Stanley Kubrick made a film. In this sequel, Danny Torrance, once the fiendish child of the first novel, comes across a sect of "vampires", who feed on a "life-elixir" made out of the griefs of tortured children. The action slightly recalls the myths of conspiracy of the QAnon movement. The new vampires are definitely not billionaires from Silicon Valley, but inconspicuous men of leisure, dressed in polyester clothes who drive around in their Land Rovers. On the contrary, Danny Torrance's work consists in accompanying people in a retirement home towards death by purveying a soft death, and therefore, he goes by the loving name "Doctor Sleep". It is not the vampires who must be fought against, but older people, who do not want to die, thus goes King's unsettling message, which seems to dream about a new, peaceful culture of death.

Epilogue

What do we lose in the endless extension of our lives? We lose not only the ideal of equality and solidarity, or the possibility of love and relationships, but also a sort of way of giving meaning to our own lives. The Flemish writer and philosopher Patricia de Martelaere dealt with this aspect in her inspired essay on the *Aesthetik des Selbstmords*. In analogy with a sentence by sci-fiction author Frederik Brown, she wonders about a type of suicide-prone people, who would have "preferred" to have lived instead of living. This impossible attitude is shaped by a "desire for wholeness, for rounding up one's life" (de Martelaere 1997, 118 *passim*). Heidegger (2003, 237) also wrote of the "question of the wholeness of being-there – the existential question about a possible ability-to-be-whole,

[8] Cfr. Hülswitt & Brinzanek 2010.

as well as the existential question about the essential constitution of 'end' and 'wholeness'". However, a "regrettable aspect of living" so argues Patricia de Martelaere, consists exactly in the fact that life does not usually conclude, does not finish up. For we actually imagine that "we, "at the end of our life" we will die, which would be not only logical but right and very nice. Yet we die on the way, while we fetch the children from school, in our bathroom, while we listen to a cultural program on the radio, or in bed with a woman, who is not our woman. We die, so it seems, in the most unseemly moments. And everything which we still have to do, everything which we absolutely still want to say, in reality remains not done and unsaid. Our life is interrupted by death, not finished.[9] Therefore, in the traditional discourse on the art of life, we actually express the wish of being able to conclude our own life as a whole, as a "work of art". It is not surprising that so many women artist and artists have taken their lives after they had written or staged an important work.[10] In short, the art of life is conceived as a new experimental *"ars moriendi"*, as the art of dying, and also increasingly practiced as such. This is what Michel Foucault clearly write in his late works. Didn't the "Experimental Turn" of modernity start exactly at this point – perhaps precisely in the year 1922?

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[9] Cfr. de Martelaere 1997, 120.
[10] Cfr. Macho 2017, 338 passim.

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JOSEPH CERMATORI

SEEKING THE UNIVERSAL AMID RUINS

On Walter Benjamin's Philosophy of Journal Editing (circa 1922)

ABSTRACT: This paper revisits Walter Benjamin's unpublished "Announcement of the Journal *Angelus Novus*," one of relatively few texts Benjamin is known to have written in 1922, European modernism's widely recognized *annus mirabilis*. The announcement followed numerous, transformative essays and fragments of 1921 and was written alongside his dissertation on *The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism*, encompassing a pivotal moment in Benjamin's philosophical maturation. Heralding the new, never realized journal, the announcement articulates what might be deemed "the task of the editor," which it describes as a quest for "philosophical universality". The *Angelus Novus* journal would proceed form the fact of modern social discontinuities toward the elaboration of universal philosophical truths through the criticism of literary works. This paper reconsiders Benjamin's editorial ambitions as part of his individual philosophical development and within a broader context of "total modernism," discussing the announcement's continued relevance for our contemporary world.

KEYWORDS: Walter Benjamin, *Angelus Novus*, Total modernism, 1922, Philosophy of editing, Critical theory, Comparative literature.

In evaluating the historic impact of 1922 from a century's remove, it would be a mistake to review only widely acknowledged "masterpieces" like *Ulysses*, *Wozzeck,* the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus,* and other usual suspects. A robust discussion has grown up around this extraordinary year (Goldstein 2017; North 1999; Rabaté 2015), but a truly constellational approach requires that we also take stock of works at the other extreme: the failures, rejections, aborted plans, notable moments of delay or non-productivity, writings that never made it past the publisher's desk. Walter Benjamin will serve as a case in point. He seems to have published almost nothing in 1922, but that year nonetheless functioned as a pivotal moment in his philosophical biography. He had only recently, in June 1919, completed his doctoral studies at the University of Bern with his dissertation on *The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism*, and, despite uncertainties about a life in academia, had begun projecting a postdoctoral thesis or *Habilitationsschrift* on German baroque drama. In the four years since the Great War's ending, he also drafted several unpublished but significant fragments, including his "Program of the Coming Philosophy" (1918), his "Theory of Criticism" (1919–20), the "Theological-Political Fragment" (likely 1920–21), alongside essays for publication on "Fate and Character" (published 1921) and on "Goethe's *Elective Affinities*" (drafted

1919–22, published 1924–25).[1] This period also notably overlaps with the beginning of Benjamin's more expressly socio-political writings. 1921 sees his "Critique of Violence" drafted and published, under the influence of anarchist Georges Sorel. This same year also found him writing "Capitalism as Religion," his rejoinder to the sociological historiography of Max Weber. Not truly abandoning his prior literary interests, these more emphatically political efforts coincided with his ongoing work translating Baudelaire's poetry and with the reflections on language in his introduction for the Baudelaire volume, on "The Task of the Translator," also completed by the end of 1921 (SW 1, 505).

Following this general fervour of activity, 1922 seems to have been a somewhat quieter year at Benjamin's writing desk. However, during this period, he drafted an unpublished prospectus outlining his vision of a future literary journal. Of his writings available in English, it appears as the only major free-standing text he composed during modernism's *annus mirabilis*. He had just acquired Paul Klee's monoprint known as *Angelus Novus* in the spring of 1921; by August of that same year, he had written to Gershom Scholem of his intention to bring out a new journal named for it with his publisher Richard Weissbach, with whom he was then under contract for the Baudelaire translations (SW 1, 506). Although Benjamin's editorial ambitions never materialized, the 1922 prospectus announcing this new journal still serves an instructive role in illuminating his philosophy of editing. My objectives in this paper are threefold: to situate the *Angelus Novus* announcement within the context of Benjamin's thinking in 1922, showing how it extends and develops several ideas of his other writings from that period; to explain how the *Angelus Novus* project fits within a larger situation of "total modernism" (Rabaté 2015, 4); and to assess this document's significance, both for Benjamin's own development and for our present historical moment.

Benjamin's hopes for a journal editorship were short lived, but nevertheless transformative for him during this time of astounding historical change. By October 1922, he wrote to the conservative intellectual Florens Christian Rang, complaining of delays in publication and financial difficulties on his publisher's part, threatening the project's chances (SW 1, 507). As he put it then, "for the moment … a journal of my own would be possible only as a private and, so to speak, anonymous enterprise" (SW 1, 507–508). Two months later, he would write to Gershom Scholem that the journal had become "unlikely" (SW 1, 506). The year 1922 thus furnished him a brief window in which to imagine a future in professional editing, conceive a journal theoretically, assemble a manuscript for its first issue, then abandon hope for the project almost as quickly. His subsequent desire to internalize the project's aims ("as a private and … anonymous enterprise") indicates that this "philosophy of editing" statement explains not only his projected practice of editorship, but also illuminates his view of the critic as

[1] These dates follow those given in Benjamin's four-volume Selected Writings published between 1996 and 2003 by Harvard University Press. All English citations to Benjamin in this essay refer to this official edition of his work: volume numbers are given as SW 1, SW 2, etc. German citations refer to his seven-volume Gesammelte Schriften published in 1991 by Surhkamp (given as GS 1, GS 2, etc.).

an anonymous editor, so to speak, collecting and compiling fragments of discourse. Henceforth, with an editorial career closed off to him, criticism would serve him as editing by other means — that is, editing without institutional supports — and, one might also venture, as a *Trauerarbeit* or sublimated mourning process for a publication destined never to exist.

Even if, as a prospectus, the *Angelus Novus* announcement is necessarily short and schematic, roughly four pages, it still stands as a Janus-faced monument, modelling future editorial labour while also reaching backward to the Schlegel's *Athenaeum* journal from a century earlier as its Romantic precedent (SW 1, 293). Though it does not proceed through explicit invocations of "modernism" or of "totality," its rhetoric links it implicitly to both notions. Where "the modern" is concerned, Benjamin asserts that the journal's primary task is to "proclaim the spirit of its age" and thereby to attain "relevance to the present," a criterion "more important even than unity or clarity" (SW 1, 292). Furthermore, it will not "look to the public to supply the yardstick by which true relevance to the present is to be measured" but instead aims at "distilling what is truly relevant from the sterile pageant of new and fashionable events" (SW 1, 292–293). These claims for modern relevance are made with a specific reader in mind, whom Benjamin describes as "the man who stands on his own threshold in the evening when his work is done and in the morning before he sets out on his daily tasks, and who takes in the familiar horizon with a glance, rather than scanning it searchingly, so as to retain whatever new thing greets him there" (SW 1, 295). This image projects the journal's ideal reader as a daily labourer, a member of the working classes, seeking guidance in a terrain whose horizons can only be taken in fleetingly. Although this scene seems placid in comparison to the famous maelstrom of progress described in Benjamin's final writings on the *Angelus Novus* image, the journal's claim to relevance will still be an urgent one, requiring historical justification.

This is because of the general atmosphere of crisis in which Benjamin's reflections transpired. Several recent disasters can be invoked here to illustrate the sense of historical emergency: the recently concluded World War, the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, and the subsequent collapse of the German economy would be just the most obvious and devastating. In Berlin, specifically, where Benjamin resided during much of the period 1920–1922, he also lived through the recent assassination of left activists like Rosa Luxemburg (murdered in January 1919); the consequent rise of far-right nationalism in the new Weimar Republic, including the Kapp Putsch in March 1920; the General Strike that followed the putsch that same month; and the German left's subsequent inability to regain parliamentary power afterward. These are the circumstances typically adduced to contextualize Benjamin's political writings of this time, particularly the "Critique of Violence," but they also illuminate the sense of historical emergency that impelled his vision for a new journal at this juncture.

Although the imagined journal would include new works of literature and philosophy, its primary purpose would be critical. It would both aim to annihilate "talented fakes" in literature (notably, the recent popularity of Expressionism), and even

more importantly, would "concentrate on the individual work of art" for, as the journal announcement explains, "the function of great criticism" is "to cognize by immersing itself in the object." Criticism must *account for the truth of works*, a task just as essential for literature as for philosophy" (SW 1, 293; emphasis added). This mission statement — allowing criticism to subtend both literature and philosophy, despite those fields' traditional hostilities toward each other, vaunted at least since the time of Plato's *Republic* — can be said to participate in a broader modernist quest for totality (Rabaté 2015), but also suggests a doubt about the notion of totality in its familiar sense. That doubt is similarly registered in a passage from Goethe's notes for his *Theory of Colours* that Benjamin favourably cited in his private notebooks of 1921 as accurately grasping "the relation of knowledge to truth" (SW 1, 278). Goethe theorized the knowledge-truth relation as follows, in a formulation that Benjamin clearly admired:

> Since in knowledge, as in reflection, no totality [*kein Ganzes*] can be created, because the first lacks the inner … and the second the outer …, we must necessarily think of science as an art if we are to hope for totality [*Ganzheit*] of any kind from it. Moreover, we are not to look for this totality in the general [*im Allgemeinen*], in the superabundant, but since art always constitutes itself wholly in every work of art, science too, should manifest itself entirely in each application.[2]

To "think of science as an art" — to rethink the hunt for scientific knowledge as an interminable, quasi-artistic process that lacks wholeness in both knowledge and reflection alike — means projecting for science and art together a renovated conception of totality. If science can offer knowledge, but never holistic insight into the complete (capital T) Truth of things, what regarding science as an art *can* accomplish is to give "an *account* of the truth" or, for criticism to "*account* for the truth of works" (SW 1, 279, 293, emphases added).

This accounting or narrating of truth — one might say, this critical storytelling of truth, a process of artistic creation rather than of piercing discovery, uncovering, violation, or conquest — will never succeed at grasping the unbroken Truth of things unmediated. By drawing on Goethe's aesthetic theory, Benjamin implies such unmediated totality is not on offer in his epistemology. Instead of promising a view into an unmediated "general" totality of truth, what the *Angelus Novus* announcement instead promises is what Benjamin calls intellectual or philosophical "universality". Here I quote Benjamin's 1922 announcement at length:

> The intellectual universality [*Universalität*] contained in the plan for this journal will not be confused with an attempt to achieve universality in terms of content. For, on the one hand, it will not lose sight

[2] Quoted in SW 1, 279. This excerpt from Goethe's writings also served Benjamin as the epigraph to his book on the German Trauerspiel in 1928: "Da im Wissen sowohl als in der Reflexion kein Ganzes zusammengebracht werden kann, weil jenem das Innre, dieser das Äußere fehlt, so müssen wir uns die Wissenschaft notwendig als Kunst denken, wenn wir von ihr irgend eine Art von Ganzheit erwarten. Und zwar haben wir diese nicht im Allgemeinen, im Überschwänglichen zu suchen, sondern, wie die Kunst sich immer ganz in jedem einzelnen Kunstwerk darstellt, so sollte die Wissenschaft sich auch jedesmal ganz in jedem einzelnen Behandelten erweisen" (GS 1.1, 207).

> of the fact that a philosophical treatment confers universal meaning on every scientific or practical topic, on every mathematical line of inquiry as much as on any political question. And on, the other hand, it will bear in mind that even the literary or philosophical themes of immediate interest will be given a welcome only because of this approach and on the condition that it be adopted. *This philosophical universality* [*philosophische Universalität*] *is the touchstone that will enable the journal to demonstrate its true contemporary relevance most accurately.* (SW 1, 294; emphasis mine)[3]

Such "philosophical universality" will necessarily be provisional and is not to be confused with universally comprehensive reportage: Benjamin makes clear his journal will exclude coverage of the plastic arts and scientific research (SW 1, 295). Neither will the *Angelus Novus* attempt to create any unanimity of belief among its contributors: giving voice to such "unity, let alone a community," Benjamin asserts, notably, is also not possible "in our age" (SW 1, 296).[4] Rather, what drives Benjamin's theory of editing is a faith in the kind of philosophical universality that would allow criticism to give an credible account of truth — the truths of works, and of modern life — thus attaining contemporary "relevance" for his readers.

Underpinning this ambition for philosophical universality are several longstanding metaphysical questions in Benjamin's development, derived from Platonic and Kantian sources. Several earlier notes among Benjamin's unpublished writings make these connections clear. In an outline of his "Theory of Criticism" (1919–20), Benjamin draws on a Kantian vocabulary to claim that correspondences exist between "the individual truth in the individual work of art" and the "manifestation of the beautiful in the true: This is the manifestation of the coherent, harmonious totality [*Allheit*] of the beautiful in the unity [*Einheit*] of the true. Plato's *Symposium,* at its climax, deals with this topic" (SW 1, 219). If the true forms a "unity" in the Platonic sense, then in this instance, "the beautiful" forms a "multiplicity assembled into a totality [Vielheit, zusammengefaßt zur Allheit]" (*Ibid.*).[5] The vocabulary Benjamin deploys in this definition is clearly Kantian,

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[3] "Die sachliche Universalität, welche im Plan dieser Zeitschrift liegt, wird sie nicht mit einer stofflichen verwechseln. Und da sie einerseits sich gegenwärtig hält, daß die philosophische Behandlung jedem wissenschaftlichen oder praktischen Gegenstand, einem mathematischen Gedankengang so gut wie einem politischen, universale Bedeutung verleiht, wird sie anderseits nicht vergessen, daß auch ihre nächsten literarischen oder philosophischen Gegenstände nur um eben dieser Behandlungsweise und unter deren Bedingung ihr willkommen sind. Diese philosophische Universalität ist die Form, in deren Auslegung am genauesten die Zeitschrift Sinn für wahre Aktualität wird erweisen könne" (GS 2.1, 244).

[4] Where the journal's lack of material comprehensiveness is concerned, the announcement makes clear Benjamin will exclude discussions of the plastic arts and the natural sciences from the journal's scope. As to its ideological non-unanimity, Benjamin notably hoped to include writings by Rang, a conservative, in an early issue of the journal. (SW 1, 507).

[5] "Dieser Erscheinung des Wahren sowohl als der einzelnen Wahrheit in dem einzelnen schönen Gebilde entspricht ein anders zu bestimmendes Erscheinen des Schönen im Wahren; die Erscheinung der geschlossnen harmonischen Allheit des Schönen in der Einheit des Wahren. Von ihr handelt auf seinem Gipfel Platons Symposion. Erst im Ganzen der Wahrheit, wird dort gelehrt, erscheint virtuell die Schönheit. … Welcher gemeinsame Grund für diese beiden Relationen zwischen Kunst und Philosophie sich finden läßt, bleibt zu untersuchen.

[*das Wahre: Einheit*

insofar as "*Allheit*" (literally "Allness") functions at various moments in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* as a synonym for "Totality" (*Totalität*), denoting "plurality regarded as unity."[6] However, for Benjamin — both working under the influence of Kant's epistemology and Plato's metaphysics, and departing in strategic ways from both those frameworks — pluralities can be regarded as unities and "assembled" into totalities. A totality in this sense involves the work of construction, configuration, assemblage: the journal editor's task, then, is to form a provisional totality from the multiplicity of works available at any given historical juncture.

Furthermore, translation has a crucial role to play in this project, as Benjamin's *Angelus Novus* aimed to be a foundational publication in the study of what is now called comparative literature. Just as Benjamin articulates his aspiration toward universality, he also praises translation as "a genre that has always had a beneficial effect on [literature] in its periods of great crisis" (SW 1, 294). The first issue of the journal promises to treat questions of translation at length, highlighting their key importance as an ongoing feature of the editor's concern. Translated works will spur German writers "to abandon superannuated linguistic practices, while developing new ones" (SW 1, 294). In this way, including works in translation alongside their originals will produce what the prospectus describes as a "school of language-in-the-making" (SW 1, 294), a laboratory where new experiments in the history of literature can be developed.

This emphasis on translation is among the most striking signs of Benjamin's concern with philosophical universality, as well as a marker of his linguistic conception of knowledge, and ultimately, his conception of truth. For as he avers in his essay on "The Task of the Translator" — written for the Baudelaire translation project, but which he also hoped to include as his own contribution to the first issue of *Angelus Novus* — "in every [human language] as a whole, one and the same thing is meant. Yet this one thing is achievable not by any single language but only by the totality [der Allheit] of their intentions supplementing one another: the pure language" (SW 1, 257).[7] What is ultimately universal to human languages is that no finally accurate or fully truthful meaning resides in any of them individually, and that fully adequate meanings are absent from all human words, regardless of the linguistic systems that produce them. Hence the need for poetic and fictive language, which makes no claims to empirical truth, and even more so, for translation, which allows human languages to appear alongside each other in their shared incompleteness. Translation thus illuminates a shared intention toward

das Schöne: Vielheit, zusammengefaßt zur Allheit]" (GS 1.3, 834–835).

[6] For this definition of Allness [*Allheit*] as "plurality" [*Vielheit*] regarded as unity [*Einheit*], and for the further equation of Allness to "Totality" [*Totalität*], see §§B111 and B379 in the 1786 edition of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. On Kant's concept of "universality" (*Allgemeinheit*) as corresponding with "allness or totality of conditions," see B379.

[7] "[I]n ihrer jeder als ganzer jeweils eines und zwar dasselbe gemeint ist, das dennoch keiner einzelnen von ihnen, sondern nur der Allheit ihrer einander ergänzenden Intentionen erreichbar ist: die reine Sprache" (GS 4.1, 13).

the totality of language as such, and this intention is both consequential in a metaphysical and, as we shall see, political sense.

* * *

Speaking of the many landmark literary and philosophical works that were produced in 1922, Jean-Michel Rabaté has argued that "[w]hat distinguishes those masterpieces from the works that came before the war is a sense of a new mission: because of the massive destruction, there was a general sense of added responsibility. The thinkers, writers, and artists had to give birth to something that would approach a totality of experience" (2015, 4). Given the total devastations of the war, and the radical impoverishment of experience undergone by an entire younger generation of Germans, this "approach" toward a "totality of experience" was impossible from its outset. Still, Benjamin's ambition with the ill-fated *Angelus Novus* journal — to safeguard the possibility of the universal by constructing a provisional totality of truth out of the capricious fragments into which experience had been shivered — clearly formed part of a larger modernist project in 1922, the larger modernist "responsibility" Rabaté has described. Although the journal never came to fruition, Benjamin would continue pursuing this ambition in his later research and writings, most notably his *Arcades Project*, a text that aims to construct a near-totalizing picture of 19th-century Paris out of a kaleidoscope of quotations, configured alongside each other like so many jigsaw puzzle pieces, left incomplete at the time of Benjamin's death. In "composing" the *Arcades*, he continued to implement his theory of editing "as a private and, so to speak, anonymous enterprise." With his studies of the Parisian passages, one might reasonably ask: is Benjamin the text's author, or should he be better understood as its *Redakteur*, the one who collects a work's contents and assembles them according to editorial needs and desires?[8] For, as Rabaté elsewhere writes:

> Benjamin's composition of the enormous and unfinished *Arcades Project* was an attempt at creating order in a literary and philosophical collection. He evoked in "Unpacking my Library" the 'bliss of the collector,' a bliss that was not limited to the possession of some rare items but approximated the happiness of whoever can contemplate history as the field of ruins and fragments that it is but finds there a reason to be more alive in the present. […] We collect so as to recollect, thus turning into the curators of an always unfinished and unfinishable archive. This archive can be called modernism. It is an archive that will never become a totality. (2019, 8–9)

Offering a description for the task of modernist studies — inspired by Benjamin's larger corpus — Rabaté productively troubles any easy distinctions between re/collecting, researching, writing, editing, curating, and translating. In his description of

[8] One web source, the Online Etymology Dictionary, gives the origin of "redact" as "from Latin *redactus*, past participle of *redigere*: "to drive back, force back, bring back; collect, call in." and indicates a shared etymological root (via "the Old Latin habit of using red- as the form of re- before vowels") with the word "redemption."

"an always unfinished and unfinishable archive," he implies this task as an historical and scholarly one, "unfinishable," in much the same way Goethe's *Theory of Colours* depicts the pursuit of scientific knowledge as ultimately interminable.[9] In critical writing and in the editing of criticism, however, as Benjamin imagined it, another temporality is at stake: not the interminable *chronos* of *Wissenschaft* — approaching scientific knowledge as a curve infinitely approaches an unattainable asymptote — but rather, the *kairos* of truth, which appears as a fragmentary totality recognizable to the philosophical critic or editor in a moment of instantaneous illumination, prompted by immersion in artistic objects.

Important political consequences may be derived from the 1922 *Angelus Novus* announcement, relevant both for Benjamin's lifetime and today. At a basic level, the document's Neo-Kantian language bespeaks Benjamin's continued dialectical engagements with Hermann Cohen's writings and "ethical socialism." In a persuasive reading of Cohen's *Ethics of the Pure Will* (1904), Harry van der Linden has shown that Kant's ethics depend on a "threefold division [that] corresponds to the categories of quantity as developed in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (B106; A80): unity, plurality, and totality. It follows that the purpose of general obedience to the moral law is to make possible a unified plurality, i.e., a totality" (van der Linden 1994, 6).[10] Van der Linden furthermore argues that Cohen reconstructed Kant's ethics on specifically socialist grounds, based in the model of the worker's cooperative (*Genossenschaft*), which could then in turn provide the model for the ideal state. "Like Kant, Cohen holds that existing humanity is a mere plurality and must be transformed into a unified plurality or totality. But unlike Kant, Cohen holds that this means that all our institutions must become unified pluralities or totalities" (1994, 6–7). The residually (neo-)Kantian language of totality and universality in Benjamin's *Angelus Novus* plan thus signals, in some measure, a radical democratic politics, relevant to cooperative political endeavours and to the lives of working people, those whom it describes standing at their thresholds, glancing over their daily horizons. But where Cohen's Kantianism had embraced an optimistic, social-

[9] "The encyclopaedia will never be closed on itself, and like Benjamin's *Arcades Project*, it will remain forever unfinished. This is the belief that Derrida and Benjamin share, and both find in it a condition for a revolutionary awakening. In the same way as there is no absolute language, there is no absolute collection, thus no end to modernism. Because the absolute is lacking, the task of the collector, which includes loving all the things and texts that will be redeemed, will be to keep open the discontinuous history of modernisms in the plural" (Rabaté 2019, 9).

[10] The full context for Van der Linden's claim is as follows: "Kant's summary in the Foundations of the [three] different formulations of the categorical imperative underlines the foregoing account. Kant states here that all maxims that accord with the moral law have a form (universality), a material (human agents as ends in themselves), and a complete determination (consistency with the realm of ends, i.e., the harmony of free wills). The threefold division corresponds to the categories of quantity as developed in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (B106; A80): unity, plurality, and totality. It follows that the purpose of general obedience to the moral law is to make possible a unified plurality, i.e. a totality. It The unity (form) is universal law as such. The plurality (the material) consists of human agents and their personal ends. The former applied to the latter creates a moral totality (the complete determination), ideal humanity" (6).

democratic philosophy of history, modelled on the endless task of human progress, Benjamin's *Angelus Novus* signals a chronopolitics and a philosophy of history altogether distinct from Cohen's, rooted not in the eternality of the progressive future, but in the messianic potentials of the now.[11]

To this point, the English-language editors of Benjamin's collected works, Marcus Bullock and Michael Jennings, have shown that Benjamin's theory of language transected his editorial and critical labours and carried implications for a theory of revolutionary politics (SW 1, 500). That is, the *Angelus Novus* announcement attests to a period of Benjamin's development in which Cohen's Kantian ethical socialism, Sorel's anarchism, and practical, anti-capitalist protest tactics were commingling generatively in Benjamin's theoretical imagination. Bullock and Jennings connect Benjamin's linguistic theory and his support for the proletarian general strike (in "The Critique of Violence") by way of Benjamin's letter to the philosopher Martin Buber in July 1916, describing his essay of that year "On Language as Such and the Language of Man," and declining Buber's invitation to contribute to the Zionist journal *Der Jude*. Speaking of the apparent speechlessness of Nature, its tacitness, which Benjamin will describe in the 1921 "Translation" essay as the silence between languages that Mallarmé intuited, Benjamin wrote to Buber, "only where this sphere of speechlessness reveals itself in unutterably pure power can the magic spark leap between the word and the motivating deed, where the unity [Einheit] of these two equally real entities resides" (SW 1, 501).[12] Translation then, serves not only to renovate the German language past "superannuated" linguistic practices; it also serves to illuminate that sphere of speechlessness that resides in the interstices between languages, and their shared, that is, supplemental totality of intentions.[13] This domain of silent communion may make possible a leap between "word" and "motivating deed," from language to embodied action, from theory into revolutionary practice.[14]

That is, by claiming "philosophical universality" as "the touchstone" of "true contemporary relevance" (SW 1, 294), this announcement's author opens his attention more fully toward questions not grasped within academic philosophy and *belles lettres*. The *Angelus Novus* was to be a philosophical literary journal with revolutionary

[11] For useful analyses of Benjamin's debts and critical relations to Cohen's neo-Kantianism, especially as regards their dissimilar philosophies of history, see: Deuber-Mankowsky 2004 (135–139); Fenves 2011 (5–13); Hamacher 2011 (176–179); Hamacher 2012 (508n17).

[12] "[N]ur wo diese Sphäre des Wortlosen in unsagbar reiner Macht sich erschließt, kann der magische Funken zwischen Wort und bewegender Tat überspringen, wo die Einheit dieser beiden gleich wirklichen ist" (*Briefe*, 127).

[13] Mallarmé's rhetoric of speechlessness in the "Crisis of Verse" essay is useful here for illuminating Benjamin's poetic and theoretical touchstones: "Languages imperfect insofar as they are many; the absolute one is lacking: thought considered as writing without accessories, not even whispers, still *stills* immortal speech; the diversity, on earth, of idioms prevents anyone from proffering words that would otherwise be, when made uniquely, the material truth" (Mallarmé 1897, 205).

[14] For a discussion of Hermann Cohen's influence over Benjamin's "Critique of Violence," see: Eiland and Jennings 2014, 132.

ambitions, but, as Benjamin also acknowledged in almost the same breath, even if the journal were to go forward, "there is no guarantee that the universality aspired to will be fully achieved" (SW 1, 295). All the more poignant, then, that the *Angelus Novus* never materialized as an actual journal in the first place: Benjamin's hopes for it perished almost as soon as they first arose. Over a century later, his philosophy of editing is no less urgent. In light of recent and ongoing "disruptions" to the domains of humanistic study that Benjamin so prized —in academic institutions of all sizes, in their official organs of scholarly or "peer reviewed" dissemination, and in the field of literary magazines that has historically functioned alongside or within both — the *Angelus Novus* announcement continues to read as an untimely document, with marked contemporary importance.

In February 2021, to give just one notable, recent, and "disruptive" example, the American news network CNN published a web editorial by the journalist Leah Asmelash under the title "Long-standing literary magazines are struggling to stay afloat. Where do they go from here?" chronicling the downfall of the prominent American journal *The Believer* after its home institution, the University of Nevada, announced its closure in October 2021, citing pandemic-related financial woes. The magazine's March 2022 issue was its last, after nearly twenty years of operation. Similar closures, professional downsizings, and labour casualizations are occurring throughout the public sphere, lending the contemporary moment a sense of crisis in the arts, humanities, and education, as is well known and widely acknowledged. While prominent web journals continue to emerge (and some seem to thrive) in our new digital economy, the capacity for criticism to flourish in these outlets is still uncertain. This is particularly the case when such outlets operate with increasingly less institutional and monetary support, in competition with platforms and apps that function more like monopolies helmed by billionaires and less like infrastructures of universal public good. Amid these dismal developments, notable voices on the left are once again advocating for a "universalist" politics, and the editorial engines of modernist critical and artistic production must heed these calls (McGowan, 2020; Sunkara, 2019). What is needed now on the left is a renewed commitment to the expanding modernist archive Benjamin claimed for his critical custodianship, still deeper thinking of his editorial universalism in theory and practice, and a commitment to his principles that might still be applied successfully from within the catastrophes of our contemporary world.

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La rivoluzione conservatrice come via da destra al modernismo

ABSTRACT: Through an analysis of the concepts of form, *Gemeinschaft,* and *Kultur,* this article highlights how German, Italian, and French intellectuals of the right develop a personal pathway to modernism, having increasingly abandoned the reactionary and anti-modern perspectives that characterised them up until the First World War.

KEYWORDS: Form, Community, *Kultur*, Modernism, Myth.

Kultur, è la definizione di Thomas Mann, "significa unità, stile, forma, [...] una organizzazione spirituale del mondo" (1957, 35). La *Kultur* è quel complesso di fattori che racchiude in un limite circoscritto tutto l'insieme dei valori in cui risiederebbe la realtà profonda di un gruppo socio-nazionale. La capacità di elevare a *forma* i valori della *Kultur* non è solo un modo per rinsaldarli, ma tende a diventare dimostrazione dell'esistenza della *Kultur* stessa: "L'arte [...] è una forza [...] che conserva e dà forma" (Mann 1957, 48). Dalla forma in cui la *Kultur* si manifesta devono restare infatti esclusi tanto quei valori avvertiti come estranei, quanto tutte quelle esperienze che vengono interpretate come assenza di *Kultur* (*Zivilisation*), vale a dire come non poggianti su un materiale di tipo organico, ma facenti riferimento solo ad aggregazioni di tipo meccanico (possono essere la conformazione cittadina in opposizione a quella rurale, così come le strutture sociali create dal capitalismo liberale o dal collettivismo marxista). Tali manifestazioni produrranno infatti – per i teorici della *Kultur* – espressioni artistiche (possono essere quelle dell'avanguardia così come il realismo socialista) non dotate di vera *forma* perché tese a staccarsi da quei valori archetipici e omogenei che la *Kultur* sottende. In questa direzione gli agenti della *Zivilisation* passano a essere identificati in tutta una serie di gruppi etno-sociali la cui stessa capacità mitopoietica (le *forme* da loro prodotte: linguaggio incluso) sottolinea di un mancato legame con la *Kultur*. Nel Céline di *La scuola dei cadaveri* (1938), per esempio, tale incapacità è incentrata in un "balbettio ebraico" che minaccia il ritmo stilistico della lingua francese, cioè, per lo scrittore, la *forma* suprema che simbolizza la *Kultur* nazionale. Gli ebrei, motori della *Zivilisation*, sarebbero così portatori di un principio anti-poetico (il "balbettio") teso a legare gli ariani proprio a quella mancanza di *forma* che secondo Céline si manifesta nell'arte moderna: cinema, design industriale, ecc. In questo caso, come spesso accade, il risveglio del popolo francese è dunque connesso tanto al mito della rigenerazione dopo la decadenza, quanto

al recupero di pratiche, simboli, valori, tradizioni linguistiche condivise, che mettono in *forma* la comunità (*reductio ad unum* che ne magnifica il valore simbolico). La *Kultur* è insomma qui ciò che permette di inserire le dinamiche socio-culturali nella ricerca di alcune regolarità di tipo al fondo metafisico (dove l'eterno giustifica il particolare fenomenico). Si tratta di ri-poeticizzare l'esistenza, negli anni del nichilismo e della tecnica, mediante la creazione di un *mondo* organico-omogeneo identificato col mondo *reale* dietro le apparenze della corrente conformazione sociale e dei suoi prodotti.

Siamo ancora nei pressi del "principio estetico" schilleriano, vale a dire nei pressi dell'idea di ricreare, mediante la *forma*, l'organicità del reale. E però, mentre tale principio estetico tendeva comunque a riconoscere *realtà* al mondo corrente, negli interpreti novecenteschi della *Kulturkritik* l'attuale realtà del mondo è data appunto come *apparente*, cioè con non-conforme a quei principi archetipali solo medianti i quali la realtà stessa assurge al rango … di *vera* realtà. Se tale movenza intellettuale può certo essere riferita a una particolare interpretazione del discorso romantico (a cominciare dal *Volk* herderiano come sostrato culturale che tiene insieme, in un *intero* organico, linguaggio, letteratura, religione e costumi fornendo la base per un'unificata estetica della vita pubblica) è chiaro altresì che qui non stiamo più parlando del possibile "ritorno degli dei" annunciato da Novalis in *La Cristianità ossia l'Europa* (1799), perché nella concezione mitico-archetipale della *Kulturkritik* gli dei non se ne sono mai andati. Ciò, nel campo politico-economico, significa appunto negare *realtà* alla situazione corrente (cioè alla società *divisa*), affermando invece come reale un'immagine mitico-archetipale della società stessa (ed ecco gli appelli alla necessità di rigenerazione e *risveglio*), e dunque presentando il "principio estetico" che riporta la frammentazione a unità non come un atto d'accusa verso ciò che la modernità (la modernità capitalista) ha fatto al mondo, ma come proiezione di una soggettività che si crede *intatta* perché parte del modello archetipico della *Kultur*.

In Francia, Barrès pone tale *Kultur* nel nesso congiunto di tradizione e determinismo, dove la cultura francese diventa un principio che lega l'individuo al Sé nazionale ("una nazione è il luogo dove gli uomini hanno memorie e costumi in comune"; 1902, 63). Barrès connette poi a questo asse centrale tutti i presupposti canonici collegati al nesso *Kultur*-forma, a cominciare dall'individuazione di quegli elementi che al sistema omogeneo della *Kultur* si oppongono, come gli stranieri (Zola viene ad esempio accusato di essere italiano e di parteggiare dunque per un gusto estetico anti-francese così come parteggia, politicamente, per un "non-francese": Dreyfus), e più in generale tutti quei *déracinés* (liberali anglicizzanti, socialisti sovieticizzanti, ecc.) che, esistendo in una situazione di *anomia* rispetto all'ordine nazionale, ne minacciano il retroterra artistico-ideologico (tradizione, estetica, architettura, ecc.). Tale ordine trova invece rafforzamento mediante una lunga serie di manifestazioni mitopoietiche (linguaggio incluso) che vanno dal sepolcro di Napoleone (principio estetico di identità condivisa) al funerale di Hugo (celebrazione dell'identità nazionale che trasforma Parigi in un'unità collettiva), dalla stessa rivolta anti-dreyfusarda (mediante la quale la società francese riconoscerebbe se stessa e i suoi nemici) a movimenti politici quali il boulangismo, alla

partecipazione popolare alla guerra mondiale che permette finalmente alle masse di partecipare dell'anima della nazione: "Milioni di Francesi sono entrati in quello stato di eroismo e di martirio che un tempo, alle epoche più alte della nostra storia, fu solo il fatto di una casta scelta" (1917, 55-56). Barrès può connettere elementi disparati (e appartenenti a tradizioni politiche differenti) perché li inquadra in un processo storico continuativo dove però a dominare non è il principio del cambiamento, ma quello della ripetizione, che ripresenta costantemente (pur nelle esteriori modifiche storiche) il nocciolo essenziale connesso alla *Kultur* francese. È per questo che tale nocciolo può diventare motore e principio ordinatore delle più svariate manifestazioni della forma concatenata alla *Kultur*, in un proposito che trova inevitabile sponda in un nazionalismo che passa a diventare il punto di vista della stessa *Kultur*: "Che cos'è la verità? [...] è trovare un certo punto, un punto unico, quello, nessun'altro, da cui ogni cosa ci appaia nelle sue vere proporzioni. [...] E il nazionalismo non è nient'altro che la coscienza che questo punto esiste" (1902, 12-13).

