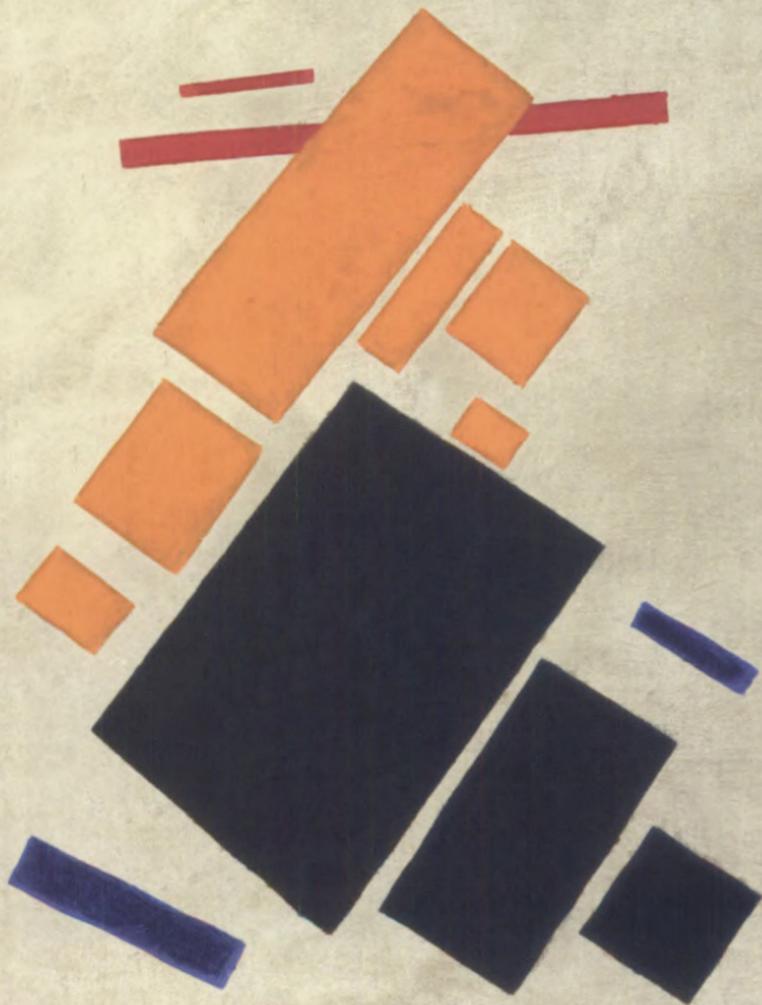


FREDRIC JAMESON

# A SINGULAR MODERNITY

ESSAY ON THE ONTOLOGY OF THE PRESENT





A SINGULAR  
MODERNITY



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MODERNITY

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For Wayne Booth

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## Contents

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Preface: Regressions of the Current Age	1
Part I The Four Maxims of Modernity	15
Transitional Modes	97
Part II Modernism as Ideology	139
Conclusion: 'Il faut être absolument moderne!'	211
Notes	217
Index	241



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## PREFACE

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### Regressions of the Current Age

In full postmodernity, and until very recently, there had always seemed to be a certain general agreement, a certain unspoken consensus, on those features of the modern that were no longer desirable. The asceticism of the modern, for example, or its phallocentrism (whether it was ever altogether logocentric I am a little less sure); the authoritarianism and even the occasional repressiveness of the modern; the teleology of the modernist aesthetic as it proceeded on triumphalistically from the newer to the newest; the minimalism of much that was modernist as well; the cult of the genius or seer; the non-pleasurable demands made on the audience or public – all these things, which are of course interrelated and often simply aspects or different versions of each other, have systematically and repeatedly been named by the commentators.

Yet in the midst of all these healthy movements of disgust and revulsion, indeed, to the very sound of windows breaking and old furniture being thrown out, we have begun in the last few years to witness phenomena of a very different order, phenomena that suggest the return to and the re-establishment of all kinds of old things, rather than their wholesale liquidation. Thus one of the great achievements of postmodernity – of ‘theory’ or theoretical discourse on the one hand, of Rorty’s *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* on the other (along with Bourdieu’s critique of the disci-

## A SINGULAR MODERNITY

plines) – was surely to have discredited ‘philosophy’ in the traditional disciplinary sense and to have stimulated a proliferation of new kinds of thinking and new kinds of conceptual writing. Yet now we begin to witness the return of traditional philosophy all over the world, beginning with its hoariest subfields, such as ethics;<sup>1</sup> can metaphysics be far behind, one wonders (there are New Age speculations about physics that suggest it), if not theology itself (of which negative theology had promised the undermining)?

So it is that something like political philosophy re-emerges as well, trailing after it all those ancient issues of constitutions and citizenship, of civil society and parliamentary representation, of responsibility and civic virtue, which were the hottest topics of the late eighteenth century just as surely as they are no longer our own.<sup>2</sup> It is as though nothing had been learned from the challenges of the revolutionary century just concluded, which confronted traditional bourgeois thinking about the state with the bitter antinomies of class and collective social being. For all those older conceptualities themselves constituted so many reflexes of a very different historical situation from our own – namely the transition from feudalism to capitalism – which it would seem abusive to assimilate to some putative transition from communism to democracy (itself in any case, one would think, less a transition than a conceptual slippage, from an economic thought to a political one).

Along with all this, an older political economy totters forth, like a shade, and offers us a prodigious new development, namely the reinvention of the market, something about as exciting as the reinvention of the wheel: people can no doubt be left to their own tastes, but no one is going to persuade me that there is anything glamorous about the

## PREFACE: REGRESSIONS OF THE CURRENT AGE

thought of a Milton Friedman, a Hayek or a Popper in the present day and age.

And then there is the resuscitation of aesthetics, a discipline we thought modernism had both invented and deconstructed simultaneously, the various modernist forms of the sublime effacing aesthetic questions as swiftly as they began to emerge. And yet today once again people are beginning to raise the issue of beauty, the central subject of an aesthetics whose bourgeois motivation can be registered in its twin end points: the trivializations of the purely decorative and enjoyable on the one hand, and the sentimental idealism of the various ideologies of aesthetic justification on the other.

What is (equally traditionally) identified as the history of ideas is poorly equipped to deal with intellectual regressions of this kind, which can often more plausibly be accounted for by political conjunctures and by institutional dynamics. The defeat of Marxism (if it really was defeated) checked the flow of much contemporary theory at its source, which was the Marxist problematic as such (even if it travelled via the detour of Sartrean existentialism and phenomenology). Meanwhile the professionalization (and, increasingly, the privatization) of the university can explain the systematic recontainment of theoretical energy as such, as aberrant in its effects as it is anarchist in its aims. But this is precisely why such reinstitutionalizations and their regressions can scarcely be numbered among the consequences of postmodernity, with the latter's well-known rhetoric of the decentred and the aleatory, the rhizomatic, the heterogeneous and the multiple. Nor can one imagine that this was exactly what Jean-François Lyotard had in mind when he celebrated the displacement of the 'grand narratives' of history by the multiple language games of the postmodern,<sup>3</sup> which surely

## A SINGULAR MODERNITY

implied the invention of new language games and not the artificial resuscitation of those of the academic yesteryear.

But it is wrong to think that Lyotard's postmodernity – a non-systematic 'actuality' stirring with a random coexistence of irreconcilable Nietzschean presents of time – or indeed any of the others, marks a repudiation of the past, its wholesale consignment into oblivion. Rather, what is repudiated, along with the so-called 'grand' narratives, are also the pettier narratives of philosophical, literary and other forms of historiography. For this last, as with the historical novels of postmodernity,<sup>4</sup> is to be reinvented in the form of provisional and disposable canons, constellations of textual relationships subject to dissolution and replacement at one and the same time. For Lyotard, as for Deleuze, the philosophers of the past were to be reinvented and rewritten in the postcontemporary idiom (as Deleuze himself did so brilliantly for Nietzsche and Kant, for Hume and Leibniz), the operative slogan being the famous evocation of 'a bearded Hegel and a clean-shaven Marx'.<sup>5</sup>

In fact, like Deleuze, Lyotard was himself in many ways a quintessential modernist, passionately committed to the eruption of the genuinely, the radically, and, dare one even say, the authentically New: a commitment which ultimately marks the politics of both men (as different from each other as they may be) as aesthetic. This is why Lyotard's great preemptive strike on the so-called grand narratives (aimed at communism and French republicanism alike) turned out to be no more definitive than the Gulf War (which he also supported). For in order to keep faith with the aesthetic modernism hidden away within his ostensible political postmodernity (like Walter Benjamin's wizened theology within his activist automaton<sup>6</sup>), Lyotard found himself obliged to reinvent one of the oldest models of temporality on the

books, namely the cyclical one, which alone could authorize the suitably outrageous position that postmodernism does not follow, but rather precedes, true modernism as such, whose return it prepares.<sup>7</sup> He cannot in any case have had in mind the kinds of returns I have been enumerating here.

Still, his embarrassment suggests two useful conclusions. The first has to do with a dependence of the postmodern on what remain essentially modernist categories of the new, which cannot be fully eradicated from the 'new' dispensation whatever its rhetoric. And this is indeed no small or insignificant contradiction for postmodernity, which is unable to divest itself of the supreme value of innovation (despite the end of style and the death of the subject), if only because the museums and the art galleries can scarcely function without it. Thus, the new fetish of Difference continues to overlap the older one of the New, even if the two are not altogether coterminous.

The second consequence to be drawn is that it is easier to denounce historical narratives (and their 'shrunken dwarf', teleology) than it is to do without them. I have already made the point elsewhere that Lyotard's theory of the end of grand narratives is itself another grand narrative.<sup>8</sup> In a different area altogether, the New Critics' elevation of poetic language (presumably non-narrative in its very essence) over the other, generally narrative forms of discourse, turns out to be validated by a historical grand narrative that is something like a conservative 'philosophy of history', the unity of sensibility of the old English yeoman agricultural order (Eliot, Leavis) as it was shattered by revolutionary Romanticism (now re-identified with the Enlightenment and embodied in a poet like Shelley). Nor is this secondary narrative some mere secondary ideological supplement. I would want to press for a stronger formal conclusion, namely that the very refusal

## A SINGULAR MODERNITY

and repudiation of narrative calls up a kind of narrative return of the repressed and tends in spite of itself to justify its anti-narrative position by way of yet another narrative the argument has every interest in decently concealing.<sup>9</sup> But rather than trying to give this principle some ontological formulation, I would prefer to recast it in methodological form, as a recommendation to search out the concealed ideological narratives at work in all seemingly non-narrative concepts, particularly when they are directed against narrative itself. And if this recommendation is still far too general and abstract, in what follows I will propose a more concrete specification in our present context (a first maxim of four to come).