Tale principio *formativo*, teso a essere connettivo della comunità e riprova della sua esistenza, può assumere qualsiasi sembianza. Può farsi contenitore di un cattolicesimo ultramontano (il Leon Bloy di *Nelle tenebre* o il *Dizionario dell'omo salvatico* di Papini e Giuliotti), ma può anche focalizzarsi, ad esempio in Brasillach o in Rebatet, al di fuori della sfera del sacro, mirando a quel legame inossidabile fra cultura, letteratura e politica che avrebbe caratterizzato la Francia in tempi "migliori", in tempi appunto di trionfo della *Kultur*. Brasillach e Rebatet escludono infatti dalla *Kultur* (cioè dalla comunità francese) non solo le solite tipologie umane e razziali, ma anche quegli artisti (come Mallarmé) che hanno lavorato per infrangere la lingua nazionale e, con essa, il nesso fra questa e la politica, diventando, sono parole proprio di Brasillach, "stranieri nella propria nazione". Il linguaggio è qui infatti, come di consueto, un fondante elemento unificante (*forma*) che ribadisce l'omogeneizzazione nazionale. Il linguaggio aggregante sarà, Brasillach è un caso estremo di estetizzazione della politica, quello delle adunate nazi-fasciste, dove la lingua (in particolare la lingua di Hitler) sarà proprio il sintomo *formale* dell'ottenuta compattezza nazionale. Allo stesso modo la distruzione artistica della forma-*Kultur* (Modigliani, Kisling, ecc.) sarà per Rebatet un attentato (è l'articolo "La corruption des esprits") alla stessa comunità nazionale.

La prospettiva della *Heimat*, del luogo in cui ogni cosa sia significante, si connette sovente al progetto di una formulazione artistica tesa alla riattivazione della capacità simbolica del reale o, come scrive Slataper: "Compito di ogni arte è [....] render tangibile l'infinito nel fenomeno particolare", perché "che roba è mai un uomo a cui manca la forma! Una secchia piena d'acqua senza la secchia" (1931, 37). Slataper concepisce la forma artistica quale "progetto di mitizzazione" teso a ricostruire il valore universalistico del reale sostituendo la religione nel suo compito tradizionale. Lo stile diventa cioè parte integrante di ciò che Clifford Geertz ha chiamato "il processo autonomo di formazione simbolica" (1973, 211). Necessariamente connesso a una struttura sociale che deve ricevere tale simbolizzazione, tale messa in *forma*, è però inevitabile che la saldezza di tale struttura divenga poi riprova della riuscita artistica della stessa forma, e che, di

conseguenza, a tale saldezza si guardi come al campo ideale per il funzionamento del medesimo progetto artistico. C'è bisogno insomma di lavorare per un certo tipo di società perché una certa arte sia possibile.

Il percorso di Gottfried Benn è quanto mai emblematico nel quadro delle vicende che stiamo descrivendo. Partito dalla critica di razionalismo e relativismo quali elementi cardine della *ratio* borghese ("massicciata della civiltà tecnica"; 1992, 37), Benn vi aveva inizialmente contrapposto elementi eternizzanti di tipo ctonio ("il fondo comune della psiche fa filtrare certe identità attraverso tutte le epoche"; 1992, 39). Compito dell'arte era qui, in un intento simbolico-dionisiaco, riportare alla luce quelle tracce *eterne* che affiorano all'inconscio quando la razionalità riposa. Al momento l'idea di *forma* che Benn stava portando avanti era ancora fortemente legata più alla sfera dell'irrazionale che non a una visione *Kulturkritik*. Anche la sua produzione espressionista ("Il viaggio", "Cervelli"), come rimarca Amelia Valtolina, mirava a far emergere la sfera stessa della disgregazione.[1] Non già però perché il materiale connesso al non-formato, al non-conciliato, fosse espressione dell'assenza di conciliazione della società corrente (come per l'Adorno di *Filosofia della musica moderna*), ma perché solo il disgregato poteva superare la barriera del razionalismo borghese (e su questo Adorno poteva essere d'accordo) per approdare alle sorgenti di ciò che eternamente esiste oltre le apparenze della *Zivilisation* (e su questo certo Adorno non sarebbe stato d'accordo).

I due capolavori saggistici del 1932 (*Goethe e le scienze naturali* e *Oltre il nichilismo*) radicano però progressivamente la sua posizione nel campo afferente alla visione platonico-apollinea dalla forma-*Kultur*. Come Spengler e Jünger utilizzano Goethe (in particolare la teoria della *Urpflanze*) per sottolineare quel principio emanativo che si sviluppa, invece che su una linea evolutiva, come destino, cioè come svolgimento delle possibilità già iscritte nella *forma* originaria, così Benn si riferisce all'*os intermaxillare* (alla scoperta della sua esistenza nell'uomo oltre che nelle scimmie) per indicare esattamente lo stesso principio. Il principio *formale* ("il grande motivo, [...] gli strati più profondi della specie"; 1992, 100) postula una possibile identità di essere e pensiero appunto secondo il principio dell'emanazione da un archetipo. Il pensiero potrebbe cioè essere fatto della stessa materia dell'essere, in quanto noi stessi emanazione del principio *formale* originario. La soluzione che Benn cerca è qui ancora una soluzione di tipo stilistico ("L'ʻArtistik' è il tentativo dell'arte [...] di contrapporre al generale nichilismo dei valori una nuova trascendenza"; 1992, 162), ma anche qui il progetto culturale si lega (e siamo all'estetizzazione della politica) a un progetto sociale (cioè a un'idea di conformazione comunitaria) di riferimento, che *raddoppia* e stabilizza il progetto artistico. In questo caso è il nazismo:

> Sarà il senso della forma la grande trascendenza della nuova epica, il connettivo del secondo evo: [...] l'interregno del nichilismo è alla fine. [...] Disciplina e arte – i due simboli dell'Europa nuova. [...] forma e disciplina. (1992, 172-176)

[1] Cfr. Amelia Valtolina 2016.

Sul nazismo Benn proietta il superamento di quelle società (capitalista e comunista) che, credendo a un'idea storico-evolutiva, rifiutano il principio *formale* emanativo. Non rinuncia a un'idea di autonomia della sfera culturale (lo stile che nega tale autonomia è infatti quello del realismo socialista), ma chiama certamente al mutuo sostegno di cultura e politica: "Platone, spiritualmente l'ultimo dei Dori – lui che affronta ancora una volta la battaglia contro l'individualismo, [...] per combattere a favore della 'comunità politica'" (1992, 199). Il mito dorico si rifaceva in particolare a un volume di Karl Müller del 1824, che identificava nei Dori una popolazione proveniente dalla regione medio-danubiana (dunque connettibile razzialmente ai tedeschi), e che avrebbe importato in Grecia – sempre secondo Müller… il culto di Apollo. Se la *forma* infatti è diventata questione decisiva per la salvezza dell'Occidente, è chiaro che qui, anche per Benn, l'apollineo deve tornare a prendere il posto che era stato del dionisiaco:

> noi abbiamo conosciuto frattanto [...] popoli primitivi, in particolare razze negre, la cui esistenza sembrava essere tutto un seguito di accessi di ebbrezza, senza che mai ne sorgesse arte. Fra ebbrezza e arte deve porsi Apollo, la grande forza capace di selezione e formazione. (1992, 200-201)

L'avvento del nazismo permetterebbe ora il passaggio a quella conformazione apollinea dove lo stile diventa riprova di un modo di esistenza della comunità, e dove l'arte, al pari della politica, dirige e rafforza le manifestazioni dell'essere originario da cui prorompe: "l'arte in Germania, come fatto fondamentale dell'essere metafisico, [...] questo è Reich tedesco" (1992, 146-147).

Ora, le tematiche principali pertinenti agli autori della rivoluzione conservatrice (il legame identitario fra individuo e comunità, il recupero di quei principi simbolici che sarebbero alla base di una *Kultur* etno-nazionale, ecc.) vengono solitamente interpretate come inerenti a un processo di resistenza rispetto a quelle nuove dinamiche sociali (ruolo delle masse, egemonia della metropoli, sviluppo tecnologico-industriale, ecc.) che costituiscono invece uno dei campi privilegiati d'indagine della cultura modernista. Vorrei però chiarire come i tre concetti cardine della cultura reazionaria *fin de siècle* (*forma*, *Gemeinschaft* e *Kultur*) vengano sottoposti, nel passaggio di questo settore culturale alla temperie modernista, a un processo di *restyling* che mira a lasciarne intatto il significato.

L'intreccio di temi modernisti e antimodernisti è uno dei tratti più tipici della cultura di destra fra le due guerre. Non solo il campo di indagine si divide in due opposti orientamenti, con da un lato i difensori della funzione nazionale dell'industria e della *tecnica,* dell'emersione di nuovi attori storici (le masse), e dall'altro i propugnatori di un ritorno a passate conformazioni associative nel quadro di una resistenza alla modernità avanzante, ma spesso, anche, i due vettori si sovrappongono nello stesso autore. Non è possibile segnalare un singolo modello d'intersezione fra suggestioni moderniste e antimoderniste, ma è possibile sostenere che il tratto più tipico di tali contaminazioni è quello di avvenire in moduli di pensiero dove la dialettica risulta annullata. Se, infatti, la destra antimodernista tende direttamente a invalidare gli effetti dello sviluppo storico-materiale, contrapponendovi l'immagine di un passato *intatto* a cui tornare, cioè

l'immagine di una *totalità* di significato che la modernità avrebbe posto in crisi imponendo una direzione *sbagliata* all'esistenza (Evola e Guénon sono l'esempio estremo di questo modo di pensare), la destra modernista individua sì la progressione storica quale alveo di sviluppo di nuove concezioni, ma riempie poi tale progressione con valori non-dialettici (si pensi a Malaparte, dove è proprio l'ascesa del proletariato a permettere il ritorno all'esperienza della Controriforma: *archetipo* e *agaton* dell'animo italiano), valori finalizzati ad assegnare a uno dei tratti della modernità (può essere la massa come anche la tecnica: è il caso di Jünger) il quadro valoriale di una significazione capace di redimere il reale e la modernità stessa.

Lo scontro, a destra, fra modernismo e antimodernismo si lega ad altri dibattiti politico-culturali di cui viene, di volta in volta, riconosciuto come un aspetto centrale al dibattito medesimo. Lo vediamo, ad esempio, comparire nel contrasto fra economia libero-scambista e protezionista che vede coinvolti Sorel e Barrès (dove il primo contrappone al protezionismo barresiano, finalizzato a proteggere le radici rurali della *Kultur* francese, l'etica industriale che avrebbe in sé la capacità di distruggere il democraticismo della Terza Repubblica); nella polemica fra Maurras e Valois sul ruolo delle masse nel processo rivoluzionario; ecc. Ciò non significa che lo scontro fra fascismo modernista e fascismo antimodernista sia il nodo centrale delle controversie interne alla cultura di destra. Ma significa che i vari posizionamenti ideologici, sui vari *focus* politico-economici del dibattitto (ruolo delle masse, principi comunitari, ruolo del complesso industriale, ecc.), necessitano di sviluppare un'interpretazione riguardo alla questione modernismo *vs.* antimodernismo.

In Germania la riformulazione modernista dei principi *Kulturkritik* e comunitari si sviluppa all'interno di quel variegato movimento che è la "rivoluzione conservatrice". Tanto le sue frange conservatrici quanto quelle rivoluzionarie, alle prese con le condizioni imposte dalla pace di Versailles, riformulano, nel quadro dell'azione dello Stato, le caratteristiche in precedenza assegnate in larga misura alla società civile. Fatti salvi i gruppi a tendenza ancora agraria (ben rappresentati da Darré), le altre frange del movimento si orientano verso un'interpretazione organicistica dello sviluppo industrial-tecnologico.

La fine della guerra e poi la Repubblica hanno permesso agli intellettuali tedeschi di spostare nuovamente all'interno delle frontiere nazionali lo scontro ideologico fra *Kultur* e *Zivilisation*, ma la mutata forma dello Stato ha anche imposto la modifica delle caratteristiche della *Kultur* medesima, per trovare spazio in questa non più al solo generico concetto di *popolo*, ma altresì ai concetti di massa e di sviluppo industriale.

"Se vi arrestano dite una cosa qualunque [...]. Dite che Rathenau era uno degli anziani di Sion, oppure che ha dato in moglie sua sorella a Radek, o una qualunque altra idiozia" (von Salomon 2001, 382). Lo scrittore Ernst von Salomon (parte della cellula dei *Freikorps* che organizza l'attentato contro Rathenau) così racconta l'assassinio dell'industriale nel romanzo *I proscritti*. Qui l'omicidio viene descritto come azione finalizzata a difendere un'idea di realtà che si rifiuta a ogni invasione di quella *visione* borghese che ha in Rathenau il suo rappresentante: "Un fruscio enorme di carte copriva

il paese [...] il lardo americano ci consolava dei treni di carbone da consegnare" (136-137). Per von Salomon, Rathenau deve morire perché è colui che "mentre cercava di nobilitare la materia ne riconosceva il dominio... l'unico uomo in grado di strappare la Germania a se stessa e di ridurla a una copia delle democrazia occidentali" (383): colui che punta a spiritualizzare la legge del mercato.

Ma se von Salomon resta legato a una prospettiva agonistica rispetto allo sviluppo industrial-tecnologico di tipo capitalista, la sconfitta militare induce alcuni intellettuali di diversa provenienza (Moeller e Spengler, Jünger e Schmitt) a interrogarsi sulle ragioni della vittoria dell'Intesa, riconoscendole non solo nelle capacità di sviluppo delle democrazie occidentali, ma anche nella capacità di presentare il proprio modello (economico e politico) come universale: "La politica imperialistica in Germania [...] è stata incapace di esprimere i suoi propositi in principi che non fossero fondati sulla potenza ma sul diritto" (Moeller van den Bruck 2000, 274-275). Ciò li conduce a ripensare le ragioni della *Kulturkritik* secondo una prospettiva che richiede una formulazione ideologica in grado di superare tanto i confini di classe (saranno le varie versioni del "socialismo tedesco") quanto le pregiudiziali anti-moderniste.

Jünger, del resto, ha già riconosciuto, mediante gli eventi della guerra e della rivoluzione in Russia, l'emersione di un nuovo soggetto sociale ("ci occorrono le forze di un ceto che oggi dispone ancora delle energie e delle possibilità rivoluzionarie [...] i lavoratori"; 2005, 88) che, educato dallo strapotere della tecnica nelle "battaglie di materiali", mira ora a uno Stato (anti-partitico, gerarchico, pianificato) il quale si faccia espressione diretta non di una classe, ma di un'epoca e del *nuovo* individuo che la esprime: "nazionalismo. È un termine che non esprime il disgusto rispetto ai partiti o per determinati strati dell'umanità, bensì *rispetto a un'intera epoca*" (2005, 300-301). Lo Stato immaginato da Jünger rigetta gli elementi *tradizionalmente* identitari (barresiani) per fondarsi ideologicamente, come sostenuto da Andrea Benedetti (2008), proprio su quella progressione, tecnica ed economica, che la guerra ha rivelato. In tale movimento l'antimodernismo verrà identificato da Jünger nel concetto borghese di "sicurezza" ("il borghese [...] finirà per essere riconosciuto come lo scudiero di una restaurazione dietro cui si nasconde la stessa aspirazione alla sicurezza"; 1984, 218), funzione tesa a mitigare gli effetti dello stesso capitalismo, la cui progressione, invece, ha già creato le premesse per il suo superamento nell'alveo, appunto, di un nuovo Stato in formazione e di una nuova *forma* ("che l'operaio concepisca se stesso in un'altra forma") che è espressione di un nuovo *tipo* umano.

Le teorie organicistiche tendono da ora a prendere una sterzata modernista, dal momento che gli elementi tratti dal passato (a cominciare dalle istanze comunitarie) iniziano a fornire giustificazione ideologica al processo tecnico-industriale. Questo viene da ora non semplicemente spiritualizzato, come vuole Jeffrey Herf, ma direttamente rapportato, è proprio il caso di Jünger, a principi formativi-archetipici che lo giustificano in quanto manifestazione di una nuova *Kultur*.

L'altra via in cui il modernismo si esprime, a destra, è invece quella che consiste in un utilizzo pragmatistico (dunque strumentale, dunque legato a doppio filo alla ratio

tecnologica, come voleva Furio Jesi) dei *miti*, come via a una identificazione ancora di politica e cultura.

Se si pensa che già nel 1931, mentre si moltiplicavano le descrizioni della modernità americana quale progresso tecnologico separato da ogni fondamento spirituale, Brasillach affermava (è l'inchiesta di *Le Figaro* sugli Stati Uniti) di contrapporsi all'America non a causa del suo *futurismo*, ma a causa del suo conservatorismo (cioè a causa di un capitalismo non in grado di convogliare le masse verso un nuovo progetto di Stato), si comprende benissimo tanto il suo rifiuto dei propositi della destra conservatrice, quanto l'interesse (ed è il vero centro tanto del suo fascismo quanto del suo modernismo) per quella capacità nazista di sviluppare cerimonie iniziatiche di tipo cultuale (che Brasillach intende proprio basate sul concetto soreliano di *mito*: "il successo del nazionalismo, in quegli anni, derivava essenzialmente dalla sua capacità di proporre alle folle delle parole e delle immagini, dei *miti*"; 1986, 350) finalizzate a ri-attivare quei valori (unità della nazione, unità etnica) che la modernità (cioè, in Francia, l'alleanza fra radicali e socialisti) ha posto in crisi:

> voler trasformare tanto radicalmente la realtà, sino a creare dei nuovi riti, un nuovo culto, una nuova religione, che entrassero a tal punto nel cuore e nella vita dei cittadini tedeschi? [...] il lavoro, il sacrificio, l'amor di patria … : nel ripristinare innanzitutto quei valori eterni ed universali [...] Questa è la lezione più valida che la Germania ci può offrire. [...] Quei giovani vestiti di bruno, sotto gli alberi, componevano, con tanta naturalezza e spontaneità, un tale quadro della Germania eterna. (1986, 350-354)

Ma siamo altresì ancora nel mito *culturalista* che permette all'intellettuale (all'organizzatore "pragmatistico" di *miti*) di riporre ancora le proprie teorizzazioni alla pari dei progetti di tipo politico. La riduzione della politica a cultura è infatti l'altro centro del fascismo di Brasillach (che attribuisce l'epiteto di poeta a Mussolini e a Hitler). In tale ottica tutto ciò che incrina la compattezza (nazionale e sociale) che l'elemento culturale connesso al *mito* crea (è ovviamente il caso degli ebrei ma non solo) diventa infrazione alla cultura medesima, cioè ai progetti gerarchico-totalitari che la cultura *presta* alla politica. Quali siano poi i temi di tali progetti Brasillach lo spiega in *Lettres à une provinciale*. Sono semplicemente i temi antimodernisti della *terra*, delle corporazioni medievaleggianti, della tradizione nazionale, rivissuti però nel loro riemergere (modernista) nel piano cultuale di massa, dove i *miti* attivano un nuovo ordine politico che però è assolutamente *estetico*:

> la grande forza della Rivoluzione del 1933 [...]: la necessità dell'autorità, la preminenza dello Stato sull'individuo [...]. Ma noi vorremo aggiungere un'altra cosa: la seduzione che queste Rivoluzioni hanno operato sulle masse, e particolarmente sulla giovinezza, deriva dal fatto che hanno saputo creare una poesia. [...] Non c'era una poesia del radicalismo. [...] Le cerimonie di Norimberga, le cattedrali di luce, [...] sono la più alta creazione artistica dei nostri tempi. [...] supportate da idee universali, quelle della patria, della fedeltà, della giovinezza. [...] non esiste una grande dottrina, una suprema esaltazione di un popolo, senza queste visioni semi-religiose. (1943)

La parabola di Brasillach dimostra così come non ci sia neanche bisogno di partecipare direttamente ai modelli (pur spiritualizzati) dell'industria e della tecnica per aderire all'attitudine modernista. La componente auratica connessa a una produzione artistica che si presenta come paritaria alla direzione politica, può infatti rilanciare le componenti cultuali e spirituali (risoluzione, in termini comunitari, dei mali della società borghese-capitalistica) riconciliandosi su questa via con lo scenario industriale.

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ILARIA NATALI

1922-2022: MEMORY, THE MEDIA, AND PRESENT-DAY MODERNISM

ABSTRACT: Jennifer Egan's *The Candy House*, published in 2022, revisits the form and themes of two works that crowned the *annus mirabilis* of 1922: James Joyce's *Ulysses* and T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. What especially connects these works to each other is a shared interest in the relationship between individual and collective memory, as well as a reflection on the technological tools or means of communication that can be adopted to capture, externalize, and share past experiences.

KEYWORDS: James Joyce, T.S. Eliot, Jennifer Egan, Memory, Digital culture.

The Collective Consciousness

In April 2022, Pulitzer Prize-winning author Jennifer Egan published *The Candy House*, a paradigmatic example that, in both conceptual frameworks and textual practices, anglophone literary modernism still shows remarkable continuity even one hundred years after its *annus mirabilis*. Especially in the last two decades, literary features associated with the early twentieth century have increasingly resurfaced in what has been called, somewhat controversially, a new metamodernist sensibility, that is, "abandoning tactics such as pastiche and parataxis for strategies like myth and metaxis, melancholy for hope, and exhibitionism for engagement" (Vermeulen and van den Akker 2010). Lisa Siraganian (2016, 204) chooses the more descriptive expression "neo rear-guard modernism", where authors "use the tools they've been handed, along with the mass cultural tools available to them now, to define a way to make modernist poetic forms work anew".[1] This definition is quite apt to describe Egan's latest novel, which, as most of her previous production, adopts a fragmentary structure with varying styles, introduces creative typographic possibilities, and uses recent means of communication such as e-mails or tweets. In short, *The Candy House* is animated by an aesthetic legacy of modernist experimentation; technologies have changed, but the textual strategies adopted to capture elements of the contemporary seem to have undergone minor alterations since the introduction of cinema, the radio, and the gramophone.

Most of the ideas explored in *The Candy House* are the same that enthralled modernist writers one century ago, and concern especially means of communication, recording, and

[1] See also Vittorini 2017.

cultural representation. In particular, Egan describes the effects of an imaginary technological "memorevolution", *Own Your Unconscious*™, which allows externalizing the contents of one's mind (including repressed or lost memories) in a Consciousness Cube. Thanks to the company Mandala's machinery, users can revisit and relive their own perception of past occurrences, then share them with others by participating in a new social media environment called the *Collective Consciousness*. So, "[b]y uploading all or part of your externalized memory to an online 'collective', you gained proportionate access to the anonymous thoughts and memories of everyone in the world, living or dead, who had done the same" (Egan 2022, 56). This collective is indeed an irresistibly appealing but potentially deceitful candy house; temptation lies not only in the prospect of stepping outside oneself, although momentarily, but also in the near-Faustian opportunity to assimilate various and varied perspectives on the same event, thereby reaching an awareness of the past that is close to objectivity.

Yet, little or nothing gets recomposed when Egan's characters access the data available in the shared collective, as their understanding of key moments in their lives remains fragmentary at best – just as fragmentary and non-linear as the narrative itself. Expanding one's experience does not seem to bring about any feeling of enrichment, completeness, or maybe long-sought consolation; on the contrary, it causes heightened distress and a sense of loss. Probably, this loss can be understood in the light of Walter Benjamin's notion of reproducibility: if the individuals' uniqueness becomes technologically replicable, their authenticity and sacrality is compromised and the self is reduced to human material, a mere product. In addition, by projecting themselves into another mind, characters disrupt the boundaries of their own ego in a violent act directed towards both the self and the other, whose viewpoint is appropriated as one's own.

The seductiveness (and danger) of the idea of a collective mind is well known to modernist literature, where the concept of individual or interior experience is constantly questioned. Minds can establish fleeting contacts, like the threads of Richard's cobweb-like thoughts in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1992, 125) because their borders, to borrow W.B. Yeats' words, "are ever shifting, and [...] many minds can flow into one another, as it were, and create or reveal a single mind, a single energy" (Yeats 1924, 33). A combination of stimuli lays at the foundations of this broadened conception of consciousness which includes contemporary theories regarding the sociological and psychological behaviour of crowds, theosophical beliefs,[2] and the impact of new broadcast networks, a factor to which I will devote special attention.

Far from being elusive, Egan's allusions and references to the modernist tradition focus on two specific works. The first, published in 1922, is carried around by Bix Bouton, the developer of the ethically questionable *Collective Consciousness*, and a returning character from the author's previous novel *The Goon Squad* (2010):

> From his Walter backpack, he unearthed another disguise element: the copy of *Ulysses* he'd read in graduate school with the explicit aim of acquiring literary depth. [...] He'd kept *Ulysses* as a romantic

[2] See, for instance, Tratner 1995, and Terrinoni 2007, 56.

> artifact, although its worn look derived more from the passage of years than rereading. He opened it randomly.
> "– *Eureka*! Buck Mulligan cried. *Eureka*!" (Egan 2022, 17)

Joyce's novel, mentioned twice in *The Candy House*,[3] is misused and re-purposed: emptied of its meaning, it becomes a sort of relic which is kept only for extemporary and casual consultation. Bix opens it as if it were a bibliomantic device from which he expected revelations and suggestions; however, no illumination ensues, and the founder of Mandala is mocked by the same work that he actualized or translated into technology. Of course, Joyce's writings, which cope with the "collective consciousness drawing upon the collective unconscious" (Tindall 1969, 19), are the ideal inspiration for a digital container of inter-mental thought.

Reference to *Ulysses* also helps reveal a minute network of connections among Egan's works: Buck Mulligan's "*Eureka*" is uttered in the library shortly after Stephen argues that our experiences reflect who we are, the same words that form the epigraph of Egan's second novel, *Look at me* (2001).[4] Apparently, *The Candy House* is part of a constantly expanding macro-novel, which quotes itself and its paratext, recalls its episodes, and restages old characters in a procedure that is very familiar to Joyce's readers and scholars.

Among the recurring elements in Egan's corpus are also allusions to another work published in 1922, *The Waste Land*, which is referenced in *Manhattan Beach* (2017),[5] parodied in *The Goon Squad* (Cowart 2015, 181), and implicitly at the heart of *The Candy House*. In fact, the latter text, like Eliot's poem, shows violations of "the very notion of a private self" (Ellmann 1987, 15), stages a "tragedy of unreconciled voices" (Hart 2007, 184), and "attempts to reach outside the individual subject [...] even while acknowledging the painful and dangerous nature of such perspective shifting" (Sorum 2015, 162).

It is not surprising that *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land* could be paired as Egan's main sources of inspiration, given that Joyce's novel had significant influence on the themes and style of Eliot's then-evolving poem. For instance, Giorgio Melchiori (1954, 57) suggests that *The Waste Land* is so heavily indebted to *Ulysses* that we should not think of the two texts as actually emerging at the same time. In continuity with one another, the works propose (among other things) a reflection on the interplay between recorded past and personal experience, and they create worlds where thought, memory or perception belong to everyone and to no one simultaneously. As is well known, in *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land* the characters' mental processes are in constant dialogue with a shared basin of knowledge and imagery deriving from cultural or archetypal dimensions. At the same time, individual minds connect, collide with each another, or even short-

[3] In one of the final chapters of The Candy House (significantly titled "Eureka Gold"), Joyce's book is mentioned again when Bix tries to convince his son Gregory that Own Your Unconscious does not pose an "existential threat to fiction" – and possibly to Ulysses in particular. See Egan 2022, 313.

[4] Stephen says, "We walk through ourselves, meeting robbers, ghosts, giants, old men, young men, wives, widows, brothers-in-love, but always meeting ourselves" (Joyce 1986, 175).

[5] See "To him, the ocean was a wasteland" (Egan 2017).

circuit, creating complex rhizomatic networks that enmesh both personal and collective experience.

Especially innovative is Joyce's representation of active and constant inter-mental thought regarding the characters of *Ulysses*, a process which has often been defined in terms of telepathic interaction. Telepathy, however, seems to be hardly adequate as a description of this phenomenon, for in *Ulysses* there is no direct mental influence of one mind on another, no acquisition of new information from other individuals, and no awareness of thinking somebody else's thoughts. To be specific, although characters remain oblivious of their mental connections, at times they suspect that they could be feeding on external sources. In this respect, Bloom conflates ingestion and cognition in "Lestrygonians" with the famous "Never know whose thoughts you're chewing" (1986, 140), a statement which betrays some resistance to receive or assimilate external thought and, at the same time, sounds like a metatextual warning regarding the difficulties that readers might encounter in distinguishing the character's voices and mental processes in the novel.[6]

Most inter-mental activity in *Ulysses* concerns the minutiae of everyday life, matters as irrelevant as a fleeting memory of the pantomime *Turko the Terrible* or the news that someone was "found drowned" (1986, 9, 47, 41, 101). The fact that thought connections take place even for trivial questions emphasizes that there are no private mental spaces, and the characters can claim ownership of their thoughts at no time. Ideas and memories seem to be externalized and wander as disembodied ghosts from one mind to another, ever-present and ever-absent like the evanescent algorithms in Egan's *Collective Consciousness*. The heterodiegetic narrator of *Ulysses*, as John Rickard suggests, acts like a sort of over-mind capable of collecting shared memories and perceptions (1999); like Mandala's social network, he absorbs and records various voices, creating a repository of consciousness where consultation can proceed linearly or jump from one connection to the next. After all, scholars have repeatedly noted that the novel is structured according to the logic of a modern-day database.[7]

The metafictional reflection on shared thought and memory is even more radical in *The Waste Land*, which contains shards of consciousness presented with the rotatory perspective of a Cubist painting, and where the fragmented characters and voices lack any unifying entity. In a note to the "The Fire Sermon", Eliot writes that "Tiresias, although a mere spectator and not indeed a 'character', is yet the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest" (2001, 23); however, this claim sounds as "an *ex post facto* imposition of form" on a poem that is fundamentally polyglossic (Bolton 2011, 35). In practical terms, Eliot's supposed over-mind offers no guidance to distinguish among different speakers, or even between utterance and thought. The poem

[6] For further analysis of this statement, see Pugliatti 1986 and Ruggieri 2011.

[7] Pressman (2022, 223) remarks that the plot of "Ithaca" advances through a process of queries and responses; from this starting point, Emerson demonstrates that "comparison with databases allows us to define the logic behind the links throughout Ulysses" (2017, 43). As regards "Ithaca", one might add that the episode also resembles today's automated help desk systems and chatbots.

encompasses the anonymous views of "everyone in the world, living or dead" as in Egan's collective (2022, 56), but the border separating these views is hazy and unstable. If Eliot's method resembles an instance of data compression, as Paul Stephens suggests (2015, 11), then it lacks the metadata required to navigate it.

Consequently, readers are often puzzled as to who remembers and what exactly is remembered. For instance, in "The Burial of the Dead", Madame Sosostris quotes Ariel's song in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* 1.3 exclaiming, "(Those are pearls that were his eyes. Look!)" (2001, 6). When the same words are repeated in "A Game of Chess", the anonymous speaker seems to gain access to different repositories simultaneously, as "we don't know if [he] remembers the line from *The Tempest*, the words spoken by the 'famous clairvoyante', or even the poem itself" (Ducroux 2011, 40) – or, I might add, all these things simultaneously. Eliot seems to propose that the character's consciousness traverses the borders separating the cultural, fictional, and metatextual spheres, and that intersubjectivity can originate even between the speaker and the text of the poem.

There is more to the recursive elements in "A Game of Chess", a section replete with both lexical repetitions within the same lines and cross-references or echoes from other sections of the poem, in a multi-levelled pattern of returns with variation:

> "My nerves are bad to-night. Yes, bad. Stay with me.
> Speak to me. Why do you never speak. Speak.
> What are you thinking of? What thinking? What?
> I never know what you are thinking. Think".
>
> I think we are in rats' alley
> Where the dead men lost their bones.
>
> "What is that noise?"
> The wind under the door.
> "What is that noise now? What is the wind doing?"
> Nothing again nothing.
> "Do
> You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember
> Nothing?"
> I remember
> Those are pearls that were his eyes.
> "Are you alive, or not? Is there nothing in your head?" (2001, 9)

The imperatives "Speak" and the questions "Do / You know nothing? Do you see nothing?", "Are you alive, or not?" repeat and refashion four statements in the hyacinth garden of "The Burial of the Dead", respectively "I could not / Speak", "I knew nothing", "my eyes failed", and "I was neither / Living nor dead" (2001, 6). Especially relevant for the present purpose is that even the formal structure and unconventional representation of the communicative acts is repeated or recalled from one section to another. In the above passage, as in "The Burial of the Dead", differences in punctuation and the use of quotation marks suggest that some lines are not spoken aloud; yet, here both characters

seem to react and respond to each other's words, be they uttered or otherwise, as in a sort of telepathic connection. As such, readers may suspect that the exchange does not actually involve different poetic personas and that the (alleged) alternation of speech and thought stems from the same subjectivity.

Assuming that two figures are interacting, the impression is that the text without quotation marks belongs to an extradiegetic or disembodied speaker, whose presence recreates the effect of voice-over and voice-off in cinema, or a radio commentary. *The Waste Land* emphasizes, therefore, that representation of thought, memory, and communication are closely related to a reflection on technologies of transmission and media other than writing. In other words, Eliot explores what John Durham Peters defines as the contemporary "dream of telepathy" (1999, 16) brought about by broadcast networks, which "began to be conceived as a kind of collective consciousness, a nervous system or potential form of spiritual union for the community" (Feldman, Mead, and Tonning 2016, 2). In addition, the above quotation does not neglect interart exchange, since sounds, punctuation, and the pace of phrasing mark a rhythmic pulse or beat that appeals to the reader as a score addresses a musician. The visual component, in turn, is dealt with through a special typographic setting of this passage in the first printed edition, where words cascade down the page "to convey [...] the anxiety of the speaker" (Van Mierlo 2013, 148).

Egan rearticulates Joyce and Eliot's ideas of disembodiment chiefly at the level of plot, by imagining selves that become projected everywhere and nowhere at the same time. Mandala's *Own Your Unconscious* and *Collective Consciousness* promise full comprehension of both self and others by breaking down any communicative barrier that provokes loss of information and misunderstanding, including disrupting noise, subjective perceptions, and even forgetfulness. Yet, pure connection reveals itself to be anti-utopian, as both internal and external dialogue depends on the possibility for error. For instance, eliminating difference implies levelling the field of interpersonal relations to the extent that the subjects lose themselves, or, borrowing Egan's terms, they become "subsumed" by an anonymous "wider sphere" of understanding (2022, 157).

The digital technologies described in *The Candy House* fulfil a long-standing dream of transcending the subject's physical limitations through self-expansion – indeed, the Cube makes Roxy feel "as if her brain has been released from a cell it outgrew" (2022, 157). But ever since the eighteenth century and Kant's *Critique of Judgment* in particular (1790) it has been assumed that any attempt at self-empowerment comes at the cost of a concomitant sense of self-annihilation. Overcoming natural boundaries, as Roxy's case shows, proceeds chiefly from synecdochizing the subject, splitting it into parts, or otherwise transforming it. Since the Cube "contains the entire contents of [Roxy's] mind: all the things she can and can't remember, every thought and feeling she has had", one can only wonder whether it is appropriate to conclude that the piece of machinery "is *her*, in a way" (Egan 2022, 157).

Long-lost twins

It has often been claimed that the so-called "digital" thought – or "connective", "hypertextual" thought, etc. –originated much earlier than the computer era, and this logic influenced the emergence of new means of communication as much as the opposite. Similarly, the literary aesthetics based on the confluence of different modes of communication typical of our age of global interconnectivity cannot be considered as being dependent on technological advancement per se. General consensus is that it took form especially during modernism, that is, "the classical period of our contemporary technological age" (Pressman 2014, 4), which saw the rise of the literature of technology. Many questions posed in 2022, therefore, are not dissimilar from those that emerged in 1922 in that they still concern the ways in which the workings of the mind define and are defined by new means of communication.

At this point, it seems clear that Jennifer Egan draws on modernism as much more than a traditional repertoire of forms. She conceives this period, to borrow Tom Gunning's words, as the long-lost twin of our present age (2003, 51), which marks the first revolutionary changes in the means of cultural communication and signals a new awareness regarding the transfer of narratives between different media. Indeed, *The Candy House* renews and enriches the idea that human forms of cognition are not located within the individual, but situated at a crossroads of the self, culture, and the media. What Egan derives from modernist writers is especially an understanding of memory as media theory and a vision of the mind as a recording or archival tool, a means of representation and storage which is "haunted by loss, absence, or contingency as meaninglessness and excessive detail" (Nieland 2012, 582).

The idea of excessive detail deserves further attention. Starting with the early twentieth century, distraction has become not only a recurring literary theme,[8] but also a technique to try the limits of the written word and give the impression that literature can borrow typical features from other media. For instance, Robert Escarpit notes that, when compared to written texts, animated images and voice broadcasting stimulate various human senses simultaneously, broaden the field of perception, and increase exponentially the amount of information conveyed to the public, who navigates an ocean of transient data studded with irrelevant detail (2000, 83). It is hardly coincidental that *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land*, written during the rise of film and radio, have been said to contain "an excess of information and sensory data that […] the reader has inadequate resources to manage" (Diepeveen 2003, 55). Often defined as encyclopaedic or hyperdiegetic, they create vast narrative spaces which readers usually tackle through several re-readings, wondering, for instance, whether *Ulysses* needs to describe each step in the process of preparing tea, not only once, but twice, as if it were an outlandish ritual.[9]

[8] See also Benjamin 2010, 33 and Moretti 2003, 128-132.

[9] The first description of this "ritual" appears in the "Calypso" episode of Ulysses (1986, 51) and the second is in "Ithaca" (548). The chief function of these passages is conveying the satisfaction that Bloom derives from engaging in domestic activities.

Wolf's notion of intermedial reference is particularly useful to identify the kind of procedures at play in modernist works. Intermedial references do not actually incorporate distinct media but imitate their formal features to suggest their presence. The result, therefore, is (in Wolf's words) "medial and semiotic homogeneity" (2011), since the work only uses one medium and its sign system(s), while simultaneously it blurs the epistemological boundaries separating different channels of communication. *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land*, thus, evoke elements or structures of other media creating an illusion of shifting between different modes of articulation, in a fictitious intermedial dialogue.

In Joyce and Eliot's works, similar ideas and events are narrated, re-narrated, sometimes expanded from one section or episode to the next, while the style or mask of imitation changes. In fact, a chief feature of *Ulysses* is its "systematic refusal to assume one style as the privileged vehicle of expression" (Moretti 2005, 206). In this sense, I believe that some episodes of the novel give the illusion of remediating parts of the other sections, because events are not only re-told, but also revised and modified, as common in today's fictional universes created through media convergence (or divergence). For instance, readers experience Dignam's funeral in various forms: "Eumaeus" translates the ceremony first described in "Hades" into a dry, journalistic account full of clichés, implicit advertisement, and lists of names (1986, 529),[10] which departs from the fictional reality of *Ulysses* or distorts it – Stephen is erroneously included among the attendees, Bloom's surname is explosively misspelled as "Boom", etc. In "Cyclops", this procedure is exasperated, as the parodic interpolations somehow translate the events related by the intradiegetic narrator not only into newspaper feature-stories, but also into Irish legendry, legal documents, nursery rhymes, accounts of spiritualist séances, medical reports, the minutes of the House of Commons, descriptions of illuminated manuscripts, and so on.

Because representational techniques differ, in *Ulysses* each repetition adds and subtracts something from the previous ones; as if subject to a process of mnemonic drift, retelling creates potential incongruity, contradiction, and variation, not just because of what is told, but especially because of what is not told. Notoriously absent in the novel is any indication that, in the morning, Molly and Bloom ever discussed the specific time at which Blazes Boylan, the woman's lover, would visit her that same afternoon. And yet, in "Sirens", Bloom counts the hours and the minutes until his wife's adulterous encounter, repeating obsessively "At four, she said", "At four", "At four she", etc. (1986, 214; 217; 219). When and where he acquired this piece of information remains a mystery to the reader, who starts mistrusting the seemingly meticulous narratorial over-mind, capable of failing to record such a relevant part of the couple's earlier conversation.[11] These tears

[10] Ulysses also offers the perspective of Dignam's son on the funeral in Joyce 1986, 206-207; see also Fisher 2002, 605.

[11] This omission can also be seen as part of the Homeric parallel. In the Odyssey, what Ulysses learns from the Sirens' song remain a mystery; similarly, in the "Sirens" episode of Ulysses, Bloom receives new information in a mysterious way.

in the narrative fabric of the novel closely resemble what happens with remediated stories, which, Colin Harvey notes, are allowed to "remember, misremember, forget and even non-remember diegetic elements from elsewhere" (2015, 2).

If Joyce anticipates some aspects of today's transmedia fictional universes and their semantic inconsistencies, Eliot recasts voice and sound recording as an ontological condition of *The Waste Land*. The fleeting and disappointing sexual encounter between an unnamed woman, known as "the typist," and a clerk, her "young man carbuncular" may serve as a metareferential element in this regard: when the typist remains alone, she "smoothes her hair with automatic hand, / And puts a record on the gramophone" (2001, 13-14). The typing hand, an "automatic" tool or piece of machinery, undergoes a sudden transformation and merges with the gramophone's tone arm and needle as if to signify a smooth shift from one recording technology to another, from writing to sound playback. After all, *The Waste Land* is commonly said to rely on a musical organization since, in addition to exploiting the sonority of the spoken word, it borrows from symphonic structure. Rather than adding up to a choir, however, the individual voices featured in this musical piece clash due to sharp differences in tone, register, or accent, and often their relationship seems to be based on mere contiguity.

Marianne Thormählen emphasizes that "[t]he difficulty of deciding where one voice fades out and another is switched on can only be resolved on the basis of individual estimate; there are no stage directions suggesting identifications and re-emergences" (1978, 83). The idea that *The Waste Land* should need "stage directions" underlines that readers struggle with the discursive properties of the text; above all, they perceive clear departures from the conventions of poetry and some proximity with the dialogic part of dramatic texts, perhaps even with transcribed speech. Indeed, Eliot's poem is structured as if it were meant to be performed, or better listened to, for only aural fruition would allow recognizing the shifts from one voice to another. I would argue that *The Waste Land* evades any expectation associated with literary categorizations because it mimes channels of transmission other than writing while lacking the metadiscursive indications guiding these shifts.[12] In particular, the poem transforms itself into some sort of recording device, containing not only conversations, but also – if they were physically recordable, as in Egan's novel – impressions, thoughts, and memories.

Undoubtedly, the function of the gramophone goes well beyond contributing to the thematic structure of the poem and shapes its formal features. This is not surprising at a time when, as Lisa Gitelman notes, the first records were played imagining an author reading from his own work because "phonographs were [...] understood according to the practices of writing and reading, particularly in their relation to speaking, and not, for instance, according to the practices or commodification of musical notation, composition, and performance" (2006, 25). In addition, new acoustic technologies

[12] To be precise, The Waste Land incorporates metadiscursive information, just not especially useful information. Eliot's notes allow the poem to be both a literary work and a commentary, each retaining its own dynamic, and force the reader into an ambiguous epistemological position, as they cause the collapse of two different modes of thinking and experiencing.

allowed reactualization of tokens from the past, as well as preservation and reconstruction of (public and private) experience, altering people's relationship with time and memory.

Accordingly, Egan's twenty-first century emphasizes an increasing discomfort with the idea of a static, fixed past. New digital systems further blur increasingly porous boundaries between different time periods and support society's compulsion to repetition and retelling by sparking a temptation to relive some life experiences. The radical forms of externalized memory imagined in *The Candy House* promise not only to give shape to the past, but also to bring part of that past alive into the present, where it is subject to new interpretation.

Jeff Pruchnic and Kim Lacey (2011, 474) explain that the concept of externalization of memory is by no means recent, for this cognitive capacity has been positioned as an interface "between the 'inside' and 'outside' of human subjectivity" since ancient times, acting as a bridge which connects subjective interiority with cultural exteriority. But continuity does not necessarily imply uniformity; the emergence of communicative media such as the telephone, the gramophone, and the radio brought about unprecedented opportunities of storing and retrieving material or sharing information with immediacy. High-speed direct contacts also imply enhanced authenticity and intimacy, that is, a renegotiation of the relationship between the individual and the collective dimension. What the modernist period emphasised is that collective thought or memory does not depend on shared representations of static imagery but on a dynamic and dialogic process of exchange.

To some extent, modernism explores cognition acknowledging not only its subjective nature but also its vulnerability as it shows a new awareness that some human faculties, once poured into external media, are at risk of being appropriated and manipulated. The preoccupations that authors such as Joyce and Eliot express about their own time of technological change have sensitized the age of networked computing, storage devices, and interactive ecosystems to potential dangers underlying the evolution of mechanisms for memory externalization. In this sense, I believe that *The Candy House* pays homage to "a formative movement in the looping cultural lineage of cybernetic thought" (Love 2016, 107) and to the first authors who recognized the implications of a relationship between the faculties of the mind and communicative media.

From a purely literary perspective, the changes that have occurred between 1922 and 2022 transpire from the function that *Ulysses* serves in Egan's latest novel. An idol rather than an icon, Joyce's book denies any epiphanic experience once Bix opens it; irremediably desecrated, it is subjected to the laws of reproducibility which characterise an era affected by high-tech amnesia. *Ulysses* acts as a *mise en abyme* of Bix's *Collective Consciousness* by being physically present in the story yet removed from the representative dimension and devoid of a symbolic halo – or an aura, to use Benjamin's terms. In a similar vein, *The Candy House* does not propose itself as a representation of a fragmented, hyper-digital reality because the epistemological condition that it should

expose has invaded the text itself: the novel has become a piece of that fragmented reality, a factual testimony of it.

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WEI ZHOU

T.S. ELIOT AND THE RETURN OF THE SOLDIER

Re-gendering Nostos *in "The Waste Land"*

ABSTRACT: T. S. Eliot's 1922 poem *The Waste Land* reimagines the theme of the soldier's return in the wake of the Great War. In Part II of the poem ("A Game of Chess"), Eliot reveals the domestic crisis that the return of the demobilised soldier named Albert may cause. "A Game of Chess" is also concerned with the troubled homecoming of the unnamed, shell-shocked soldier who fought in "rats' alley" by exposing the strain of psychological trauma on his married life. Drawing upon the literary trope of *nostos* ("homecoming") that originates in Homer's *Odyssey*, this article examines how Eliot's treatment of the soldier's return revisits the archetype of return from war in modern conditions. By examining the two passages constituting "A Game of Chess," with a focus on relevant literary and cultural references, I investigate how the heroic, masculine narrative of *nostos*, homecoming in the classical epic tradition, is reframed in the domestic sphere associated with femininity.

KEYWORDS: T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, *Nostos*, Return, Gender, The Great War, Shell Shock, Abortion.

Introduction

In his landmark modernist poem, *The Waste Land* (1922), T. S. Eliot responds to the aftermath of the Great War, exploring the theme of the soldier's return not only from the perspective of soldiers themselves but also from the perspective of the women around them in two passages constituting Part II of the poem ("A Game of Chess"). In the first passage of "A Game of Chess," one of the speakers appears shell-shocked, haunted by the memory of the battlefield in "rats' alley" (Eliot 1922, line 115). Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue note, "Rat's Alley was a trench in the Somme sector, taken over from the French by the British in 1916" (2015, 632). As I shall discuss later, the shell-shocked soldier's disengaged interaction with his wife set in a drawing room implies a troubled homecoming from the war. In a more direct manner, the second passage relates the impact of the return of another soldier Albert on his wife Lil. In these passages, Eliot reframes the trope of the soldier's return in the realm of domestic life involving both genders.

Although critics have engaged with the soldier's return represented in the poem to investigate Eliot's response to the post-war condition, the theme of return itself has not yet been extensively discussed. Richard Badenhausen focuses on the war trauma on

married couples in "A Game of Chess:" "Eliot is interrogating the difficulty for veterans of returning home to an environment unprepared to deal with their problems" (2015, 155). Badenhausen positions *The Waste Land* as "a type of anti-elegy, a representation of trauma that elucidates the devastation of being blocked emotionally" (2015, 154). In contrast, my reading of "A Game of Chess" aims to explore the WWI soldier's homecoming complicated by conditions such as shell shock and abortion as a revisit to the long-standing literary trope of return from the war. Oliver Tearle (2019) conceptualises how modernist poets such as Eliot make sense of the Great War by revisiting the classical tradition, especially Homer's *Odyssey*. In a passing note, Tearle compares Homer's and Eliot's characters to demonstrate the modern degradation in the 1922 poem: Albert "falls short of the devotion and responsibility that characterize" Odysseus while Lil "becomes a latter-day Penelope" who fails to maintain the home (Tearle 2019, 88). Despite referring to Odysseus's *nostos* ("homecoming") from Troy, Tearle does not comment on its thematic relevance to Eliot's response to the soldier's return from WWI.

In this article, I argue that Eliot's treatment of the soldier's return in *The Waste Land* radically reimagines the classical trope of *nostos* in formal and thematic terms. As Edith Hall puts it, "In the *Odyssey*, the Greek word *nostos* signifies both the action of returning and the story about the person who returns by sea. Odysseus achieves his *nostos* but the poem about him will also be called a *nostos*" (2012, 163). The fragmentary style of *The Waste Land* in correspondence to the loss of totality in the global war subverts the Homeric mode of *nostos* that entails an overarching storyline of a hero coming home. Steering away from an account of an epic journey that displays heroism and masculinity, Eliot turns his gaze inwards, focusing on the soldier's return to the domestic life problematised by war trauma and gender oppression. Combining a textual analysis with contextual findings primarily in histories of culture and medicine, I examine Eliot's formulation of a gender-inclusive *nostos* that foregrounds the psychological and domestic crises of WWI soldiers and their spouses in Part II of the poem. The opening section of this article provides an overview of the trope of the soldier's return in the ancient and modern renderings that are relevant to Eliot. Then I investigate how the impact of shell shock on the soldier unsettles his sense of being at home and alienates him from his wife. In the closing section, I examine the account of Lil's reaction to Albert's return from the war to reveal their complex sexual and social relationships.

Ancient and Modern: The Return from the War in the *Odyssey* and Modernism

At the centre of *The Waste Land*, Eliot juxtaposes two homecomings with a direct allusion to *nostos* in Homer's *Odyssey* by restaging the prophet Tiresias as a central speaker:

I Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between two lives,
Old man with wrinkled female breasts, can see
At the violet hour, the evening hour that strives
Homeward, and brings the sailor home from sea.
The typist home at teatime, clears her breakfast, lights
Her stove, and lays out food in tins. (Eliot 1922, lines 218–223)

Originating in Homer's *Odyssey*, Tiresias is a seer of Odysseus's homecoming after the War of Troy. Having wandered for ten years after the war, Odysseus visits the ghost of Tiresias, who predicts his homecoming in the form of a sea journey. (Homer 2004, XI. 113–115) The allusion to the epic return of Odysseus, a sailor and soldier, is in contrast with the typist's circadian return set in London. The convergence of the epic mode and everyday life resonates with James Joyce's 1922 novel *Ulysses*, which rewrites Odysseus's ten-year wandering before his ultimate return into Leopold Bloom's one-day journey from and return to home in Dublin on 16 June 1904.

In a lecture on James Joyce in Paris on 7 December 1921, French critic and writer Valéry Larbaud summarises the Odyssean design of Joyce's *Ulysses*, which was serialised in *The Little Review* before its 1922 publication in a book form. (Larbaud 1922) Eliot used the term "nostos" when translating the "Ulysses" section of Larbaud's lecture: "The last books of the *Odyssey* relate the return of Ulysses to Ithaca … To this part of the *Odyssey*, which is called the Return (*Nostos*), correspond, in *Ulysses*, the three last episodes" (Larbaud 1967, 101). In this translation, Eliot transliterates the capitalised '*Nostos*' in Greek used by Larbaud in the original version. (Larbaud 1922, 406) He published this translation alongside *The Waste Land* in the inaugural issue of his journal *Criterion* in October 1922. According to Gabrielle McIntire, such a publication arrangement promotes high modernism by drawing a literary paradigm upon shared features of Eliot's and Joyce's 1922 texts. (2015, 22) One of the main features is the use of myth, which Eliot later conceptualises as "a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity" (Eliot 1923, 478). While Joyce radically rewrites Odysseus's journey into an everyman's urban experience, Eliot juxtaposes references to the ancient myth and observations of modern life to dramatise various homecoming situations in the post-WWI society.

The parallel between the ancient *nostos* and modern homecoming in Tiresias's vision creates a thematic framework for a discussion of the episodic narratives of the soldier's return in the poem. As Eliot notes, "Tiresias is the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest … What Tiresias *sees*, in fact, is the substance of the poem" (Eliot 1922, 74; emphasis original). A considerable proportion of what Tiresias sees is the typist's domestic activities and sexual encounter with the clerk, whose visit is anticipated by both the character and the narrator: "I too awaited the expected guest" (Eliot 1922, line 230). In a relationship with the clerk referred to as her "lover" (Eliot 1922, line 250), the typist does not object to his "Endeavours to engage her in caresses / Which still are unreproved, if undesired" (Eliot 1922, lines 237–38). However, before she fully consents, the clerk advances by force: "Flushed and decided, he assaults at once.

/ Exploring hands encounter no defence" (Eliot 1922, lines 239–40). The military language used here to describe non-consensual sex in a domestic setting, such as "assault" and "defence," recalls the recently ended war. While the typist is sexually assaulted by her lover, Lil is coerced to have sex with her husband when he returns. Engaging with Eliot's note that "all the women are one woman, and the two sexes meet in Tiresias" (Eliot 1922, 74), Rachel Blau DuPlessis comments that the overgeneralising statement connects a plethora of female characters afflicted by "the fierce problematic of sex-gender in *The Waste Land*" (2011, 299). While Tiresias's hermaphroditic identity opens a conversation on sex and gender, his vision of homecomings in the *Odyssey* and Eliot's appropriation has wider implications for rethinking the soldiers' returns represented in the poem. These soldiers' homes are not represented as havens but sites of complex mental realities and social forces.

By rendering the impact of shell shock on the soldier's domestic life and foregrounding Lil's reaction to her husband's return, Eliot's modern modulations of *nostos* offer a counternarrative to the classical tradition of the war hero's return. However, even in the *Odyssey*, the earliest Western epic known for Odysseus's heroic adventures, domestic experience is integral to his *nostos*. Sheila Murnaghan and Hunter Gardner argue:

> Odysseus' famous adventures on the high seas … are narrated in a flashback that occupies just four of the *Odyssey*'s twenty-four books. Over half of the poem is set in Odysseus' home on Ithaca and focuses on the problems caused there by Odysseus' absence and on the artful, clandestine negotiations through which the returning hero gradually picks up the threads of his previous life. (2014, 1)

Thus, Ulyssean *nostos* is more than just a story of sea voyages; it also focuses on how Odysseus deals with domestic issues to reclaim his household from his usurpers. Murnaghan considers the trope of *nostos* "an experience that transcends gender, that maps onto the daily rounds of ordinary life, and that is psychological rather than physical" (2014, 112). Re-engaging with the literary archetype, Murnaghan's reading of one of the first literary responses to WWI, Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier* (1918), examines the repercussions of war on the shell-shocked combatant Chris Baldry and his wife Kitty, his cousin (and the narrator) Jenny and his ex-girlfriend Margaret Grey. Though West does not allude to the *Odyssey* in this novella, the thematic relevance of the return of the soldier and the attendant domestic complexities allows Murnaghan to establish it as a modern rendering of *nostos*. Building on and departing from Murnaghan's rethinking of *nostos* and its modern adaptation in response to the Great War, I examine the modernist poetic appropriations of the classical trope by focusing on the vignettes of the soldier's return associated with psychological and domestic crises in *The Waste Land*.

The Shell-shocked Soldier in the Drawing Room

Compared to the tale of Albert's homecoming, a more subtle account of a returning soldier's struggle to reintegrate into domestic life consists in the first episode of "A Game of Chess." This episode depicts an elaborately decorated drawing room where two characters have a strange conversation:

> "My nerves are bad to-night. Yes, bad. Stay with me.
> "Speak to me. Why do you never speak? Speak.
> "What are you thinking of? What thinking? What?
> "I never know what you are thinking. Think."
>
> I think we are in rats' alley
> Where the dead men lost their bones. (Eliot 1922, lines 111-16)

The use of quotation marks and lack thereof differentiate two speakers' voices. The first voice belongs to the woman introduced earlier in this scene: "Under the firelight, under the brush, her hair / Spread out in fiery points / Glowed into words, then would be savagely still" (Eliot 1922, lines 108-10). As I mentioned earlier, the second speaker might be a soldier having fought in the trenches in the Somme sector. He discloses his thoughts of corpses in "rats' alley" in response to the woman. That the woman probes for the soldier's thoughts while brushing her hair at night in the drawing room suggests that they are a couple. In this domestic space, the soldier's mind is preoccupied with the thoughts of the battlefield and dead soldiers. The present tense and the first-person plural pronoun in his answer ("I think / we are in rats' alley") suggest that the soldier's memory of the war experience is so vivid and present that it appears to interfere with his sense of his immediate surroundings.

The reference to the trenches in the name of "rats' alley" indicates that shell shock may take a toll on the returning soldier. Rick and McCue specifically assign the name to a trench on the Somme through personal communication with the historian of military cartography, Peter Chasseaud. (2015, 632) Referring to Chasseaud's 2006 study *Rats Alley: Trench Names of the Western Front, 1914–1918*, Badenhausen comments that "the reference to 'rats' alley' [...] was a common wartime name for a trench, where corpses sat at the mercy of rats picking away at limbs" (2015, 157). Through different references to the same historian, both comments allude to the typical condition of the trench war represented in Eliot's poem. The Battle of Somme is a useful reference point to shed light on the shell-shocked soldier's experience in the poem. According to the medical historian Ben Shephard, "On the Somme, shell-shock and 'nervous disorders of war', hitherto a marginal medical problem, became a major drain on manpower" (2002, 41). The impact of the Battle of Somme on soldiers' mental faculties was related to the tremendous loss the British Army experienced: "So heavily did the dead and wounded lie in no-man's land that it took days, in some cases weeks, for stretcher-bearers to reach and recover them" (Shephard 2002, 39). In Eliot's poem, the unnamed soldier's intrusive thought of the decomposing corpses in "rats' alley" exhibits one of the shell-shock symptoms covered

by *The Times* on 25 May 1915: "past experiences on the battlefield are recalled vividly" (quoted in Shephard 2002, 28). The soldier's nervous disorder echoes the woman's complaint about her bad nerves at the beginning of the conversation. The specialist's and public's growing concerns about nervous breakdowns in the early 20th century paved the way to conceptualise and understand shell shock during and after WWI. Shell-shocked soldiers often disconnect from other people, including their spouses. Notable examples of married couples affected by the husband's shell-shocked condition in modernist literature include Chris Baldry and Kitty in West's *The Return of the Soldier* (1918), Septimus Warren Smith and Lucrezia in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), and Christopher Tietjens and Sylvia in Ford Madox Ford's tetralogy *Parade's End* (1924-1928).

Compared to these contemporary writings, Eliot's poem addresses the shell-shocked soldier's return and inability to reintegrate in a more nuanced way. In the drawing room, both the unnamed soldier and his wife have neurological symptoms and struggle to connect, as the following conversation illustrates:

"What is that noise?"
The wind under the door.
"What is that noise now? What is the wind doing?"
Nothing again nothing.
"Do
"You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember
"Nothing?"
I remember
Those are pearls that were his eyes.
"Are you alive or not? Is there nothing in your head?" (Eliot 1922, lines 117–126)

Except for the quick exchange on the wind at the door, the woman does not follow up on the staccato replies the soldier gives. The sense of disconnection peaks in the final question quoted above, making the woman appear inconsiderate and even cruel. However, the lack of connection between each question and answer, the soldier's usual silence ("Why do you never speak"), and his reply placed outside the quotation marks indicate that he makes all these responses in his head rather than utter them.

However fragmentary and disconnected they may seem, the shell-shocked soldier's responses reveal intertwined themes of assumed death and survival in the form of an assemblage of literary allusions from various sources, which are extracted and recontextualised here to indicate his wartime experience. Eliot notes that "The wind under the door" refers to John Webster's *The Devil's Law-Case* (1623): "Is the wind in that door still?" (III. 2. 146; Eliot 1922, 73). In the original play, a surgeon asks this question when he mistakes for the sound of the wind the groaning of the fatally wounded character, Contarino, when he regains consciousness. The reference to a sign of surviving a severe wound may suggest the shell-shocked soldier's survival of his time in the trenches. The soldier's thoughts then drift to line 125, which contains an allusion to the shipwreck in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1611): "Those are pearls that were his eyes" (I.

2. 399). In the original play, the line is part of Ariel's song that imagines the subaquatic transformation of King Alonso. By singing this song, Ariel leads Prince Ferdinand to believe his father drowned. The ambiguity of the life-death boundary in these literary references resonates with the woman's question of whether the soldier is alive or dead and reminds the reader of the multitude of the dead and wounded lying in trenches.

Alongside referring to the dramatic survival from apparent death in early modern plays, Eliot draws upon the classical allusion to the shipwreck to formulate the shell-shocked soldier's perception of his home. The firewood in the hearth of the drawing room is depicted as ships in flames: "Huge sea-wood fed with copper / Burned green and orange, framed by the coloured stone, / In which sad light a carvèd dolphin swam." (Eliot 1922, lines 94–96) The Swedish translator of *The Waste Land*, Eric Mesterton, interprets the burning sea-wood as "oak wood from a wrecked or waterlogged copper-bottomed ship; it burned green because of being saturated with copper hydroxide" (quoted in Eliot 1932, 38, note 1), which Eliot confirmed in correspondence (Eliot 1932, 39). The image of the firewood taken from a wrecked ship correlates to the allusion to Virgil's *Aeneid* I, which introduces Aeneas, who survives from shipwreck and lands in Dido's Carthage:

> In vials of ivory and coloured glass
> Unstoppered, lurked her strange synthetic perfumes,
> Unguent, powdered, or liquid – troubled, confused
> And drowned the sense in odours; stirred by the air
> That freshened from the window, these ascended
> In fattening the prolonged candle-flames,
> Flung their smoke into the laquearia,
> Stirring the pattern on the coffered ceiling. (Eliot 1922, lines 86–93)

The word "laquearia," meaning "panelled ceilings" in Latin, refers to the festal hall of Dido, Queen of Carthage, in *Aeneid* I: "lighted lamps hang down from the fretted roof of gold, and flaming torches drive out the night" (Virgil 1999, I. 726–27). She is hosting Aeneas in this hall, who bears "gifts that survive the sea and the flames of Troy" (Virgil 1999, I. 679). Elizabeth Vandiver suggests that in Britain, the Great War was perceived by the classically educated generation as the second Troy not only because of the involvement of the Dardanelles but also the soldiers' valour and civilians' dignity in Flanders. (2010, 241) The marine image and classical allusion that feature the soldier's perception of his surroundings indicate that the trench war is reimagined as the Trojan War in this scene.

Through the reference to "laquearia" in the *Aeneid*, Eliot associates the allusion to Aeneas's vulnerable position after the Trojan War with the shell-shocked soldier's troubled condition in the poem. Although Eliot was deeply influenced by classical epics, his poetry rejects an easy appropriation of the hero rhetoric in such tradition and engages with it to reflect on modernity. In the poem "Gerontion," Eliot considers that heroism nurtures the condition for the Great War: "Unnatural vices / Are fathered by our heroism" (Eliot 1920, lines 44-45). Composed in 1919 (Ricks and McCue 2015, 467), "Gerontion" records Eliot's immediate reflection on the Great War and anticipates *The*

Waste Land. Stuck in a rented home, the narrator in "Gerontion" experiences the loss of senses: "I have lost my sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch: / How should I use it for your closer contact?" (Eliot 1920, lines 59-60). Even though the narrator does not participate in the war: "I was neither at the hot gates / Nor fought in the warm rain" (Eliot 1920, lines 3-4), his loss of senses resembles the symptoms of shell shock reported by *The Times* in 1915: "The soldier … becomes a prey to his primitive instincts. He may be so affected that changes occur in his sense perceptions; he may become blind or deaf or lose the sense of smell or taste" (quoted in Shephard 2002, 28). The non-combatant narrator in "Gerontion" experiencing shell-shock symptoms implies the impact of the war across the board. The shell-shocked soldier in *The Waste Land* does not lose his senses but seems to experience changes in sense perceptions. He perceives the décor and objects in the drawing room as foreign and threatening. Historian Jane Hamlett suggests that the drawing room was essentially a feminine space in the middle-class home, which "contained distinctive gendered material cultures" in England in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (2010, 122). The materialised gendered division at home exacerbates the sense of estrangement between the couple, which is underscored by the reference to the relationship between Aeneas and Dido and the consequent hostility between Rome and Carthage in the *Aeneid*.

The sensory perceptions of the modern home and the intrusive memory of the technological war are melded in the soldier's traumatised consciousness. In particular, the synthetic perfumes in the room that make the soldier feel disorientated and suffocated (Eliot 1922, lines 88-89) may evoke his memory of the war. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, developments in chemistry contributed to both the booming industry of synthetic perfumes and to chemical war. One representative synthetic perfume launched after WWI, for example, was Chanel's "No. 5," which, according to fashion historians Valerie Mendes and Amy de la Haye, was blended by the perfumer Ernest Beaux in 1921. (1999, 57) They comment that Beaux "was famous for his innovative use of synthetic aldehydes to enhance the smell of costly natural ingredients such as jasmine" (Mendes and de la Haye 1999, 57). Although Eliot does not specify the brand of the synthetic perfumes, the scent of chemicals that bewilders the shell-shocked soldier may incite his memory of dealing with the unprecedented use of explosives and poison gas in WWI. Matthew Beaumont briefly mentions that by creating the phantasmagorical atmosphere of "Unreal City," Eliot "provides a superimposition of two linked terrains: the prospect of urban modernity and the landscapes of technological war" (2016, 230). The soldier's reaction to synthetic perfumes indicates that such superimposition permeates the domestic space.

The shell-shocked soldier's return from WWI, which is compared to Troy, is not rendered a heroic action as glorified in the classical epics but a sequence of fragmentary memories. Post-war psychological trauma severely affects his ability to reintegrate into daily life, as the frustrating conversation with his wife shows. Suffering from neurological symptoms herself, the wife appears clingy and demanding, as demonstrated by how she starts a conversation (Eliot 1922, lines 111-12). She also craves attention and connection

in a melodramatic way: "I shall rush out as I am, and walk the street / With my hair down, so. What shall we do tomorrow?" (Eliot 1922, lines 132–33). However, her question, "Why do you never speak" (Eliot 1922, line 112) might explain, if not justify, why she acts this way, as the shell-shocked soldier is emotionally absent and mentally troubled. The shell-shocked soldier survives the war, returns home, and reunites with his wife, but their inability to build connections makes their home unhomely.

Albert's Homecoming, Lil's Suffering

While the tension between the couple in the drawing room relates to war trauma, it arises from the gendered power relation between another couple, Albert and Lil, in the following episode. In this episode, set in a London pub at closing time, the speaker recounts her conversation with Lil.[1] The speaker's monologue is punctuated by the publican's repeated announcement that the pub is closing in compliance with the wartime regulations of opening hours. Eliot's use of "HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME" (Eliot 1922, lines 141, 152, 165, 168–69), according to Randall Stevenson, was "topical and newly familiar" to his reader when *The Waste Land* was first published (2013, 71). Structured by the war-related reference, the monologue begins with the husband coming home from the front: "When Lil's husband got demobbed, I said— / I didn't mince my words, I said to her myself" (Eliot 1922, lines 139–40). While the first round of the publican's calls interrupts the speaker and urges her to exit the pub (Eliot 1922, line 141), it simultaneously prompts her to tell the story that reveals Lil's unwillingness to manage Albert's expectations on his return. After the war, as historian Joanna Bourke observes, "Married men returned to familiar beds; unmarried men sought companions. For these men, home was the ultimate retreat from the disciplines of military society" (1996, 168). As Eliot's poem reveals, home may mean a retreat for Albert returning from the battlefield, but when he returns, his self-entitled and socially encouraged right to sex and procreation potentially makes their home unsafe for Lil.

The speaker brings up a complex range of Lil's anxieties on the event of Albert's return: economic, sexual and reproductive. She criticises Lil's negligence of financial and familial obligations as a wife. These obligations revolve around the budget for Lil to get a set of false teeth to make her more attractive:

> Now Albert's coming back, make yourself a bit smart.
> He'll want to know what you done with that money he gave you
> To get yourself some teeth. He did, I was there.

[1] The setting of the episode is inspired by the pub opposite 18 Crawford Mansions, Eliot's residence between 1916 and 1920. In her memoir, Mary Trevelyan recalls that in the Crawford flat Eliot "used to watch the people coming out at Closing Time – that's the origin of 'Hurry up Ladies – it's time'" (Trevelyan and Wagner 2022, 37). Eliot told his second wife, Valerie, that "this passage was 'pure Ellen Kellond', a maid employed by [Eliot and his first wife Vivien], who recounted it to them." (Eliot 2011, 127)

You have them all out, Lil, and get a nice set,
He said, I swear, I can't bear to look at you.
And no more can't I, I said, and think of poor Albert,
He's been in the army four years, he wants a good time,
And if you don't give it him, there's others will, I said. (Eliot 1922, lines 142–149)

The speaker's interrogation into the false teeth seems legitimate, as the money Albert gave to Lil before he went to war has apparently not been used for this purpose. When he comes home after the war, he will be concerned with the financial arrangement and disappointed by his wife's refusal to enhance her appearance at his request. Jean-Michel Rabaté suggests Lil's lack of concern for her physical appearance demonstrates the difficulty of returning to pre-war life, as if "the demobilization has triggered a general demoralization, which would be marked by a loss of sensual appetite and a vanishing desire" (Rabaté 2016, 121). Lil's reluctance to resume the sexual relationship with her husband may be a sign of post-war demoralisation, but it also results from the couple's pre-existing domestic issues.

Lil is not willing to stimulate Albert's sexual desire, as this might impregnate her again after she has had five children by the age of thirty-one and nearly died in childbirth:

You ought to be ashamed, I said, to look so antique.
(And her only thirty-one.)
I can't help it, she said, pulling a long face,
It's them pills I took, to bring it off, she said.
(She's had five already, and nearly died of young George.)
The chemist said it would be alright, but I've never been the same. (Eliot 1922, lines 156–61)

While Lil may suffer from unexpected side effects of the abortifacient she took, it is also likely that she was advised to take pills with unsafe elements. Christina Hauck suggests that the "pills" Lil could purchase from the chemist at that time might contain "ergot, [a] compound of lead, [or] oil of savin" (2003, 243). Ricks and McCue's editorial note briefly mentions the dangerous abortion measures in the context of *The Waste Land*: "Before the age of the Pill, dangerous remedies were available under the counter. *Partridge* gives 'bring it away' as 20th-century slang for 'effect an abortion'" (2015, 639). After outlining the birth control situation before the invention of the Pill, if the capitalised word indeed refers to the oral contraceptive pill introduced in May 1950, Ricks and McCue could have provided more specific information about "the pills" in the poem. Megan Quigley critiques the note as "practically nothing," which falls short of guiding the reader of the # MeToo Generation to understand gender issues in *The Waste Land* (2019). In response to Quigley, Ricks asserts that the editor's key priority is to provide a "full and precise record" rather than "critical appreciation or exegesis" (2019, 469). While the editorial note may be brief and indirect, it does draw the contemporary reader's attention to the law and practice of abortion in the context of the poem.[2]

[2] While abortion was still a crime in Britain during and after the Great War, it was difficult to establish the incidence of abortion because the term is underdefined and underused outside the medical profession

An examination of Lil's abortion in its context is critical to consider what home means to her and Albert on his return from war at personal and collective levels. Historian Barbara Brookes writes: "The popularity of the coalition government's slogan 'Homes fit for heroes' went beyond the appeal of a neat council house to the wider emotional resonance of a wife and family. Shaken by the upheaval of war, contemporaries clung to traditional gender roles to provide a sense of stability in a changing world" (1988, 10). The collective desire to return to the pre-war normality, with the appeal of a stable home and a large family, was generally unfulfilled in the interwar years. Abortion was condemned for causing a reproductive crisis that "would lead to a breakdown of the family, the community, and the nation" (Hauck 2003, 229–230). Such discourse is charged with class consciousness: "Debate about working-class abortion focused on the perceived ignorance of the aborting woman, who was often imagined to be uninformed about the dangers of abortion and who was often depicted as hapless in the face of her husband's sexual demands and her own fecundity" (Hauck 2003, 229–230). The viewpoint echoes the speaker's response: "You *are* a proper fool" (Eliot 1922, line 162; emphasis original), when she learns that Lil is misinformed by the chemist.

Knowing that the abortifacient has done visible damage to Lil, the speaker still upbraids her for not wanting to meet her sexual and reproductive obligations: "Well, if Albert won't leave you alone, there it is, I said, / What you get married for if you don't want children?" (Eliot 1922, lines 163–64). Brookes comments, "Maternity was regarded as a responsibility of married life, even if a woman had been sexually coerced or experienced contraceptive failure" (1988, 8). As Eliot's poem reveals, Lil has already had five children and nearly died in childbirth, and her abortion beyond this point should have been empathised.[3] The speaker's criticism of Lil perhaps reflects a social concern about the declining reproduction rate during and after WWI. An anti-abortion narrative at that time claimed: "The British Empire would be trampled by its enemies, whose reproductive rates were significantly higher than Britain's" (Hauck 2003, 230). Although the poem does not indicate whether the speaker proactively responds to such discourse, the war rhetoric used by the anti-abortionist resonates with the formal effect of the speaker's reproach (Eliot 1922, lines 153-164) structured by the references to the early closing legislation: "HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME" (Eliot 1922, lines 152, 165). Stevenson notes, "Legislation introduced under the Defence of the Realm Act had by 1915 curtailed pub opening hours in areas of the country deemed to be closely involved in the war effort. In 1921, these registrations were extended nationwide" (2013, 71). Counterpointed with the early closing legislation, the speaker's insistence on Lil's

(Brookes 1988, 8). Apart from the abortion-related slang "bring it away" suggested by Ricks and McCue, women use phrases such as "bring me round," "put me on my way" or "put me right" to refer to the termination of their pregnancies by using pills and douches and dissociated these methods from "abortion", a term "usually reserved for a surgical procedure" in the early 20th century (Brookes 1988, 8).

[3] Despite the illegal status of abortion in the early 20th century, medical records show that "many women routinely aborted every pregnancy after the fourth child" (Brookes 1988, 8).

reproductive obligation resonates with another kind of "war effort" by increasing the birth rate for the sake of the nation's future.

While the publican's calls interrupt the speaker, they punctuate the speaker's projection on Lil's sexual and reproductive obligations in such a way that it creates a contrapuntal effect whereby the speaker's personal view advances the wartime domestic ideology and may even seem patriotic. The publican's call (Eliot 1922, line 165) interrupts the speaker after she asks Lil the question quoted above ("What you get married for if you don't want children?"). The formal effect caused by the publican's interruption helps the speaker establish her view that reproduction is a non-negotiable part of a marriage in the form of a rhetorical question. When resuming her monologue, the speaker does not report Lil's response, if there is any, but goes on to describe the couple's family reunion: "Well, that Sunday Albert was home, they had a hot gammon, / And they asked me into dinner, to get the beauty of it hot—" (Eliot 1922, lines 166–167). As the speaker must exit following the final calls (Eliot 1922, lines 168–169), her narrative ends with the moment of the apparent domestic ideal, leaving the couple's unresolved issues untold.

From the speaker's account of the conversation, we can see that Lil is not rejoicing over her husband's homecoming. While her husband has been away for four years (Eliot 1922, line 148), she has been in charge of their household, taking care of five children, which is challenging for a thirty-one-year-old woman whose health has been compromised by difficult childbirth and abortion. However, her husband's absence perhaps means four years of freedom for her from sexual oppression in the marital institution. When Albert returns, she will be expected to meet his sexual needs, and her feeble attempt to resist procreation by not having a nice set of false teeth is about to be defeated. Albert's return may even be life-threatening to Lil, as it might put her through childbirth again with a high risk of maternal mortality or the dangerous practice of abortion. It is also worth noting that the illegal status of abortion contributed significantly to its inherent danger. When the speaker warns that Albert will have affairs with other women, possibly even herself, if he is sexually unsatisfied at home, Lil responds, "Then I'll know who to thank, she said, and give me a straight look" (Eliot 1922, line 151). Her response may imply that she is not concerned about Albert's infidelity as imagined by the speaker but sees it as a form of liberation and perhaps survival from the anticipated jeopardy of a future pregnancy.