But now it is time to return to that context, and to consider some final return or reinvention of the outmoded in full postmodernity, a recurrence that is doubtless the most paradoxical of all since it proves to be that of the very concept of modernity as such, which we had all naïvely assumed long since to be superseded. But it is in fact back in business all over the world, and virtually inescapable in political discussions from Latin America to China, not to speak of the former Second World itself. Yet the West's alleged triumph has been persistently celebrated in explicitly postmodern terms, as the overcoming of the old modernist Utopian and productivist values, as the 'end' of ideology and history alike, and the nominalist doxa of the specific and of Difference, whether all those things are articulated in left-wing or right-wing languages (indeed the renunciation of any distinction between left and right is often a centrepiece of just such 'postmodern' rhetoric). What purpose can the revival of the slogan 'modernity' still serve, after the thoroughgoing removal of the modern from all the shelves and shop windows, its retirement from the media, and the

## PREFACE: REGRESSIONS OF THE CURRENT AGE

obedient demodernification of all but a few cantankerous and self-avowedly saurian intellectuals? It must somehow be a postmodern thing, one begins to suspect, this recrudescence of the language of an older modernity: for it is certainly not the result of any honest philological and historiographic interest in our recent past. What we have here is rather the reminting of the modern, its repackaging, its production in great quantities for renewed sales in the intellectual marketplace, from the biggest names in sociology to garden-variety discussions in all the social sciences (and in some of the arts as well).

There are in fact many reasons why this should be happening, although few enough of them justify it. Postmodernity came to seem a relatively disreputable idea in the established disciplines when some of its nastier consequences – a retheorization of late capitalism, feminism, coming to terms with so-called ‘relativism’ and the constructedness of social reality – became more evident. Even if you distrust periodization as such, the concept of modernity, which traces its lineage back to the founding fathers of sociology – and with which indeed sociology itself is coterminous as a field of study – seems respectable and academic enough.

But there are deeper motivations, deeper advantages, and they mostly lie, if I may put it that way, in the new global market, and not least in the global marketplace of ideas. For one of the inescapable dimensions of the concept of modernity was that of modernization (itself a much later, post-World-War-II coinage). Modernity always had something to do with technology (at least in ‘modern times’), and thus eventually with progress. But World War I dealt a very serious blow to ideologies of progress, particularly those related to technology; and in any event bourgeois thinkers themselves had had serious and self-critical doubts about

## A SINGULAR MODERNITY

progress from the late nineteenth century on. The invention of modernization theory after World War II allowed the bourgeois idea of progress a certain afterlife, while modernity and modernization knew a rather different version in the socialist countries in the Stalinist promise of catching up with the West and its industry. The vociferous denunciation of Stalinist versions of modernization, however, which was strategically associated with the general proposition that Marxism and socialism were in their very nature bad 'Promethean' ideologies, ought not to obscure the parallel discrediting of Western versions of modernization by the ecology movement, by certain feminisms and by a variety of left-wing critiques of progress and industrialization. Yet it is difficult to imagine how one can shape an attractive political programme if you believe in the 'end of history' and have excluded the dimension of the future and of radical change (let alone of 'progress') from your political thinking.

The revival of the concept of modernity is an attempt to solve that problem: in a situation in which modernization, socialism, industrialization (particularly the former, pre-computerized kind of heavy industry), Prometheanism, and the 'rape of nature' generally, have been discredited, you can still suggest that the so-called underdeveloped countries might want to look forward to simple 'modernity' itself. Never mind the fact that all the viable nation-states in the world today have long since been 'modern' in every conceivable sense, from the technological onwards: what is encouraged is the illusion that the West has something no one else possesses – but which they ought to desire for themselves. That mysterious something can then be baptized 'modernity' and described at great length by those who are called upon to sell the product in question.

I want to give one topical illustration of the renewed

## PREFACE: REGRESSIONS OF THE CURRENT AGE

polemic use of the term ‘modern’ and the confusions into which it leads us. In Oskar Lafontaine’s recent memoir of his fate under the new Schroeder administration in Germany, he complains of the widespread description of his market adversaries in that government as ‘modernizers’:

The words ‘modernization’ and ‘modernity’ have been degraded to fashionable concepts under which you can think anything at all. If you try to figure out what the people called ‘modernizers’ today understand under the term ‘modernity’, you find that it is little else than economic and social adaptation to the supposed constraints of the global market. The concept of modernity is reduced to purely economic and technical categories. Thus, the Anglo-Saxons have no legal protection against layoffs, so if we want to be modern we have to get rid of our protections in that area as well. In many countries the social safety net is being seriously reduced, so if we want to be modern we have to reduce it drastically as well. In many countries, business taxes have been reduced so that the entrepreneurs don’t leave the country and go elsewhere, so we have to be modern and reduce our taxes as well. Modernity has simply become a word for the conformity to such economic constraints. The question of how we want to live together and what kind of society we want has become a completely unmodern question and is no longer posed at all.<sup>10</sup>

In this context, the introduction of the term ‘modern’ is part of a fundamental political discursive struggle (as, in another context, success in imposing the distinction between ‘reformers’ and ‘hardliners’). If free-market positions can be systematically identified with modernity and habitually grasped as representing what is modern, then the free-market people have won a fundamental victory which goes well beyond the

## A SINGULAR MODERNITY

older ideological victories. To call this a media victory is to underestimate the displacement onto language and terminology of political struggle today. The point is that the holders of the opposite position have nowhere to go terminologically. The adversaries of the free market, such as the socialists, can only be classed in the negative or privative category of the unmodern, the traditionalist, or even, ultimately, since they clearly resist progress and modernity, of the hardliners. It is clear from Lafontaine's plaintive accents here not only that he lost this fundamental discursive struggle, but that he was never aware of its fundamental nature and stakes in the first place.

So much for the political dynamics of the word 'modernity', which has been revived all over the world and is being used systematically in this particular way. But I want to point out a conceptual and philosophical incoherence in this revival as well. What is generally meant in the polemics against socialism and Marxism (if not even against all forms of a left-centre liberalism) is that those positions are old-fashioned because they are still committed to the basic paradigm of modernism. But modernism is here understood as some old-fashioned realm of top-down planning, whether this be in statecraft, economics or aesthetics, a place of centralized power utterly at odds with the values of decentralization and the aleatory that characterize every new postmodern dispensation. So people like Lafontaine are unmodern because they are still modernists; it is modernism itself that is unmodern; 'modernity' however – in the newly approved positive sense – is good because it is postmodern. Then why not use that word instead?

The obvious answers – too theoretical, not yet popular enough or in wider currency, the 'post' automatically provoking malaise, quizzicality and ironic inquiry – those rea-

## PREFACE: REGRESSIONS OF THE CURRENT AGE

sons mask deeper ones, I believe, which are best explored by examining the work of the most influential contemporary ideologue of 'modernity', Anthony Giddens: a work that began life precisely as a critique of that modernity he has ended up championing. In *The Consequences of Modernity*, Giddens puts an end to his flirtation with the postmodern, and explains why he finds it expedient to do so (it should be understood that like so many others he thinks of 'post-modernity' as a nihilistic and relativistic kind of philosophy primarily espoused by people like Lyotard). Here is his comment:

It is not sufficient merely to invent new terms, like post-modernity and the rest. Instead, we have to look at the nature of modernity itself which, for fairly specific reasons, has been poorly grasped in the social sciences hitherto. Rather than entering a period of post-modernity, we are moving into one in which the consequences of modernity are becoming more radicalised and universalised than before. Beyond modernity, I shall claim, we can perceive the contours of a new and different order, which is 'post-modern'; but this is quite distinct from what is at the moment called by many 'post-modernity'.<sup>11</sup>

His proposition will then be rebaptized as 'radicalized modernity', which certainly does not sound terribly different from Habermas's brilliant formula of an incomplete modernity, of 'modernity as an unfinished project'. But Habermas's formula remains usefully ambiguous, and allows one to entertain the possibility that modernity is incomplete because it never could be completed by the middle class and its economic system. This is, however, exactly what Giddens would like us to try to do: the commitment of the Third Way to the free market makes a mockery of the socialist

## A SINGULAR MODERNITY

phrases he likes to use from time to time. I should add that on at least one issue I agree with him – where modernity was a set of questions and answers that characterized a situation of incomplete or partial modernization, postmodernity is what obtains under a tendentially far more complete modernization, which can be summed up in two achievements: the industrialization of agriculture, that is, the destruction of all traditional peasantries, and the colonization and commercialization of the Unconscious or, in other words, mass culture and the culture industry.

How then can the ideologues of ‘modernity’ in its current sense manage to distinguish their product – the information revolution, and globalized, free-market modernity – from the detestable older kind, without getting themselves involved in asking the kinds of serious political and economic, systemic questions that the concept of a postmodernity makes unavoidable? The answer is simple: you talk about ‘alternate’ or ‘alternative’ modernities.<sup>12</sup> Everyone knows the formula by now: this means that there can be a modernity for everybody which is different from the standard or hegemonic Anglo-Saxon model. Whatever you dislike about the latter, including the subaltern position it leaves you in, can be effaced by the reassuring and ‘cultural’ notion that you can fashion your own modernity differently, so that there can be a Latin-American kind, or an Indian kind or an African kind, and so forth. Or you can follow Samuel Huntington’s lead and recast all this in terms of essentially religious varieties of culture: a Greek or Russian Orthodox modernity, a Confucian modernity, and so on to a Toynbeean number.<sup>13</sup> But this is to overlook the other fundamental meaning of modernity which is that of a worldwide capitalism itself. The standardization projected by capitalist globalization in this third or late stage of the system casts

## PREFACE: REGRESSIONS OF THE CURRENT AGE

considerable doubt on all these pious hopes for cultural variety in a future world colonized by a universal market order.

Yet although I believe that the only satisfactory semantic meaning of modernity lies in its association with capitalism (I will, however, single out another way of using the term which seems to me useful and as dramatic as it is ultimately unobjectionable), the following extended essay will come at the matter in a rather different and non-substantive way. Let's say, to cut it short, that this will be a formal analysis of the uses of the word 'modernity' that explicitly rejects any presupposition that there is a correct use of the word to be discovered, conceptualized and proposed. It is a path that will lead us on to a related concept in the aesthetic sphere, modernism, where analogous ambiguities can and will be found. But modernism in its turn will lead us on, unexpectedly, into its own immediate history and fortunes, so that the essay will conclude, not on any emergent postmodern note, as might have been expected, but rather with that specifically historical period concept I want to call late modernism. The project is therefore one of the ideological analysis, not so much of a concept, as of a word. What is constitutively frustrating about such analysis is that, like the pane of glass at which you try to gaze even as you are looking through it, you must simultaneously affirm the existence of the object while denying the relevance of the term that designates that existence. Or perhaps it might be better to admit that the notions that cluster around the word 'modern' are as unavoidable as they are unacceptable.



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PART I

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The Four Maxims  
of Modernity



'Modernity' as a concept is so often associated with modernity that it comes as something of a shock to find the word 'modern' in use as far back as the fifth century AD.<sup>1</sup> In the usage of Pope Gelasius I (494/5) it simply distinguishes the contemporaries from the older period of the Church fathers, and implies no particular privilege (save the chronological one) for the present. Present and immediate past are here in continuity, both of them sharply distinguished from that unique historical time in which witnesses saw Jesus alive. So far, then, the Latin *modernus* simply means 'now' or 'the time of the now', thereby replicating Greek, which has no equivalent for *modernus* as such.<sup>2</sup> Yet in the work of Cassiodorus, writing at much the same time, after the conquest of Rome by the Goths, the term has acquired a new overtone. For *modernus*, in the thought of this essentially literary scholar, now knows a substantive antithesis, in what Cassiodorus terms *antiquas*. From the Pope's standpoint, the new Gothic empire scarcely marked a break in the Christian theological tradition; for the man of letters, it signifies a fundamental dividing line between a henceforth classical culture and a present whose historic task lies in reinventing that culture. It is this break that is crucial in the endowment of the term 'modern' with the specific meaning it has continued to bear down to our own time. Nor does it matter that for Cassiodorus the term is freighted with the melan-

choly of *Epigonentum*, while for the various Renaissances (the Carolingian as well as those of the twelfth century and of Burckhardt's Italy) the new historic mission is taken up with exultation.

What is at stake here is the distinction between *novus* and *modernus*, between *new* and *modern*. Can we sort this out by observing that everything modern is necessarily new, while everything new is not necessarily modern? This is, it seems to me, to differentiate between a personal and a collective (or historical) chronology; between the events of individual experience and the implicit or explicit recognition of moments in which a whole collective temporality is tangibly modified.

In the case of the new, the thus predicated subject is distinguished from its predecessors as an (isolated) individual with no particular reference or consequence; in the case of the modern, it is grasped in connection with a series of analogous phenomena and contrasted with a closed and vanished phenomenal world of a different type.<sup>3</sup>

What role does the existence of the new word play in the consciousness of this distinction? For the structural lexicologists of this tradition,<sup>4</sup> the availability of distinct terms and variants is certainly a fundamental precondition: 'where no specific differentiation of a field is available, no radically different temporal space can be delimited either'.<sup>5</sup> Yet causality is not thereby assigned, nor does it have to be: we can imagine the proliferation of terms in one space, and their appropriation by some emergent consciousness in another.

However, it is crucial at this stage not to underestimate the anomalous dynamics of a word like *modernus*. We have at least two competing models for the comprehension of

## PART I: THE FOUR MAXIMS OF MODERNITY

such a term. The first offers to deal with it in the framework of temporal categories, which eventually resolve themselves into those of the tenses as such (future, future anterior, perfective past, imperfective past, etcetera). We can then, with Reinhart Kosselek,<sup>6</sup> generate a history of ideas in which the emergence of new time-words is evidence for a narrative about the evolution of historical consciousness. Philosophically, however, this approach founders on the antinomies of temporality itself, about which it has authoritatively been said that 'it is always too late to speak about time'.<sup>7</sup>

The other obvious model, which approaches the problem not from the side of meaning and consciousness but from the side of the material signs themselves, is that of linguistics. It can be argued that 'modern' demands to be ranged under the category of what Jespersen called 'shifters':<sup>8</sup> namely those empty vehicles of 'deixis' or reference to the context of the enunciation, whose meaning and content vary from speaker to speaker throughout time. Such are the pronouns (I, me and you), the words for place (here and there), and of course the time-words as well (now and then). In fact, well before modern linguistics, Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* famously opens with a discussion of precisely such shifters, which as he points out might at first seem the most concrete words of all, until we grasp their portable variability.<sup>9</sup> Yet shifters exist, however incoherent they may be philosophically; and the well-known case of yesterday's 'modern' fashions suggested that the term 'modern' might well be included among them. In that case, however, the paradoxes of the modern are reduced to those of the merely new; and the existence of shifters in every known language tends to deprive our current object of inquiry of even that historicality that it was the merit of the preceding model to have underscored.

## A SINGULAR MODERNITY

Yet the internal contradictions of both approaches, while disqualifying them in the absolute, tend also to suggest some fundamental ambiguity in that object itself (which may well therefore impose a set of procedural measures and precautions). Jauss's magisterial overview suggests two further developments in the history of the concept of modernity which heighten that suspicion even further and demand to be taken into account before some final evaluation.

One is the emergent distinction between what Jauss calls 'cyclical' and 'typological' versions of the modern.<sup>10</sup> We are certainly familiar with cyclical thinking when it comes to historical moments like the Renaissance ('Maintenant toutes disciplines sont restituées, les langues instaurées');<sup>11</sup> it is less obvious that the category of the 'generation' always brings a certain cyclical movement with it, while at the same time requiring intense collective self-consciousness about the identity and uniqueness of the period in question (generally, as in the 1960s, felt to be revolutionary in a specific way that identifies the content of the 'cyclical' return).

Meanwhile, by the 'typological', Jauss means not only the sense in which a given period feels itself to be fulfilling or completing a moment in the past (as when the New Testament completes the figural anticipations of the Old). This relationship certainly holds for the Renaissance or for the positions of the so-called modernists in the 'Querelle des anciens et des modernes': but is less evidently relevant for situations of simple emulation or imitation, as in Cassiodorus's reverence for the literature of paganism, or the respect for the past of the twelfth-century *moderni*, who famously thought of themselves as dwarfs standing on the shoulders of giants. Yet, as the history of the Querelle itself demonstrates, the felt inferiority or superiority of present over past may be less important than the establishment of an

## PART I: THE FOUR MAXIMS OF MODERNITY

identification between two historical moments, an identification that can be evaluated either way.

There is, however, a further incoherence here: namely that, when we look at the opposition more closely, its two poles seem to vanish into one another; and the cyclical proves to be fully as typological, in this sense, as the typological is cyclical. The distinction is therefore to be reformulated in another, less evident way: in reality, it involves a kind of Gestalt alternation between two forms of perception of the same object, the same moment in historical time. It seems to me that the first perceptual organization (the one identified as 'cyclical') is better described as an awareness of history invested in the feeling of a radical break; the 'typological' form consists rather in the attention to a whole period, and the sense that our ('modern') period is somehow analogous to this or that period in the past. A shift of attention must be registered in passing from one perspective to the other, however complementary they may seem to be: to feel our own moment as a whole new period in its own right is not exactly the same as focusing on the dramatic way in which its originality is set off against an immediate past.

The other opposition noted by Jauss can then serve to complete and to clarify this one. It is an opposition that historically contrasts the characterizations of 'classic' and 'romantic', but which can also be found to have a more general significance. To be sure, when late romanticism comes to feel dissatisfaction with what is still perceived to be a reactive stance against the classical, then the concept of *modernité* is born, and Baudelaire mints a usage that is presumably still with us, and whose signal advantage seems to lie in its new-found independence from all such historical oppositions and antitheses.

But even this development is dependent on changes

## A SINGULAR MODERNITY

marked by the coming into being of the category of the classical itself, which no longer coincides with what used to be identified as 'antiquity' (or 'les anciens'). It is a momentous development, in which a good deal of the nostalgia and the fascination with the past, along with the pain of the Epigone's inferiority, have fallen away. Indeed, the most dramatic moment in Jauss's narrative of the fortunes of 'modernus' comes precisely at this point: when the 'quarrel' between the ancients and the moderns as it were unravels and undoes itself, and both sides unexpectedly come to the same conviction, namely that the terms in which the judgement is to be adjudicated – the superiority or not of antiquity, the inferiority or not of the present and of the modern times – are unsatisfactory. The conclusion on both sides is then that the past, and antiquity, is neither superior nor inferior, but simply different. This is the moment of the birth of historicity itself: and the historically new consciousness of historical difference as such now reshuffles the deck and leaves us with a new word for the present's opposite: the classical, which Stendhal will then virtually at once describe as the modernity (or the 'romanticism') of this or that moment of the past.<sup>12</sup> Jauss concludes his narrative at this point, only touching in passing on that other indispensable dimension of historicity, which is the future. Yet the future's inevitable judgement on both our past and the actuality of our own present – already evoked by the Abbé de Saint-Pierre in 1735<sup>13</sup> – will play an equally significant role in our own dealings with the modern and modernity.

It is now time to draw some provisional formal conclusions before examining some of the most current and widespread theories of modernity today. What we have tried to isolate is a dialectic of the break and the period, which is itself a moment of some wider dialectic of continuity and rupture (or, in other words, of Identity and Difference). For the latter process is dialectical in that it cannot be arrested and 'solved' in and for itself, but generates ever new forms and categories. I have observed elsewhere that the choice between continuity and rupture is something like an absolute historiographic beginning, that cannot be justified by the nature of the historical material or evidence, since it organizes all such material and evidence in the first place.<sup>14</sup> But of course every such choice or grounding can itself be reconstructed as a simple fact which demands its own prehistory and generates its own causalities: in this case, the simplest version would underscore the taste of our own period and postmodernity in general for breaks rather than continuities, for decisionism rather than tradition. One could go on to evoke the temporalities of late capitalism, its reduction to the present, the loss of the sense of history and continuity, and so forth. It is at least minimally clear that this establishment of a new chain of causality involves in fact the construction of a new narrative (with a rather different starting point than that of the historiographic problem from which we began).

## A SINGULAR MODERNITY

This situation, in which new narratives and new starting points are generated out of the limits and the starting points of older ones, may also be suggestive of the new dialectical moment we want to consider now, namely the dialectic of the break and the period. What is at stake here is a twofold movement, in which the foregrounding of continuities, the insistent and unwavering focus on the seamless passage from past to present, slowly turns into a consciousness of a radical break; while at the same time the enforced attention to a break gradually turns the latter into a period in its own right.

Thus, the more we seek to persuade ourselves of the fidelity of our own projects and values with respect to the past, the more obsessively do we find ourselves exploring the latter and its projects and values, which slowly begin to form into a kind of totality and to dissociate themselves from our own present as the living moment in the continuum. This is of course the moment of the latecomers' melancholy reverence and the inferiority into which our own late moderns have long since passed.