Conclusion

In this article, I have investigated Eliot's representations of the trope of the return of the soldier in *The Waste Land*, specifically Part II of the poem under the heading of "A Game of Chess." In "A Game of Chess," Eliot displaces the heroic implications of two soldiers' returns by exploring to what extent their returns reshape their domestic experiences and affect their spouses. In the first instance, homecoming is represented as

the shell-shocked soldier's psychological experience, which interferes with his reintegration into family life. In the second instance, Albert's homecoming could be said to be a threat to his wife Lil, who has suffered from abortion and difficult childbirth. Eliot's approach to the trope of the soldier's return shows an inward turn of the representation of *nostos* from the heroic narrative in the classical tradition, into a modernist exploration of the impact of such return on domestic life, by highlighting traumatised consciousness and female experience to make *nostos* a gender-inclusive experience.

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ROMANTIC IRONY AS A SOURCE OF VALUE JUDGMENT IN MODERNISM AND NEW CRITICISM

ABSTRACT: This article discusses how the reception of Romantic irony in modernism and New Criticism bears significant implications for the emergence of irony as a key evaluative term in contemporary literary criticism. In particular, this article shows how irony usually alludes to a feature of the artist's intelligence, as expressed by Ezra Pound, André Breton, Walter Benjamin, and Thomas Mann for instance. It also addresses how the concept of irony, as identified in North American New Criticism by Cleanth Brooks, among others, takes on an ambiguous and self-serving meaning, ultimately at the service of the critics' value claims.

KEYWORDS: Romantic Irony, Modernism, New Criticism, Cleanth Brooks, Value Judgment.

This article focuses on how modernism and New Criticism inherit and transform the concept of romantic irony. As proved by Dane (2011), among others, Romanticism is a key moment in the history of the de-rhetoricisation of the word "irony". Since Friedrich Schlegel at least irony is not only (and less frequently is in following literary criticism) the figure, or trope, by which "*contrarium ei quod dicitur intelligendum est*", according to the canonical definition by Quintilian (2001, 58-59). In the first half of the 20th century, irony is a stable presence in the vocabulary of the literary critic. According to Ernst Behler (1993, 141), "irony is virtually identical with that self-reflexive style of poetry that became accentuated during early German Romanticism and constitutes a decisive work of literary modernism". The New Critics, and especially Cleanth Brooks, take full advantage of this coincidence, and elevate irony to a principle of literary value. However, the term remains ambiguous, arbitrary, and is often used in a self-serving manner by New Critics, who use it as a pseudo-scientific reason behind the construction of a canon within which modernism enjoys a central position.

Irony is certainly not the only critical term that suffers from a lack of clarity, or that can be used if one accepts its degrees of ambiguity. Due to its very nature, perhaps, irony has nonetheless attracted a unique rhetoric indefinability. Eleanor Hutchens (1960, 62), while acknowledging how New Critics' mentions of irony are endangering irony by emptying it of its "usefulness through indiscriminate applications", also admits that "its capacity for extension is one of the secrets of its vitality". Similarly, Lilian Furst (1984,

11) concedes that "from whichever angle irony is approached, it is always its elusiveness that emerges as its primary characteristic. However disconcerting, this has to be accepted as pivotal to the nature of irony. If we are unable to pin down its meaning, it is because irony sets out to evade specificity". Furst (1984, 15) also argues that "irony can be regarded as a secret language, a channel of communication between the initiates": the initiates being, in the praxis of hermeneutics, the author and the critic.

It seems necessary to understand whether "to question the New Critics' ironic stance is to threaten the authority of their purportedly disinterested language and to subvert the basis of their claims to objectivity" (Buttigieg 1983, 31). This article aims to undertake this challenge, for the function of irony as a covert evaluative term continues to be relevant for contemporary cultural and literary discourses. More broadly, this article aims to renew a debate about the unexpressed political biases and value judgments implied in the use of supposedly neutral key terms, such as "irony", in today's theory and criticism.

Romantic irony and its discontents

The concept of romantic irony bears paramount implications for following literary practice and criticism. However, Schlegel's references to irony only appear in fragmentary form on the journal *Athenaeum* and in his late notebooks. Schlegel provided several different definitions, or, better, suggestive elaborations on the concept of irony. One of the most famous is the following: "irony is a permanent parabasis" (Schlegel 1963, 85).[1] The parabasis is a part of the ancient Greek drama, when the chorus addresses the audience directly to vehiculate the perspective of the author on what is being performed by the actors on stage. It is a digression, as well as a rupture of theatrical mimesis. It is legitimate to assume that for Schlegel romantic irony takes place "when texts become self-reflective about their construction as texts and authors show genuine scepticism about their own aesthetic control of their products" (Handwerk 2000, 206).

At the same time, romantic irony stems from an epistemological intuition about the paradox of human reason, which is both limited by natural boundaries and infinite in its scope and curiosity. Perhaps, the best representation of this condition was stated by Immanuel Kant (1965, 7) at the beginning of his *Critique of Pure Reason*: "Human reason has this peculiar fate that in one species of its knowledge it is burdened by questions which, as prescribed by the very nature of reason itself, it is not able to ignore, but which, as transcending all its powers, it is also not able to answer". Schlegel's irony represents an aesthetical answer to the epistemological conundrum posed by Kant's transcendental turn. According to the Romantic philosopher, irony should be a poetic translation of the Kantian self-consciousness of one's own epistemological limits.

Perhaps, the most telling summary of this attempt at translating Kant's words into an aesthetic as well as epistemological concept is provided by Schlegel himself, in his

[1] Translated in Roy 2009, 107.

renowned review of Goethe's *Meister*: "Why should it not be possible to perceive the smell of a flower, and then contemplate the never-ending veins of every leaf, and to lost oneself entirely in this contemplation?" (Cusatelli 2000, 251; my translation). For Schlegel, romantic irony is having the chance to enjoy an object aesthetically, while at the same time being able to glimpse into its mechanical working; the wisdom of the artisan joined with the pleasure of the critic, the fragment as a symbol of the whole, and vice versa.

Despite or in virtue of Schlegel's suggestive elaborations, the unique success of romantic irony within the field of literary criticism is fundamentally due to its critiques; Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1975) and Søren Kierkegaard (2013) primarily.[2] Moreover, "the phrase 'Romantic irony' was virtually never used during the Romantic period to characterize specifically Romantic texts, and debates persist even today about what texts best exhibit it" (Handwerk 2000, 206-207). Romantic irony, then, not very differently from Socratic irony, is a concept almost entirely shaped at its reception (initially critical, in this case), rather than at its origin.

What is romantic irony for a literary critic, anyway? Gary Handwerk (2000, 207) defines it convincingly:

> As a technical device, Romantic irony has most typically been identified as the disruption within a text or performance of its aura of aesthetic illusion. This disruption can take the form of direct intrusion by the author or narrator in commenting upon the process by which the text has been produced (while authorial asides that simply comment in a direct way upon the characters or events, as in so many nineteenth-century novels, for instance, are not necessarily ironic). It can also manifest itself in the self-reflexivity that occurs when characters see or read the text in which they themselves appear. Or it can simply show up in abruptly disjunctive transitions from one mode of reality and one narrative thread to another. In all these cases, the disruption signals the fictional status of literary artifacts and the provisional nature of aesthetic experience. Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, Diderot's *Jacques le fataliste*, the plays of Aristophanes and Tieck, Byron's *Don Juan* and Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* provide signal instances of the first trait. Part two of Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, Brentano's *Godwi*, Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*, and Novalis's *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* contain striking examples of the second. The tales of E. T. A. Hoffmann (*Kater Murr* and others), the plays of Shakespeare (with their plays within plays), and even the echoing between framing tale and main narrative set up in Romantic novels such as Shelley's *Frankenstein* neatly illustrate the third.

Romantic irony allows the poet to be, metaphorically, both within and outside of their oeuvre; within and outside of a literary tradition; within and outside of art itself. In Friedrich Schiller's terms, one could say that romantic irony allows the sentimental poet to restate their sentimentality in their endless, ultimately failing attempt at producing naïve poetry. However, although apparently purely aesthetical and epistemological in its nature, romantic irony carries an unequivocally metaphysical aftertaste. The ironic moment of disruption, which allows the creator to look at their own oeuvre from an outside perspective, becomes a double-edged symbol of human limitation, as well as of

[2] Cfr. also Dane 2011, pp. 73-82. For a comprehensive review of Hegel's critique of Schlegel's irony and the development of the question in the 20th century, cf. Behler 1990, pp. 37-110.

human capacity to transcend that limitation. The fundamentally subjective nature of romantic irony is what Hegel could not tolerate in Schlegel's irony when he defines it as "absolute infinite negativity" (Hegel 1975, 68). As for the aesthetical nature of Schlegel's irony, Hegel is not kind about it either: it is "neither fish nor fowl, neither poetry nor philosophy" (Hegel 2018, 43). Kierkegaard, on the other hand, identified romantic irony as a fundamental trait of a disenchanted modernity; at the same time, he "sided with Hegel in arguing for the need to overcome the ironic stance" (Roy 2009, 108). It is because irony had a "kinship with Romanticism", as well as "with Socrates, in whom dialectical thinking was born" (Behler 2021, 13), that Friedrich Nietzsche will later associate irony with the senescence of Western societies.[3]

The legacy of romantic irony, as Handwerk (2000, 222-225) points out, is vast. Particularly relevant are the implications of romantic irony for the reader, as well as the reader's active participation in the formation of the meaning of the oeuvre. In this sense, romantic irony contains an "openness with respect to meaning [...], captured in Novalis's idea of the reader as an 'extended author'. One reason why a speaker or author cannot hope to control the significance of what they express is that the full meaning of their words lies not in them alone, but in the expansive force that the words have as they move through other people" (Handwerk 2000, 223). Moreover, by disrupting a linear aesthetic illusion and by observing their work as if they were readers, the Romantic ironist gives birth to the figure of the author as a critic (self-critic, firstly), as well as of the critic as author. Through the multi-layered development of romantic irony, irony is not only entirely cut from its rhetorical or Socratic roots; it also turns into an aesthetical issue where the lines between authors and critics are blurred. First a rhetorical strategy for the rhetorician and a philosophical attitude incarnated by Socrates, then a fashionable pendant for the cultivated gentleman in the Renaissance and the Baroque,[4] after Romanticism, irony is finally on the path to entering the vocabulary of the hermeneut.

Romantic irony as an evaluative term in modernism and New Criticism

The practice of irony as a means of disrupting the aesthetical illusion influences modernism greatly, as several critics clearly identified.[5] Modernists authors are generally keener on highlighting the epistemological implications of romantic irony, rather than its metaphysical and aesthetical ones. Exemplary in this sense is Ezra Pound's remarks on the anti-metaphysical and subversive power of irony. He writes in his 1917 manifesto about the "Things to be done": "Codes, etiquettes and moralities have wavered and varied. Irony is still set down as a 'sin' in manuals of devotion. The last heretic was burnt at the stake in 1758. We are not yet out of the forest" (Pound 1917a, 314). In the same year, he also writes a well-known article about the relevance of Jules Laforgue as a model

[3] Cfr. at least Nietzsche 1997a; 1997b.
[4] Cfr. at least Knox 1961; Accetto 1997.
[5] Cfr. at least Handwerk 1985; Wilde 1987; Martens 2007; Stratton 2014.

for covert satire. There, Pound (1917b) produces a suggestive definition of irony as "the citadel of intelligence", and of the ironist as the "one who suggest that the reader should think, and this process being unnatural to the majority of mankind, the way of the ironical is beset with snares and furze-bushes" (Pound 1917b, 95). Incidentally, it is also noticeable how Pound's formulations around irony are burdened by violent classist biases, which are certainly not unique within the critical discourse of the time.

The idea of irony as intelligence informs other coeval expressions of modernism, often in some of its most canonical texts. In 1916, Tristan Tzara writes in one of the first manifestos of Dadaism "DADA is neither madness, nor wisdom, nor irony, take a look, dear bourgeois" (Danchev 2011). In a programmatic text, irony is refuted as a bourgeois category, a sign of that intelligence of creation that Dada wanted to tackle and destroy. When André Breton presents Marcel Duchamp in his *Anthology of Black Humor*, he (2009, 254) writes:

> In this resides what Duchamp has called 'the irony of affirmation,' in contrast to 'negative irony, which depends solely on laughter.' The irony of affirmation is to humour what fine-milled flour is to wheat. The miller in question – he who, at the end of the historical process tracing the development of dandyism, has agreed to act as 'voluntary technician' (to use Gabrielle Buffet's term) – our friend Marcel Duchamp, is certainly the most intelligent and, for many, the most troublesome man of this first half of the twentieth century.

Again, irony and intelligence are tied together, the former being the transparent translation of the other on the aesthetic level.

Irony is a key word in the early 20th-century Germany too, especially amongst the intellectuals fascinated by the ideal of the *Konservative Revolution*. In 1921, Hugo von Hofmannsthal's essay "The Irony of Things" proposes a re-reading of his own, and his own generation's artistic development under the light of irony.[6] Hofmannsthal's intervention starts with a quote by Novalis: "*After an unlucky war, one must write comedies*" [my translation]. Hofmannsthal admits that he has found this sentence odd for a long time, but that the outcome of the First World War has clarified the subtle meaning of Novalis' prescription to him: the primary element of a comedy is irony, and nothing like a lost war suggests to an artist that a tragic irony governs all things. Hofmannsthal's version of irony is significantly different from the one mentioned by Pound or Tzara, as well as from Thomas Mann's, which will be discussed later. For Hofmannsthal, irony coincides with humour and features as an essential element of the comic. Rather than from Schlegel, Hofmannsthal's irony derives from Schopenhauer's theory of the laughable, and this conceptualisation of irony (which is not far from Luigi Pirandello's *umorismo*) will be an essential element for the contemporary comic tradition in the German language.[7] On the contrary, for Schlegel irony is no philosophical laughing

[6] The complete German text is available here: http://www.zeno.org/Literatur/M/Hofmannsthal,+Hugo+von/Essays,+Reden,+Vortr%C3%A4ge/Drei+kleine+Betrachtungen/Die+Ironie+der+Dinge [accessed 10-12-2022]. Cfr. also Raponi 2006.
[7] Cfr. Weitzman 2015.

matter: "*Mit der Ironie ist durchaus nicht zu scherzen*" ["there is absolutely nothing to joke about irony"],[8] he once wrote in the *Athenaeum*.

Particularly significant is then the case of Thomas Mann. The last essay in his *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man*, heavily influenced by Nietzsche and published in 1918, draws a dichotomy between irony and radicalism, or the ironist and the activist. This collection of Mann's writings is a point of reference for the whole *Konservative Revolution*, an influential ideal amongst several German intellectuals between the two world wars. Mann intends irony as the tendency to identify life, rather than intellect, as the "final, decisive, absolute" (Mann 2021, 454) argument. Radicalism, on the other hand, considers truth to be of the primary importance: "But is truth an argument — when life is at stake?" (ib.), asks Mann rhetorically. Irony, art, and conservativism go hand in hand: for irony is the only "*decent* relationship of the artist [...] to artistic nature" (ib., 458). Mann's essay is eminently political, and the object of his own critique is the democratic Republic of Weimar, even before than its 'activist' artists. Mann's essay is then about moral, and "irony as modesty, as skepticism turned backward, is a form of morality" (ib., 460). Nonetheless, irony is viewed amongst the majority as an old junk, a "*vieux jeu*, a sign of burgherly nature and of shabby quietism. The activist has arrived — *pulcher et fortissimus*" (ib., 458). The activists Mann is denouncing are supporting "false, confused, and deceptive concepts of freedom and equality, [...] maxims, arguments, declamations, and associations that aim at or also [...] lead to anarchy, revolt, violent overthrow of the burgherly order" (ib., 471). What Mann's essay shows again is that irony is primarily associated to an artistic predisposition, a (positive) tendency which belongs to true artists. Against them, stands a mass of pseudo-artists who claim to sustain the boldest, most progressive ideas, while in truth they remain faithful to the democratic regime and its conformism. Mann ends his essay with the promise to work with all his might against these positions.

In 1930, Walter Benjamin will vigorously attack the poetry of Erich Kästner, a member of the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, a movement that made large use of irony both in its theory and aesthetical practice: "The subject and the effects of Kästner's poetry are limited to this class [*the bourgeoisie*], and he is not able to talk to the dispossessed with his rebel cries, in the same way he is not able to strike the industrialists with his irony" (Benjamin 1974, 28). Irony again is intended as wit, as the critical tool that the intelligent and cultivated intellectual makes use of in society: a trait that Benjamin sees at play in the *Neue Sachlichkeit* and that he despises, similarly to Tzara. The Schlegelian idea that irony "originates in the union of *savoir vivre* and scientific spirit, in the conjunction of a perfectly instinctive and a perfectly conscious philosophy" (Schlegel 1991, 13) keeps on inspiring Mann's and Benjamin's polemical approaches to irony, which is not a trope nor

[8] The complete German text is available here: http://www.zeno.org/Literatur/M/Schlegel,+Friedrich/%C3%84sthetische+und+politische+Schriften/%C3%9Cber+die+Unverst%C3%A4ndlichkeit [accessed 31-05-2023].

a stylistic feature, but an enigmatic aesthetic feature of the author, even before than their work of art.

The modernist appreciation of irony as an evaluative term finds a consistent translation in the literary theory of the time. Inspired by T. S. Eliot's essays on poetry, opposed to the politicisation of literary criticism carried forward by Marxism, as well as the historicisation of the study of literature, New Criticism rises in order to examine the literary text as the expression of a specific type of language, with its rules and forms.[9] The privileged position enjoyed by modernism in the canon shaped by New Criticism is, to a certain extent, self-evident since the title of the 'manifesto' of this critical trend: that is, *The New Criticism: An Examination of the Critical Theories of I. A. Richards, T. S. Eliot, Yvor Winters, William Empson*.[10] Cleanth Brooks also played a decisive role in determining the poetic primacy of T. S. Eliot in North American universities since the 1930s.[11] The connection between New Criticism and modernism, however, runs deeper and significantly concerns romantic irony too: for it is that 'Romantic' self-reflexivity of modernist texts that Brooks and others call "irony", and raise as a principle of literary value. Douglas Muecke, a most influential scholar of irony, claims that "to study Romantic Irony is to discover how modern Romanticism could be, or, if you like, how Romantic Modernism is" (Muecke 1980, 182). Romantic irony, that is, increasingly coincides since New Criticism with metatextuality *tout court*: a prominent feature of modernist texts, as it is known.

New Criticism is responsible for the modern creation of a notion of irony as the tell-tale sign of aesthetical value. In 1930, William Empson (1991, 1-47) uses irony as a *de facto* synonym for the term 'ambiguity', which the critic meticulously implements, albeit defining it in quite broad terms, as the primary measure for the evaluation of aesthetical value for the literary art. Kenneth Burke (1941) later identifies irony as a critical simulacrum, that is a term that truly stands for something else: in his sense, dialectics. By dialectics, Burke means both the struggle that the audience engages with when enjoying a work of art, and the mechanism of dramatic *peripeteia*: "as an over-all ironic formula here, and one that has the quality of 'inevitability,' we could lay it down that 'what goes forth as A returns as non-A.' This is the basic pattern that places the essence of drama and dialectic in the irony of the 'peripety,' the strategic moment of reversal" (Burke 1941, 438). Northrop Frye, whose work on irony "seems both a reaction to New Criticism and a product of many of its assumptions" (Dane 2011, 158), tries to rehistoricise irony by using it to define one of the key modes, as he calls them, of contemporary narrative. According to Frye, the ironic mode signals the influence of a philosophy of history that

[9] Cfr. at least Wellek 1978; Newton 1988; Crowe Ransom 2001.

[10] Cfr. Crowe Ransom 1941.

[11] "It is hardly surprising to note that Eliot, high priest of modernist poetics, shaped Brooks, high priest of New Criticism. Cleanth Brooks's admiration of Eliot, both as poet and essayist, manifests itself in a myriad of way" (Duvall 1992-93, 24).

reads historical development as a recursive series of cycles, as theorized by the pre-Romantic philosopher Giambattista Vico.[12]

It is however only with Cleanth Brooks that irony becomes a forthright critical expression of positive artistic value; and quite an arbitrary one at that (if value judgments can ever be otherwise). In 1947, while dealing with poetry and how to read it, Brooks (1960, 3-20) establishes (following thus a similar path to Empson's) that the key trait that should be used to measure poetical value is paradox. Unsurprisingly, Brooks finds himself using the word "irony" in an extensive manner and as a synonym of paradox.[13] Self-conscious of the Romantic and post-Romantic connotations of the word, Brooks (1960, 209-210) suddenly writes, as if in an *a parte* digression from his analysis:

> By using the term irony, one risks, of course, making the poem seem arch and self-conscious, since irony, for most readers of poetry, is associated with satire, *vers de société*, and other "intellectual" poetries. Yet, the necessity for some such term ought to be apparent; and *irony is the most general term that we have for the kind of qualification which the various elements in a context receive from the context*. This kind of qualification, as we have seen, is of tremendous importance in any poem. Moreover, *irony is our most general term for indicating that recognition of incongruities — which, again, pervades all poetry to a degree far beyond what our conventional criticism has been heretofore willing to allow*. [emphasis added]

As Dane (2011, 3) rightly puts it, in this moment irony simply becomes "that on which the critic's eye fall". For Brooks, irony is a term that critics use to talk about the textual loci where the friction between the contexts in which words are inserted and those words is apparent. In a later article, Brooks further delves into the function of irony as intended by him only to reiterate this position and emphasise the broadness of the concept: "We had doubtless stretched the term too much, but it has been almost the only term available by which to point to a general and important aspect of poetry" (Brooks 1971, 1045). As for the breadth of its possible applications, Brooks asks on the same page: "what indeed would be a statement wholly devoid of an ironic potential— a statement that did not show any qualification of the context? One is forced to offer statements like 'Two plus two equals four,' or 'The square on the hypotenuse of a right triangle is equal to the sum of the squares on the two sides'". With Brooks, irony expressly becomes a peculiar, as well as significant entry in the critical lexicon: namely, that which the critic considers to be worthy of attention.

Just like the shift from modernism to what comes after is a story of continuities and subtle discontinuities, rather than abrupt breaks, New Criticism influences greatly the so-called postmodernist theories. It is not surprising that Paul De Man, in his influential treatment of philosophical irony in relation to allegory (a canonical text of postmodernist theory), will acknowledge his debt to both Schlegel (who pioneered an ironic mode of reasoning on aesthetics that he and the deconstructionists allegedly inherited and

[12] Cfr. Frye 1957, pp. 33 passim.
[13] Cfr. also Bredin 1998.

perfected)[14] and New Criticism (although De Man disguises this homage in a footnote).[15] Faithful to Schlegel's *Lyceumfragment 42*, by which "philosophy is the real homeland of irony, which one would like to define as logical beauty" (Schlegel 1991, 5), De Man reclaims irony for philosophy when he celebrates, at the same time, the aesthetical dimension of romantic irony, as well as the arbitrary and inherently positive connotation of irony devised in New Criticism.

What happened after, and a daring comparison

Romantic irony is a multi-faceted concept, shaped by the reception of Schlegel's elaborations on irony, whose implications were originally of aesthetical, epistemological, and metaphysical nature. The development of the concept during New Criticism, mediated and substantiated by modernists such as Mann, added another face to Romantic irony, for it transformed it into a key word of the critical discourse, a spy of the critics' own biases and convictions. Paradoxically, one of the effects of New Criticism's recovery of romantic irony as the primary sign of artistic value is the perpetuation of a critical discourse founded on the authoritativeness of the writer. By favouring metatextuality, New Critics reinstated the figure of the author, which both Marxism and historicism already relied upon for their critical practice, and against which New Criticism was originally devised. As Handwerk pointed out, when romantic irony breaks into a text the narrator might speak directly to the reader, or remind them of the fictionality of the story. While building an influential, especially in educational terms, canon of Western literature, New Critics privileged works of art in which the author sneaks, however indirectly, into the text. It is not by chance, therefore, that at the end of 1970s the reader-oriented turn, emblematically represented by Stanley Fish's affective stylistics (1980), will mark their distance from New Criticism by acknowledging that interpretative efforts, despite well-intended claims to objectivity, are always partial. Readers' responses, rather than authorial or textual intentions, should and will be the object of further theorical attention.

The extent to which postmodernist theory inherited and made use of the same self-serving ambiguities around irony displayed by New Criticism is still unexplored. What seems true is that when certain theorists of postmodernism felt the need to distance themselves from the contradictions of New Criticism, they spent much critical vigour on redefinitions of irony.[16] Candace Lang, for instance, compares and contrasts irony and humour in a vast array of canonical and contemporary literary texts, and ends his book by remarking that "postmodern literature's and poststructuralist theory's preoccupation

[14] De Man 1996. Cfr. also Roy 2009; Cometa 2019.

[15] De Man 1983, 187 (footnote 1).

[16] Linda Hutcheon's development from the study of metatextuality (Hutcheon 1980), through postmodernism (Hutcheon 1989), to irony (Hutcheon 1994), is in this sense quite emblematic of a broader critical tendency.

with language and subjectivity has nothing in common with the narcissistic, onanistic, and potentially solipsistic discourse commonly termed romantic irony" (Lang 1988, 195). When postmodernist theories too started falling out of fashion, metatextuality (irony often coinciding with it) became the object of critical concern: synonymous with narcissism and escapism, self-reflexivity began to be perceived as an ideological trait, rather than as an inherent sign of value, of literary texts.[17]

To conclude, it is helpful to take a step back from the history of literary criticism and discuss two occurrences of literary romantic irony that might be telling of a slightly different focus between modernists and so-called postmodernists. Postmodernists undoubtedly make abundant use of romantic irony; however, their concern is mostly aesthetical, rather than epistemological, as used to be the case for the modernists writers analysed above. An unconventional comparison might highlight, in succinct form, how modernism uses romantic irony to produce statements on epistemological questions in an aesthetic form; and, on the other hand, how postmodernism uses romantic irony to produce statements on aesthetic questions in aesthetic form. The passages compared come from very different texts and eras; nevertheless, they are both hyper-canonical (each in their own way), and share two formal similarities: romantic irony occurs at the very beginning of the *œuvre*, and in both cases irony is delivered through, and hidden at the same time in an adverb. Firstly, the incipit of the poem "Man Carrying Thing" (1947) by Wallace Stevens: "The poem must resist the intelligence / *Almost* successfully [emphasis added]. Secondly, the beginning of Umberto Eco's *Name of the Rose* (1980): "*Naturalmente* un manoscritto" [emphasis added]. Stevens warns the reader about overly cerebral readings of his poem, but at the same time invites them to make use, if marginal, of their own intellectual power. Eco tells the reader that the narrator knows that the reader knows that the stratagem of the manuscript is a well-known stereotype in the tradition of the novel: his novel makes no exception, but the narrator needs to acknowledge this legacy in a disingenuous way: therefore, 'naturally', a manuscript. Both texts make use of irony through an adverb in order to talk about epistemological and aesthetic problems at the same time: although, and it is not irrelevant, Stevens is more concerned about the former, while Eco is more concerned about the latter.

[17] The literature on this topic is vast: for their impact on contemporary fiction, cf. at least Vollmann 1990; Wallace 1993.

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ROBIN V. HUEPPE

SORTING DEBRIS

Another Look at the Modernist Urbanism Experiment

ABSTRACT: Despite its controversial reputation, some ideas of modernist urbanism can still inform the future of cities. Postmodern critics often failed to dissociate the unified project from its complicated political, economic, and infrastructural context. When the reputation of modernist mass housing declined after omnipresent pushbacks, the architectural debate shifted to different problems. Modernist urbanism became known as an unsuccessful project, while its buildings still inform architectural design today. One hundred years after the beginnings and again – for different reasons – cities confront the need for holistic ideas for affordable housing catering to growing urban populations. This challenge clashes with the ecological imperative to free up land to regreen urban environments affected by global warming. Although different times bring different requirements, the first waves of modernist experiments have laid out some tools. By sorting the debris of what remains of their urbanism in Brasilia and Berlin, this argument shows a path to reconsider forgotten potential and nuance the postmodern critique. Further, the essay outlines valuable concepts of selected projects and how their critics convoluted too many layers. Tracing ideas in their historical context to establish a continuity between the early 20th and early 21st centuries through modernist urbanism might still be a path forward.

KEYWORDS: Modernism, Urbanism, Post-War, Mass Housing, Berlin, Brasilia.

It began one hundred years ago and lasted until the end of the cold war. Both high and total modernist urbanism produced abundant visions with potential for the future of cities. However, the emergence of postmodernism in the late 1970s confined previous city plans to the discourse's periphery. Postmodern scholars declared the projects tested and failed because of enormous housing densities, monofunctional planning, and motorized mobility orientation, among other points. So why should anyone engage in a failed project in the first place? By outlining the tipping point between high and total modernism, Michel Rabaté offers a historical parallel: "What distinguishes those [1922] masterpieces from the works that came before […] is a sense of a new mission: because of the massive destruction there was a general sense of added responsibility" (Rabaté 2015, 3-4).

Rabaté's hint at continuity shows that the emergent conditions of modern totality are still relevant. Urgent housing demands, accelerated by continuous urbanization and the simultaneous mitigation of global warming effects, lend architecture and urban design a sense of added responsibility. Most present-day projects, however, fail to address those problems on an appropriate scale. Still or again, humanity is at a point where a global

impulse requires planners and architects to consider large-scale collective responses to an overarching question: how to provide affordable housing for the many while minimizing environmental impact?

With this renewed attention to modernist urbanism, its continuities, and parallels, I argue that high and total modernist urbanism hold future potential despite their controversial reputation. As Rabaté (2015, 12) claims, Corbusier's totalizing rationalism did not plan to control the masses but to build a machine for living a better life. Against the prevailing notion of the modernist city as architectural totalization, the two projects of edifice and city were not as smoothly intertwined. Modernist urbanism maintained its separate course from the experimental to the established modernist city.

A look at the evolution of Brasilia informs the first part of my argument on how to complicate the postmodern critique clinging to modernist urbanism. Brazil's capital is one of the few totalizations of high modernism. As such, the discretely planned city became a prime target for critics of modernist urbanism. Despite several good reasons for critique, none of those accounts properly consider some valuable ideas behind the master plan concept. The second part of this argument revisits the rise and rupture of Berlin's high modernist urbanism in the 1920s. Its expanding wave of modernism after the second world war can exemplify how the projects became subjects of a discourse focusing on architectural deficiencies until declared failures (Jencks 1984, 9).[1] However, the judgment always ignored that total modernist urbanism was not total (i.e. complete) *enough* to surpass the laboratory. Instead of archiving the strain of ideas, renewed attention could establish continuities between high and total modernist urbanism, and today. The outcomes might inform the revision and development of once visionary ideas.

On Brasilia

In Rabaté's chronology that precedes his book *1922*, the author lists numerous relevant events and dates for the development of early modernism. Brasilia's conception could be an additional entry. On Thursday, September 7th, 1922, Brazil celebrated one hundred years of independence. On that very day, the foundational stone for Brasilia, the future capital, was laid. Not long after, news of ongoing plans to transfer the government from Rio de Janeiro reached the architect Charles-Édouard Jeanneret, known as Le Corbusier, via his friend and artist Fernand Leger. Le Corbusier's desire to build new cities manifested that same year with "*ville contemporaine*," a city for three-million people (an entry in Rabaté's *1922* chronology). It was that year when Le Corbusier and other architects dreamt of seeing their ideas of a modernist city materialize in South America. Getulio Vargas' *coup d'état* and his totalitarian *Estado Novo* convoluted the constitutional

[1] Charles Jencks' famous declaration that modernist architecture is dead, referring to the demolition of Pruitt Igoe in 1972, has been a contested "modern myth" since the early 1990s (Bristol 1991). However, the postmodern dismissal and rejection of modernist urbanism carry on, visible in the predominant paradigm of "new urbanism."

transfer of Brazil's capital until 1945. With the regime's fall, the new congress formed an urban planning subcommission in 1954, which invited Le Corbusier to supervise the project. After a national competition, the subcommission selected Lucio Costa's master plan for its capacity to project a capital of Brazilian culture while accounting for temporal constraints (el-Dahdah 2021, 8-10).

The story of Brasilia is a unique example. It represents the evolution from experimental, high modernist concepts to a built national capital, thus totalizing modernist architecture. Brasilia is also relevant because its architecture is still held accountable for turning the city into a symbol of a failed modernist project. Beyond aesthetic and spatial reasons, the narrative imbues the architecture with real classism, racism, and colonialism in its foundations (Tavares 2020). However, most critics mash too many ingredients together. Le Corbusier and Brasilia's "founding fathers" indeed adhered to racist ideologies (Wilson 1996, 35-39). It would yet be hasty to conflate Brasilia's colonialist heritage with its modernist architecture and urban design. Brazil's population can only address the former with a collective and intensive healing and repairing process. The problems of modernist urbanism are more ambiguous.

The two anthropologists James Holston and James Scott are likely among the most prominent critics of modernist urbanism. Both make the spatial qualities of car-oriented, over-scaled open spaces responsible for Brasilia's minimal success in launching its country toward a new way of life (Holston 1989; Scott 1999). Both also fail to acknowledge the informal public spaces that weave throughout the fabric of Brasilia's north and south wings. Additionally, they disregard the entangled economic and political factors implicated in the spatial layout of Brasilia (el-Dahdah 2021, 15). Lastly, their seminal books exclude the spatial experience of Brasilia's residents, many of whom enjoy their daily lives in the planned city.[2] Of course, this does not invalidate criticism concerning social inequality, political corruption, or postcolonial power dynamics. But it shows that making modernist architecture responsible for the city's perceived success or failure falls short.

Apart from many Brazilians appreciating the intimate dynamics of the superblock courtyards, Brasilia originated from several compelling design ideas. Many of its residential buildings are lifted from the ground, leaving ample space for pedestrians, not cars, to roam freely. It was the first master plan conceived as a park city – in contrast to a garden city – to be a green and publicly oriented environment representing a young democracy. Additionally, instead of maintaining the building composition as an image in the plan, Costa inscribed the preservation of the city in a text accompanying his master plan for Brasilia (el-Dahdah 2021, 14). This text-based preservation principle remarkably resembles James Joyce's claim that writing Ulysses could serve to rebuild the

[2] Farès el-Dahdah grew up in Brasilia and published on its intricate emergence while putting the postmodern critique into perspective. Supporting this argument, Michel Rabaté commented on the oral presentation of this paper at the conference "1922/2022" (Università degli Studi di Torino, May 2022), that his acquaintances retain fond memories of growing up in Brasilia too. Both accounts coincide with the author's encounters with Brasilia natives.

city of Dublin from its pages in case of its destruction (Rabaté 2015, 12). Brasilia was hence the first city on record to account for temporal change by protecting its urban scales in a text, instead of freezing entire building compositions in time. It allowed for aggregations to be renewed over and over if the defined four scales (monumental, residential, aggregate, and bucolic) were preserved (el-Dahdah, 2021, 14).

From an urbanist viewpoint, this idea of preservation is still significant. At its core, Brasilia was more about its spaces than about the solids. Revisiting its central design principles might assist in sorting out the shimmering debris of a shattered vision. It aims to recover the valuable potential lost between the experimental and total phases of modernist urbanism. Brasilia's design had significant and lasting values despite the racist, colonialist, and machine-centered history of its emergence. Revisiting these values is my first argument to salvage the zombie of modernist urbanism from its reputation. It exemplifies that the idea of the modernist city is more than a unique, frozen object in time, more than a success or a failure, more than a discrete thought kept in books. The modernist city continues.

On Berlin's Modernist Housing Estates

Siemensstadt or Weisse Stadt, Berlin's examples of high modernist urbanism from the 1910s and 1920s, are coherent and scale-crossing neighborhoods. They are Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerke*, designed from immaterial spaces to buildings, conceived from façade to beam down to every screw, and arranged from the centers of their urban morphology to the fringes of adjacent neighborhoods. Like Brasilia, they hold potential beyond their historical UNESCO heritage value that preserves their past configuration into our present and future. The first generation of modernist urbanists emerged from the experimental, compositional ideas for entire housing neighborhoods. Incorporated into the teachings of the Bauhaus school, it included the emancipation of space over form. Its first propagators were interested in buildings constituting a whole exceeding the sum of its parts. They delivered plans for constructing projects that still show their avant-gardist heritage and beliefs, embedded in the provision of affordable housing through typification and industrial manufacturing (Sieverts 2006, 163-167).

Spatial form in those housing estates develops experiences from tradition, structure, and composition of forms while following aesthetic superstructures. For example, the prominent architects Bruno Taut and Max Wagner skillfully emphasized material, structure, and form. However, their expertise in landscape, program, and urban scale was still developing. Early modernist urban design became susceptible to schematism through aesthetic reduction, abstraction, and ornamental timidity. The phase turned out to be challenging to assume new standards. Although the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM) in 1928 made modernist urbanism part of an international movement, the rise of Hitler's totalitarian regime disrupted the change in Germany. As in Brasilia's case, totalitarianism violently paused the totalization of

modernist urbanism. Instead, Nazi Germany returned to megalomaniac neoclassicism and more representational city architecture.

Nonetheless, the planning and construction of those early modernist neighborhoods demarcate a structural change in large-scale housing developments as a counter-model to the private-sector speculation with its overcrowded tenement buildings of the late nineteenth century. Aesthetic ideas of the architectural avant-garde met social concepts of the political left. Unions, cooperatives, and municipal building groups became guiding motors of those projects. They managed to overlay high aesthetics and complex densification with popular social demands for novel ways of living.