At that point, then, simple chronology becomes periodization, and the past comes before us as a complete historical world to which we can take any number of existential attitudes. This is no doubt the moment most often called *historicism*; and it becomes productive, no doubt, only when the stance so energetically defined by Schelling becomes available:

How few people really know what a past is: There can in fact be no past without a powerful present, a present achieved by the disjunction [of our past] from ourselves. That person incapable of confronting his or her own past antagonistically really can be said to have no past; or

## PART I: THE FOUR MAXIMS OF MODERNITY

better still, he never gets out of his own past, and lives perpetually within it still.<sup>15</sup>

Schelling thus here isolates a unique moment, in which the past is created by way of its energetic separation from the present; by way of a powerful act of dissociation whereby the present seals off its past from itself and expels and ejects it; an act without which neither present nor past truly exist, the past not yet fully constituted, the present still a living on within the force field of a past not yet over and done with.

It is this vital energy of the present and its violent self-creation that not only overcomes the stagnant melancholies of the epigones, it also assigns a mission to a temporal and historical period which ought not yet to have the right to be one. For the present is not yet a historical period: it ought not to be able to name itself and characterize its own originality. Yet it is precisely this unauthorized self-affirmation that will finally shape that new thing we call actuality, and for various forms of which our contemporary usage of modern and modernity are made to stand. For Jauss, we do not meet this stage of history until Romanticism (let us say that with Baudelaire 'late romanticism' produces the concept of *modernité* as a way of throwing off its own Epigonentum with respect to Romanticism proper); nor does the Renaissance exactly meet these requirements, since it is still turned towards the re-creation of a past beyond its own immediate past, and intent on ideal emulation and imitation rather than on historically new creativities of its own.

But romanticism and its modernity come into being, as has already been suggested, only after history itself, or rather historicity, the consciousness of history and of being historical, has appeared (in the dissolution of the Querelle). It is thus history as such that enables this new attitude towards

the present, in such a way that one is tempted to add a fifth and final form (if it is not already implicit in the preceding one). This is the judgement of the future on the present, which has been attributed to Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, and of which we find strong forms all the way down to Sartre (in *Les Séquestrés d'Altona*). I am tempted to argue that the present cannot feel itself to be a historical period in its own right without this gaze from the future, which seals it off and expels it as powerfully from time to come as it was able to do with its own immediate precedents. We need not overemphasize the matter of guilt (which, however, rightfully clings to every form of praxis) so much as that of responsibility which cannot perhaps be affirmed without the suspicion of guilt: for it is the present's responsibility for its own self-definition of its own mission that makes it into a historical period in its own right and that requires the relationship to the future fully as much as it involves the taking of a position on the past. History is to be sure both dimensions; but it is not sufficiently understood that the future exists for us not merely as a Utopian space of projection and desire, of anticipation and the project: it must also bring with it that anxiety in the face of an unknown future and its judgements for which the thematics of simple posterity is a truly insipid characterization.

But now we need to turn to the other, complementary moment, in which the break becomes a period in its own right. Such is the case, for example, with that moment traditionally identified in the West as the Renaissance, in which a certain break, a certain instauration of 'modernity', has the effect of opening up a whole new period, aptly termed the Middle Ages, as the unmarked other of a present felt to be the reinvention of that older or first modernity of the Romans (in which the modern conception of abstraction

## PART I: THE FOUR MAXIMS OF MODERNITY

and of philosophy itself, along with a certain conception of history as something distinct from the chronicle, first appear). We will come to the other surprising feature of this illustration – namely the emergence of two breaks, that of the Renaissance with its pre-modernity, that of the ancients with theirs – in a later section. Here what needs to be stressed is the way in which the modern break itself expands into a whole new period of the past, namely the medieval age. The strangeness of this emergence – before it, there only existed the break with the classical past, as in Cassiodorus; but not this later closure, which seals the Middle Ages off into a period in their own right – can be judged by the way in which, for contemporary historiography, striking effects of rewriting can be achieved by pushing the boundaries of ‘modernity’ ever further back into the former Middle Ages, and affirming some modern break and some new modern beginning – now rebaptized ‘the early modern’ – at a point deep in formerly medieval territory (such as Petrarch, or the twelfth century, or even nominalism).

Nor is this some unique occurrence: for if the break is initially characterized as a perturbation of causality as such, as the severance of the threads, as the moment in which the continuities of an older social and cultural logic come to an incomprehensible end and find themselves displaced by a logic and a form of causality not active in the older system, then the renewed and mesmerized contemplation of the moment of such a break, as it begins to detect causalities and coherences not previously visible to the naked eye, is bound to expand that break into a period in its own right. Such is, for example, the drama of Etienne Balibar’s theorization of a so-called transitional period (to which we will return), in which, by the very force of things, the logic of the period, or the moment, or the system, necessarily turns back

on the idea of the transition and dispels it. So it is that, in Marxist periodization, the 'eighteenth century' also offers the example of a radical break which slowly develops into a whole period, and an earlier form of modernity as such.

But this peculiar movement back and forth from the break to the period and the period to the break at least allows us to frame a first, provisional maxim, about periodization as such. For it has become clear that the terms 'modern' and 'modernity' always bring some form of periodizing logic with them, however implicit it may at first be. Nor does the argument propose itself as a defence of periodization, exactly: indeed, the burden of this whole first part will consist in the denunciation of the abuses of the term 'modernity', and thereby, at least implicitly, of the very operation of periodization itself. Meanwhile, in Part II, we will be concerned to denounce the sterility of the standard aesthetic move, which consists in isolating 'modernism' as a standard by which to compare a whole series of historically and artistically incomparable writers (or painters or musicians).

Indeed, I want to insist on something more than the simple abuse of periodization: I want to argue that this operation is intolerable and unacceptable in its very nature, for it attempts to take a point of view on individual events which is well beyond the observational capacities of any individual, and to unify, both horizontally and vertically, hosts of realities whose interrelationships must remain inaccessible and unverifiable, to say the least. In any case, what is unacceptable about periodization, at least to the contemporary reader, has already been exhaustively recapitulated in the attacks, in a structuralist idiom, on 'historicism' (or in other words, on Spengler).

## PART I: THE FOUR MAXIMS OF MODERNITY

Now, however, we need to consider the most obvious consequence of some repudiation of periodization, which would take the form of a historiography of the break as such, or in other words that endless series of sheer facts and unrelated events proposed, in their very different ways, by Nietzsche as well as by Henry Ford ('one goddamned thing after another'). It would be too simple to observe that this method of dealing with the past amounts to a reversion to the chronicle as a mode of storing and registering information: insofar as historicity is itself presumably a modern invention, the critique and repudiation of the modern is bound to generate at least the option of a regression to this or that pre-modern operation.

I would prefer to recall here our initial hypothesis (outside the frame of this particular investigation, of modernity as such): namely that there can always be expected to be a return of the repressed of narrative itself, something one would certainly expect to find in any enumeration of breaks (and which the dialectic of the transformation of the break into a period in its own right goes a long way towards verifying). But now we may specify this 'law' (if it is one) in terms of our immediate issue, namely periodization itself. In this context, we may then frame a more specific maxim (the first of four to come in the present part), which, while acknowledging the objections to periodization as a philosophical act, nonetheless finds itself brought up short against its inevitability: or in other words,

1. We cannot not periodize.

The maxim, which seems to encourage a resignation to defeat, would also appear to open the door to a thorough-

## A SINGULAR MODERNITY

going relativization of historical narratives, just as all the critics of postmodernity feared. But we will not know whether 'everything goes' in this sense until we examine the dominant narratives themselves.

'Modernity' always means setting a date and positing a beginning, and it is in any case always amusing and instructive to make an inventory of the possibilities, which tend to move around in chronological time, the most recent – nominalism (and also McLuhanism) – being among the oldest. The Protestant Reformation obviously enjoys a certain priority for the German tradition in general (and for Hegel in particular). For the philosophers, however, Descartes's thoroughgoing break with the past constitutes not only the inauguration of modernity but already a self-conscious or reflexive theory of it; while the cogito itself then stages reflexivity as one of modernity's central features. In hindsight – the hindsight of the twentieth century and decolonization – it now seems clear that the conquest of the Americas brought with it a significant new element of modernity,<sup>16</sup> even though traditionally it has been the French Revolution, and the Enlightenment that prepared and accompanied it, that is credited with modernity's most momentous social and political break. Yet the reminder of science and technology suddenly sends us all the way back to Galileo if we are not content to affirm the existence of an alternate revolution in the Industrial one. But Adam Smith and others make the emergence of capitalism an unavoidable narrative option; while the German tradition (and more recently the Foucault of *The Order of Things*) affirms the significance of that

special kind of reflexivity that is the historicist kind, or the sense of history itself. After that, modernities fly thick and fast: secularization and the Nietzschean death of God; Weberian rationalization in the second or bureaucratic/monopoly stage of industrial capitalism; aesthetic modernism itself with the reification of language and the emergence of formal abstractions of all kinds; and, last but not least, the Soviet revolution. In recent years, however, breaks that would once have been characterized as so many modernities have tended rather to be termed postmodern. Thus the 1960s brought momentous changes of all kinds, which it somehow seems superfluous to call a further modernity.

That makes some fourteen proposals: one can be sure that many more are lurking in the wings, and also that the 'correct' theory of modernity is not to be obtained by putting them all together in some hierarchical synthesis. Indeed, it will already have been understood that, on my view, it is not to be obtained at all: since what we have to do with here are narrative options and alternate storytelling possibilities, as which even the most scientific-looking and structural of purely sociological concepts can always be unmasked.<sup>17</sup> Is this not then to return to that frightening possibility of an utter relativism, which always seems to make its reappearance in any discussion of the postmodern (narrativity is thought to be an essentially postmodern slogan), bringing with it the ultimate threat of the disappearance of Truth as such? But the truth in question is not that of existentialism or psychoanalysis, nor that of collective life and political decisionism; but rather the static epistemological kind an older generation of scientists clings to, along with its Platonic translation into a 'value' by an older generation of aesthetes and humanists.

## PART I: THE FOUR MAXIMS OF MODERNITY

It may be reassuring to observe that even in some untrammelled and 'postmodern' reign of narrativity as such, we may expect some narratives to be less persuasive or useful than others: that is, even if the search for some true or even correct narrative is vain and doomed to every failure but the ideological one, we can certainly go on talking about false narratives, and we may even expect to isolate a certain number of themes in terms of which the narrative of modernity must *not* be told (see Chapter 4). Meanwhile, there exists something like narrative elucidation, and we may presume that to use the narrative of modernity in this way, as the explanation of a historical event or problem, puts us on a more productive track. Causality is itself, after all, a narrative category; and its identification as such clarifies both its appropriate use and the conceptual dilemmas it inevitably brings with it. In any case, this new secondary or auxiliary status of 'modernity' as an explanatory feature rather than an object of study in its own right helps exclude a certain number of false problems.

One of those problems is bound to be the alternation we have already identified in the dialectic of the break and the period. This is, as has already been shown, a kind of Gestalt fluctuation between the perception of modernity as an event and its apprehension as the cultural logic of a whole period of history (one which is by definition – at least until the onset of theories of postmodernity – still with us). The event thus seems to contain within itself synchronically the very logic or dynamic of some diachronic unfolding over time (perhaps, indeed, it is this for which Althusser reserved the term 'expressive causality'). In any case this is also the very logic of storytelling itself, in which the teller of the tale can expand a given datum at great length, or compress it into a

narrative fact or point; and in which the axis of selection is projected onto the axis of combination (as in Jakobson's famous formula for poetry).<sup>18</sup>

Indeed, perhaps this can initially be conveyed more forcefully in terms of classical rhetoric (which it was the historical merit of Jakobson, among others, to have reintroduced into theory). In that case, 'modernity' is then to be considered a unique kind of rhetorical effect, or, if you prefer, a trope, but one utterly different in structure from the traditional figures as those have been catalogued since antiquity. Indeed, the trope of modernity may in that sense be considered as self-referential, if not performative, since its appearance signals the emergence of a new kind of figure, a decisive break with previous forms of figurality, and is to that extent a sign of its own existence, a signifier that indicates itself, and whose form is its very content. 'Modernity' then, as a trope, is itself a sign of modernity as such. The very concept of modernity, then, is itself modern, and dramatizes its own claims. Or to put it the other way around, we may say that what passes for a theory of modernity in all the writers we have mentioned is itself little more than the projection of its own rhetorical structure onto the themes and content in question: the theory of modernity is little more than a projection of the trope itself.

But we may also describe this trope in terms of its effects. First of all, the trope of modernity bears a libidinal charge: that is, it is the operator of a unique kind of intellectual excitement not normally associated with other forms of conceptuality (or if any of the latter arouse such excitement, one may suspect that a certain premise of modernity is concealed within such seemingly unrelated discourses). This is, no doubt, a temporal structure, distantly related to emotions like joy or eager anticipation: it seems to concen-

## PART I: THE FOUR MAXIMS OF MODERNITY

trate a promise within a present of time and to offer a way of possessing the future more immediately within that present itself. It is in this sense something of a Utopian figure, insofar as it includes and envelops a dimension of future temporality; but then in that case one would also add that it is an ideological distortion of the Utopian perspective, and constitutes something of a spurious promise intended in the long run to displace and replace the Utopian one. What I want to underscore in this first point, however, is the way in which to affirm the 'modernity' of this or that historical phenomenon is always to generate a kind of electrical charge: to isolate this or that Renaissance painter as the sign of some first or nascent modernity<sup>19</sup> is – as we shall see in a moment – always to awaken a feeling of intensity and energy that is greatly in excess of the attention we generally bring to interesting events or monuments in the past.

In one sense, the trope of modernity is closely related to that other chronological or historicizing, narrative, trope of 'for the first time', which also reorganizes our perceptions around the premise of a new kind of time line. But 'for the first time' is individual, and 'modern' is collective: the former only isolates a single phenomenon, even though closer enquiry may well press and force it to the point at which it mutates into a sign and symptom of modernity proper. Of 'for the first time' we may say that it announces a break without a period, and is thereby not subject to the temporal and narrative antinomies of 'modernity' as such.

This is then also to say that the trope of 'modernity' is always in one way or another a rewriting, a powerful displacement of previous narrative paradigms. Indeed, when one comes to recent thought and writing, the affirmation of the 'modernity' of this or that generally involves a rewriting of the narratives of modernity itself which are already in

place and have become conventional wisdom. In my opinion, then, all of the themes generally appealed to as ways of identifying the modern – self-consciousness or reflexivity, greater attention to language or representation, a materiality of the painted surface, and so on and so forth – all these features are themselves mere pretexts for the rewriting operation and for securing the effect of astonishment and conviction appropriate to the registering of a paradigm shift. This is not to say that those features or themes are fictive or unreal; it is merely to affirm the priority of the rewriting operation over the alleged insights of historical analysis.

The process is best observed in examples less world-historical than the absolute breaks enumerated at the beginning of this Chapter: although to refocus all of those as so many versions of the beginning of *Western* modernity does tend to reduce them to tropes of the kind I want to illustrate here. Thus while Luther or German objective idealism may well offer self-evident though dramatic starting points for some worldwide modernity, to reread Hitler as the agent and the very fulfilment of a specifically German modernity<sup>20</sup> is surely to offer a powerful defamiliarization of the recent past as well as a scandalous rewriting procedure. The trope reorganizes our perception of the Nazi movement, displacing an aesthetic of horror (the Holocaust, Nazi racism and the genocides) along with other ethical perspectives (the well-known ‘banality of evil’, for example) and even those political analyses in which Nazism is seen as the ultimate unfolding of the substance of radical right ideology in general, with a very different developmental narrative context which operates on at least two levels.

The first, more fundamental one posits the ‘final solution’ of the problem of feudalism, and the sweeping away of all those feudal and aristocratic or Junker survivals that char-

## PART I: THE FOUR MAXIMS OF MODERNITY

acterized Germany's uneven development in 'modern' times and its class dynamics as well as its legal and social institutions. 'Hitler' is then here a kind of 'vanishing mediator'<sup>21</sup> which includes both the Nazi politics as such and the immense devastation of the war, which clears the slate of everything 'residual' (in Raymond Williams's expression): indeed, it might well be suggested that the trope of modernity in this sense always has the structure of a vanishing mediator (and also that the latter is to be seen as a trope in its own right); nor is the content of this example altogether innocent, as we shall see in a moment.

But we can also here observe the projection of the trope of modernity on that more secondary expressive level of technology as well. Here, not only the utilization by Hitler of any number of very 'modern' communicational systems (the radio, the airplane), leads to the invention of the modern politician-demagogue and the wholesale reorganization of representational politics; we must also register the virtual creation of a 'modern' everyday life, as witness the VW and the autobahn, not to speak of that electrification whose arrival in the village function in Edgar Reisz's remarkable television series *Heimat* stands as the very marker of the Nazi seizure of power.

Thus a whole historiography can be organized around the clearly unverifiable deployment of the trope of modernity as a rewriting strategy for the Nazi period in Germany. The example might be repeated in any number of very different contexts from this one. Thus, we might also have examined Giovanni Arrighi's positioning of the beginnings of some properly capitalist modernity in the double bookkeeping and 'internalization of protection costs' of sixteenth-century Genoa.<sup>22</sup> Or, in a very different context, we might evoke Kierkegaard's celebration of Christianity's essential modern-

ity<sup>23</sup> and the implicit retheologization of the culture critique it imposes. Or Weber's identification of the beginnings of Western rationalization (his word for modernity) in the medieval monastic orders (if not in the beginnings of tonality in Western music).<sup>24</sup>

But I prefer to conclude the list with a somewhat different deployment of the modernity effect, as we find it in a striking page of Proust devoted to the mysteries of travel and displacement:

Unhappily those marvellous places, railway stations, from which one sets out for a remote destination, are tragic places also, for in them the miracle is accomplished whereby scenes which hitherto have had no existence save in our minds are about to become the scenes among which we shall be living, for that very reason we must, as we emerge from the waiting-room, abandon any thought of presently finding ourselves once more in the familiar room which but a moment ago still housed us. We must lay aside all hope of going home to sleep in our own bed, once we have decided to penetrate into the pestiferous cavern through which we gain access to the mystery, into one of these vast, glass-roofed sheds, like that of Saint-Lazare into which I went to find the train for Balbec, and which extended over the eviscerated city one of those bleak and boundless skies, heavy with an accumulation of dramatic menace, like certain skies painted with an almost Parisian modernity by Mantegna or Veronese, beneath which only some terrible and solemn act could be in process, such as a departure by train or the erection of the Cross.<sup>25</sup>

This is something like Proust's embodiment of the 'Querelle des anciens et des modernes', whose canonical form is to be found in the characterization of Tante Léonie, in despotism

## PART I: THE FOUR MAXIMS OF MODERNITY

fully as much in punctilious insistence on ceremony and repetition, as Louis XIV. Here also, the banal 'modern' train trip drinks, as it were, the blood of the past and re-emerges in the full-blown tragic drama of the Crucifixion: modernity gets reinvented as tragic solemnity, but only by way of a detour characterizing the great tragic painters of the past as 'modern' (and as Parisian at that!). But we scarcely need to argue the case for reading Proust as a systematic rewriting of the present in terms of the cultural past; and in any case his own theory of metaphor is very specifically one of that defamiliarization that he himself discovered at much the same time as the Russian Formalists.

I want to open a parenthesis here, and to suggest that we can take a further step and attempt to restore the social and historical meaning of the rewriting operation by positing it as a trace and an abstraction from a real historical event and trauma, one which can be said to amount to a rewriting and a surcharging of the social itself in its most concrete form. This is the moment of the overcoming of feudalism by capitalism, and of the aristocratic social order of castes and blood by the new bourgeois order which at least promised social and juridical equality and political democracy. This is to locate the referent of 'modernity' in a new way, via the ancient ghostly forms of the experience itself rather than in some one-to-one correspondence between the alleged concept and its equally alleged object. It is also to mark some fundamental differences in the various national situations. For while in Europe itself this convulsive transformation, not really complete in some places until World War II, left real scars behind it, which the ghostly abstract repetition in the mind recapitulates and reproduces, in the US notoriously the schema does not apply; and in the various countries of the Third World what might have seemed to constitute remnants

of feudalism have now been reabsorbed into capitalism in a very different fashion (here we find the urgency of the whole debate about whether the latifundia really constitute survivals of feudalism or not). In any case – and this is the deeper justification for tracing the formal operations of the trope of modernity back to its traumatic historical emergence – our situation at the beginning of the twenty-first century has nothing to do with this any longer. Conceptualities from the revolutionary eighteenth century – such as the notion of civil society – are no longer relevant to the age of globalization and the world market and the moment of some tendential commodification of agriculture and culture itself by a new kind of capitalism. Indeed, this historical distinction between an old social trauma and a very new one (which does not exactly constitute a violent rewriting in our first sense) goes a long way towards denouncing the ideological character of the revival of the concept of modernity in the first place.