As a result of several modernist architects having fled their prosecution during the war, a new generation of young, post-war architects, joined by some returnees, initiated the second wave of modernist cities from the late 1950s onwards. Kicked off by a group of pre-war modernists in 1957, the second wave of modernist urbanists tried to learn from examples of the past. The subsequent projects, such as Märkisches Viertel and Gropiusstadt, reacted to a particularly pressing housing shortage with an impressive range of large-scale projects in Berlin's periphery. In this instance, the projects experienced an enormous increase in height and density due to a constantly growing demand from the municipality. The housing tower and slab typologies introduced new conceptions of dwelling. Yet, the designers still had to defend their projects against accusations like high conceptual rigidity, too little mixed-use, no diversity of household incomes, and a top-down planning approach.

Landscape architecture had now become more independent. Landscape architects repeatedly rejected masterplan suggestions of superordinate green spaces and focused on free-flowing landscapes (IfS Institut 2021). The combination of non-hierarchical green space with a progressively dominant automobile infrastructure turned open spaces into amorphous "non-places". Their program and scale changed drastically (Augé 2009). Simultaneously, the projects suffered from a 90% social housing ordinance, which turned the flats shortly after completion into a relatively homogenous composition of low-income households (Hunger 2021). Berlin's late modernist housing estates entered a process of neglect. Their reputation declined, and the architectural canon shifted away from modernist urbanism (Jencks 1984). Although modernist architecture recovered from this trauma, the branch of modernist urbanism became known for failing twice.

Here again, not all criticism is unwarranted. The enthusiasm for economic feasibility models and technical advancement led to utilitarian housing estates that obeyed the demands for optimization. However, the technocratic character of both movements cannot cloud the goals aiming at social equality and freeing the urban environment from previous constraints or dangers. Despite the abundant criticism, modernist housing estates still require an interpretation as elemental symbols of their emergent conditions. Like Brasilia, car orientation, use separation, or ordinance failures are reactive witnesses of their time. They do not deem the virtues of modernist urbanism as entirely lost. The availability of public institutions in post-war modernist housing developments, schools, and civic centers, especially their open landscapes and high density, unveil significant

potential. The execution of the original plans often came with severe budget cuts and densification requirements. It thus helps to study the original plan documents to understand the design intentions separately to subsequent political demands so as to initiate a critical redevelopment. Not coincidentally, one hundred years after 1922, the Pritzker Prize went to Anne Lacaton and Jean-Phillipe Vassal, two architects dedicated to the careful renewal of post-war modernist housing. Their projects expose original qualities achieved by conversion and renovation.

Sorting Debris

Housing estates are still relevant because they are familiar with the problems of today: the need for new housing units for a rapidly growing city as quickly and affordable as possible. Modernist urbanism had always been about experimentation. While there is a better understanding of why some solutions were incorrect, there is no convincing reason for abandoning the core set of ideas altogether. Instead, urbanism has spent decades and resources defending itself against neoliberal housing supply mechanisms. Therefore, it left the stage for the business side of the housing industry (Pope 2021, 112-121). One hundred years after 1922, once again, humans need affordable housing while freeing up land and regreening cities to address global warming. Although different reasons alter the requirements, the experiment of modernist urbanism had already invented some of the necessary tools (Harnack 2018, 173-180).

Learning from past failures, one of the central problems was a top-down planning approach susceptible to the political routines of the time. Projects of architectural authorship imposed individuals' ideas on diverse collectives. Present urban design must find appropriable and innovative tools to repair and reconsider the modernist experiment. It needs to imagine a Doctor Frankenstein who would not flee in horror at the creature he bungled at first, but instead, one who returns to the laboratory and takes everyone back in with him (Latour 2009, 459-475). A new experimental turn in modernist urbanism starts with redefining the term "laboratory" and who has access to it. It should reconcile Prometheus with the seemingly antithetical notion of care and repair. These concepts were present in the paradigmatic projects discussed above. However, the declared failures of large-scale ideas made early 21st-century planning more incremental. It is a city of immediacy that condemned modernist urbanism as a dystopia. Against this notion, many of its housing estates have become teeming heterotopias, cities within cities, in the meanwhile of the urban periphery (Foucault 1967, 1-9).

How can the history of modernist urbanism inform an experimental turn in urbanism and urban design today? The continuities between 1922 and 2022 outlined in this text lay out some starting points for answers. The foundation of Brasilia demarcated a period in which a generation of architects began to see their utopian visions of modern cities materialize. Despite today's architectural discourse treating Brasilia as a representative

failure of modernist urbanism, the critique often dismisses the revolutionary ideas of Brasilia's origin: text-based preservation of scales, continuous public parkland, and a fine-grained succession of urban spaces dominating form. At its core, these ideas bring all attention to the collective and away from the authoritative individual. They also foresee the change of a city over time. The critical discussion around Brasilia fails to disentangle its spatial quality and democratic aesthetics from the complicated heritage of Brazil's national history. In Berlin's case, a totalitarian regime and then a world war halted the first modernist urbanism experiment. When the new generation of architects initiated the second, more popular wave, their projects received a negative public reputation, sometimes even before completion. The initiators of this notoriety always ignored the immense successes of Berlin's housing estates regarding the integration of vulnerable newcomers to the city, green environments, and housing provision for the masses.

Their declared failure, if this term still applies, was not inherent in the architecture but in the convolution of deficient urban management strategies. These economy-driven politics hampered a diversity of households and incomes, restricted high degrees of use separation, and led to the peripheral locations of the estates, to name but a few. The modernist urbanism experiment, first conceived in the early 20th century, was discontinued by the end of the 1980s. It is time to sort out the reasons for those failures so as to save the experiment from its enduring reputation and reopen the discourse toward new, and more continuities. Scholars and designers should reconsider the tools brought forward by modernist urbanism to face the recurring challenges for people in future cities. It starts with negotiation. It lies between the successes and failures of the first and second waves, and thus takes the shape of a third wave between high and total, master composition and temporal aggregation. It starts with sorting modernist debris.

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ANTONIO DALL'IGNA

IL LAVORO E IL LAVORATORE SECONDO ERNST JÜNGER E SIMONE WEIL

ABSTRACT: The present article compares Ernst Jünger's and Simone Weil's thought, starting from the concepts of work and worker. Work takes on the meaning of a meticulous exercise of reading and modifying the reality and its stratifications, and coincides with the position of the human being within the becoming of forms and meanings. Both thinkers maintain that the worker can reach a higher stage, i.e., the void that affirms the divine grace, according to Weil, and the anarchic space that captures the elemental, according to Jünger. Despite the similarities, there is a crucial difference between these perspectives: according to Jünger, the fulfilment consists in the dominion, while for Weil fulfilment coincides with radical waiting.

KEYWORDS: Dominion, Waiting, Catastrophe, *Krieger*, War.

Introduzione

Il presente contributo propone un confronto teoretico tra il pensiero di Simone Weil e quello di Ernst Jünger, a partire dal concetto di lavoro e dalla figura del lavoratore.[1] Preciso che qui farò riferimento al primo segmento della speculazione di Ernst Jünger, quello delle battaglie di materiali, della mobilitazione totale, dell'opera sul lavoratore; lo Jünger che pone al centro del suo pensiero le figure del *Krieger* e dell'*Arbeiter*. Per quanto concerne Simone Weil, si guarderà alla sua speculazione a partire dagli esiti mistici che coronano il suo *Denkweg*, in quanto momenti in cui il lavoro si afferma come lettura apicale del reale.

Jünger e Weil sono un pensatore e una pensatrice che presentano certamente differenze radicali, ma anche alcuni punti di contatto, connessioni che permettono di operare un interessante scavo teoretico all'interno di numerosi concetti – come lavoro, lettura, forma, dominio, attesa, impersonalità, tecnica, forza, catastrofe. Le differenze

[1] Il tema del lavoro è presente fin dalla prima riflessione di Simone Weil. Cfr. Pétrement 1994, 90-92 e gli scritti compresi in Weil 1994. Sul concetto di lavoro in Weil, tra gli altri, cfr. Vetö 2014, 155-165; Gabellieri 2003, 83-103, 183-187; Cahiers Simone Weil 2009, 32:4; Cahiers Simone Weil 2010, 33:1; Kahn 1978; Little 1979; Fogarty 1979; Chenavier 2009; Devette 2016. Per quanto concerne il pensiero di Ernst Jünger, si rimanda a Riedel 2003. Per il rapporto tra i due pensatori, ritengo significativi i rilievi contenuti in Taïbi 2009. Per la redazione del presente lavoro sono state consultate l'edizione delle opere di Simone Weil. 1988. Œuvres Complètes, a cura di André A. Devaux et Florence de Lussy. Parigi; Gallimard, e l'edizione delle opere di Ernst Jünger. 2015. Sämtliche Werke Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta.

sono, principalmente, dovute a una collocazione in punti opposti dello spettro ideologico: lo scrittore tedesco essendo un noto rappresentante della cultura di destra,[2] mentre la filosofa francese resta un'anarchica cristiana *sui generis*.

Tuttavia, è possibile rintracciare un nesso filosofico tra la pensatrice e il pensatore nello schema neoplatonico che sottende il loro pensiero: il rapporto tra il principio e il principiato, l'origine e il divenire, tra Dio e la creazione (per Weil) e tra l'elementare e il mondo (per Jünger), nelle rispettive filosofie, può essere ricondotto a dinamiche processuali di stampo neoplatonico che prevedono l'espressione di una origine divina nel perimetro di una dimensione costituita di limiti formali. Si tratta di dinamiche metafisiche che si dispongono all'interno di una direzione comune, nella quale, nondimeno, sono presenti alcune differenze essenziali perché, rispetto a Jünger, in Weil il darsi del principio presenta un momento di sottrazione che alimenta il suo neoplatonismo con notevoli tensioni gnostiche, le quali risultano in un'accentuata trascendenza della divinità, in un forte anticosmismo e in un moderato antinomismo. Quando il principio divino si manifesta per mezzo della sottrazione della potenza e dell'affermazione della grazia, l'assetto teofanico subisce uno squilibrio che comporta la coagulazione di forze radicalmente oppositive al principio stesso.[3]

Anche secondo il versante etico e antropologico (con riferimento a quella che chiamo "antropologia integrale" perché comprende l'umano nel metafisico), è possibile affermare che il neoplatonismo di entrambi porti a considerare l'essere umano alla stregua di una forma, un limite, un ente determinato che deve abbandonare l'affezione alla determinazione, diventando una forma senza forma perché ha dismesso l'influenza, obnubilante il *quantum* divino nell'umano, che la *determinatio* detiene sul desiderio. Tuttavia, per Jünger, la forma realizzata della persona assoluta (il "tipo") è dominio della tecnica, del mondo, della mobilitazione, dell'elementare, come recita il sottotitolo dell'opera più conosciuta di Ernst Jünger, *Der Arbeiter*: *Herrschaft und Gestalt* (nella traduzione italiana: *Dominio e forma*; Jünger 2020); secondo Simone Weil, l'essere umano come forma che compie l'impersonale divino entro i propri contorni creaturali non è dominio, non è presa che afferra una porzione di mondo, ma è attesa, apertura paziente e consapevole nei confronti della grazia divina: non vi è assolutezza nella forma umana realizzata, ma rigorosa e attenta subordinazione al principio. Quindi, i punti di contatto significativi e fecondi qui elencati si aprono a differenze ostinate e radicali.

In particolare, è interessante evidenziare la possibilità di intravedere due paradigmi che scandiscono la relazione tra essere umano e principio divino, tra essere umano e contesto fisico e metafisico, tra essere umano e tecnica, tra essere umano e natura, tra essere umano e catastrofe. Uno è il paradigma del dominio (quello del primo Jünger); l'altro è il paradigma dell'attesa (e qui il riferimento è a Simone Weil).

[2] Per una profonda e attenta analisi della cultura di destra, cfr. Cangiano 2022.

[3] Per una valutazione del problema, rimando a Dall'Igna 2021a.

A mio avviso, i concetti secondo i quali è possibile articolare un confronto teoretico tra le due prospettive sono i seguenti:

- il concetto di lavoro come lettura e trasformazione della realtà;
- la figura del lavoratore;
- lo stile impersonale dell'azione che anima il miglior tipo di lavoro e l'affinamento estremo della lettura;
- le questioni circa la tecnica; in particolare, la sua collocazione nello spettro del reale e il suo statuto all'interno della relazione che sussiste tra l'essere umano e il contesto metafisico;
- il concetto di catastrofe come interruzione dell'ordine, segnata dalla discontinuità radicale, e come irruzione del principio o attestazione della grazia;
- l'origine (l'elementare per Jünger e la grazia per Weil);
- i problemi che riguardano il misticismo, ovvero la possibilità, consegnata all'essere umano, di conoscere ed esperire, e quindi di tradurre in una forma formata, il principio divino.

Per esigenze di sintesi, e al fine di porre in rilievo i termini del confronto, mi soffermerò soprattutto sui primi due punti e, almeno in parte, sull'ultimo; ciononostante, verranno toccati, in modo marginale, anche gli altri aspetti.

Il lavoro

Secondo l'accostamento delle due strutture di pensiero, è possibile affermare che il lavoro assume la valenza di rigoroso esercizio di lettura (o interpretazione) e di modificazione del reale e delle sue stratificazioni (in linea con la struttura neoplatonizzante, queste forme di pensiero prevedono una realtà stratificata o una serie di piani sovrapposti del reale). Il lavoro coincide con lo stare dell'essere umano all'interno del divenire di forme e di significati. Il lavoratore è figura che si muove nel mondo, nel complesso del divenire, nel regno della natura. La sua collocazione metafisica gli impone l'attività, ovvero non gli consente di astenersi dalla lettura e dall'intervento (dalla mobilitazione del mondo, per dirla con Jünger) e, quindi, non gli permette di rinunciare al lavoro. Il lavoratore/lettore è in grado di cogliere le complesse configurazioni dell'elementare (questo il nome del principio per Jünger) o le complesse configurazioni della grazia divina (il principio secondo Weil), di interpretarne limiti costitutivi e margini taglienti, di dominare le asperità della natura attraverso un ambivalente rapporto con la tecnica.

Per Ernst Jünger, l'*Arbeiter* è, da un lato, una forma assoluta, perfetta e impersonale (un "tipo")[4] e, dall'altro lato, un ente la cui libertà si rivela nell'esercizio di una volontà che è azione concreta e nesso di responsabilità nei confronti della porzione di mondo in cui il tipo umano interviene. Persona assoluta e compiuta, animata da un alto grado di oggettività e di automatismo, il lavoratore matura una "seconda coscienza", lo stile impersonale dell'azione, una disposizione che differenzia il tipo dagli altri esseri umani.[5]

L'*Arbeiter* non è una forma chiusa e astratta perché essa è rivolta al dominio e alla mobilitazione del mondo, luogo in cui incontra e si scontra con le altre forme e dimensione cosmica per mezzo della quale egli si pone in relazione con l'elementare: "il singolo è inserito in una vasta gerarchia di forme [*Rangordnung von Gestalten*]: sono potenze che non ci si può raffigurare con la bastante efficacia, corposità e precisione. Di fronte ad esse, egli stesso diviene metafora, rappresentante, e l'energia, la ricchezza, il senso della sua vita dipendono dalla misura in cui egli partecipa all'ordine e allo scontro delle forme [*an der Ordnung und am Streit der Gestalten*]" (Jünger 2020, 35). Di queste forme differenziate si dice che "esse custodiscono in sé la totalità, esigono la totalità [*das Ganze*]"; ciò decreta "la propria definizione e il proprio destino [*Schicksal*]", che prepara al sacrificio più significativo, che è il "sacrificio di sangue" (Jünger 2020, 35).

L'ambiente unisce i caratteri dell'officina e i movimenti della tempesta. Si concepisce la vita secondo un assoluto in cui coincidono libertà e necessità (riflettendo il senso del destino che anima gli autori della Rivoluzione conservatrice). In un'"era operaia", in un "paesaggio da officina", la situazione, metafisica e concreta, dell'essere umano coincide con il lavoro: "non può esistere nulla che non sia concepito come lavoro [*als Arbeit*]. Lavoro è il ritmo della mano operosa, dei pensieri, del cuore, è la vita diurna e notturna, la scienza, l'amore, l'arte, la fede, il culto, la guerra; lavoro è l'orbitale atomico e la forza che muove i sistemi planetari" (Jünger 2020, 62). Il lavoro è definito come un "modo di vivere" totale, "un nuovo modo di vivere [*als eine neue Art zu leben*] che ha per oggetto l'orbe terrestre" (Jünger 2020, 81). Non esiste tempo vissuto e spazio dominato al di là del lavoro perché "non esiste alcuna condizione che non possa essere concepita come lavoro" (Jünger 2020, 83): anche il tempo libero, il margine che dovrebbe rimanere altro rispetto all'attività lavorativa, viene vissuto nella forma del lavoro. Si tratta di una "visione del lavoro come totalità dell'esistenza [*dieser totale Zug*]" (Jünger 2020, 83) perché l'esistenza coincide con lo spazio della mobilitazione totale.[6]

È bene ricordare che l'*Arbeiter* non è soltanto disposizione formale realizzata in un essere umano che è diventato pura funzione tecnica, mera procedura astratta, rigoroso modulo automatico, ma il tipo del lavoratore comporta anche un costante dominio, un controllo concreto, una presenza attiva che è presa all'interno della realtà, una situazione in cui una porzione di mondo viene afferrata mediante una presenza vigile che è esercizio

[4] Per un approfondimento su questi concetti, cfr. Jünger 2001.

[5] "Questa Seconda coscienza, più fredda [Dieses Zweite und kältere Bewußtsein], si annuncia nella crescente capacità di vedere se stessi come un oggetto [sich selbst als Objekt zu sehen]" (Jünger 2012b, 175).

[6] Per il concetto di mobilitazione, cfr. Jünger 2012a.

consapevole ed efficace del lavoro. Scrive Jünger: "chiamiamo dominio [*Herrschaft*] uno stato nel quale lo sconfinato spazio del potere [*Machtraum*] trova il suo riferimento centrale in un punto dal quale esso appare come spazio del diritto [*Rechtsraum*]" (Jünger 2020, 65). Il punto centrale di questa costruzione metafisica è il luogo che lo scrittore chiama "nucleo germinale del tempo [*Anteil zu haben am innersten Keime der Zeit*]" (Jünger 2020, 55): si tratta dell'apertura attraverso cui riaffiora l'elementare, il punto in cui l'essere umano fa palpitare il proprio "cuore avventuroso", per citare il titolo di un'opera dell'autore tedesco.[7]

Per quanto riguarda il tema del lavoro in Simone Weil, al fine di questo confronto teoretico, risulta utile partire dal concetto di lettura.[8] L'esercizio della lettura, che è decifrazione e interpretazione del reale, attraverso un atto interpretativo e per mezzo della elaborazione di significati, decreta la capacità di addentrarsi nella conoscenza della realtà secondo la sua stratificazione: si tratta di una conoscenza che dirige l'intervento dell'essere umano nel mondo. Il significato è lo sfondo ermeneutico di una inevitabile attività che costringe il soggetto allo scavo di porzioni determinate di mondo: collocandosi all'interno del significato, l'essere umano è destinato alla lettura e al lavoro perché non risulta possibile – ad eccezione del momento mistico della non-lettura – sottrarsi alla mobilitazione a cui consegna lo stare entro il significato. L'interazione tra l'essere umano e il significato determinante presenta un carattere ancipite perché il soggetto è, da un lato, attivo nella costruzione dei significati: li elabora, li modella costantemente, ne approfondisce il carico teorico; tuttavia, dall'altro lato, la dimensione del significato giunge da una realtà esterna al soggetto stesso che gli si impone inevitabilmente. Simone Weil sostiene che "tutta la nostra vita è fatta dello stesso tessuto, di significati che s'impongono l'uno dopo l'altro [*toute notre vie est faite du même tissu, de significations qui s'imposent successivement*]" (Weil 2005b, 413): il significato è il luogo metafisico nel quale e attraverso il quale avviene la conoscenza e la modificazione della realtà da parte dell'essere umano. Il soggetto si muove in tale sfondo attivando diverse intensificazioni della lettura, e quindi diversi livelli dello stare all'interno del significato.

Le intensificazioni sono il risultato di un lavoro su di sé: si tratta del "potere di cambiare i significati che leggo nelle apparenze e che mi s'impongono; ma anche questo potere è limitato, indiretto e si esercita mediante un lavoro [*mais ce pouvoir aussi est limité, indirect et s'exerce par un travail*]" (Weil 2005b, 413). Questo lavoro a cui non si può rinunciare, e che corrisponde a una mobilitazione del significato determinante, causa i movimenti dell'essere umano nel divenire: "l'azione su se stessi, l'azione sugli altri consiste nel trasformare i significati" [*l'action sur soi-même, l'action sur autrui consistent à transformer les significations*] (Weil 2005b, 413), regolando e approfondendo il significato secondo il livello di consapevolezza che anima l'essere umano, un tipo di conoscenza che

[7] Cfr. Jünger 2019.

[8] Cfr. Weil 2005a; Weil 2005b. Sul concetto di lettura, cfr. Zani 1994, 90-92; Fulco 2002, 93-128, 169-174; Vogel 2010, 201-213; Chenavier 2012, 116-130; Dall'Igna 2021, 152-166.

non neutralizza la prospettiva determinata perché l'influenza del tessuto spazio-temporale non viene abbandonata. Per Simone Weil, dunque, si può affermare che l'essere umano non smette mai di lavorare perché è irrimediabilmente connesso, in modo attivo e passivo, al tessuto di significati, indissolubilmente costretto a una prospettiva, nel contempo, assunta attivamente e accettata passivamente. Il regno dei significati è un paesaggio cangiante, la cui mobilitazione investe e incontra l'attività interpretativa del soggetto, un momento ermeneutico che prevede l'altrettanto inevitabile modificazione di una porzione di realtà. Il lavoro esteriore, il lavoro *stricto sensu*, è un caso particolare del lavoro interiore come regolazione e mobilitazione totale dei significati, agiti e subiti.

Entrambi i pensatori teorizzano una concezione dello stare dell'essere umano nel divenire come inevitabile presa e scavo nei livelli della realtà, all'interno della stratificazione metafisica che costituisce il reale. Per Ernst Jünger, tutto è lavoro perché l'essere umano non può evitare di mobilitare enti e significati con slancio eroico e stile impersonale; per Simone Weil, non è possibile dismettere l'esercizio di lettura del reale, e il lavoro che ad esso è associato, perché non si può abbandonare la regione del significato, la quale comporta sempre un lavoro su di sé che è il modello del lavoro esteriore.

La mistica del lavoro

Se questi elementi possono accostare la proposta teorica dei due autori, le differenze radicali emergono sia a partire dallo schema metafisico, come detto in apertura, sia guardando alla realizzazione, che è possibile chiamare mistica, delle due figure del lavoratore/lettore. Intendo con il termine "misticismo" la parte della filosofia che si occupa della possibilità di fare conoscenza ed esperienza dell'origine. All'interno di questo confronto teoretico, il momento di massima penetrazione della realtà, e di incontro con il principio, segna una differenza essenziale tra le due prospettive.

Per Ernst Jünger, "quanto più l'individualità [*Individualität*] si dissolve, tanto più diminuisce l'opposizione del singolo alla propria mobilitazione" (Jünger 2020, 134), e quindi all'esperienza dell'elementare; secondo Simone Weil, fare il vuoto significa aprire la propria creatura alla grazia divina sacrificando la creaturalità personale. Tutto è lavoro, e il lavoro è la cifra metafisica dello stare nel mondo, ma la consapevolezza di essere un lavoratore/lettore totale, integrale, autentico dipende dall'abbandono dell'influenza degli enti determinati, che chiude nell'individualità, e dalla subordinazione al principio (dinamiche, queste, tipiche del misticismo).

Tuttavia, in Jünger il lavoratore distaccato diventa sovrano, riuscendo ad allinearsi perfettamente alla mobilitazione, controllata attraverso il mezzo tecnico. La sua è una *conversio* che gli permette di abbandonare l'individualità per affermarsi come tipo, come persona assoluta, come strumento funzionale e fruibile, e che gli consente di tradurre senza sbavature l'elementare che si rivela nel mondo della tempesta e dell'officina.

Questo tema emerge con forza nel saggio del 1922 *Der Kampf als inneres Erlebnis* (*La battaglia come esperienza interiore* (Jünger 2017)), dove il lavoratore assume i sembianti del combattente e la mobilitazione in cui è calato comporta violenti e pericolosi scenari di guerra. Qui si afferma che l'elementare risiede anche nell'interiorità dell'essere umano: infatti, "le vere fonti della guerra sgorgano dal profondo del nostro petto [*springen tief in unserer Brust*], e tutto l'orrore che poi inonda il mondo è solo un'immagine riflessa dell'anima umana [*nur ein Spiegelbild der menschlichen Seele*] che si palesa negli avvenimenti" (Jünger 2017, 59). È necessario aderire al corso della mobilitazione e allo sviluppo della tecnica al fine di portare a coincidenza il *quantum* elementare dell'uomo con il principio elementare del Tutto, connessione radicale che, nella metafisica jüngeriana della guerra, viene dipinta con i contorni dell'incontro estatico: "è un'ebbrezza [*ein Rausch*] superiore a qualsiasi ebbrezza, uno scatenamento che spezza ogni vincolo. È una corsa a rotta di collo senza scrupoli né limiti, paragonabile solo alle forze della natura. Nell'estasi [*Ekstase*], l'uomo è come una tempesta scrosciante, come il mare in burrasca, come il tuono. Si fonde nello spazio, corre verso gli oscuri cancelli della morte come il proiettile verso l'obiettivo. E quando le onde buie si rovesciano su di lui, la coscienza del trapasso è ormai lontana. È un flutto che si lascia risucchiare dal mare" (Jünger 2017, 73-74). L'elementare è il principio dell'affermazione e della negazione da cui procede il divenire del mondo, un movimento che è riapparizione e riconfigurazione costanti della dimensione dell'eterno all'interno del tempo; l'elementare produce sia la pace sia la guerra, come la mobilitazione, la lotta e il lavoro guardano sia alla creazione sia alla distruzione.

Per Simone Weil, il lettore della realtà deve giungere a uno stadio chiamato non-lettura, un livello in cui la lettura operata dall'intelletto perviene al proprio auto-annullamento: in una paradossale coincidenza di attività e passività, di presenza e di assenza, l'intelletto legge se stesso come determinazione tra le determinazioni, operando un auto-superamento del significato (opera interiore assistita dalla grazia divina). Il lettore riesce a dismettere l'orizzonte del significato determinante, permanendo un significato ultimo che risiede nel riconoscimento dell'origine divina: La non-lettura rimane prospettiva sulla verità, ma si realizza come prospettiva sgombra dalle immagini determinanti, come specchio terso e rettificato in cui risplende, con vigore teofanico, la perfetta luce della grazia divina. Il non-lettore coglie gli enti secondo l'ordine della pura presenza delle forme; una situazione metafisica che comporta l'abbandono di quella volontà di appropriazione che genera prevaricazione, forza e sventura: uno stato dell'essere e del conoscere che prevede l'affermazione di un amore divino privo di potenza, del limite che ha rinunciato all'illimitato, della grazia pura il cui modello è la morte in croce della divinità. Per il/la lavoratore/lavoratrice weiliano/a, il raggiungimento dell'ordine divino consiste non nel dominio del mondo attraverso la mobilitazione tecnica, ma nell'accettazione del lavoro alienante – mobilitazione estrema dei significati –, il quale è un metodo tecnicizzato che annulla il significato umano del lavoro e afferma il sistema disumano della macchina. Gli esiti della tecnica perfetta della macchina, riflesso del metodo necessario, perfetto e assoluto della grazia divina, valgono

da momento di sventura che permette di imitare l'esempio della Croce, sono un'occasione per compiere quella radice soprannaturale che è già ben piantata nel punto centrale dell'essere umano.[9]

Quindi, la realizzazione della forma umana, secondo lo Jünger di questo periodo, è conquista e dominio del mondo, della tecnica e dell'elementare; nel pensiero di Simone Weil, essa è attesa, accettazione e riconoscimento della grazia soprannaturale, che si riversa nella stretta divina del *malheur*. Per Jünger, è compimento della seconda coscienza nel mondo freddo e gerarchizzato delle forme, animate da una "disciplina automatica"; per Weil, è realizzazione di un ordine delle forme pervaso dall'amore divino e attento alla marginalità e alla sventura. Per Jünger è esaltazione del lavoro tecnico e mobilitante come fermo dominio della realtà, per Weil è riconoscimento del lavoro alienante come occasione per imitare ed esperire la Croce. In Jünger è presa, in Weil è apertura. E tale distanza tra le due prospettive dipende dalle differenze che sussistono al livello del rapporto metafisico tra l'origine e il mondo.

La catastrofe

Essendo l'evento catastrofico il punto di condensazione degli scenari metafisici di Jünger e di Weil, nel rapporto dell'essere umano con l'apertura lacerante prodotta dalla catastrofe si gioca una differenza importante, che contribuisce a definire la distanza delle due prospettive. La tempesta e l'officina dell'autore tedesco sono perennemente collocate nel movimento catastrofico di riconfigurazione continua dell'elementare nelle forme formate: si tratta del darsi dell'eterno nel flusso vicissitudinale del mondo, dimensione che prevede l'alternanza di forme sempre nuove, una modalità agonale dell'interazione degli enti, la drammatica e pericolosa affermazione del principio della morte, a cui l'essere umano deve rispondere con l'esaltazione estatica della volontà per l'elementare scatenato.[10] I margini del reale – o la realtà come margine della trascendenza – della pensatrice francese procedono dall'evento catastrofico centrale nel dominio della metafisica weiliana, quella morte in croce della divinità in cui viene sconfitto il Dio della potenza e in cui trionfa l'amore soprannaturale e quintessenziato. La sventura, che è strutturale all'essere umano e che stabilisce la sua situazione ontologica, è immagine metafisica e punto di riconnessione del *malheur* supremo della Croce, un nesso che deve essere riconosciuto dalla trasformazione della volontà umana nell'amore del Dio della grazia.

[9] Per questo tema, rinvio ancora a Dall'Igna 2021a, segnatamente il capitolo terzo.

[10] "[…] l'orrore si mostra come lo scardinamento e la perversione delle morfologie e delle relazioni naturali e di qualunque 'forma' [Gestalt] in generale, costituendo così un movimento opposto rispetto a quello di produzione e sviluppo di forme che Jünger instancabilmente cerca di rintracciare nell'universo naturale e storico" (Gorgone 2008, 161). Cfr. anche Gorgone 2008, 155-179.

Per il *Krieger* e per l'*Arbeiter*, l'ora della catastrofe è l'ora del dominio;[11] la catastrofe rappresenta una intensificazione secondo cesura della potenza mobilitante, stacco che decreta la possibilità di entrare autenticamente e consapevolmente in contatto con la dimensione dell'elementare. Per Weil, la catastrofe suprema è la massima realizzazione della grazia divina – pura perché priva di potenza – che costituisce il piano della realtà abitato dall'essere umano e che garantisce un ponte in grado di superare la mobilitazione delle determinazioni spazio-temporali.[12] In un caso, la catastrofe è il compimento dell'elementare nella potenza, realizzazione controllata dalla figura titanica dell'operaio; nell'altro caso, l'evento catastrofico è il compimento della sottrazione della potenza, realizzazione alla quale lo sventurato consapevole di Weil acconsente con attesa subordinante. Il *Krieger*, come afferma Jünger nello scritto sulla guerra del 1922, "si fa inchiodare come singolo alla croce [*sich als Einzelner ans Kreuz schlagen lassen*] per la propria missione" (Jünger 2017, 66; traduzione mia); per Weil, la Croce è l'evento metafisico che costituisce la realtà fin nei suoi limiti marginali e che deve essere imitato da un essere umano che può guardare alla Croce al modo della umile accettazione.

Affinità e divergenze

Nonostante le differenze decisive che sussistono tra le due prospettive, è possibile intravedere sia similitudini che derivano dalla presenza di elementi neoplatonizzanti all'interno delle architetture metafisiche dei due pensatori, sia un elemento comune che risiede nel momento apicale della conoscenza ed esperienza del principio metafisico del reale. Risulta proficuo approfondire il punto di contatto del momento mistico, rilevando che il dato comune risiede nel concetto di ricettività radicale. Al fine di guadagnare una presenza attenta, distaccata e autentica nel tessuto cosmico, e di raggiungere quindi una comprensione profonda dell'intero spettro del reale, lo sventurato consapevole di Weil e il lavoratore assoluto jüngeriano devono realizzare una ricezione profonda dell'originario.

Il termine dominio è stato qui associato alla proposta filosofica di Ernst Jünger: tuttavia, anche per l'atteggiamento di attesa attenta e impersonale auspicato da Weil si potrebbe utilizzare questa categoria, nella misura in cui essa rimanda a una prospettiva ferma, acuta e consapevole, che regola il transito dell'essere umano nel divenire, e a una esperienza piena e salda dell'abitare con impersonale distacco l'ordine della pura presenza degli enti. L'accettazione della sventura comporta una trasformazione della volontà in amore soprannaturale e discendente, uno svuotamento che avviene secondo la scelta per l'umiltà metafisica; ciononostante, l'essere umano che imita il modello della Croce riesce a dominare tutte le asperità della stretta divina, non soltanto sottoponendo pazientemente la sua costituzione creaturale all'azione devastante delle componenti del

[11] "L'ora della catastrofe è ritenuta infatti essere per i Mauretani l'ora del dominio [Gilt doch die Stunde der Katastrophe als die Stunde der Mauretanier]" (Jünger 2002, 107).
[12] Cfr., tra gli altri, Weil 2008.

malheur (dolore fisico, sradicamento dell'anima e marginalizzazione sociale), ma anche ergendosi come argine, cavo e accogliente, alla diffusione della stessa sventura che subisce, la quale viene costretta e sorvegliata entro un ente umano divenuto limite soprannaturale. In un certo senso, lo sventurato consapevole domina uno scenario di sventura, seppur mediante la subordinazione alla grazia divina.

La forma dell'attesa è stata utilizzata per designare la versione weiliana dell'opera interiore; tuttavia, anche per la presa sul reale operata dal lavoratore di Jünger è possibile affiancare al concetto di *Herrschaft* la modalità dell'attesa, evidenziando il versante della presa che comporta il riconoscimento, l'ascolto e il contatto con una dimensione ulteriore rispetto al soggetto che realizza il dominio. L'*Arbeiter* che domina il mondo, la tecnica e l'elementare deve conoscere e accettare questi tre livelli, al fine di realizzare la com-prensione decisiva. Il dominio che contraddistingue le forme del lavoratore e del combattente prevede anche una subordinazione preliminare a un contesto metafisico che sembra eccederlo:[13] è necessario conoscere la tecnica, per allineare il metodo umano alla scansione della macchina e mobilitare il mondo attraverso di essa; è necessario portare a compimento l'identità che sussiste tra l'elementare che risiede nell'anima umana e il principio elementare del tutto, al fine di entrare, in modo estatico, nel divenire della lotta. Secondo un particolare rispetto, il dominio attivo comporta e ammette una componente di attesa passiva, tanto da mettere in questione, relativizzandola, l'assolutezza della forma del lavoratore e da prevedere una modificazione dello schema metafisico, accompagnata dall'avvento di figure (come il *Waldgänger* e l'*Anarch*) che, affiancando l'*Arbeiter*, risulteranno maggiormente congeniali alla prospettiva che lo scrittore tedesco andava maturando.

Credo sia possibile sostenere che entrambe le prospettive situano il cardine della antropologia integrale nella disposizione ricettiva (che è incrocio di attività e passività) dell'essere umano nei confronti di ciò che lo sovrasta e che gli dà origine. Tuttavia, in Jünger è più marcato il lato attivo e interventistico di tale ricettività; in Weil prevale quello passivo e subordinante. E la differenza in parola può essere ricondotta alla differenza radicale tra la dazione originaria di un principio che si esprime (l'elementare jüngeriano) e quella di una divinità che sottrae una delle sue componenti (la grazia weiliana): si tratta di una distanza teoretica rappresentata icasticamente dalla diversa interpretazione del simbolo della croce come evento metafisico di portata catastrofica.

[13] "[…] se da una parte la mobilitazione totale rimanda a quell'energia elementare che attraversa tutta la materia, organica e inorganica, dall'altra l'Operaio è la sola figura in grado di darle forma, ossia di "dominarla", conferendo un ordine al suo anarchico manifestarsi. Jünger, tuttavia, non si nasconde – nemmeno ai tempi dell'Arbeiter – il fatto che, in realtà, non sia tanto l'uomo a servirsi della tecnica per imporre la propria forma alla Terra, ma sia piuttosto quest'ultima a servirsi dell'uomo o comunque a strumentalizzarlo all'interno di un disegno più vasto e impenetrabile, i cui scopi ultimi, inevitabilmente, ci sono inaccessibili. Se ancora nel testo del '32 egli è convinto che l'Operaio riuscirà a esercitare la propria imposizione della forma e con ciò il proprio dominio sulla terra […], d'altra parte c'è da dire che esso sarà in seguito ampiamente superato […]" (Resta 2000, 88-89 n. 25). Cfr. anche Amato 2001, in particolare 33-72.

Concludo affermando che, accostando il pensiero di Simone Weil e quello del primo Jünger, a partire dal concetto di lavoro inteso come lettura e modificazione del reale, e sviluppando tale concetto nel versante dominato dall'idea di catastrofe e secondo la direzione che culmina nel misticismo, è possibile suggerire i due paradigmi qualitativamente opposti, ma germinati dalla medesima ricettività radicale e originaria, del dominio e dell'attesa.

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CAMILLA BALBI, MARCELLO SESSA[1]

UN ASTRATTISMO MANCATO?

Carl Einstein e Clement Greenberg rileggono Kandinsky

ABSTRACT: Through an aesthetic and a historical-philological lens, this essay analyses the complex relationship between Wassily Kandinsky's work and its critical interpretations by Carl Einstein and Clement Greenberg in the first half of the 20th century. Within two different and paradigmatic modernisms — the European and the North American one, the German-speaking and the English-speaking one —, both authors read Kandinsky's abstraction both as a negative (in its deviation from modernist orthodoxy) and positive (a chance to project through Kandisky's work an unprecedented image of modernism, as well as their critical vision) form of art.

KEYWORDS: Carl Einstein, Clement Greenberg, Wassily Kandinsky, Modernism.

Introduzione

È il 1922 quando Wassily Kandinsky decide di lasciare Mosca per unirsi a una delle esperienze artistiche e culturali più rilevanti del suo tempo: il Bauhaus di Gropius. Qui, il fondatore del *Blaue Reiter* avrebbe portato a compimento la sua teoria dell'astrattismo, scrivendo un capitolo fondamentale della storia del modernismo pittorico. Nei decenni successivi, dai due lati dell'Atlantico, due dei principali teorici dell'arte moderna – Carl Einstein e Clement Greenberg – si interrogavano sulla validità delle sue intuizioni, criticandole profondamente. L'articolo analizza, per la prima volta, la complessa triangolazione che viene dunque a crearsi tra la teoria e l'opera di Kandinsky, e le letture critiche dei due autori, che sono stati scelti come possibili paradigmi di un modernismo bifronte: germanofono e anglofono.

Si osserveranno così affinità e divergenze tra approcci niente affatto sovrapponibili, ma a volte tangenti: nei due casi, la lettura di Kandinsky si rivela pietra angolare degli snodi concettuali più rilevanti delle rispettive concezioni del modernismo. Sia per Einstein sia per Greenberg, l'astrazione kandinskyana è a un tempo, in negativo, una deviazione difettiva dall'ortodossia modernista e, in positivo, un'occasione per proiettare su un autore la propria visione critica. Verificare queste rifrazioni confrontandole con l'effettivo dettato di Kandinsky può essere un modo per fare emergere *a contrario*

[1] Il lavoro è frutto della riflessione comune degli autori. Sono tuttavia da attribuirsi alla dott.ssa Camilla Balbi il primo paragrafo, e a Marcello Sessa il secondo. L'introduzione e la conclusione nascono invece dal lavoro di scrittura congiunta dei due autori.

un'immagine del modernismo a partire dai suoi obiettivi mancati, e per riflettere di nuovo sullo statuto ambiguo della pittura astratta sviluppatasi dal *Blaue Reiter*, perennemente tesa tra spirituale e materiale. La critica alla teoria dell'arte kandinskyana sembra infine gettare un ponte inatteso e idiosincratico tra modernismo americano e modernismo europeo.

La perdita del mondo. Einstein su Kandinsky

Die Kunst des 20 Jahrhunderts è un progetto complesso. Le sue diverse versioni (Einstein 1926b, 1928, 1931) si presentano come un intricato palinsesto di ripensamenti, esitazioni e riscritture, da cui traspaiono le drammatiche vicende che accompagnano l'esistenza del suo autore, Carl Einstein, e della sua epoca. Tra una versione e l'altra, l'abbandono di una Repubblica di Weimar sull'orlo del tracollo economico, intellettuale e politico, per Parigi; la fondazione di *Documents* e un continuo, conseguente, riposizionamento delle sue idee sul modernismo e sull'arte del suo tempo.

Già nel 1926 il critico Albert Dreyfus riconosceva il carattere peculiare del libro – che negli anni Trenta parlava dell'arte di tutto il secolo XX come da un "futur passé" (Starvinaki 2011, 199) – per i toni assolutamente antitrionfalistici, estranei alla retorica modernista, che caratterizzavano la pagina einsteiniana: "Non è un'opera di gioia. È un'opera più distruttiva che ricostruttiva, specchio di un'epoca segnata dalla grande guerra e dai suoi presagi" (Dreyfus 1926, 214).

Se la critica si è generalmente soffermata sulle pagine che Einstein dedica al cubismo, o ha limitato la sua attenzione per la sua "svolta surrealista" (Kiefer 2016, 55) agli scritti su Paul Klee (Hexathausen 2003, 132), scarsa attenzione è stata dedicata al, severissimo, giudizio che il teorico riserva all'arte di Wassily Kandinsky.

Einstein affronta infatti, nel suo percorso attraverso l'arte del Novecento, non soltanto le esperienze che considera *produttive*, ma anche talune in cui riconosce un carattere essenzialmente *distruttivo*. Sono queste ultime che gettano il seme di una sfiducia profonda nelle possibilità dell'arte, di una sconfitta del modernismo e della modernità, culminata nella scelta di andare a combattere in Spagna nel 1936, e smettere di pubblicare. Di questa sfiducia reca traccia il postumo e incompleto *Die Fabrikation der Fiktionen,* "auto-da-fé della cultura europea d'avanguardia del ventesimo secolo" (Haxthausen 2019, 310). Ed è appunto di questa autobiografia suicida del modernismo che si fanno premonitrici le pagine dedicate a Wassily Kandinsky.

> Un incontro, quello tra Einstein e il *Blaue Reiter,* insieme tempestivo e mancato. Già nel 1912, Kandinsky aveva infatti manifestato un precoce interesse per il critico, interrogandosi con Franz Marc sulla possibilità di includerne un saggio nel primo, storico, numero dell'almanacco del *Blaue Reiter* (Kandinsky 1912, in Lankheit 1983, 125). Marc gli avrebbe risposto di trovare gli scritti di Einstein "*sehr interessant,*" ma di preferire rimandarne la pubblicazione al secondo numero dell'almanacco, previsto per il 1914. (Marc 1912, in Lankheit 1983, 133)

Qui, tuttavia, il testo di Einstein non sarebbe mai apparso. Come nota Fleckner (2006, 88), la scelta einsteiniana di inviare un saggio al *Blaue Reiter* già nel 1912 denota una precocissima attenzione da parte del teorico – d'altronde molto vicino a Paul Cassirer e agli ambienti della Secessione berlinese – per la rivoluzione artistica in corso a Monaco.[2] Un entusiasmo, tuttavia, rapidamente sfumato (e, con esso, il proposito di pubblicare sull'almanacco) dopo la lettura del manifesto teorico kandinskyano, *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* (1911), che rivelava le aspirazioni esplicitamente metafisiche del suo autore.[3]

Negli anni successivi, malgrado Einstein avesse conosciuto l'artista di persona (frequentandolo assiduamente, assieme a Gropius e Klee, a partire dal 1919, quando gli si sarebbe prospettata l'occasione, mancata, di insegnare al Bauhaus), il suo giudizio sul progetto metafisico di Kandinsky sarebbe rimasto estremamente ambivalente, articolandosi teoricamente con più precisione con il progressivo affermarsi nell'arte tedesca – a ridosso della pubblicazione di *Die Kunst des 20 Jahrhunderts* – della *Nuova oggettività.* Nell'arte "giornalistica" (Einstein 1928, 153) della *neue Sachlichkeit* Einstein vedeva infatti una reazione al rifiuto del reale inaugurato dal cavaliere azzurro. Così, nell'unico testo "monografico" dedicato a Kandinsky — un breve brano del 1926, pubblicato per il sessantesimo compleanno dell'artista —, le conquiste teoriche del fondatore del *Blaue Reiter* venivano raccontate come cronache dolceamare di una sconfitta:

> Kandinsky, un uomo audace, ha rotto finestre che oggi sono di nuovo vetrate: questi vetri andranno in frantumi ancora, e spesso; ancora e spesso la ribellione si stancherà nella conversione. È il gioco del cambio generazionale, per cui i più giovani molto spesso si dimostrano cautamente stanchi. Non sappiamo quale profezia vincerà alla fine: se quella della ripetizione o quella del cambiamento. La questione è se verrà contato il Soggetto o l'Oggetto. Probabilmente sono reciprocamente dipendenti; gusci di una bilancia: scambio di pesi, cambio di valutazioni. Kandinsky trovava gli oggetti troppo leggeri, questi oggi si prendono la loro sobria rivincita in una semplicità arrivista e schematica. (Einstein 1926a, 372-373)

Non stupirà allora che quando, nello stesso anno, vede la luce la grande storia dell'arte einsteiniana, il giudizio del critico su Kandinsky sia particolarmente severo, e ugualmente incentrato sulla sterilità, cui il teorico guardava con preoccupazione, della dialettica tra soggetto e oggetto:

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[2] Einstein aveva visto l'opera di Kandinsky per la prima volta nell'anno precedente, in occasione della mostra della nuova secessione inaugurata a Berlino nel novembre del 1911.

[3] Leggiamo negli appunti di Einstein di quell'anno: "da Kandinsky non voglio la metafisica in quanto tale; poi probabilmente non avremo nemmeno bisogno di parlare dei suoi quadri," Einstein 1912, pp.nn. Einstein, Carl. 1912. Bemerkungen zum heutigen Kunstbetrieb, nel Carl Einstein Archiv.
Il testo è consultabile a questo indirizzo:
https://digital.adk.de/en/hitlist/detailpage/?tx_dlf%5Bid%5D=5814&tx_dlf%5Bpage%5D=1&cHash=a777a08e61a59bf8db11d08a35c531ac (ultimo accesso 9 dicembre 2022).
Le traduzioni dal tedesco sono dell'autrice dell'articolo.

> Davanti al russo Kandinsky si spalancava un profondo dualismo tra motivo e contenuto interiore; egli sentiva che il motivo osservato apparteneva solo indirettamente al processo psichico interiore, che veniva percepito non come accidente contingente ma come nucleo inscindibile degli eventi. Ci si scindeva dall'esterno e ci si ritirava nell'io nudo, che esplodeva nel colore come per necessità. (Einstein 1926b, 143)

Un'opposizione dualistica che, in ultimo, avrebbe condotto Kandinsky a una "polverizzazione dell'oggetto sotto l'azione di un solipsismo ottico" (47). Einstein proseguiva dunque criticando l'individualismo eroico kandinskyano con toni accesi, parlando variamente di "cristianizzazione dell'ottica," "dittatura del vissuto," o "monologo circolare" "straordinariamente egocentrico" (148, 149, 150). A fare da sfondo al discorso, una critica più latamente generazionale, e culturale: la mancata comprensione — che Einstein considerava comune all'intera teoria dell'arte tedesca — dell'intrinseca inscindibilità di forma e contenuto, astrazione e rappresentazione. Il risultato: una rinuncia a creare forme, *Gestaltungen*, in grado di interagire con il mondo reale, e la postulazione della costruzione di significati condivisi a un simbolismo misticheggiante, di matrice ancora marcatamente letteraria, con cui "i quadri si riducono a una catena associativa di illustrazioni di un teorema insufficiente" (151).

A fare da sfondo a queste critiche è l'ingeneroso confronto con l'arte di Paul Klee — Klee stesso avrebbe chiesto, inutilmente, al critico di smorzare il contrasto con l'amico e collega (Klee 1931, in Kiefer e Meffre 2020, 519) — cui Einstein dedica il paragrafo immediatamente successivo,[4] affermando che "le intelligenze brillanti e fini si sono stancate di questo mondo, ma non si arrendono alle teorie ostili alla forma, cercano invece forme nuove. In questo, Klee si separa decisamente da Kandinsky" (Einstein 1926, 155).

Se, dunque, l'artista russo sarebbe promotore di un rifiuto ascetico del mondo, Klee sarebbe invece impegnato, per Einstein, nella creazione di uno *Zwischenwelt* (155) tra mondo e sogno, "in cui un atteggiamento primitivo prende forma dalla complessità del sensibile" (156).

Una contrapposizione destinata a esacerbarsi ulteriormente nella terza edizione del testo, del 1931, in cui Einstein opera una significativa riarticolazione dell'indice, aggiungendo un capitolo sul Surrealismo (figlio dell'esperienza di *Documents*) e un capitolo dedicato agli artisti del *Blaue Reiter,* nelle precedenti versioni inclusi nella sezione "I tedeschi" assieme agli autori dell'Espressionismo e della *Neue Sachlichkeit*.

Indice 1926, 1928	Indice 1931
Premesse	Premesse
L'inizio	L'inizio

[4] Tra i grandi progetti non realizzati di Einstein, si trova menzionato nelle corrispondenze, già a partire dal 1923, il progetto su un Kleebuch (cfr. Kiefer e Meffre 2020, 293 e 365). Per una lettura critica delle riflessioni einsteiniane su Klee si vedano Haxthausen 2003 e Zeidler 2010.

Il cubismo	Il cubismo
	La generazione romantica
Il futurismo	Il futurismo
I tedeschi	I tedeschi
I russi	I russi
	Il blaue Reiter
Le arti plastiche	Le arti plastiche

Come è stato osservato (Haxthausen 2019, X), la scelta, apparentemente idiosincratica, di porre un movimento nato nel 1912, e morto poco dopo, a conclusione della sua storia dell'arte, con una decisa forzatura delle cronologie, era plausibilmente dovuta alla riconsiderazione — a seguito dei contatti col surrealismo — della vitalità delle teorie del Cavaliere azzurro, che aveva anticipato e approfondito tendenze surrealiste come l'automatismo, l'allucinazione o il sogno. Monito sottovalutato, ma ancora vitale, per l'arte a venire. Se dunque Einstein rilegge, nel 1931, il *Blaue Reiter* con il filtro del Surrealismo, è interessante osservare anche come, in un movimento inverso, sia proprio la sua interpretazione del *Blaue Reiter* degli anni Venti – e di Kandinsky in particolare – a consentirgli di individuare con chiarezza i limiti del gruppo di Breton, soggetto ai medesimi rischi di "autismo" (Einstein 131, 260;262) e individualistica arbitrarietà (131) dell'avanguardia monacense.

Così, diviene possibile osservare un inaspettato gioco di echi tra le sezioni dedicate ai due movimenti: se Kandinsky "traduce continuamente l'origine fantasmatica o allucinatoria che gli è propria comunicando non tanto puri teoremi, quanto generalizzazioni di un vissuto soggettivo, impressioni spirituali" (Einstein 1926, 148), nei surrealisti

> si manifesta un'enfasi sui processi allucinatori e psicografici, ci si sottomette all'intuizione che detta le *Gestalten*, e si cerca di afferrarle con il disegno; non si accetta più il mondo come qualcosa di finito, ma come una costruzione provvisoria, e si tenta di infonderlo con esperienze e punti di vista inediti, sacrificandosi a un'ispirazione fatidica. (Einstein 1931, 257)

Le implicazioni etiche e politiche di questa teoria dell'arte appaiono evidenti nell'unica integrazione, passata inosservata alla critica, che Einstein apporta nel 1931 al suo paragrafo su Kandinsky: "dalla separazione tra forma e contenuto si solleva il problema dell'autonomia dei processi interiori e, con esso, il problema della libertà umana" (Einstein 1931, 213). La fuga dal mondo, per Einstein, non può essere una risposta efficace al tempo presente, non se quel tempo è il 1931. La contrapposizione tra Kandinsky e Klee, in chiusura alla sua storia della pittura del XX secolo, non è allora da leggere soltanto come discorso artistico, ma etico e politico, dalle stringenti implicazioni esistenziali. Un discorso che mantiene, in fondo, uno slancio utopico, messianico, forse ottimistico. Così, nella conclusione alla terza versione, che prende quasi le forme di un testamento teorico, Einstein affida alle nuove pagine su Klee le ultime speranze per un'arte intesa come rivolta, magica e poetica, mitopoietica e in grado di forzare le maglie

del razionalismo occidentale. È qui che si coglie in profondità l'utopismo del progetto einsteiniano. Il critico vuole Klee, nel testo del 1931 (uno dei pochi completamente riscritti), impegnato "nell'integrazione dell'esperienze solitarie in segni collettivamente validi" (Einstein 1931, 281). Non una fuga dal mondo, dunque, non l'iniezione nel mondo di visioni private: "la questione è intercalare *Gestalten* e oggetti nella realtà, per cui il significato del mito non è più una preservazione del passato ma una rivolta contro ciò che esiste nel presente" (281).

Einstein indica una via, ma è consapevole che la "rivoluzione kandinskyana" — che prosegue in molte esperienze contemporanee — va in una direzione diversa; l'utopismo della sua *Die Kunst des 20 Jahrhundert* acquista allora la dimensione di una profezia disperata, che contiene in sé il suo rovesciamento. Così, se tradizionalmente si concepisce il crollo delle speranze einsteiniane nel modernismo, evidenti in *Die Fabrikation der Fiktionen* (1936 ca.), come un brusco stravolgimento teorico dovuto all'impotenza della cultura davanti all'avanzare del Nazionalsocialismo, la storia della sconfitta dell'avanguardia, del suo "precipitare" in un individualismo afasico, in una comunità culturale incapace di farsi *communitas*, è — nel percorso teorico di Einstein — molto più radicata. In questo quadro, l'esperienza kandinskyana costituisce in qualche modo l'epicentro segreto di un sisma i cui effetti, i cui crolli, sarebbero stati evidenti solo negli anni successivi. Un percorso teorico di slanci utopici e delusioni amare, presentimenti oscuri e avventure ideologiche che, come una parabola dell'intera Repubblica di Weimar, conduce ad un'unica, la più tragica, fine.

Quadri come ricettacoli. Greenberg su Kandinsky

La narrazione del modernismo secondo Clement Greenberg procede forte del fatto che l'astrazione abbia alterato l'ontologia dell'immagine come una rivoluzione. Stupisce allora l'assenza di Wassily Kandinsky dal suo canone. Uno dei padri fondatori dell'astrattismo riveste, in un edificio critico che fa dell'astratto il suo perno, un ruolo secondario: tale contraddizione merita di essere analizzata. Nei suoi articoli, Greenberg menziona Kandinsky poche volte, escludendolo dalle trattazioni più teoriche in cui configura i caratteri dell'immagine modernista e ne seleziona gli attori. Queste occasioni sono preziose, e dimostrano che il rifiuto della figurazione nel medesimo spazio del quadro può essere interpretato in modi differenti.

Sebbene constati anzitutto che sia la "purity in art" (Greenberg 1988a, 23) a contraddistinguere la pittura modernista, Greenberg prende invero il partito della materialità. Già dagli esordi offre una singolare giustificazione dell'arte astratta. L'astrazione è sì l'esito di una "search of the absolute," (Greenberg 1988a, 8) che ha condotto alla dissoluzione di ogni contenuto extra-artistico nell'opera d'arte, ma tale ricerca e tale assoluto risiedono nell'artistico puro; l'artista la attua "in turning his attention away from subject matter," per dedicarla "upon the medium of his own craft." (Greenberg 1988a, 8-9) L'arte "nonobjective" nasce da una transizione da "matter"

(complemento non pittorico che occulta il quadro) a "medium" (essenza pittorica al centro di esso).

La "historical apology for abstract art" (Greenberg 1988a, 37) si rivela materialista laddove la fuga dalla *subject matter* collima con un'esasperazione progressiva della matericità pittorica courbetiana;[5] la rivendicazione del *medium* ha matrice realista: "For the visual art the medium is discovered to be physical; hence pure painting [...] seek above else to affect the spectator physically" (Greenberg 1988a, 32-33). La pittura è astratta quando è essenzialmente pittorica; quando si libera dell'oggetto referente e al suo posto afferma la propria materialità; quando giunge a una "realization of painting as a physical medium." (Greenberg 1988b, 271)

Kandinsky, invece, riconduce l'astrazione allo spirito. La sua attività di scrittore è il tentativo di soddisfare "le besoin de justifier" il suo astrattismo pittorico, descritto come "l'événement de sa vie" (Vallier 2012, 44). Dipingere, nel 1910, il presunto primo acquerello astratto è stato per l'artista una rivelazione, al punto da spingerlo a dilatare il piano individuale su quello universale, facendo corrispondere la singola creazione alla "svolta spirituale" di un'epoca così annunciata, in nome di una "somiglianza" e di una "affinità" (Kandinsky 2005, 17,18) interiori tra opere e mondo. La collocazione dell'artistico in un regime immateriale è stata oggetto delle letture più diverse: c'è chi la considera una pendenza "à l'exsangue spiritualisme fin de siècle" (Vallier 2012, 44-45); chi ci vede una "nientificazione" del mondo naturale che offre al pittore la possibilità di "costituire un perfetto analogon dell'intelligere divino," (Masini 1972, 135, 134) reiterando le suggestioni della mistica tedesca eckhartiana in un tempo secolarizzato;[6] e chi la ritiene la più radicale "conferma lampante dell'anteriorità dell'invisibile" (Henry 2017, 25) nell'immanenza del visibile pittorico.

La spinta introflessa dell'arte è sorretta da una complessiva opposizione tra esterno e interno, che sono "due [...] proprietà" inerenti ai fenomeni, da cui derivano "due maniere non [...] arbitrarie" secondo cui "ogni fenomeno può essere vissuto" (Kandinsky 2010, 7). Quelle esterne sono sempre subordinate all'interno. La teoria kandinskyana oblitera la natura esteriore e materiale dell'arte astratta rimandando tutti problemi di forma al problema del contenuto (con moto centripeto e antitetico rispetto alla liberazione centrifuga dalla *subject matter* da cui secondo Greenberg è emersa l'astrazione). Per Kandinsky la pittura è astratta quando — commenta Michel Henry — "sono astratti anche i mezzi della pittura" stessa; quando il *medium* visibile sempre rimanda all'invisibile (Henry 2017, 19).

[5] Cfr. Greenberg (1988a, 29). Per Greenberg, il percorso 'materialista' della pittura continua con Édouard Manet, prosegue con certo impressionismo, poi con la svolta di Paul Cézanne, con la rivoluzione cubista e infine arriva all'apice con l'arte astratta. Chi qui scrive ha scelto, per quanto riguarda il corpus di Greenberg e altri testi in lingua inglese e francese, per la maggior parte non tradotti in italiano, di affidarsi all'immediatezza della lezione originale.

[6] L'origine mistica dell'astrazione di Kandinsky è ben evidenziata da Robert Rosenblum (1994). Sulle sue fonti spiritualiste, cfr. Ringbom (2022). Sul rapporto tra mistica e astrazione pittorica primonovecentesca, cfr. Ringbom (1970).

Il principale capo d'accusa di Greenberg al pittore non è tanto la sua "semplicistica [...] 'conversione all'interiorità'" (Masini 1972, 131). Per lui sono i risultati a contare; non crede all'influsso dello spirito sul fare artistico, e mitiga l'accezione trascendente del lemma "spirituale"; lo depotenzia secolarizzandolo: "As far as I can make out, Kandinsky's 'spiritual' means simply intensity and seriousness and has no religious connotations" (Greenberg 1988b, 16). Non ammette una teologia dell'arte: fa bensì della storia della pittura una teleologia. E taccia pure lo spiritualismo kandinskyano di "provincialism in art" (Greenberg 1988b, 3).[7]

Lo scontro tra i due risiede nella natura delle rispettive concezioni dell'arte, che collidono in un luogo cruciale: il trattamento della superficie pittorica. L'avanzamento della superficie al centro del quadro è, nella visione greenberghiana, la causa che invera una pittura modernista. La superficie *è* il quadro astratto, che "has now become an object of literally the same spatial order as our bodies, and no longer the vehicle of an imagined equivalent of that order. It has lost its 'inside' and become almost all 'outside', all plane surface" (Greenberg 1993a, 191).

Nella teoria kandinskyana, viceversa, lo statuto della superficie è subalterno. Ce ne si accorge limitandosi a scomporre il titolo originale di *Punkt und Linie zu Fläche*. Posto che ognora "la forma è sensibile come una nuvola di fumo" (Kandinsky 2005, 54), in principio viene il punto; unità formale primigenia e soglia tra visibile e invisibile, è "quasi strappato dal circostante" e dal contingente (Henry 2017, 27, 2). Dal "'movimento' creatore," poi, nasce la linea; la dinamizzazione del punto comporta la sua "distruzione," affinché la "tensione" possa acquisire una "forza formatrice di superfici" (Henry 2017, 58, 57, 62). In proposito Kandinsky è equivoco; nondimeno è certo che per lui la superficie sia una risultante, su cui pende l'azione (*sulla* superficie) di due spinte gerarchizzate (punto *e* linea).

Alla superficie viene risparmiata la precisione definitoria di punto e linea; non ha la loro ricchissima metaforologia, ma è soprattutto teatro di una contraddizione. Dopo avere decretato la primogenitura del punto, Kandinsky asserisce che "il punto è il risultato del primo scontro tra lo strumento [grafico-pittorico] e la superficie materiale, la superficie di fondo," e che, in seguito, essa viene "fecondata" (Kandinsky 2010, 22). Come se il piano si desse innanzitutto come corpo sterile, e solo successivamente reso riproduttivo per inseminazione indotta dal punto. Il punto è parte attiva, mentre la superficie è passiva.

A tale paradosso se ne aggiunge un altro: Kandinsky usa il termine 'superficie' per indicare con noncuranza due cose diverse. 'Superficie' è prevalentemente "superficie di fondo," la "superficie materiale destinata ad accogliere il contenuto dell'opera;" è una schematica e delimitata entità autonoma, ma soltanto "nel suo àmbito;" ha un "suono tranquillo = oggettivo," da cui si ode piano il *Klang* della necessità interiore (Kandinsky 2010, 131): è un oggetto. 'Superficie' è però, poi, anche dato formale; "il punto può crescere, diventare superficie e coprire inavvertitamente tutta la superficie di fondo;"

[7] Sul "provincialismo" come valore positivo per Kandinsky, cfr. Roskill (1992, 36-45).

come "una speciale proprietà della linea" (Kandinsky 2010, 22-23, 62), è "forza formatrice di superfici." Ci si chiede "dove sarebbe il limite fra punto e superficie," e tra linea e superficie. '*Fläche*' è al contempo supporto e tensione formante. In entrambi i casi, tuttavia, il suo statuto è derogato *ex lege* al punto.

La tirannia del "Punkt," o meglio la sottomissione della superficie, è per Greenberg la debolezza di Kandinsky, e l'ostruzione che gli preclude di centrare l'astrazione modernista. Egli affronta *in negativo* ogni problematica del quadro; rifugge l'incidenza della superficie evitando l'ostacolo:

> For him the picture plane remained something negatively given and inert, not something that acted upon and controlled the drawing, placing, color and size of a shape or line, and whose flatness was re-created by the configuration upon it, or at least (as with the Old Masters) re-invoked. [...] The surface remained, in effect, a mere *receptacle*. (Greenberg 1989, 113)

Il quadro modernista greenberghianamente concepito non ha più bisogno di mostrare una natura contenitiva che non gli è propria, per cui è costretto ad accogliere passivamente altri elementi. Tutte le sue componenti vengono oggettivate e risuonano della struttura, ricreata in ogni parte del quadro. Un'immagine che non è più 'ricettacolo' non deve più essere contenuta, perché a circoscrivere le forme bastano le forme stesse, ripetendo la tensione unitaria della superficie.

La tensione spirituale per Kandinsky, all'opposto, va oltre la superficie, fino a trascurarla: "Una grande superficie in sé non ha nulla di sovrannaturale" (Kandinsky 2013, 49-50). Non realizzare che è proprio la superficie il campo d'azione dell'espressione equivale, per Greenberg, a non avere "the new awareness that easel-painting takes place on a flat, continuous, finitely bounded surface"; a creare uno spazio che rimane "inactive and meaningless" (Greenberg 1988b, 5): "Instead of a picture, however, a gimcrack is produced" (Greenberg 1988a, 64). Greenberg fa di lui il paradigma dell'artista modernista e astratto unicamente in apparenza: si presenta come tale, ma a causa di una mancata comprensione di genesi e sviluppi della pittura moderna ne mistifica l'essenza. A dispetto dell'esibizione di forme astratte, le sue tele perpetuano la logica della figurazione: la qualità per eccellenza di una pittura antimodernista, con il rischio che "the painterly" divenga nulla più che "a matter more of *trompe-l'oeil* illusion" (Greenberg 1993b, 123-124).

La grammatica dell'arte kandinskyana si fonda su un connotato principio di base: la composizione. È l'elemento che insuffla alle opere la "necessità interiore" : "Il contenuto di un'opera trova la sua espressione nella composizione, cioè nella somma internamente organizzata delle tensioni necessarie nel caso contemplato" (Kandinsky 2010, 29). Essa è sussunta alla "necessità interiore" per via musicale: è un "contrappunto" che perviene all'armonia tramite "contrasti e contraddizioni" (Kandinsky 2005, 55,74), secondo un'adorniana oggettivazione esterna delle dissonanze interne.[8] Anche riletta a posteriori,

[8] Per il paragone tra i contrasti secondo Kandinsky e le dissonanze secondo Theodor W. Adorno, cfr. Escoubas 2011, 152-153.

con lente fenomenologica per esempio, come autoconsapevolezza della cifra ritmica costitutiva dell'estetico,[9] la visione di Kandinsky rimane ordinatrice e parcellizzante: "L'art abstrait, issu de la tension, est par essence construction;" e ciò si riflette sulla natura della superficie pittorica e sul piano che instaura: "Le plan originel est donc tout entier contraste. [...] Le plan originel s'institue donc entre dramatisation et compensation" (Escoubas 2011, 133, 143).

All'esatto contrario, Greenberg ha dell'immagine astratta una concezione schiettamente anti-compositiva: strutturale, non strutturante, che viene conquistata dalla "Cubist grid" (Greenberg 1993b, 254). Da una griglia atomizzata che, scomponendo i rapporti spaziali tra gli oggetti tridimensionali e rendendoli bidimensionali, giunge a "the skeleton [...] of the traditional picture" (Greenberg 1993b, 10). Chi con le forme astratte si ostina a comporre, è "superficial" (Greenberg 1988a, 64), e si abbassa in "a lot of flirting with the third dimension" (Greenberg 1993b, 252-253). La pittura modernista prosegue imperterrita la ricerca di un'immagine 'analitica,' per cui ogni parte equivale all'altra.

Non meraviglia, allora, che il solo modo di avvicinare Kandinsky a un simile racconto del modernismo sia stravolgerlo; cambiarlo di segno come fece Alexandre Kojève con la celebre inversione da 'astratto' a 'concreto.' Rispettando l'ortodossia hegeliana, quello concreto è il quadro la cui bellezza è quella "della sola superficie [...] piana limitata": che circoscrive il bello in due dimensioni per renderlo "indipendente dal Bello dell'Universo" (Kojève 2005, 17, 35)[10] e delle cose. Questa prospettiva — per cui l'autosufficienza della pura pittoricità è l'unica via per produrre il quadro anti-mimetico "in quanto intero —" (Kojève 2005, 33) devia dal primato dell'interno che ha fatto scoccare, in Kandinsky, la scintilla di una creazione "astratta." È inutile dire che Greenberg non crede al concretismo post-*Rappel à l'ordre*; almeno per quanto concerne il pittore russo, che persino in punto di morte è ritratto come un astrattista mancato. Il critico avrebbe potuto fare proprio il giudizio severo di un modernista tanto diverso, László Moholy-Nagy, che nel 1947 confessava: "Cercavo di eliminare [dal quadro] tutti quegli elementi che avrebbero potuto disturbare il loro rigore: al contrario dei dipinti di Kandinsky, per esempio, che mi ricordavano un mondo sottomarino" (Moholy-Nagy 1975, 30); figurativo, in fondo.

Conclusione

Il dialogo impossibile fin qui ripercorso, tra due autori lontani tra loro eppure cruciali nello scrivere la storia del modernismo, restituisce dunque una fisionomia kandinskyana lontana da quella consegnataci dalla tradizione. Tuttora Kandinsky appare come uno dei cosiddetti padri fondatori dell'astrattismo, se non come unico tenutario dell'invenzione

[9] L'estetica dei ritmi di Henri Maldiney è alla base della reinterpretazione di Escoubas della composizione di Kandinsky, cfr. Maldiney 2012, 201-230. Sulla nozione di "vertigine" estetica, cfr. Escoubas 2006.
[10] Sull'estetica hegeliana in Kojève, cfr. Sampugnaro 2019.

dell'astrazione nella pittura da cavalletto. La lezione di Einstein e Greenberg, chiamati a riflettere sul Kandinsky teorico prima ancora che sull'artista, sembra invece rovesciare la vulgata.

Entrambi gli autori lo criticano, insomma, da un punto di vista negativo: per essi, è come se egli avesse mancato l'obiettivo chiave per un'effettiva svolta modernista. A ritornare, nella pittura kandinskyana, sarebbe per i critici uno spettro antico, quello del romanticismo; ai loro occhi, egli non si svincola da schematismi letterari, di matrice simbolica e simbolista. Per i due interpreti i riferimenti pittorici del modernismo sono altri. Klee, nelle pagine del critico tedesco, a guidare quella che Einstein avrebbe definito una concezione della "forma come rivolta" (Zeidler 2010); Picasso in quelle del teorico americano. Per Greenberg, infatti, è necessario assorbire appieno la lezione radicale del cubismo analitico per ingaggiare la sfida di una pittura modernista veramente tale.

A cento anni dall'arrivo di Kandinsky al Bauhaus, i percorsi ermeneutici concessi dalla sua arte e dalle reazioni critiche da questa suscitate — se focalizzati con lenti diverse — si aprono a nuove interpretazioni. Si insinua il sospetto, nelle riletture moderniste che ne vengono fatte dai due lati dell'oceano, che la rivoluzione kandinskyana della pittura astratta sia soltanto presunta. Che sia, piuttosto, una restaurazione.

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PERCORSI

RICHARD HARDACK

TOTAL TIMESCAPING

The Modernist Moment in Pynchon's Against the Day

ABSTRACT: In his novel *Against the Day*, Pynchon's formulation of modernism anticipates and even subsumes postmodernism, yet also is predicated on an abolition of sequential time and cause and effect, which might reflect a modernist decentering of space, time, and gravity. Pynchon's modernism dramatizes the idea that linear time no longer exists – that our time and space are no longer the center of the universe, much as conscious individual thought no longer is the center of subjectivity. Periods, literary or grammatical, also fall by the wayside. This decentering of time also is associated with modernist science and ontology, which paradoxically put modernism back at the center of an aesthetic without a center. Modernism functions as the narrative equivalent of relativity, yet also of quantum theory, because all spaces and time emerge and exist at once, in a process that Pynchon refers to as bilocation. Modernist connection then veers into concurrence. At least heuristically, Pynchon also treats the modernist project as a form of doubling and repetition. As a result, Pynchon situates modernism and World War I as precursors to their successor, postmodernism and World War II, without directly addressing them, yet somehow also as co-existing with them; both are doubled though repetitions that rewrite the originals. Pynchon situates modernism as an ethos of echoes, but a repetition without an original. A kind of quilting point, modernism becomes a contradictory master term that still explains everything, a lens through which all else is seen.

KEYWORDS: Thomas Pynchon, Modernism, Postmodernism, Modernity, *Against the Day*, Time.

> "Time itself was disrupted, a thoroughgoing and merciless forswearing of Time as we had known it."
> Thomas Pynchon 2006, 148

Introduction: the master signifier of modernism

In this article, I argue that Thomas Pynchon's 2006 novel *Against the Day* (*AtD*) represents a (post?) postmodern reprisal of modernist aesthetics and politics, and I reassess the novel as an interrogation of the modernist imperatives of 1922. Spanning the period from 1893 to just after World War I, the novel opens with a modernist low-culture exposition of the Chums of Chance, aeronauts who represent a pastiche and parody of boy's adventure novels, but quickly moves to incorporate, on the same plane, anarchism, Pinkertons, The White City, photography, and the cusp of World War I, just up to 1922, all situated in terms of high modernist end(s). Tiina Käkelä-Puumala documents

Pynchon's "historic interest" in "the era of modernization we have been living in since the 17th century [...] Puritanism, the Enlightenment, industrialism, scientific revolutions, global economy, information explosion, simulation – throughout his fiction Pynchon is very much a writer of modernization, of its historical preconditions, aims, and limits" (Käkelä-Puumala 2007, 12; Cowart 2012, 385). But Pynchon also hijacks the concept of modernism to develop a collage of periods, genres, affects, events and aesthetics that are often anachronistically conflated: his positing of modernism as one end of history, which also absorbs all eras, reaches its apotheosis in *AtD*, which could be subtitled *Everywhere, All the Time, All at Once*.

Yet the book, one of whose central *foci* is invisibility, also in some ways occludes the causes or referents for its own construction of modernism. David Cowart observes that "the author's refusal fully to depict World War I poses one of this text's most interesting questions: Why does a chronicle largely focused on the decades preceding 1914 not avail itself of a culmination as convenient to narrative as to history? Fought off-page, the Great War detains the reader only briefly as the novel reaches its conclusion" (2012, 394). In other words, much that propels the narrative, or that the narrative circles around without directly incorporating, remains invisible. Modernism too is a spectre haunting the novel, often off page. What's missing, or invisible, both represents the center and indicates the center has not held: that modernism anticipates and even contains postmodernism, yet also stands for the abolition of sequential time and cause and effect (which, among other things, might reflect the modernist decentering of space, time, and gravity). Simon de Bourcier proposes that "*Against the Day* presents a dialogue between the modernist aesthetic strategy of, in Žižek's terms, 'demonstrating that the game works without an object, that the play is set in motion by a central absence,' and postmodernism's counter-move of 'displaying the object directly'" (2019, 174). But I would argue that modernist absence (and ultimately invisibility) take primacy here, and that *AtD* also is structured around binaries, or what Pynchon terms "bilocated" opposites that ultimately overlap — the same things but from different times and spaces. The referent for all these duplications, or their Rosetta Stone, remains modernism. In Pynchon's novel, modernism also encapsulates and is used to dramatize the idea that linear time no longer exists (or, in other words, that our time and space are no longer the center of the universe, or even of us, much as conscious individual thought no longer remains the center of subjectivity): periods, literary or grammatical, therefore also no longer exist, but only from the reified vantage of modernism.