At this point, however, it may be enough to conclude this Chapter with the formulation of a second maxim on the uses of the ‘concept’ of modernity. For just as Danto showed that all non-narrative history is susceptible to translation into a properly narrative form, so I would also want to argue that the detection of tropological underpinnings in a given text is itself an incomplete operation, and that tropes are themselves the signs and symptoms of a hidden or buried narrative. So it is at least with what we have been describing as the trope of modernity, with its various vanishing mediators. We may therefore wish to draw the conclusion that

2. Modernity is not a concept, philosophical or otherwise, but a narrative category.

In that case, we will not only wish to abandon the vain attempt to formulate a conceptual account of modernity as

## PART I: THE FOUR MAXIMS OF MODERNITY

such; but we will find ourselves likely to wonder whether the modernity effect is perhaps not best reserved exclusively for the rewriting of moments of the past, which is to say of previously existing versions or narratives of the past. To eschew all uses of modernity in our analyses of the present, let alone our prognoses of the future, would certainly offer one effective way of discrediting a certain number of (ideological) narratives of modernity. But there are other ways of achieving that aim as well.

It is probably well to begin with that moment that has always been taken as the epitome of the absolute beginning, namely that of Descartes and the cogito. It is certainly an appearance systematically fostered by the philosopher himself, who anticipates Schelling's formula by a wholesale public repudiation of the past in general: 'je quittai entièrement l'étude des lettres',<sup>26</sup> which is to say, I stopped reading books altogether. This not altogether veracious statement combines with another happy incident, namely, the state of non-discipleship in which his failure to find or choose a single master<sup>27</sup> left the kind of intellectual void or blank slate given a kind of corporeal analogy in the experiment at the beginning of the Third Meditation: 'I will now close my eyes, stop up my ears, withdraw all my senses [from their objects], I will even erase the images of physical things from my thought', etcetera.<sup>28</sup> The result of this well-nigh phenomenological epochē will then be that consciousness in which the cogito rises. It has been astutely observed (many times!) that a consciousness that requires such elaborate preparations and systematic negations can scarcely be considered to be a primary phenomenon or reality. Or perhaps it would be better to say that it is, in reality as well as in its concept, a construction: a term that will shortly put us on the path of Heidegger's thrilling reinterpretation.

First, however, we need to say something about the cogito

## PART I: THE FOUR MAXIMS OF MODERNITY

as a representation, and as a representation of consciousness or subjectivity at that. For it is on the strength of this representation that Descartes has so often been taken to be the inaugurator of that subject/object split which constitutes modernity as such and from which we all allegedly continue to suffer today. This is indeed no doubt the meaning of the paradoxical fact that Descartes is not only the founder of modern philosophical idealism, he is also the founder of modern philosophical materialism as well. (We will return to his materialism, and his 'scientific method', later in Part I.) Yet to put it in any of these ways is to assume that modern discussions of subjectivity (if not the latter's experience) spring from Descartes; which is to say that in some fashion, with Descartes, we should be able to witness the emergence of the subject, or in other words, of the Western subject, that is to say, the modern subject as such, the subject of modernity.

Yet we could witness such an emergence only if we had some representation of what thereby emerged. It is precisely this I want to place in doubt: for we only seem to have a name for this state of consciousness, unless it is that rather different and even more peculiar thing, a name for this event which is the coming to consciousness. It is a very peculiar name indeed, reminding us of those archaic and allegorical personifications who wander about carrying their identification written on their back: 'I think', or 'cogito'. But a name is not a representation, and one might even conjecture that, in this case, it is the substitute and as it were the 'placeholder' (the Lacanian *tenant-lieu*) for such a representation, about which it only remains to conclude that it must be impossible in the first place. There are any number of reasons why consciousness should be pronounced to be unrepresentable. Colin McGinn's suggestive volume reminds us, about

the empiricist dictum ‘nothing in the mind that was not previously in the senses’, that what we call consciousness was certainly never in the senses.<sup>29</sup> Meanwhile, Kant famously pronounced the subject to be a noumenon rather than a phenomenon; which means by definition that consciousness, as a thing-in-itself, cannot be represented, inasmuch as it is what representations are represented to and for. From there to the Lacanian position on the subject – Žižek dramatizes it as an ‘include me out!’<sup>30</sup> – it is but a step; and Lacan usefully reminds us that, after the abandonment of the *Entwurf*, Freud resolutely bracketed the problem of consciousness as such and systematically left it outside his problematic.<sup>31</sup>

We may also return to the matter from a different angle by observing that, whatever the force of such arguments, the cogito is most often taken to be a representation anyway, and that that representation itself is most often described as a point, insofar as the latter is something without dimension or extension.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, we might want to include location in this account as well, for it is the disembodied location in space of the point that also seems to capture something of consciousness’s situatedness in the world, while at the same time it denies itself any even symbolic reification, any type of substantiality about which one could affirm this or that property or trait. But this confronts us with a dialectical outcome in which the emergent subject is somehow generated out of the space of the object world, and becomes describable (pure location) only when the space of the latter has been reorganized into pure homogeneous extension. Or if you prefer, consciousness and the subject are representable only by way of the indirection of the object world, and of the moment of an object world itself historically produced at that. Now what is modern about the cogito turned out to

## PART I: THE FOUR MAXIMS OF MODERNITY

be, not subjectivity, but extension; and if there is any causality at all in this attempt at an absolute beginning, it is then the object that constitutes the subject over against itself, along with its own distance from that subject and vice versa (the famous subject/object split): but that object is in any case the outcome of a specific historical process (that of the universal production of homogeneous space). But where does this last come from? And how to imagine an absolute beginning, a kind of primal rupture, in which subject and object possess equal rights of causality? The mythologies of the German ‘idealist’ philosophers (Fichte and Schelling) tried to reconceptualize such beginnings,<sup>33</sup> about which to be sure only primal myths offer any representational hints. But *muthos* in Greek means narrative or story; and I would therefore prefer to conclude that this version of modernity’s absolute beginning is also a narrative than to fall back on the sceptical and unproductive formula that it is simply a myth.

But perhaps this is the moment to examine Heidegger’s version of this particular beginning, in which we would indeed be hard put to assign priority to either subject or object; in which each side produces the other by producing itself at one and the same time – subject and object resulting from this initial act of positing through separation, of separating through positing. In fact we here touch on the narrative problem posed by any form of relationship, about which and virtually by definition and in advance we are obligated to do equal justice to the difference between two things at the same time that we affirm their unity within the relationship, no matter how momentary and ephemeral that may be.

Heidegger’s ‘solution’<sup>34</sup> – an immensely influential one which may be said to have influenced all the newer theories of ideology in the 1960s (or in so-called poststructuralism)

from *Tel quel* to film theory – turns on a characteristic wordplay (related to his notorious folk etymologies), namely a segmentation of the German word for representation (*Vorstellung*). For, to anticipate, the notion of representation is itself Heidegger's solution: for him it means exactly the same thing as the subject/object split; only the word 'representation' underscores the mutual interaction of these two poles while the other formula separates them by giving each a separate name, namely subject on the one hand and object on the other.

But how does representation come to serve as the key for the interpretation of the Cartesian cogito? It is very simple: Heidegger brings to bear the immense weight of his classical learning – so palpable in his stunning readings of the philosophical texts of the tradition – on a lexical point. On contextual evidence,<sup>35</sup> he wants us to agree that 'thinking' is too narrow and restricted a reading of 'cogitare', and that it is precisely by 'representation' that this crucial verb must be rendered. But now 'representation' – the German *Vorstellung* – must be deployed and put through its paces: its combined sections convey the meaning of a placing something before us, of a positioning of the putative object in such a way that it is reorganized around its being perceived. *Vorstellen*, the equivalent of the Cartesian *per-cipere*, designates for Heidegger the process of bringing a thing before one's self, and thereby *imagining* it (the German word is the same), perceiving it, thinking or intuiting it, or as Heidegger puts it, 'etwas in Besitz nehmen', taking possession of it.<sup>36</sup> On this reading of *Vorstellung*, the *esse* of the object is its *percipi*; provided one adds the proviso that then in that case the object did not previously exist in that form at all; but also that this is not an idealist formulation and the object is not here reduced to my 'idea' of the object, since as yet no perceiving subject

## PART I: THE FOUR MAXIMS OF MODERNITY

exists (we will come to the emergence of a subject pole in representation in a moment).

The more contemporary and postmodern slogan of construction will make all this clearer: what Heidegger calls representation is a way of constructing the object in a specific way. We may trace the Heideggerian influence up to the present day in order to identify a privileged example of the construction of an object in representation: this is perspective, in painting and then in the related ideological analysis of film theory.<sup>37</sup> Perspective clearly reconstructs the object as a phenomenon, in Kant's sense, as an object perceptible and conceptualizable for us. To claim, as Heidegger sometimes does, that the era of representation is also the reign of Western metaphysical subjectivism does not mean that the object in perspective is merely a figment, an idea for me, a projection or a product of my own subjectivity. It merely offers a certain construction of the real among other conceivable ones (and the representational object of perspective in painting is also very much, for Heidegger, the object of modern scientific experimentation).

But what is the purpose of this construction? Nothing less, Heidegger tells us, than the construction of *certainty*;<sup>38</sup> and as every reader of Descartes knows, this can only be achieved by way of a preliminary construction of *doubt*. The undoubtedness of Cartesian certainty – *fundamentum absolutum inconcussum veritatis* – can only come about by the systematic dispelling of a doubt which one must therefore produce in advance and marshal. It is only by way of this newly achieved certainty that a new conception of truth as correctness can emerge historically; or in other words, that something like 'modernity' can make its appearance.

Yet where is the subject and 'subjectification' to be found in this process? The reading proposes two further textual

steps: the first is the alternate Cartesian formula of a *cogito me cogitare*,<sup>39</sup> which seems to lay in place a rather conventional idea of self-consciousness (a term Heidegger himself uses approvingly). But in the context of a construction of the object by representation, this self that seems automatically to accompany the cogito and the focus on the represented object must also be grasped as a construction. The best way to make this point is to underscore the illusions generated by a substantive like 'self', which suggests something like a person or a 'me' located within and behind the whole process of perception. What Heidegger's model suggests, however, is rather a purely formal account of this emergence of the subject: the construction of the object of representation as perceptible formally opens a place from which that perception is supposed to take place: it is this structural or formal place, and not any kind of substance or essence, which is the subject. And this is indeed the sense in which the later critiques of representation denounce perspective and related structures as being ideological in and of themselves, without the intervention of subjective opinions and the ideological 'positions' of an individual. But this is also the sense in which, in Heidegger's narrative, the object may be said to produce the subject (rather than, as with the *fiat* of a Fichte or a Schelling, the other way round).