Pynchon associates this decentering of time with modernist science and ontology, which paradoxically put modernism back at the center of an aesthetic without a center. Modernism here functions as the narrative equivalent of relativity, yet also of quantum theory, because all spaces, times and events emerge and exist at once, and through what Pynchon refers to as bilocation. At least narratologically, Pynchon treats the modernist project as a form of doubling and repetition. As a result, he situates modernism and World War I as precursors to their successors, postmodernism and World War II, without directly addressing them; both critically are doubled through repetitions that

rewrite the originals. Even their names tether the iteration to inescapable first enactments that are both hyper-present and recedingly invisible. Pynchon situates modernism as an ethos of echoes, but a form of repetition without an original; it serves as kind of empty set that decenters cause and effect and a kind of quilting point. In J. P. E. Harper-Scott's elaboration of Lacan, the quilting point is the concept "around which all concrete analysis of discourse must operate", the "point of convergence that enables everything that happens in this discourse to be situated retroactively and prospectively"; it becomes a master term that explains everything, a lens through which everything is seen (2012, 7-8). Modernity becomes the fulcrum and common reference point around which all other terms revolve; as Barry Smart observes in *Modern Conditions, Postmodern Controversies*, modernism can be conceived as encompassing

> a late nineteenth-century stage of transition from romanticism to modernism, the subsequent 'triumph of modernism,' a postmodern reaction, and finally the emergence of ultramodernism. Underlying each of these respective stages is the common denominator of modernity, which by definition, and in contrast to the persisting forms and practices associated with tradition, is considered to be constantly in flux. (1992, 151-152)

Typically situated betwixt and between, modernism itself often is a term in the middle of the definition of modernism. In other words, it is what is, and therefore also what it is not. In other words, modernism is an unstable and self-contradictory term defined largely by what is on either side of it . I don't want to offer a formal description of the ways Pynchon incorporates modernist tropes and references, but an analysis of why he explores modernism "proactively" from the future and through temporal displacements, and what this approach achieves.

According to Simon Wortham, Žižek, after Lacan, "evokes the quilting point as that which operates as an exceptional element or 'master signifier' to unify a 'patchwork' of contingent elements into a single 'edifice' capable of 'totalizing the field and stabilizing its signification'" (2019, 99). I would not contend that modernism is a signifier without a signified, but it does serve as a master signifier that is also a semiotic McGuffin. Pynchon's version of modernism cannot be a transcendental, stable point of reference not only because it is in flux, but because – to use a series of appropriately mixed metaphors – it is a syncretic and self-erasing heuristic; a temporary scaffolding with which he develops narrative structure; and ultimately the equivalent of disappearing stitches. It is necessary to hold the corpus together until it dissolves.

(Bi)locating modernism

According to Cowart, Pynchon in *AtD* develops a

> catalog, spread through the text, [that] eventually signals the imminence of a specific global catastrophe. At first, pure accident disguises the gathering malevolence, but presently the disasters begin to seem decidedly portentous: the Krakatoa eruptions of 1883 to recurrently, the 1902

> toppling of the campanile in Venice […] References to attempted assassinations in the nineteenth century – of Queen Victoria by Edward Oxford in 1840, of Henry Clay Frick by Alexander Berkmann in 1892 – culminate, as it were, in the shots fired by Jean-Baptiste Victor Sipido at Edward, Prince of Wales, in the spring of 1900. (1992, 392-3)

Through to the end of the Austro-Hungarian empire and World War I. But the novel is full of references to a future that hasn't arrived, those that already have transpired, anticipatory echoes, near prophecies, prolepses, and intrusions from other times. Though the book indulges in an array of anachronisms, it situates its many later interpolations as "lateral", alternate or displaced atavisms. We repeatedly are asked to "imagine a lateral world, set only infinitesimally to the side of the one we know" (*AtD*, 230). These forms of displacement help codify Pynchon's credo of modernism as a layered, overlapping and staccato voicing of multiple places and times. In this quantum or infinitely dialogical modernism, all possibilities exist at once and can momentarily intrude into what we might have believed, in a pre-modern world, to be a stable medium of linear time and cause and effect. We are told that "Lateral world-sets, other parts of the Creation, lie all around us, each with its crossover points or gates of entry" (*AtD*, 221). Pynchon's novel is replete with "invisible gate[s]" and portals, most of which "biolocate" to modernism – that is, these other times and spaces are always tethered to and overlap with the modernist moment (*AtD*, 164). To bi-locate is to tap into and traverse these lateral coordinates. The mapping or periodization here again seems to operate under principles of quantum mechanics, because one appears able to determine time or space, but not both, and the identification of one seems to disrupt the other. These parallel spaces and times lead to the possibility of a "lateral resurrection," a sidewise escape from, or fatal return to, the "modern" here and now; that modern moment exists only because of/as the confluence of these other crossover points, which also serve as quilting points (*AtD*, 431). A ship's "Marconi room" was picking up messages or "traffic from somewhere else not quite "in" the world, more like from a continuum lateral to it" (*AtD*, 518): we frequently get hints of "a map to a hidden space," "a view into a Creation set just to the side of this one" (*AtD*, 566); we're told to "remember, everything on this map stands for something else," i.e., a displaced, lateral or doubled meaning that must return (*AtD*, 937). *AtD* is the final staging of this sidewise bilocation in Pynchon's works: "Maybe some of us are ready to step 'side-wise' [laterally] once more, into the next dimension – into Time" (*AtD*, 427).[1]

Pynchon's novel then engages in a sustained, displaced doubling of modernism itself: through lateral spatial and temporal bilocation, the novel's events always occur

[1] I build on some arguments here from Hardack 2010 regarding the novel's use of repetition and bilocation, but extend them to focus on modernity. In that article, I address how Pynchon begins to deploy notions of the sidewise, e.g., in The Crying of Lot 49, in which Oedipa "slipped sidewise, screeching back across grooves of years" (Pynchon 1966, 95). In that novel and Gravity's Rainbow, the sidewise represents an incipient form of temporal dislocation, as well as the melding of voices and identities. For example, in what Pynchon periodically refers to as a "sidewise" motion, once distinct voices come to overlap: "[T]he voices are identical" (Pynchon 1966, 106; Pynchon 1995, 577).

simultaneously. We even find out that professors "Renfrew and Werfner were one and the same person"; as happens throughout the text, they "somehow had the paranormal power to be in *at least* two places at the same time […] known in the Psychical field for about fifty years as 'bilocation'" (*AtD*, 685-86). That bilocation more profoundly applies to modernism and postmodernism, which cohabit the text and exist simultaneously as, in effect, one and the same episteme, terms inverted going backward and forward. Pynchon's modernism and postmodernism, like Renfrew and Werfner, are mirrors pointing at each other with nothing in between. Dr. Rao early on "suggest[s] the possibility of linear time becoming circular and so achieving eternal return as simply, or should I say as complexly, as that" (*AtD*, 132). And as Roswell much "later" adds, "And not only can we unfold the future history of these subjects, we can also reverse the process, to look into their pasts" (*AtD*, 1049). Connection itself in Pynchon often functions in relation to doubling and displacement (in part, as a related consideration, because comparison in Pynchon's work tends to create near consonance—tropes become identitarian. In transcendental writing, which I argue provides a context for some of Pynchon's work, metaphors often become synecdoches, and synecdoches literalized.). This echoing is closely connected to *AtD*'s radical reformulation and narrativization of time: "The doubles you report having produced are actually the original subjects themselves, slightly displaced in time" (*AtD*, 571). Simon de Bourcier suggests that Pynchon's novel takes place in a Relativistic space-time that can offer no master chronology or stable order of events, but he is also critical of theorists who conflate modernism and postmodernism into a single post-Einsteinian moment (2012, 103, 26). I would contend that Pynchon "bilocates" his periods, in a way that obviates the meaning and possibility of periodization, leaving modernism in the center of a discourse that can have no center.

If, as David Harvey (1990, 99) contends, modernism was defined by an aesthetic response to the globalization of the world market, the subjection of nature's forces to industry, and the revolutionizing of production, achieved through "violence, destruction of traditions, oppression" and the reduction of all valuation of activity to profit, Pynchon's novel develops a heterodox fugue of temporal dislocations and anachronisms, mostly centered around those features of modernism. The momentum of the book is propelled by "a big parade of modern inventions" (*AtD*, 33); "the wonders of the modern age," from photography to domed cities; all the "modern sciences" (*AtD*, 65, 306, 354) that fascinated the Chums of Chance; and even a "Modern Imperial Institute for Intensive Instruction in Idiotics, or M6.I, as it's called" (*AtD*, 823). In another anachronism, the six I's invert or reverse the initials of the British spy agency MI6, another entity that does not yet quite exist, yet irrupts into this world. Pynchon's novel also could be subtitled *Jokes from the Future*.

The aesthetics of being two places at once

Pynchon's text also is virtually structured around references to modernist aesthetics, for example The Koloni, who constructed "on the principles of Invisibilism, a school of modern architecture which believed that the more 'rationally' a structure was designed, the less visible it would appear" (*AtD*, 625). From "God's unseen world" and the numerous "invisible gateways" to the invisibility associated with the mineral Iceland spar, invisibility in manifold forms is a central theme of the novel, and critical to its play with the notion of unseen but intersecting lateral worlds, as well as the notion of the unseen modernist prime mover (*AtD*, 250, 853). Pynchon continuously invokes a range of such modernist art movements, for example, the proto-fascist Italian Futurity, which also seems to update Dante's hell in modernist form, perhaps as "the Hell of-the-future" (*AtD*, 1070). Here an overdetermined modernist concept of time/the future again evokes the notion that the future can intrude into the past, and hell irrupt from below. We're also told in *AtD* that "The world came to an end in 1914. Like the mindless dead, who don't know they're dead, we are as little aware as they of having been in Hell ever since that terrible August" (*AtD*, 1077). George Steiner (1971, 56) proposed that the twentieth century was the first time a Western hell was located above ground, and one might add that modernism encapsulated such disorienting reorientings of our sense of spatial and temporal, as well as most other, orders.

In ways that play with modernist aesthetics, Pynchon's text also conjoins not just high and low culture, but past and future in scenarios that not only connect, but totalize culture. *AtD* situates modernism as a totalizing discourse of "bilocation" that connects all times, spaces, and consciousnesses. In a Joycean context, modernism totalizes knowledge in an encyclopedic gathering, doubling and distillation of epistemes and methodologies.[2] In a sense, Pynchon therefore situates modernism everywhere but where you would most expect, at its apparent origin. In other words, characters' sense of temporal confusion and disorder is a metaphor for the book's temporal disordering of modernism. As if dreaming of a quantum cat, Lew, for example, experiences "more than everyday déjà vu, the old two-places-at-once condition, kicking up again, he couldn't be sure if he was remembering this now or, worse, *foreseeing* her in some way, so that he had to worry about the possibility that not only might Jardine Maraca be dead but also that it *had not happened* yet" (*AtD*, 1059). That phrase recurs throughout the novel, itself in effect having always already been uttered: "[I]t's so far away the new hasn't reached here 'yet'? Or it hasn't *happened* 'yet'?" (*AtD*, 577).[3] The narrator tells us that Renzo's *picchiata* was perhaps the first "expression in Northern Italy of a Certain Word that would not

[2] Odysseus becomes Ulysses; every event iterates but alters (alterates?) a prior event; all languages converge in "Oxen of the Sun"; Stephen is doubled; and the novel is intended to end the novel. See Hardack 1996 for an overview of how encyclopedic male writers attempt to replicate and totalize space and time as well as knowledge.

[3] I'm reminded of the consonant lyric in Robyn Hitchcock's song "Raymond Chandler Evening," which invokes the quasi-modernist mystery writer: "I'm lurking in the shadows/'Cause it hasn't happened yet."

quite exist for another year or two. But somehow like a precognitive murmur, a dreamed voice, it had already provisionally entered Time" (*AtD*, 1071). Here, the capitalized "Certain" word also might represent a pun regarding the strident, psychopathic self-assurance of fascism.

AtD relentlessly dramatizes the prospect that all events occur simultaneously; that they all form part of the same grid or network; and finally that all people might be the same person, and thereby explores the effects of a totalizing modernist network.[4] Through these "strange links," everything in Pynchon's novel begins "happening simultaneously" on opposite sides of the world (112). Modernist connection veers into concurrence. Every speech is made "'here, but also simultaneously' [...] [there through] the mysterious shamanic power known as bilocation" (143). We're told through "the little-understood enigmata of the simultaneous [that] their gunners were abolishing time," a conceit also adapted to the artificial temporalities of texts: the fact that "time" in a narrative is itself a heuristic, since a reader can skip to any part of the text and move backward and forward and reverse sequences, which already might be non-linear, at will (256). In this regard, *AtD* elevates the simple and formal fact that time in novels is artificial to become emblematic of a complex modernist episteme. (The "enigmata of the simultaneous" could also serve as Pynchon's definition of modernism, the abolition of time and paradoxically of genres). Here, the war that has not yet begun is altering the space/time on either side of it. In this doubling and eradication of time, bilocation, or the ability to be in two places at once, conjoins any events or figures displaced in narrative sequence. As we began to inhabit a world where, as David Harvey remarks, "two events in quite different spaces occurring at the same time could so intersect as to change how the world worked," Pynchon's representation of bilocality or ubiquity rewrites Forster's imperative to "only connect" as "only to bilocate" (*AtD*, 265).[5] Pynchon, who initialed his protagonist in *Gravity's Rainbow* "T.S.," also might be implementing Eliot's

[4] Some understandably would argue that simultaneity, or the compression of space and time, is a feature of the economic and technological globalization affiliated with postmodernism. But many of the technologies – from the telegraph to trains – and behaviors – from colonization to resource extraction – of globalization also marked the nineteenth century. As one brief but emblematic example, Melville situates Moby Dick as a kind of proleptic avatar of what we now might consider postmodernism. Seen in many places at once, and transcending space and time and connecting everything, the white whale is defined by "the unearthly conceit that [he] was ubiquitous; that he had been encountered in opposite latitudes at one and the same instant [...] [and was] not only ubiquitous, but immortal (for immortality is but ubiquity in time)" (1988, 182-83). This configuration of geographic and temporal simultaneity, or the old-two-places-at-once condition, is evident throughout AtD, in which Pynchon combines "pre-modern" and postmodern stagings of simultaneity to generate his all-encompassing version of modernity. For discussions of nineteenth-century U.S. representations of simultaneity, see Hardack 1999; 2020.

[5] In an overdetermined way, especially since the landscaping company in Pynchon's Vineland is named Marquis de Sod, Rudy Giuliani's fiasco of a press conference at Four Seasons Total Landscaping represents the postmodern letter reaching its destination. Four seasons, or time, totalize the landscape, or geography, so time eradicates space, but through an act of comically inept displacement, doubling or bilocation.

modernist proviso, in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," throughout *AtD*: that each great new work of art modifies the past, or in effect creates the kind of fantastic temporal displacements that structure this novel. In other words, all new artistic creation bilocates its sources.

This continuously iterated notion of bilocality is cathected to things that haven't happened yet and to thoughts to which we could have no access, not because they're private, but because they're inaccessible even to the characters. Pynchon's narrator in *AtD* often knows not just the thoughts of inanimate objects, but ones that haven't yet occurred, but are known will come into being. Pynchon links his conflation of high and low culture with a modernist conflation of time and space, producing an encyclopedic totalization of knowledge collated into a kind of omniscient modernist universal narrative consciousness. For Pynchon, modernism seems to be the center of a temporal and cultural fugue that posits there is no center; everything radiates from it, yet is also simultaneous, with modernism somehow remaining both foregrounded and invisible. Unlike many encyclopedists, however, Pynchon does not seek a totalized knowledge in hierarchic form, but as part of a radically egalitarian ethos – all cultures, times, places, and narrative aesthetics are gathered at once, simultaneously overlapping, but ultimately under the stance of a modernism that now also biolocates popular and elite cultures. But Pynchon's modernism represents less its own stable ethos than what the text frequently refers to as a convergence – a convergence of times and spaces, aesthetics and sciences, which, outside the context of modernism, would be incommensurate. But modernist bilocation allows for convergences that transcend the limitations and restrictions of other aesthetics and ontologies.

As Cyprian puts it in *AtD*, unreliably but evocatively, "It may be that God doesn't always require us to wander about. It may be that sometimes there is a – would you say a 'convergence' […] not merely in space but in time as well?" (*AtD*, 958) But within this egalitarian or non-hierarchical doubled singularity, modernist photography remains privileged because of "its convergence of silver, time and light" (*AtD*, 454). According to Arkadiusz Misztal, Pynchon

> employs more subtle traces to articulate his ideas of time: light traces in photography. […] [H]e creates complex temporal 'scapes' by the convergence of light and time. Pynchon […] returns in this novel to the 'natural magic' of early photography to explore the marginalized and overlooked timescapes of modernity. The restoration and celebration of these temporalities constitute an integral part of his strategies of resistance to systematized clock-time and machine-time. (2016, 40-41)

In addition to opposing machine time, Pynchon constructs his novel *as* a modernist time-machine; but like his version of modernism, the machine itself remains outside space and time, even as it brings all times and spaces together.

The modernist singularity

Throughout the novel, Pynchon's form of repetitive narration makes time not only relative and nonlinear, but non-singular and possibly impossible as a category: for example, "questions arose as to the timing, the 'simultaneousness' of [the event in Siberia] [...] something which had not quite happened yet [...] [and] only seemed to occur in the present, though really originating in the future. Was it [...] the general war [...] collapsed into a single event?" (*AtD*, 797) Just as the continents mass and converge, so do temporal nodes. The simultaneity of events is also a function of bifurcated narrative consciousness, a bi-product of narrators who can be two places at once: "Communication had commenced, while, almost exactly on the other side of the Earth, Chums of Chance monitoring personnel waited [...] was the signal going around the planet, or through it, or was the linear progression not at all the point, with everything instead happening simultaneously at every part of the circuit?" (*AtD*, 112) Another term for that circuit is modernism. Throughout *AtD*, the narrator acts and events transpire "as if time had been removed from all equations," and everything "already existed in the moment, complete, perfected" (*AtD*, 327). Everything happens all at once and also already has happened, and that is the modernist moment. In other words, the event always is only a reverberation between past and future, or between one (part of a) text and another: it exists *only* in the repetition, and therefore necessarily creates parallels/doubles/echoes, or spooky narrative action at a distance. In *AtD*, there is no time like the present. As Werfner begins to say, there might be inescapable symmetries, some "predisposition to the echoic," as Renfrew then appropriately finishes, "perhaps built into the nature of Time" (*AtD*, 227). Not surprisingly, these are conceits Pynchon repeatedly dramatizes intra- and intertextually. In *AtD*, for example, "a curious thing had happened to time" (*AtD*, 876); or as Superman proleptically opines in *Gravity's Rainbow,* "you know, Jimmy, time – time is a funny thing" (*AtD*, 752). Time itself is repeated in these texts in the way of a remix. In tandem, modernism repeats what comes before, because it still incorporates the past into its very break with it, and from our vantage is linked, and becomes a way station, to its own successor. Pynchon is here deploying a kind of Situationist detournement, a (post)modernist commandeering or rerouting (detour) of time itself, that mines and combines milieus, periods, consciousnesses, and texts.

In Pynchon, time-travel, itself situated as a modernist 'invention', functions as a Borgesian form of intersubjectivity and intertextuality: passages and characters from one work show up in 'earlier' and 'later' works, but then all texts intertwine as one undifferentiated and non-linear or simultaneous text (which is the encyclopedic universe). Ultimately, Pynchon's treatment of time is not only part of his aesthetic and narratology, but political, and at the center of his radicalism: "What are any of these 'utopian dreams' of ours but defective forms of time-travel?" (*AtD*, 942) Time becomes a locus of an eschatological modernism. Those experiencing the future at "the end of the capitalistic experiment," "were forced to migrate [...] upon that dark fourth-dimensional Atlantic known as Time" (*AtD*, 415).

Pynchon's novel is deeply invested in cultural and temporal pastiche, but also anachronism as a manifestation of anarchism. Utku Mogultay (2018, 4) contends that *AtD* "abounds with such narrative miniatures in which historicity and contemporary aesthetic sensibilities bleed into each other [...] Spanning about three decades, Pynchon's narrative starts in Chicago in the year 1893 and from there takes us to the American Midwest and West, Mexico, the Arctic, South Africa, Germany" and so on. What happens in each location bleeds over into other sections, with phrases impossibly echoing from one place and time to another. Sometimes Pynchon's narrative use of *style indirect libre* is obvious, and directed to temporal/historical and epistemological disjunction: for example, the narrator of *AtD* tells us of a "maze of islands that so confounded the Argonauts even before history began"; on the next page, Vlado tells Yashmeen of narratives "sometimes even older than the Argonauts' expedition – before history" (*AtD*, 818-819).

Here the character either is picking up the narrator's voice directly or the narrator is adumbrating or manipulating the character's speech: as often happens in Pynchon, cause and effect, before and after, launch and echo, are unstable, and even some alterations seem to confirm not difference, but underlying identity and connection. The narrator here again destabilizes linear sequence, because the text has no objective or immutable past and future, and many things transpire simultaneously or out of 'order'. In that broader sense, the novel's schema of periodization and modernism is inherently destabilized. Sometimes the echoes are not just intratextual or intertextual, but more traditionally literary, but even in that context, they arrive explicitly doubled. As Mark Quinn notes, we are cited the same passage from Dante twice in *AtD*: Chick reads "I am the way into the doleful city – Dante," above a memorial arch, which is an iteration of the phrase set above a great Portal of the City. Such repetitions or adumbrations of memories and gateways transpire because, as noted, "Time itself was disrupted, a thoroughgoing and merciless forswearing of Time as we had known it" (*AtD*, 148).

Sometimes the narrator simply seems to want to tell us what they know, as when s/he, they or it informs us – using photo bilocation to close the text's penultimate section, "Against the Day" – that Dally was "riding out to a stop in some banlieue"; begins the next section, "RuDu Depart," by describing Dally as humming "C'est pas Paris, c'est sa banlieue"; and then on the next page tells us that Dally had drifted "into its, well, banlieue" (*AtD*, 1061, 1064-65). Even here we encounter a slippage: the second time you say something, it means something slightly different from the first, especially if you directly repeat it. The double is transformed in being bilocated, and the same effect applies to the text's iteration of modernism. No banlieue here is an original – they are all doubles and echoes.

Many eternal returns

For Pynchon, repetition seems to confirm identity, but identity doubled and slightly altered, and that process also would apply to the relationship between postmodernism and modernism. Pynchon's modernist project, as one example, deploys some of Joyce's aesthetic and narratological strategies, and especially that of *Ulysses*, which is set in Dublin – a city of doubling that of course hosts the bilocation not just of Stephen and Leopold, but *The Odyssey*. In other words, meaning emerges through the repetition of and response to the past: repetition with, but also as, difference. Pynchon's technique is reminiscent of what Hugh Kenner (1979, 15-18) calls the Uncle Charles principle in Joyce, a form of the aforementioned *style indirect libre* in which characters' worldviews and limitations frame the narrator's depiction of them, and that too is a critical form of repetition with difference. What we hear from Pynchon's narrator is a translated version of the past. In *AtD*, we are told such repetitions reflect "the genuine article, and the substructure of reality. The doubling of the Creation, each image clear and believable [...] its curious advent into the world occurred within only a few years of the discovery of Imaginary Numbers, which also provided a doubling of the mathematical Creation" (*AtD*, 133). The iterated phrase "doubling of the Creation" is itself a reformulation of several passages in *Gravity Rainbow*, in which "*everything is connected*, everything in creation" (Pynchon 1995, 703). When *AtD* invokes convergences and "outward and visible metaphors" (811), it channels not just St. Augustine, but *Gravity's Rainbow*, which repeatedly invokes the "outward and visible signs" of predestination (e.g. Pynchon 1995, 448, 665, 811). *AtD* here continues to establish itself as a double for *Gravity Rainbow*, itself a text constructed of doubles. Some of these doubles in *AtD*, perhaps including the narrators, are barely visible, as if they were "somehow, only fractionally present" (*AtD*, 135). Pynchon's modernist doubling always is accompanied by such fractioning, and present space and time through intrusions, advents, and convergences of their counterparts, and, spatial and temporal Renfrews and Werfners, their "equal[s] and opposite[s]" (*AtD*, 33-34).[6] Renfrew and Werfner are modernism and postmodernism, or rather the reverse. Postmodernism in some ways repeats, doubles and alters modernism, or partly ventriloquizes it through repetition, and for Pynchon partly creates it retroactively.

[6] The novel is full of passages that evoke invisible or undetectable disruptions of space and time, or link the decentering of time to the doubling of space: "Time could not, somehow, be taken for granted. It sped up and slowed down, like a variable that was dependent on something else, something so far, at least, undetectable. I have since learned of other cities, out here, secret cities, secular counterparts to the Buddhist hidden lands, more indelibly contaminated by Time, deep in the taiga, only guessed at from indirect evidence [...]" (AtD, 752, 790).

Invisible time

To end at the beginning, which is a kind of modernists trope, but a beginning altered through return, I would note that one can interpret *AtD* as itself a double for modernism displaced in time. Mogultay (2018, 11) observes that the small town we encounter in the middle of Pynchon's novel, "Wall o' Death[,] is not built on any old ruins; it is built on the ruins of the city of tomorrow," an early emblem of modernity from the 1983 Chicago World's Fair. As Mogultay (2018, 3-4) further elaborates, the city also serves as the site of considerable anachronism, and is described in terms that would apply to America only fifty years later. Encapsulating the novel's ethos, the ruins of the present are built on modernist images of the future, and the wasteland ruination associated with modernism bookends all the novel's doubles. David Cowart asserts that

> The historical range of *Against the Day*, 1893 to 1923, covers the thirty years that saw, as it were, modernity's coming of age. The author chronicles the struggle between capital and labor, the competition for colonies, the deep pull of anarchy both philosophical and political, the wars, and the fluidity of international borders that could never accommodate all the nationalisms splintering and proliferating [...]. As Shawn Smith observes, "Pynchon's fiction reunites the present with the genealogy of destruction that spawned it."[7] (2012, 405)

But *AtD* closes with a separate coda set in 1922 in Los Angeles, a spatial displacement perhaps meant to follow through on the novel's temporal ones (though one also should note that *The Crying of Lot 49* transpires in a version of Los Angeles and *Gravity's Rainbow* ends in a Los Angeles theater about 28 years after its main events in Europe). Cowart convincingly evaluates the context for that dislocation as follows:

> Why, indeed, [use] the American West Coast, rather than some likelier European locale, for a conclusion on the eve of the very annus mirabilis of modernism – the 1922 that saw the completion of Rilke's *Duino Elegies* and the publication of *Ulysses*, *The Waste Land*, and Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*? If in fact the author has deliberately elided the year 1922 from his chronicle, it may be that he means to suggest a postmodern worm in the modernist apple, one episteme born at the very moment of another's perfect ripeness. Certain of the more outré features of his 1920s Los Angeles provide an effective frame for characters who modulate from their nineteenth-century identities into figures more familiar to twentieth-century storytelling. (2012, 406)

If, as Brian McHale (2000, 49) claims, space dominates *Mason and Dixon*, where time is spatialized, time dominates *AtD*, where space is both temporalized and temporized – that is, itself both "early" and "late". Again, in sometimes inchoate ways, the narrative focus of *AtD* is early and late for modernism, its before and after, yet not actually coterminous with it. As the novel suggests, when someone is involved in a "time discrepancy," "he is not here, not completely. He is slightly somewhere else. Enough so, to present some inconvenience" (*AtD*, 599). Perhaps the *Inconvenience*, the dirigible the

[7] Quotation taken from Shawn Smith. 2013. Pynchon and History: Metahistorical Rhetoric and Postmodern Narrative Form in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon. New York: Routledge, 181.

Chums of Chance fly around the world throughout the novel, takes over the text's narrator in "being everywhere, but invisible" (*AtD*, 928), and its function is to be slightly elsewhere, slightly sidewise, slightly utopian.

In the end, Pynchon's displacements and doublings bring us back to his revisonist politics of modernist radicalism, which are closely connected to invisibility.[8] Stray, for example, remembers her earlier "notions of the Anarchist life and its promise of a *greater invisibility*" (*AtD*, 976). If we ask who goes off the grid, who becomes invisible, who declines to be further oblivionated by daguerreotype? – Slothrop, and of course his creator, though Slothrop might turn up on an album cover and Pynchon under a brown paper bag when "appearing" on *The Simpsons*. In Pynchon's texts, invisibility is a strategy of resistance, and perhaps a way to elide the wrong kind of doubling – of instead being only fractionally present. The Chums also might have disappeared to their counter-earth, perhaps across if not against the day. And perhaps the point of the text, as in *Vineland*, is to document all the events that "history would [otherwise] be blind to," to record those voices no one else "will be left to remember" (*AtD*, 1016, 1001). Against expectation, it is not the anarchists, the futurists, or any political group that travels against the day; it is the boyhood Chums who cross into the political narrative, developing their "supranational idea" that the third (or fourth) dimension was the "avenue of transcendence," and not a means for delivering explosives (*AtD*, 1083). It is the Chums, whose age in time remains ever indeterminate, who become invisible in space all around us. The narrator asks if we could imagine for them a vector where the birds are heard everywhere but are invisible, where the night is no longer violated by light displaced, or perhaps doubled, from Hell. Pynchon's novel takes place in between days, advancing a version of modernism that is both center- and off-stage, and that gravitates toward invisibility. As Simon de Bourcier (2019, 178) attests, Pynchon is concerned not only with absence, but the presence of invisible things, especially those illuminated by

[8] Being invisible for Pynchon is a defensive gesture of the preterite and disenfranchised, a way to resist power; but the invisibility of those in power generates paranoia. Pynchon likely recognized notions of political invisibility in, and further developed them from, Jim Dodge's slightly mawkish 1990 novel Stone Junction, whose protagonist Pynchon describes as pursuing a kind of alchemical "final secret of Invisibility" (1990, xiv). As Pynchon writes in his introduction to that novel, which he situates as an epic "for our own late era of corrupted romance," one way to achieve a protective anonymity, disguise and autonomy is to resist technology, surveillance and data collection by perfecting "invisibility" (1990, xi). Here, invisibility is a distinct trope, separate from the invisibility African American authors from Harriet Jacobs to Ralph Ellison invoke in relation to slavery and social death, and from the status of African Americans – rather than say the transcendentalists who sought to be invisible or transparent eyeballs – as the true unobserved observers of American society.
It's an obvious but necessary observation that Pynchon's ambivalent depictions of modernity reflect his ambivalence about technology, voiced throughout his fiction and his essay "Is it Ok to be a Luddite?" (Pynchon 1984) Though he values science and the marvels of invention, Pynchon consistently is suspicious of the uses to which technology is put, and like Dodge often manifests a nostalgia for a romanticized pantheistic nature – a vitalistic world in which everything has consciousness – and what he sometimes terms organic communities.

modernism. Pynchon's gambit is to reclaim modernism and its futurism for a more egalitarian day, and to reach a light unconstrained by the past.

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PASQUALE FAMELI

PRODURRE E RIPRODURRE I MEDIA

Il modernismo ancipite di László Moholy-Nagy

ABSTRACT: In July 1922, László Moholy-Nagy published "Produktion – Reproduktion" in *De Stijl*, a magazine of the neo-plastic movement founded by Theo Van Doesburg, a short but significant theoretical text in which he proposes the reuse of reproductive media such as the gramophone, the cinematograph and photography as means for the production of unprecedented formal relations. The rethinking of those media entails a radical detachment from the faithful reproduction of reality and the aestheticisation of their material properties. For Moholy-Nagy, this transformation satisfies the general tendency of modern men to not only extend their sensual faculties, but also to perfect them, fostered by all the new possible relationships between art and technology. The ideas underlying this writing, considered mainly within the debate on abstract avant-garde cinema, are paradigmatic of a radical modernism that, in the field of visual arts, finds highest expression its in the revelation of the specificity of a medium. However, in the course of the following decades, several artists have applied similar principles, achieving results that can be ascribed to an opposite perspective, that of an overcoming of the specificity of the medium which characterised the more mature postmodern condition. Starting from a comparison between the ideas of "Produktion – Reproduktion" and the creative conditions of the post-medium dimension, I highlight the double face of Moholy-Nagy's modernism, which finds in the most extreme version of its principles the premises for its own deconstruction.

KEYWORDS: 1922, László Moholy-Nagy, Modernism, Post-medium, Remediation.

Il 1922 è un anno fondamentale nel percorso di László Moholy-Nagy: il critico Herwarth Walden lo invita infatti a realizzare due linoleografie per le copertine di gennaio e di settembre della rivista *Der Sturm* mentre, in febbraio, organizza la sua prima mostra personale presso l'omonima galleria di Berlino. È in questa occasione che Walter Gropius lo nota e lo invita a insegnare al Bauhaus, dove prende il posto di Johannes Itten per l'erogazione del *Vorkurs*, il corso preliminare obbligatorio per la frequentazione della scuola. Qui Moholy-Nagy inizia a interessarsi al design editoriale e alla scenografia, ma si impone soprattutto per le sue ricerche fotografiche (Verdone 1962). Il 1922 non è solo l'anno del primo inquadramento professionale dell'artista ma, come ricorda la figlia Sibyl, è anche l'anno in cui egli dimostra a se stesso la vitalità visiva dell'essenzialità plastica e cromatica in qualsiasi medium (Moholy-Nagy 1969, 18). Ferdinando Bologna (2017, 301) nota poi che proprio nel 1922 l'artista tocca il limite estremo della sperimentazione tecnica dell'avanguardia attraverso la realizzazione di quadri per telefono. Nel luglio di quell'anno Moholy-Nagy pubblica su *De Stijl* "Produktion – Reproduktion", un breve ma

significativo testo teorico in cui l'artista propone il reimpiego di media riproduttivi quali il fonografo, il cinematografo e la fotografia come mezzi per la produzione di inedite relazioni formali. Il ripensamento di questi media comporta un distacco radicale dalla rappresentazione della realtà e l'estetizzazione delle loro proprietà materiali. Per l'artista, tale trasformazione soddisfa la tendenza generale dell'uomo moderno sia all'estensione delle sue facoltà sensibili sia al loro perfezionamento, favorita dal riesame della tecnologia attraverso l'arte. Affermando che la sperimentazione artistica ha il compito di preparare l'apparato percettivo alle nuove acquisizioni tecnologiche, l'artista evidenzia dinamiche proprie di un rapporto confermato anche da Marshall McLuhan:

> l'arte è una precisa conoscenza anticipata di come affrontare le conseguenze psichiche e sociali della prossima tecnologia [...] un'esatta informazione cioè, del modo in cui va predisposta la psiche per prevenire il prossimo colpo delle nostre estese facoltà. [...] nell'arte sperimentale gli uomini trovano informazioni precise sulla violenza che sta per abbattersi sulla loro psiche partendo dai propri revulsivi o dalla tecnologia. (2011, 79)

"Produktion – Reproduktion", confluito poi nel libro *Pittura Fotografia Film*, pubblicato dal Bauhaus nel 1925, può essere considerato paradigmatico della vocazione alla totalità che l'avventura modernista raggiunge proprio attorno al 1922. La ridefinizione proposta da Jean-Michel Rabaté (2015) per l'"alto modernismo" come "modernismo totale", infatti, non implica soltanto il superamento delle polarità alto-basso o vecchio-nuovo, ma anche l'abbattimento delle barriere tra i generi e la tendenza alla combinazione dei media. Interdisciplinarità e transmedialità sono anche alla base di un superamento delle ricerche sugli specifici che orientano l'avventura artistica modernista; ciò pone quindi le premesse per una sovversione del modernismo dall'interno del modernismo stesso. La poetica di Moholy-Nagy riflette queste dinamiche e sostiene valori propri dell'alto modernismo, come la fiducia nel progresso tecnologico per la crescita sociale e la rifondazione dell'arte su basi matematico-analitiche (Menna 1976), ma sviluppa al contempo approcci teorici e creativi maturati successivamente in seno al postmodernismo (Botar 2014). Nella sua ricerca coesistono inoltre l'attenzione all'evidenziazione degli specifici mediali, intesi come presupposti per lo sviluppo di una consapevolezza dell'esperienza sensoriale, e l'interesse per una ricerca volta a eludere le proprietà materiali dei mezzi stessi. Questa natura doppia, ambivalente, 'ancipite' appunto, della ricerca di Moholy-Nagy dimostra perciò come all'interno di un paradigma creativo volto all'analisi dei mezzi tecnologici si verifichino le condizioni ideali per la loro stessa decostruzione.

La polarità produzione-riproduzione è strettamente connessa al concetto di totalità, come dichiara l'artista in uno scritto del 1926: "Per alcuni anni, sono stato totalmente assorbito dall'importanza dell'equazione "produzione-riproduzione". Ho quasi cercato di controllare la totalità della vita sotto questo aspetto" (Moholy-Nagy 1970, 188). Il concetto di totalità è problematizzato da Moholy-Nagy già nelle prime pagine di *Pittura Fotografia Film*, enucleandosi perciò nel contesto di una riflessione molto vicina a quella del 1922. Si tratta di una riflessione posta a ridosso di "Produktion – Reproduktion",

quasi ad assegnarle una funzione preliminare. Per l'artista, però, la totalità non coincide con la fusione tra le arti, bensì con quella che potremmo definire una "transazione" tra le arti, impiegando questo termine nell'accezione data da John Dewey (1974), ossia di una relazione impregiudicata tra organismo e ambiente che favorisca la crescita dell'intero sistema e superi la scissione tra soggetto e oggetto.[1] La totalità di Moholy-Nagy implica infatti una circuitazione continua e reciproca tra le energie dell'uomo e dell'ambiente in cui vive e opera che trova nell'arte il suo medium elettivo:

> L'idea di un'opera d'arte totale era facilmente comprensibile ieri, in un periodo di estreme specializzazioni. [...] Ma l'"opera d'arte totale' permane una somma di arti, e per quanto ben organizzata, oggi questo non può più bastarci. Ciò di cui abbiamo bisogno, non è l'"opera d'arte totale', a lato della quale, separata, si svolge la vita, bensì la sintesi, autonomamente formantesi, di tutti gli istanti vitali in un'opera totale onnicomprensiva (la vita), che annulla ogni isolamento, in cui tutte le prestazioni *individuali* sorgono da una necessità biologica e sfociano in una necessità *universale*. [...] Non è facendo scomparire artificialmente i confini fra le diverse creazioni che si consegue l'unità della vita. *L'unità dovrebbe derivare piuttosto da fatto che ogni raffigurazione viene concepita e portata a termine prendendo lo spunto dalle sue tendenze e idoneità completamente esplicate e quindi modellatrici di vita.* [...] Così l'uomo impara nuovamente a reagire ai minimi impulsi del suo essere, come pure alle leggi della materia. (Moholy-Nagy 2019, 15-16; corsivo mio)

Antonio Somaini (2019, XXVIII) precisa che la "necessità biologica" di cui fa cenno l'artista rappresenti una costante soprastorica dello sviluppo del genere umano correlata all'esigenza antropica di estendere le proprie facoltà percettive.[2] L'evidenziazione della specificità di un mezzo mediante il suo orientamento "produttivo" e non meramente "riproduttivo" contribuisce ad acuire i sensi nei riguardi delle stesse estensioni prodotte dall'uomo. Le radicalizzazioni creative proposte da Moholy-Nagy per la fotografia e per il cinema sembrano trovare tuttavia qualche impedimento sul piano pratico. Stando alle teorie di Clement Greenberg il più radicale esito del modernismo in pittura, e nelle arti visive più in generale, comporta la rivelazione della specificità del medium impiegato. Per Greenberg (2011a) di fronte all'incalzare dei media di massa e alla loro pervasiva produzione di effetti, l'arte si definisce sempre più come attività volta a esibire i suoi stessi processi di produzione. In *Pittura modernista* precisa inoltre che il modernismo in arte sia l'autocritica radicale delle possibilità insite nella natura del mezzo impiegato. Per Greenberg (2011b) l'astrazione costituisce il culmine dell'autocritica in pittura poiché rigetta ogni illusionismo per rispettare l'integrità bidimensionale del piano pittorico ed evidenziare i propri codici costruttivi. La ricerca pittorica di Moholy-Nagy, basata sulla bidimensionalità, sull'elementarità delle forme e sulla "pura organizzazione del colore" (2019, 7), riflette appieno le condizioni descritte da Greenberg. Ma per ciò che riguarda la fotografia e il film il discorso risulta alquanto problematico. Claudio Marra (2012, 132-135) sostiene che, per quanto dichiaratamente tesi ad affermare l'autonomia artistica del

[1] Sulla rielaborazione del concetto di opera d'arte totale da parte di Moholy-Nagy si veda Botar 2010. Per quanto riguarda l'influsso di Dewey sull'artista si veda invece Charitonidou 2021.