And then there is the matter of the troublesome 'ergo', about which Descartes himself had already insisted that it had nothing to do with a logical conclusion or the movement of a syllogism in Aristotelian logic. For as Heidegger points out, the assertion of being is already at one with the process of representation, since this new metaphysics reorganizes our very categories of Being itself, which is now identified as representation: *Sein ist Vorgestelltheit*.<sup>40</sup> In that case, *ergo*

does not so much mean ‘therefore’, as in a logical conclusion, but rather something like ‘that is to say’.

This account of the emergence of modernity as representation truly seems to offer us ‘a history without a subject or a telos’<sup>41</sup> and in that sense may well be preferred to any number of vapid humanist just-so stories. (The alleged convergence of the Heideggerian narrative – *Vorstellung* as *Herrschaft* – with the Frankfurt School conception of ‘instrumental reason’ does tend to lower these standards and to generate a more conventional ‘culture critique’.) But before drawing more specific lessons for any doctrine of modernity, we need to examine the account as a narrative. Is self-creation, in other words, a narrative? Is this unique and somehow self-creating event – the production of the subject by the object and the object reciprocally by the subject – a genuine story, a kind of historical narrative, or instead little more than a myth in the privative sense of an uncaused event without a narrative context?

In fact, however, we have withheld that context until now. It is this context alone that secures the essential modernity of the Cartesian cogito, since it alone allows us to read that seemingly absolute act as a gesture of liberation, and very precisely as an emancipation from that very context itself. The reference is the conventional one which sees the Cartesian moment as a break with medieval scholasticism and indeed with a theological world in general (which, as the eponymous essay directs us, it would be wrong to characterize as a ‘world picture’ or ‘world view’, since those secular terms really only apply to modernity itself).<sup>42</sup>

But the narrative of the break enables Heidegger to set in place as it were the pre-history of the motif of certainty, and to specify its uses in Descartes as a function of the role it

played in the previous system, where it meant the certainty of salvation. It is then this that allows us to read the Cartesian gesture of liberation in a narrative way:

. . . this liberation, although without knowing it, is always still freeing itself from being bound by the revelational truth in which the salvation of man's soul is made certain and is guaranteed for him. Hence liberation *from* the revelational certainty of salvation had to be intrinsically a freeing *to* a certainty [*Gewissheit*] in which man makes secure for himself the true as the known of his own knowing [*Wissens*]. That was possible only through self-liberating man's guaranteeing for himself the certainty of the knowable. Such a thing could happen, however, only insofar as man decided, by himself and for himself, what, for him, should be 'knowable' and what knowing and the making secure of the known, i.e., certainty, should mean. Descartes's metaphysical task became the following: to create the metaphysical foundation for the freeing of man to freedom as the self-determination that is certain of itself. That foundation, however, had not only to be itself one that was certain, but since every standard of measure from any other sphere was forbidden, it had at the same time to be of such a kind that through it the essence of the freedom claimed would be posited as self-certainty. And yet everything that is certain from out of itself must at the same time concomitantly make secure as certain that being for which such certain knowing must be certain and through which everything knowable must be made secure. The *fundamentum*, the ground of that freedom, that which lies at its foundation, the *subiectum*, must be something certain that satisfies the essential demands just mentioned. A *subiectum* distinguished in all these respects becomes necessary.<sup>43</sup>

## PART I: THE FOUR MAXIMS OF MODERNITY

We can now specify the two modes of Heidegger's narrative of modernity. In the first mode, a feature that had a specific function in the first historical system – in this case, the 'certainty' of salvation – is abstracted from that context, in which alone it had a functional content, and transferred to a new system, where it is endowed with an altogether different function. It is a model we will encounter again (in Foucault and Althusser) as a more overt attempt to account for the transition from one mode of production to another. Heidegger wants to insist as well on the insufficiency of narratives that posit simple continuities (he expressly singles out the unsatisfactory notion of 'secularization'<sup>44</sup>), and also on what we have called the second mode of the narrative in question, namely that of the survival and persistence of residual elements belonging to the older system: in this case the well-known medieval features still present in Descartes's language:

Here we have the most palpable example of earlier metaphysics impeding a new beginning for metaphysical thought. A historiological report on the meaning and nature of Descartes' doctrine is forced to establish such results. A historical meditation on the inquiry proper, however, must strive to think Descartes' principles and concepts in the sense he himself wanted them to have, even if in so doing it should prove necessary to translate his assertions into a different 'language'.<sup>45</sup>

It is this insistence on the systemic character of the thoughts in question – the radical difference between Descartes and his theological 'predecessors', the relative continuity between the new Cartesian system and Nietzsche's apparent break with it – that marks Heidegger as a thinker of periodization.

We will confront the structural problems of such periodizing narratives shortly.

At this point, however, it is necessary to draw some conclusions from this investigation of the cogito and its modernity. But here Heidegger's characteristic language will cause us some initial problems and confusions: by the word traditionally rendered in English as representation (*Vorstellung*) he means, as we have seen, a whole (metaphysical) process of reorganizing the world and producing a new category of being under the sign of epistemology. Descartes's cogito is then the first symptom of this global transformation which makes up the essence of Heidegger's theory of modernity: it is the word for a new rearrangement of subject and object in a specific relationship of knowledge (and even domination) towards each other: the object coming to be only as it is known or represented, the subject only as it becomes the locus and the vehicle for such representation.

However, the traditional reading of the cogito is as the quintessence of consciousness itself, indeed as its representation in the sense of a rather different German word, *Darstellung*, which brings overtones of the theatrical and the scenic. My argument has been that in that sense the cogito is a failure, because consciousness cannot be represented at all; and the accounts of the cogito in terms of luminous dots without extension go a long way, in their figural impoverishment, towards making the point. Whatever it means as an operation and a construction, therefore, the cogito must be read as some first and still unequalled attempt to *render* consciousness as such (using Henry James's term for artistic representation), to convey this unique object in its purity. If so, it then necessarily also has the meaning of the failure of all such attempts, and their impossibility; and we must draw another lesson from it, namely that – in that sense of

## PART I: THE FOUR MAXIMS OF MODERNITY

*Darstellung* – consciousness, as an experience, as what we are all the time, cannot be represented; cannot be an object of representation. Consciousness is unrepresentable, along with the lived experience of subjectivity itself (which is not to say that the ego or personal identity cannot be represented: it is in any case already an object and a representation; as is the structure of the Unconscious which Freud and his followers mapped out allegorically).

But there follows a momentous consequence from all this in the area of theories of modernity: namely that henceforth no theory of modernity in terms of subjectivity can be accepted. For if no representations of consciousness are possible, then it becomes evident that theories that attempt to locate and describe modernity in terms of shifts and changes in consciousness are equally vitiated. For the most part, of course, the theories denounce themselves: and it is easy enough to identify pop-psychological accounts of cultural change (narcissism, the weakening of the Oedipus complex, momism, the death of God or paternal authority, etcetera, etcetera) as so much ideological fodder. But three of the more august conceptions of modernism and its subjectivity do seem to remain firmly fixed in place; and it then becomes useful to single them out and to denounce them. In particular, one has the feeling that the notion that modernity is at one with some unique type of Western freedom is still very much with us. Yet by this notion of freedom is certainly meant something subjective and a fundamental modification of consciousness as such. What it was before that is less often said, although one can assume that the otherness of the pre-modern must necessarily go hand in hand with unfreeness, obedience, and the subjection of a slave mentality and an irredeemably subaltern life-stance. (Thus 'free' imperceptibly modulates into 'bourgeois'.)

At this point in the classical celebration of modernity, however, a second characterization generally intervenes, and that is the idea of individuality. Modern people are individuals, and what is unfree about the others is then obviously enough their lack of individuality. But it should be clear that individuality is also an illicit representation of consciousness as such: it purports to characterize the inner climate of the liberated individual and his (sic!) relationship to his own being and his own death as well as to other people. When this second characterization begins to break down – it is not so easy to invent plausible descriptions of the inner atmosphere of something so unfigurable as consciousness – then the third option is grasped for.

That option involves the evocation of modernity in terms of self-consciousness or reflexivity: here then we suddenly seem to have reached a philosophically more viable concept under which both the attributes of freedom and of individuality can be argued. For it is easier to say of some ‘pre-modern person’ that he is conscious but not self-conscious in the Western philosophical sense than to assert that he is not an individual: as for freedom, the slippage of its acceptance from a metaphysical to a social or political attribute makes its non-ideological deployment a particularly delicate operation.

Yet if consciousness cannot be represented, how much the more must this be so for self-consciousness, which is normally imagined to be a kind of doubling of consciousness itself (but the figures for this new entity – mirrors, equations, reflected light, etcetera, – are even more flimsy than the cogito’s initial ‘point’). In fact, it should be obvious that if traditionally it was supposed to be a fundamental philosophical problem whether you could tell that other people were conscious or not – think only of Descartes’s own automata<sup>46</sup> – it will be even more difficult to decide whether the attribute

## PART I: THE FOUR MAXIMS OF MODERNITY

of self-consciousness can safely be assigned to them. I therefore feel that it is justified to frame some new or third maxim, according to which we assert that

3. The narrative of modernity cannot be organized around categories of subjectivity (consciousness and subjectivity are unrepresentable).

This proposition preserves much of the spirit of the anti-humanism of the 1960s and of the 'poststructuralist' critique of the subject (or of the centred subject, by which was meant none other than our old friend the cogito or consciousness). Yet even after this linguistic turn, as it is sometimes called, and the various theoretical and philosophical proposals for some radical decentring of subjectivity and consciousness, it seems to have proved very difficult to shed the older habits and to give such categories up. Thus, the omnipresent notion of reflexivity needs to be unmasked as little more than a code word for self-consciousness (however non-anthropomorphic its context may seem to be): indeed, the theme of self-reference or indexing is as we shall see central to one of the most ambitious philosophical and sociological oeuvres of our time, that of Niklas Luhmann. Meanwhile the multitudinous theories of language and communication today mostly tend to perpetuate such older philosophies of subjectivity under their scientific guises: one can be sure, whenever the slogan of intersubjectivity arises, that one is still in an essentially humanist discursive world.