[2] La ricorrenza di riferimenti biologistici nelle riflessioni di Moholy-Nagy ha inoltre sollecitato analisi relative alle implicazioni biocentriche della sua ricerca, si vedano Botar 2007, 2010 e 2011.

mezzo, i *Fotogrammi* di Moholy-Nagy perpetuano un rapporto di subordinazione della fotografia alla pittura che impedisce tale conquista: questi esperimenti rieditano infatti principi formali, luministici e costruttivi propri della ricerca pittorica svolta in parallelo e si costituiscono perciò come esiti di un pittorialismo stilisticamente aggiornato[3]. Per altre vie, Antonio Costa (2014, 243) nota inoltre che il film *Lichtspiel: Schwarz-Weiss-Grau* realizzato da Moholy-Nagy nel 1930 non sia la mera documentazione delle articolazioni di luce prodotte dalla scultura cinetica *Lichtrequisit* ma la sua realizzazione più compiuta, in virtù della concezione del cinema in quanto arte della luce strettamente connessa al superamento della divisione tra le arti che sta alla base di quella stessa opera.[4]

Questi i limiti di una ricerca artistica che, dichiaratamente tesa all'evidenziazione degli specifici mediali di fotografia e cinema, finisce per assimilare e perpetuare qualità di altre discipline quali la pittura e la scultura. Alla luce delle più recenti condizioni della cultura materiale, possiamo scorgere però in questi esperimenti lo sviluppo di un più disinvolto approccio al mezzo capace di riconfigurare il mezzo stesso in un'entità più complessa e inclusiva. L'odierna condizione postmediale, scaturita dalla dissoluzione di vari media meccanici, elettrici ed elettronici nel sistema della rappresentazione digitale (Eugeni 2015), presuppone infatti una logica di svincolamento tra funzione e dispositivo che trova i suoi primi esiti in seno alla ricerca artistica. Per Rosalind Krauss (2005) la condizione postmediale presuppone il superamento del riduzionismo modernista alla specificità mediante l'utilizzo aggregativo di più media. Il medium è considerato qui come l'insieme di regole e convenzioni derivanti dalle proprietà materiali del dispositivo; la sua reinvenzione si basa quindi sulla differenziazione continua di quelle proprietà e sul riadattamento di modelli e schemi di altri media al suo interno. Tale differenziazione, ottenuta a partire dal potenziale generativo della specificità stessa, fa emergere una più complessa stratificazione di processi operativi che smentisce l'ipotesi di un'omogeneità fondativa, rivelando il potenziale eteronomico del medium. Per Krauss, la fotografia e il film si impongono nel campo dell'arte contemporanea quando gli artisti cominciano a perdere interesse nei riguardi delle ricerche sullo specifico, ridefinendo così l'arte quale pratica sovversiva indifferente ai suoi stessi mezzi.

Se, alla luce di quest'ultima considerazione, si guarda al cinema astratto delle avanguardie storiche, ci si può rendere conto che questo processo di sovversione dello specifico inizi già all'interno di quelle ricerche. La distanza cronologica tra le ricerche delle avanguardie storiche e l'insorgere della condizione postmediale non sembra poi costituire un limite metodologico se, con McLuhan, consideriamo la sperimentazione artistica come una precisa conoscenza anticipata di trasformazioni tecnologiche

[3] Del tutto opposta è la posizione di Mario Costa (2008, 31), il quale asserisce che i Fotogrammi di Moholy-Nagy "cominciavano invece a indicare la giusta via sulla quale praticare il fotografico in quanto tale". Tale affermazione appare tuttavia in contraddizione con gli attributi stessi del fotografico, dall'idea di immagine come indice, come segno in rapporto di connessione fisica con il suo referente, al superamento di ogni preoccupazione formalista. Per un inquadramento del concetto si vedano Krauss 2000, Signorini 2001, Marra 2012, Muzzarelli 2014 e Marra 2017.

[4] Sulla teoria della luce come medium artistico nella ricerca di Moholy-Nagy si veda Iskin 2004.

prossime e se, con Krauss, attribuiamo agli artisti la capacità di porre le premesse di più generali mutamenti artistici all'interno di contesti mediali differenti. Guido Bartorelli (2021, 13-14) ha analizzato il duplice approccio alla sperimentazione filmica di un artista storicamente correlato a Moholy-Nagy, Hans Richter: egli insiste sulla necessità di valorizzare la "sfera peculiare del film" come arte a sé stante ma riconosce al contempo la stretta connessione che essa stabilisce con la sua pittura. Anzi, è proprio assimilando la ricerca pittorica che, per Richter, il cinema può acquisire l'identità di una nuova arte visiva. Dal punto di vista degli studi cinematografici tale processo di assimilazione compromette la costituzione dello specifico filmico; tuttavia, precisa Bartorelli, il cinema dei pittori genera, per sua natura, degli "stadi ibridi", delle soluzioni impure che aprono nuove direzioni di ricerca.[5] È lo stesso Richter a dichiarare infatti che

> il problema del film astratto non è tanto il problema del cinema come forma d'arte in sé, ma dell'arte moderna in generale … Il Cubismo, l'Espressionismo, il Dadaismo, l'arte astratta, il Surrealismo non solo trovarono la loro espressione nel cinema, ma necessariamente un completamento a un nuovo livello. (1977, 219, 222)

Nell'introduzione a *Pittura Fotografia Film* Moholy-Nagy dichiara apertamente la sua intenzione di andare oltre le proprietà materiali del mezzo:

> per quanto la fotografia conti ormai più di cento anni, solo in questi tempi il suo sviluppo ha permesso di trarne delle conseguenze compositive che vanno al di là dello specifico fotografico. Solo da poco la nostra visione è maturata alla comprensione di queste nuove relazioni. (2019, 6)

Lo stesso autore sottolinea, pagine dopo, che la "precisa conoscenza dei mezzi" consente di "recepire le reciproche sollecitazioni e di valersi così dei mezzi che si sviluppano in modo sempre più ricco e perfetto" (2019, 33). Questa 'perfezione' si ottiene quindi nella reciprocità tra i vari media, la stessa reciprocità che permette di raggiungere la totalità modellatrice di vita espressa in precedenza. Lo attestano le forme ibride teorizzate nello stesso libro: *tipofoto*, *fototesto* o *policinema* sono termini indicativi di una ricerca svolta all'incrocio tra differenti media e volta a verificare le diverse possibilità di prestito e di interscambio. Riadattamento e ibridazione diventano dunque i poli di una ricerca tesa alla differenziazione continua delle unità mediali.

Il riadattamento delle qualità della pittura, della scultura o della musica alla fotografia e al cinema operato da Moholy-Nagy riflette un processo proprio dell'evoluzione mediale, quello che Jay David Bolter e Richard Grusin (2000) hanno chiamato "rimediazione", ossia la rappresentazione di funzioni e proprietà di un vecchio medium in un altro formato, che è uno dei processi fondanti della condizione postmediale. Benché le riflessioni di Bolter e Grusin si focalizzino prettamente sulla cultura digitale, è opportuno precisare che la rimediazione è un processo connaturato alla logica evolutiva non di una tecnologia in particolare, ma della tecnologia in generale: i suoi effetti non sono esclusivi del passaggio dall'analogico al digitale, sono solo più visibili in questa fase

[5] Lo dimostra anche la propensione sinestetica di tali esperienze analizzata da Rebecchi 2017.

per la presenza pervasiva dei nuovi media nell'esperienza quotidiana. È lo stesso McLuhan ad affermare che i media non si susseguono l'uno all'altro ma si complicano l'uno con l'altro: "il 'contenuto' di un medium – scrive infatti – è sempre un altro medium" (2011, 29). Riportando questa affermazione, Bolter e Grusin (2000, 45) ipotizzano che McLuhan non pensasse alla semplice riproposizione di un mezzo, ma a una più complessa modalità di prestito capace di incorporare in un medium elementi propri di un altro medium, così come i pittori fiamminghi incorporavano mappe geografiche, mappamondi e specchi nei loro dipinti. Se Moholy-Nagy ha potuto intuire ed esplorare questa dinamica nelle sue ricerche non è quindi per una qualche capacità medianica, ma per via di sollecitazioni logiche scaturite da un approccio critico ai processi funzionali dei mezzi. La riconversione "produttiva" di media "riproduttivi" diventa così la via per sottrarre i media stessi alle loro più consuete modalità di utilizzo, avviando processi di carattere rimediativo.

La sperimentazione sul grammofono introdotta in "Produktion – Reproduktion" è una delle proposte di maggiore interesse per ciò che riguarda la ricerca sulla differenziazione degli specifici: Moholy-Nagy invita a incidere e a graffiare con un ago i supporti in vinile per ottenere solchi utili a produrre inediti effetti acustici. In un articolo apparso su *Der Sturm* nel 1923 l'artista approfondisce la questione partendo dalle considerazioni di Piet Mondrian sul rumorismo futurista pubblicate su *De Stijl* nel 1922. Assumono centralità, in questa riflessione, l'abrogazione della polarità individuale-universale e la necessità di inventare nuovi strumenti che permettano di mantenere costanti la lunghezza d'onda e la frequenza delle oscillazioni, un'esigenza che sarà soddisfatta solo con l'invenzione dei sintetizzatori. La reinvenzione produttiva del grammofono proposta da Moholy-Nagy annulla la differenza tra autore ed esecutore e azzera il carattere allografico della musica tradizionale rendendo eseguibili i segni stessi: lo strumento riproduce infatti i diagrammi e gli schemi grafici incisi sul supporto senza la necessità di una mediazione interpretativa dell'uomo. Automazione e depersonalizzazione diventano perciò i cardini di una ricerca plastico-musicale basata sul calcolo e sul controllo che troverà solo in anni successivi più mature applicazioni, grazie all'evoluzione delle tecnologie fino alle più recenti possibilità di parametrazione millimetrica del suono (Roads 2001). Nell'articolo del 1923 Moholy-Nagy propone inoltre di integrare l'esecuzione dei vari brani con proiezioni filmiche e luminose per un'esperienza multisensoriale, inaugurando un approccio creativo che darà estesi risultati nei *live media* della cultura digitale (Broadhurst 2019).

La sperimentazione sul grammofono non si limita tuttavia al solo ambito musicale, ma diventa la base per un'ennesima ricerca svolta all'intersezione tra i media. Lo dimostra *ABC in Sounds*, un film realizzato da Moholy-Nagy nel 1933 ma ritrovato soltanto nel 2019 presso gli archivi del British Film Institute di Londra. Presentato il 10 dicembre del 1933 alla London Film Society, il film si inserisce nell'ambito di ricerche svolte un anno prima da Rudolf Pfenninger e da Oskar Fischinger rispettivamente sulla sonorizzazione della scrittura e dei pattern ornamentali. Allo stesso modo di quelli prodotti dai due artisti tedeschi, il film di Moholy-Nagy mostra una differenziata sequenza di forme impresse

sulla traccia che passa sotto la testina sonora del proiettore, permettendo allo spettatore di confrontare simultaneamente la forma visiva con il rumore prodotto. Il film sonoro nasce infatti dalla scrittura di sequenze acustiche sulla colonna sonora senza registrazioni preesistenti (Moholy-Nagy 1947, 277). Sono prove collocabili nella prospettiva di una archeologia delle sonorità sintetiche della musica elettronica (Levin 2003, Egan 2020) e che si situano idealmente alle origini dell'approccio visuale alla composizione musicale sviluppato dalla cultura digitale[6]. Il film di Moholy-Nagy si distingue però da quelli dei due autori tedeschi per l'elaborazione di un più eterogeneo repertorio di forme, non solo geometriche, ma anche organiche e tipografiche. L'artista ha dichiarato di avere ripreso le sue ricerche sul grammofono e di avere utilizzato tracce indicali come le impronte delle sue dita e i profili di persone, ottenendo esiti tra i più interessanti (Moholy-Nagy 1947, 277n). La lateralizzazione dei pattern rispetto all'area centrale del fotogramma sottrae il supporto alla sua consueta funzione, quella di riprodurre il movimento delle immagini, tematizzando ancora una volta il decentramento del mezzo dalle sue stesse convenzioni. A partire dall'individuazione e dall'analisi degli specifici mediali Moholy-Nagy giunge dunque alla loro più radicale sovversione, dissolvendo ogni reciprocità tra i dispositivi impiegati e le loro funzioni originarie.

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LEONARDO PIANA

A BARD IN THE TRENCHES

David Jones as an artist of The Waste Land

ABSTRACT: When *The Waste Land* was published in 1922, David Jones, a 27-year-old Anglo-Welsh painter, was living in the English countryside with a monastic community of artists. A World War I veteran who had been injured in the tragic battle at the Somme, Jones had converted to Catholicism and was developing a modernist aesthetics, producing paintings and engravings where scenes from the gospels (the flagellation, the crucifixion, the empty tomb) were set on the French front, carried out by helpless British infantrymen. *The Waste Land* was a transformative read for Jones, who thought it embodied the 'metaphysical disaster' (Musil 1922) of the war. In later years, Jones began writing about his own wartime experience (Dilworth 1994, 2017): with Eliot's help and encouragement, he published *In Parenthesis* (1937), an epic poem (praised by W.H. Auden and Igor Stravinsky, among others) that moved the modernist myth of the waste land from Eliot's London to the literal wasteland of the trenches. This paper examines Jones's mythic method, underpinned by his conception of the artist as a 'maker' (Jones 1959); it shows how his works blurred the boundaries between artforms by juxtaposing paintings and inscriptions to prose and verse. Jones's singular perspective as a modernist soldier-bard, drawing from Christian liturgy and Arthurian myth, and the intertextual dialogue with Eliot's poem, suggest an original reading of the waste land as a ritual space for remembrance, representation, and re-enactment: a useful critical category for a theory of modernism, and a metaphor for the work of art itself.

KEYWORDS: David Jones, T.S. Eliot, Poetry, Modernism, Great War.

In 1922, Thomas Stearns Eliot defined the waste land of Arthurian myth as a fundamental space of modernism. More than a decade later, he oversaw the publication of a poem that expanded the waste land's symbolic potential and explored it as a physical geography, as well as a ritual one. The poem was called *In Parenthesis* and its author was David Jones. Jones has been called a "lost modernist" because his works saw the light much later – and to a narrower recognition – than those of other modernist writers. However, he was hugely admired by figures such as W.B. Yeats, W.H. Auden, Dylan Thomas, Seamus Heaney as well as T.S. Eliot, with whom Jones developed an artistic and personal relationship, one of reciprocal admiration and friendship despite differences in character and poetic choices (Dilworth 2021, 1).[1] Informed by his first-

[1] Even Igor Stravinsky, whom Jones admired, praised his poetry, and went so far as to propose that they work together on an opera, for which Jones would write the libretto. The poet, however, was not interested. Their encounter is documented in Dilworth 2021, 1292. For more on Jones's relationship with Eliot, see Dilworth 1994.

person experience as a soldier on the French front, Jones's poetry is a polyphonic and liturgical mapping of the waste land as a space of text, reality, and myth – one that employs different modes of language to build an elaborate spatial poetics, ultimately problematising the work of art itself.

While *The Waste Land* was destined to have a decisive impact on Jones's life, he did not read it until a few years after its publication. When Eliot's book first came out, Jones was living in Ditchling, a village in the English countryside, with a community of Christian artists inspired by Medieval craftsmanship (Dilworth 2021, 275). He was learning engraving from his friend and mentor Eric Gill and working as a carpenter's apprentice, while developing his own artistic practice. Born in London in 1895 to an English mother and a Welsh father, Jones had always had great talent for drawing and painting – as a teenager, he had trained at an arts school in Camberwell (Dilworth 2021, 63). He had moved to Ditchling in January 1922, shortly after converting to Roman Catholicism. Many of his works from the period pair evangelical subjects with an associative iconography. In one painting from around 1921, for example, Jones depicts the arrest of Christ by a group of soldiers wearing British uniforms from the First War World. Even before *The Waste Land*, Jones was already thinking like a modernist.

Jones's imagination had been shaped by his time on the frontline of the Great War, between 1916 and 1919, as an infantryman in the 15th Battalion of the Royal Welch Fusiliers (Dilworth 2021, 100), and especially his involvement in the battle at the Somme, where he had suffered a leg injury and many of his companions had died.[2] Jones's months in the trenches felt like an initiation, as he connected his day-to-day confrontations with fear and danger to themes from his Christian and Welsh background. When he finally came upon *The Waste Land*, in 1926 or 1927, he had already read Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*, Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, and Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*, all major sources of Eliot's poem. In a sense, Jones was the ideal reader of *The Waste Land*, as he was immediately aware of the text's references and implications:

> His initial response had been an Archimedean 'That's it!' 'At last,' he thought, 'a chap has written a real poem about real things.' . . . 'It mirrors our civilizational phase with absolute validity.' (Dilworth 2021, 493)

Jones found that the "fragments" and "ruins" of *The Waste Land* embodied what Robert Musil described in the same years as a "metaphysical disaster," one that revealed a "lack of spiritual organization" in western societies (Musil 1922, 42-45). Later on, Jones found his own words for this sentiment, pondering the "broken emblems" and "dead

[2] The strand of battle Jones took part in took place in Mametz wood in July 1916. Afterwards, Jones was brought back to Britain to recover. While he did return to France before his final dismissal in January 1919, it was that first experience that left him with the most vivid and traumatic memories. (Savoia 1985, 19)

symbols" of modernity.[3] (Jones 1937, 54; 1952, 50) But while the epicentre of Eliot's waste land had been post-war London, Jones felt that this newborn modernist myth belonged in the French front. After a long creative process, slowed down at times by health problems but encouraged by Eliot, Jones published his own modernist poem, *In Parenthesis*, in 1937. Freely alternating prose and verse, rich and varied in language, the genre-bending literary work recounts the journey of its fictional protagonist, Private John Ball, to the frontline in 1916.[4] Built concentrically, the poem's structure relies on architectural symmetries and on a meticulous arrangement of the text in the space of each page, with heavy use of indentations and stark changes in the length of paragraphs and lines.[5]

The intertextual relationship between *In Parenthesis* and *The Waste Land* is perhaps best exemplified by details. In one passage, Jones evokes the atmosphere of a night in the trenches:

> You can hear the silence of it:
> you can hear the rat of no-man's-land
> rut-out intricacies,
> weasel-out his patient workings,
> scrut, scrut, sscrut . . .
> (Jones 1937, 54)

The appearance of a rat recalls Eliot's poem: "A rat crept softly through the vegetation / Dragging its slimy belly on the bank" (Eliot 2015, 62). Notably, Eliot's rat is accompanied by the mention of "White bodies naked on the low damp ground / And bones cast in a little low dry garret / Rattled by the rat's foot only." But while the rat in *In*

[3] In the preface of his 1952 poem The Anathemata, Jones also mentions a line from Nennius's Historia Brittonum: "I have made a heap of all that I could find." As Francesca Brooks puts it, Nennius, just like Jones, "claims to be writing from the waste lands and ruins of culture, where he is plagued by the fear that the intangible and immaterial rewards of knowledge are destined to become untraceable" (Brooks 2021, 95).

[4] The genre of In Parenthesis has been the subject of debate. Without a doubt, any autobiographical content has been substantially reworked – this is not a diaristic book. Establishing whether it is a novel or a poem, however, proves harder. A hybrid artist by nature, Jones was not interested in boundaries of genre, as demonstrated by his exclusive use of words like writing, fragment and stuff when talking about his literary works. The term poem has been generally preferred by critics, notably by leading Jones scholar Thomas Dilworth, who observed that "whether in verse or not, its language almost always approaches the maximum aural and connotative potential of poetry" (Dilworth 1988, 38). Umberto Rossi, on the other hand, sees In Parenthesis as "an anomalous, deconstructed novel," contending that contaminations are the norm for a genre that was "born inclusively" (Rossi 2007). While both arguments have their reasons, a wider look at Jones's production reveals that he always alternates prose and verse to broaden the visual and spatial potential, regardless of the presence (or absence) of a narrative. He does so in The Anathemata, for example, which is definitely not a novel as it is built on form and association – but attributing it to a different genre than In Parenthesis would be misleading. In Parenthesis is a modernist poem, like The Waste Land and Saint-John Perse's Anabase.

[5] More on the symmetries between chapters in Blisset 1998. For an overview of Jones's system of parentheses, see Dilworth 1991.

Parenthesis and its onomatopoeic treatment might suggest a direct derivation from *The Waste Land*, the source of Jones's imagery is rather different. A drawing Jones made in November 1916, when stationed in the Flanders, portrays two dead rats, "shot during the pulling down of an old dugout in Ploegsteert Wood," as explained by a handwritten note in the corner of the page. A more expressionistic ecphrasis for this picture can be found in Part 4 of *In Parenthesis*: "swollen rat-body turned-turtle to the clear morning" (Jones 1937, 75).

The waste land, with its mythic and sensorial attributes, had clearly been part of Jones's imagination ever since the war (though Eliot's poem had helped him understand its poetic potential). But *In Parenthesis* never fully codifies it. Instead, the expression and its variants – *wasteland*, *wastelands*, *waste,* or *land made waste* – are disseminated in the text with a certain parsimoniousness, if not reticence. The poetic voice refrains from suggesting an interpretation and instead focuses on shaping a space, entreating the reader with a hermeneutic task. The only instance where Jones directly addresses the topic is in the preface:

> […] I think the day by day in the Waste Land, the sudden violences and the long stillnesses, the sharp contours and unformed voids of that mysterious existence, profoundly affected the imaginations of those who suffered it. It was a place of enchantment. It is perhaps best described in Malory, book iv, chapter 15—that landscape spoke 'with a grimly voice'.[6] (Jones 1937, X-XI)

Jones is talking about the myth of the Grail, a major source for Modernism – the legend of a knight who ends up in a barren and infertile land, where he meets the Fisher King, who seems to suffer from the same sickness that is affecting the soil. The Grail knight also visits a castle, where mysteries and visions suggest the presence of a supernatural danger. Mirroring the Grail myth's themes and structure, the narrative of *In Parenthesis* begins in England, where in Part 1 Jones's alter-ego, Private John Ball, is getting ready to cross the Channel with his battalion. The reader then accompanies John Ball to France, gradually approaching the frontline, getting closer to battle, and finally reaching to Jones's personal heart of darkness, the centre of the waste land.

Along this journey, Jones's writing alternates between mimetic modes (narrative, dramatic, lyrical) and the associative or allusive mode, where remembrance generates a transition into myth. (Dilworth 1988, 38) The occurrences of the associative mode within the poem signal the nature of the waste land as a space of myth. For Jones, the waste land is where *mimesis* and *mythos* are one. This intersectional space opens dramatically at the end of Part 2, when a sudden shrapnel burst becomes the first sign of the soldiers' proximity to tragedy and sorrow. In Part 3, the poem's geography begins to unravel through the rhythmical crossings of literal and metaphorical thresholds (a door, a stream, the edge of the forest). When the regiment marching through the French countryside by night streams through a seemingly unimportant cattle gate, the poem's

[6] Jones makes a small quoting mistake – the passage he references here is in book VI, chapter 15.

language seems to have incorporated the sensorial shock of that first burst and turned it into a sort of heightened perception:

> No. 1—get 'em into file corporal—move on by section—put those cigarettes out—no lights past the barrier. Past the little gate.
> Mr. Jenkins watched them file through, himself following, like western-hill shepherd.
> Past the little gate,
> into the field of upturned defences,
> into the burial-yard—
> the grinning and the gnashing and the sore dreading—nor saw he any light in that place. (Jones 1937, 31)

This is a clear example of David Jones's mythic method. He associates the officer's order to put out the cigarettes to the Good Friday liturgy, in which the priest walks up to the altar – a place of sacrifice – without lights and incense. An even stronger allusion concerns an episode of Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*: when approaching the Chapel Perelous – a dark and menacing place that poses a fatal danger – Sir Lancelot goes through a "little gate," walks into a churchyard, and sees "many fair rich shields turned up-so-down" – that is, "upturned defences," like the damaged artillery that scattered the broken landscape of the French front (Malory 2013, 215). The association is sealed by Malory's mention of a "grimly voice," the same words Jones resorted to in the preface when describing the atmosphere in the trenches.

To better understand Jones's creative process, we must remember he was first and foremost a figurative artist. During his time in the French front, Private Jones made numerous sketches, like one from 1916 depicting the aftermath of a shrapnel burst in Givenchy. These drawings might have a documentary purpose, but their deeper objective is to build a spatial and visual memory of the war. For Jones, everything begins with remembering images. Indeed, for years after the war, Jones only addressed the war obliquely in his paintings.[7] The language of *In Parenthesis*'s first chapters, therefore, is richly descriptive and analytical, as if meticulously painting an image of the waste land's broken landscape:

> They passed a small building lying back from the road, that appeared deserted, its roof and nearer wall damaged at some time and now repaired with boarding. Perhaps they'd have some kind of fire, at all events it looked sordid and unloved. He drew back into his but lately lifted gloom. (Jones 1937, 19)
> A splintered tree scattered its winter limbs, spilled its life low on the ground. (Jones 1937, 21)

Only when the sensorial memory has been re-established, the poem gradually introduces the first associative flashes, transitioning from remembrance to representation. Jones's thinking of representation is also apparent in his visual works. A painting on a wooden board made in Ditchling depicts the mocking of Jesus; the right side of an engraving from 1922 shows soldiers guarding Christ's tomb. In both cases,

[7] For more on how Jones's paintings allude to the war landscape, see Banks and Hills, 2015.

some of the soldiers are wearing helmets that identify them as British infantrymen from World War One. This associative approach plays an essential role in *In Parenthesis*, particularly in its centre piece, the inner parenthesis of the poem, the boast of Dai Greatcoat. Another double of the author (Dai is a Welsh abbreviation for David, and Jones was known among his friends for wearing large raincoats), Dai is a Welsh soldier-bard who, like Eliot's Tiresias, claims to have "foresuffered all:"[8]

> I served Longinus that Dux bat-blind and bent;
> the Dandy Xth are my regiment;
> who diced
> Crown and Mud-hook
> under the Tree . . .
> (Jones 1937, 83)

By claiming to have witnessed Christ's death (Longinus is the Roman soldier who, according to legend, pierced the side of Jesus while he was hanging on the cross), Dai Greatcoat embodies the juxtaposition of epochs in Jones's figurative work. The image of Christ's body on the "tree of the cross" sparks visions of the dead soldiers laying "under the Tree" after the battle of Mametz wood, that takes place in the final chapter. An individual's guilt and trauma are thus projected in a wider historical and mythical dimension:

> I was the spear in Balin's hand
> that made waste King Pellam's land.
> (Jones 1937, 79)

At the very heart of *In Parenthesis*, Jones returns to Malory, with a reference to the story of two brothers, Balin and Balan, mortally wounding each other in a duel. According to legend, this was the event that created the waste land. The mention of a fratricidal killing reveals Jones's deeper feelings about the war he had fought in. The epigraph that opens the poem dedicates it, among others, "to the enemy front-fighters who shared our pains against whom we found ourselves by misadventure" (Jones 1937, XVII). This theme of fraternity and sacrifice is also brought back in the very last page, with a line from the *Song of Songs*: "This is my beloved and this is my friend" (Jones 1937, 226).

There is, however, an even deeper level to Jones's poetics. Influenced by his theoretical readings, among which John Livingston Lowes, Oswald Spengler, and the Christian existentialists Jacques Maritain and Maurice de La Taille, Jones had developed a complex and layered – although at times convoluted – theory of creation and

[8] For the similarities between Dai Greatcoat and the author, see Jones 1980, 11. Dai's cultural identity is relevant. In Jones's imagination, shaped by his Welsh roots and an intense fascination with literary works like the Mabinogion, Wales was "a historical symbol of cultural wholeness and vitality" (Robichaud 2007, 47). In Jones's late writings, Wales forms a polarity with the Rome, seen as "a powerful tool with which to fight against the fall of civilisation and for the potential of cultural renewal" (Hunter Evans 2022, 11).

representation. He regarded the artist as a craftsman and a "maker," and the work of art as a physical manifestation:

> In so far as form is brought into being there is reality. 'Something' not 'nothing', moreover a new 'something' has come into existence. And if, as we aver, man's form-making has in itself the nature of a sign, then these formal realities, which the art of strategy creates, must in some sense or other, be signa. But of what can they possibly be significant? What do they show forth, re-present, recall, or in any sense, reflect?" (Jones 1959, 163)

Jones would expand this conception of artmaking in his second poem, *The Anathemata* (1952), where the act of creation is defined as the lifting up of "an efficacious sign," like the eucharist in Catholic liturgy.[9] But his key idea is that of representation as *presenting again*, as a re-enactment. In his *Note of Introduction* to In Parenthesis, T.S Eliot warns: "understanding begins in the sensibility: we must have the experience before we attempt to explore the sources of the work itself" (Jones 1937, VII). For Jones, the reader had to re-live the soldiers' journey of mystery and pain – this concrete re-enactment of memory was essential, as it could unveil the real significance of war. That is why he concluded the final chapter by rephrasing a line from the *Chanson de Roland*: "the man who does not know this has not understood anything" (Jones 1937, 187). The soldier's experience of the war might feel like a surreal parenthesis, almost impossible to recount – "when you come from this waste your tongue is not loosed," declares a line in Part 5 – but what is *in parenthesis*, Jones suggests, is far from neglectable, and is key to understanding.[10]

The space of *In Parenthesis* brings together the text, the physical reality of history, and myth, with each dimension sustaining the others. The poem is enclosed within a frontispiece and a tailpiece – two drawings by Jones depicting the waste land with its leafless trees and barbed wire, and its inhabitants (a soldier, once again mixing elements from history and myth, and the sacrificial scapegoat). This suggests an analogy between the waste land and the work of art itself – one that sheds light on the theoretical framework of modernism as a whole, especially by calling into question the role of the aesthetic pole.

The reader of *In Parenthesis* is urged to go on a quest, or to ask questions, just like the wandering knight who is scolded when he does not question the supernatural visions at the Fisher King's court.[11] The invitation addressed to the reader is highlighted by the use,

[9] Jones's conception of poetry as a "sacramental act" (see Henderson Staudt 1985) was reinforced by his interest for lettering and the crafting of inscriptions, which he appreciated as a "profoundly incarnational medium" (Powell 2020).

[10] Rachel Pomery notes that the parentheses in Jones's text serve as "a ritually separated space for attention" (Pomery 2020, 107).

[11] Jones addresses the Grail knight's silence at the climax of Dai's boast: "You ought to ask: Why, / what is this, / what's the meaning of this. / Because you don't ask, / although the spear-shaft / drips, / there's neither steading—not a roof-tree" (Jones 1937, 84). Vincent B. Sherry provides a convincing perspective of Dai's enigmatic nature and the ensuing invitation to the reader: "Dai . . . aims riddles at his reader, and, as in most riddles, the speaker is the subject. Recurring throughout the Boast, these enigmas of the

throughout the poem, of a polyphonic *you*, referring at the same time to the protagonist, to an individual reader and perhaps to a community.[12] In several instances, the poem seems to invite further investigation (a consequence perhaps of the encyclopaedic apparatus of notes of various kinds – most of them either clarifying aspects of life in the trenches or unwinding some of the mythical references). One tread seems particularly significant: it has to do with the role of nature, the Shakespearean character of Ophelia, and, once again, the relationship between *In Parenthesis* and *The Waste Land*.

At one point in Part 3, after a long march, the battalion is very close to the frontline. The unreal and unsettling atmosphere is contrasted by the familiar words of soldiers getting ready to sleep:

> For the wagon lines—forgot last night—
> good night Dai
> Good night Mick.
> . . .
> Good night Parrott
> good night Bess.
> Good night good night—buck up—he gets nasty later on.
> Good night, bon swores 'Waladr. Nos dawch, Jac-y-dandi.
> Night night.
> (Jones 1937, 29)

This polyphony of voices (among them, the Welsh one of Dai Greatcoat) is an echo of Eliot's "Good night ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good night, good night" (Eliot 2015, 61).[13] Eliot's lines, of course, are an exact quotation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, where Ophelia utters the words "good night, sweet ladies" shortly before drowning. As she sinks, Ophelia looks like a water nymph, "a creature native and endued / unto that element" (Shakespeare 1998, 319). In the moment of her tragic *death by water*, Ophelia becomes one with nature. Whether intended or not (although Jones must have been fully aware of the Shakespearean references in *The Waste Land*), this correspondence anticipates the events that close the poem.[14] In the final battle, the soldiers' bodies are absorbed by the woods, in a mystical fusion between the human and natural element. This arboreal liturgy, announced throughout the poem by the talk of "metamorphosis" and the descriptions of soldiers almost melting with the landscape, coincides with the

soldier's character are a major source of unity in it. Each is projected as though teasing, 'What am I'?" (Sherry 1982, 115).

[12] The use of you is exemplified by the closing sentence of Part 1: "You feel exposed an apprehensive in this new world" (Jones 1937, 9). Here, it is both John Ball and the reader who are confronted with a "new world" – for the former, it is the unknown landscape of the French countryside; for the latter, it is the obscure geography of the poem itself.

[13] As Dilworth points out, the words "night night" also echo the Anna Livia chapter of James Joyce's Finnegans Wake, which Jones knew by heart. (Dilworth 2008, 40)

[14] Jones often thinking of Ophelia when writing the poem is confirmed by the other instances where he appears to quote her. (Dilworth 2008, 51; 66)

conjuring of a fairy-like figure, the Queen of the Woods. It is the only time in the poem when myth, instead of appearing in flashes and allusions, seems to infiltrate reality. Advancing over the bodies of the fallen, the Queen of the Woods honours both British and German soldiers with floral tributes, choosing them according to rank and cultural specificity:

> The Queen of the Woods has cut bright boughs of various flowering.
> . . .
> Some she gives white berries
> some she gives brown
> Emil has a curious crown it's
> made of golden saxifrage.
> Fatty wears sweet-briar,
> he will reign with her for a thousand years.
> For Balder she reaches high to fetch his.
> Ulrich smiles for his myrtle wand. . .
> (Jones 1937, 185)

The Queen of the Woods has the traits of several female deities (Dilworth 1988, 141). But the manner of her ritual, and the complex symbolism of the plants she chooses for her initiates, is again reminiscent of Ophelia:

> There's rosemary, that's for remembrance. Pray, love, remember. And there is pansies, that's for thoughts.
> . . .
> There's fennel for you, and columbines. There's rue for you; and here's some for me. (Shakespeare 1998, 307-308)

On her last scene before metaphorically turning into a nymph, Ophelia herself officiates a sort of funeral ritual, offering flowers to characters who are about to die (herself included). In Shakespeare, this scene precedes the tragedy, in Jones it follows it – but in both cases, a female figure with a powerful link with nature attempts to restore the natural order that a circle of human violence has disrupted. Her pondered gestures remind us that *In Parenthesis* itself, with its liturgical pace, is a "ritual of death" (Marfè 2021, 508). After a journey of remembrance, representation, and re-enactment, the poet's effort to put loss and tragedy into words opens a possibility for restoration, inspired by the Grail knight's bid to "free the rivers" and heal the waste land.

In his book about the literature of the Great War, Bernard Bergonzi identifies a Hotspur-Falstaff polarity: while the Hotspur function highlights the bravery and glory of combat, the Falstaff function is an anti-heroic conception of war as a pointless massacre

(Bergonzi 1965, 11-19; 198-212).[15] While both aspects (especially Falstaff's attitude) have a place in Jones's poetics, *In Parenthesis* operates on a completely different level, which I would call the *Ophelia function* – one where the essential elements are memory, liturgy, and mourning. The unspeakable image at the heart of *In Parenthesis* is a sorrowful maze of bodies, trees, and bullets.[16] Eliot's "death by water" in the river Thames finds a powerful counterpoint in Jones's "death by forest" in the wood of Mametz.

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[15] While Fussell 1975 harshly criticized In Parenthesis for supposedly exalting the experience of the Great War by raising it to the rank of mythology, Sherry 1982b brilliantly showed how such judgment lacked a real understanding of Jones's poetics. To Jones, myth was not a device to glorify, but rather a pathway to memory (and his minute descriptions of life in the trenches provide plenty of opportunities to experience the brutality of war).

[16] In his late fragment The Dream of Private Clitus (1964), Jones explicitly links the forest, the cathedral, and the maze, displaying once again his poetics of space and architecture. (Jones 1974, 16)

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