Nonetheless the status of the maxim in question does demand a specific clarification: it is not to be understood as an ontological proposition, that is, it does not affirm that no such thing as subjectivity exists. It is rather a proposition about the limits of representation as such, and means simply to assert that we have no way of talking about subjectivity

or consciousness that is not already somehow figural: those words are indeed themselves pre-eminently figurations and buried or forgotten metaphors if, as Nietzsche urged, we follow them far enough back into history.<sup>47</sup> But who says figuration evokes a failure of representation: a figure is always necessarily a substitute, a second-best, an admission of linguistic and expressive defeat (from which defeat, to be sure, poetic language itself emerges). But I would not want this diagnosis of failure to be understood to entail the additional consequence that all such figurations of subjectivity are necessarily false, let alone incorrect (or even untrue). I'm not sure what that could mean in a situation in which there is no literal language and in which every possibility was always figural to begin with.

Yet in fact our pessimistic third maxim does not leave us in the midst of some impenetrable Wittgensteinian silence in which nothing can any longer be said. On the contrary, it merely excises a certain number (a rather considerable number!) of 'culture critiques' which prove to be ideological through and through and whose intents, when more closely examined, are almost always very doubtful indeed. But this does not mean that we cannot tell the narrative of modernity at all.

In fact, Heidegger's own narrative of the process – however ideological it may turn out to be in its own right – has some methodological lessons for us. In particular, we need to note the coexistence in it of two temporalities: there is the internal temporality of representation, of the subject-object split (or difference-and-identity) as that rises into being like a self-caused event; and then there is an external temporality (that of the theme of certainty) in which a theological or medieval conception of the certainty of salvation overlaps the emergence of the new system for one last moment and

coexists with it long enough to allow the function of certainty to pass from the outgoing structure into the new one, in some wholly different form. What has happened here is that a rather mythic narrative of the event that is a cause of itself has been grounded in a narrative situation or set of preconditions in which the emergence can be plausibly told in narrative form. This is not a matter of old-fashioned causality any more, of the type that plagued old-fashioned intellectual history as it attempted to decide between antecedents and genealogies, predecessors and family likenesses. Perhaps Althusser's notion of structural causality is more appropriate (we will return to it below). The movement is rather the one charted by Hegel in his *Logic* from a dialectic of oppositions to the emergence of a 'ground' or *Grund* (which also means 'cause' or 'reason for').<sup>48</sup> We will have occasion to look into other versions of this peculiar structure, about which it suffices now to say, that any theory of modernity must both affirm its absolute novelty as a break and at one and the same time its integration into a context from which it can be posited as breaking.

The word for this structure – promoted into a properly philosophical discourse first by Jaspers and then by Sartre – is the word 'situation', a narrative term that attempts to square this particular circle and to hold its contradictory features of belonging and innovation together within itself. We will then want to affirm, as a further qualification of our maxim, that one can only tell a given narrative of modernity in terms of its situation, or better still, completing the formula, that

3. The narrative of modernity cannot be organized around categories of subjectivity; consciousness and subjectivity are unrepresentable; only situations of modernity can be narrated.

Unfortunately, we do not get rid of Heidegger as easily as that; and on closer examination we discover a conceptual or formal embarrassment we failed to acknowledge during the previous discussion. It is that Heidegger has at least two theories of modernity. That, in a pinch, one could resolve by talking about his evolution, his various ‘turns’, the multiple models within his thought, and so forth. I prefer to put it in a different way, namely that in Heidegger there is not one modern break, but rather at least two.

Indeed, alongside the Cartesian break of representation and the emergence of the epistemological ‘world picture’, with its stark opposition between subject and object, there persists an older break, which we may call the Roman or Imperial break. Here we have to do with the loss of the Greek experience of Being as this is reflected in the reification of Greek thinking when it is appropriated by the Roman mentality through translation into Latin (and it should be remembered that for Heidegger Greek and German are comparable in their authenticity – freedom from the contamination of other languages, and etymological closeness to some original experience of Being). Reification (although perhaps as a term the very example of what it designates) is then not an inappropriate or anachronistic word for the translation process, insofar as Heidegger’s first illustration charts the transformation of the presence of beings into what

## PART I: THE FOUR MAXIMS OF MODERNITY

it would not be too fanciful to describe as the 'reified things' of the Roman empire (*res, ens*):

These names are not arbitrary. Something that can no longer be shown here speaks in them, the basic Greek experience of the being of entities in the sense of presence [*Anwesenheit*]. By these designations, however, the interpretation of the thingness of the thing that henceforth becomes standard is founded, and the Western interpretation of the being of entities is established. The process begins with the appropriation of Greek words by Roman-Latin thought. 'Hypokeimenon' becomes *subiectum*; 'hypostasis' becomes *substantia*; 'symbebēkos' becomes *accidens*. This translation of Greek names into the Latin language is in no way the inconsequential process it is taken to be even today. Beneath the apparently literal and thus faithful translation there is concealed, rather, a translation of Greek experience into a different kind of thinking. *Roman thought appropriates the Greek words without the corresponding experience, equally original, of what they say, without the Greek word.* The groundlessness of Western thought begins with this translation.<sup>49</sup>

It is certain that for Heidegger Roman conceptual reification is the beginning of a 'metaphysical' process that is still very much with us (as the survival of the Latin terms on into the European vernacular languages testifies). A certain modernity begins with the Roman appropriation and transformation, itself infused with domination and leading on into the catastrophes of modern Western history.<sup>50</sup> The very broad periodization of 'Western metaphysics' (which is perhaps Derrida's greatest philosophical debt to a figure who clearly both fascinates and repels him) is laid in place by this particular historical narrative. Is it inconsistent with the Descartes-oriented theory of modernity as representation

that we have outlined above? This is very much an interpretive choice: and to be reified about it, one might argue that Heidegger's Descartes merely adds a reified subject to the reified Roman object world. Still, this makes two breaks rather than one, and allows us to return to theories of modernity generally with some interesting suspicions.

(Nor is any of this simplified by the postwar emergence of yet another possible break, a third one. Heidegger's conception of technology is certainly far more ideological than either of these two earlier philosophical theories; but it would seem to mark an even more dramatic version of modernity and its emergence, not merely with its pessimistic and well-nigh apocalyptic overtones, but also with its very premise: namely, the complication of the relationship of representation between subject and object in the older theory by way of the addition of a new relay, namely the enigmatic *Gestell* in which what has been translated as a kind of 'standing reserve' (*Bestand*) enables energy to be stored up for later use.<sup>51</sup> This reusable excess or remainder (of the original act of exchange) is very much like that original surplus from which the earliest forms of political power derive; it may even be comparable to the (far more complex) Marxian analysis of capital itself. Yet as a culture critique and a philosophical concept it does not seem immediately reconcilable with the earlier critique of representation (although it certainly has its family likeness with the latter); nor does Heidegger himself attempt such a reconciliation. In that case, we have three breaks, three moments of the emergence of modernity, three narratives of the process, rather than a single one.)

Heidegger's multiplication is not an isolated instance; we have therefore some interest in examining this strange periodizing proliferation in another writer (distantly inspired by

## PART I: THE FOUR MAXIMS OF MODERNITY

Heidegger), for whom the act of periodization is now the central preoccupation and the fundamental interpretive gesture: I mean Michel Foucault, and in particular the Foucault of *Les Mots et les choses* (*The Order of Things*), which may certainly be said to offer a history, as well as a theory, of modernity.

It will be remembered that Foucault's monumental archaeology is organized around four historical moments. The first is a kind of pre-modern moment, in which elements of the medieval are combined with the more superstitious features of the Renaissance to convey a timeless mythical world in which reality is a book or text that its interpreters read. It is a text organized around microscopic and macroscopic resemblances (conventia, aemulatio, analogy and sympathy),<sup>52</sup> in which the predominance of grotesque catalogues and encyclopedias, bestiaries, fantastic histories, is not to be thought of as error or superstition in any modern sense, but only reflects a radically different kind of interest, focus and attention: an interest in 'everything that has been *seen* or *heard*, everything that has been *narrated*, either by nature or by men, by language of the world, by tradition or by the poets'.<sup>53</sup> These luminous pages form a kind of anteroom to the history proper, which begins at once as we shall see with modernity: in this world of figures and resemblances, of echoes and signatures, there is as yet no 'real' history (in the modern sense), and therefore questions about causality, beginnings and scope have no purchase here. To denounce the rest of the narrative as Eurocentric is to overlook this mythic, well-nigh African universe that precedes it; to ask how classical Greece fits in here, or China, or India, is to ask false questions.

We are entitled to raise such questions as soon as Western modernity begins: about what we are calling the second

period or moment, for example – that moment of what Foucault calls ‘representation’ (not at all in Heidegger’s sense), and what he also calls the ‘classical period’ (following a French usage that may seem parochial to the other national traditions), namely the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. We are then even explicitly authorized to raise the historical question about our third period, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, insofar as this period is itself the very moment of the invention of modern history as such, the moment of historicism, vitalism and humanism, and of the construction of the so-called human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*). As for what I am calling the fourth period, this is a shadowy and prophetic realm, a realm of language and death, which lives in the interstices of our own modernity as its negation and denial: a realm nourished by structuralism but in no way premonitory of postmodernism, since virtually by definition it cannot itself be realized as a separate historical period, yet one whose Utopian promise, very much like Heidegger’s, lies in the disappearance from it of anthropomorphism and humanism, of Heideggerian ‘representation’, such that, famously, ‘man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea’.<sup>54</sup>

Neither the first or the fourth of these moments, therefore, can technically be called a historical period. For that very reason they are most instructive about the way in which periodization necessarily constructs a frame around itself, and builds on the basis of a subtle interplay between two forms of negation, the contrary and the contradictory, between differentiation and outright opposition, between the locally distinguished and the absolute negation, antagonistic and non-antagonistic, the non- and the anti-. In this sense, the first, Renaissance world would seem to constitute a universe of the non-modern, while the last moment, the

## PART I: THE FOUR MAXIMS OF MODERNITY

underside of humanism, can be taken to be its radical negation or the pre-eminently anti-modern (which unlike the postmodern somehow remains modern in its very denial and resistance, its aesthetic indeed coming to seem the very quintessence of modernism, rather than a break from it). At any rate we may register some first production of non- and anti-modern spaces which is part and parcel of the very positing or affirmation of modernity as such.

Our basic concern here, however, has to do with the positing of two moments of the modern as such: namely our second and third moments, which alone can properly be described as historical periods. And here, even though the periodization is the traditional French one, it seems to me the other national traditions have their own rough equivalents (substitute Luther for Descartes in the German tradition, or Bacon in the English one), and that the double standard of the two moments or versions of modernity – the scientific one of the seventeenth century, the industrial one of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – is a doxa so widely held as to be largely commonsensical and unchallenged. But that lack of ideological vigilance simply reflects a slippage back into empirical history: what could be more normal, after all, than a historiography that puts Galileo before the steam engine, that enumerates merchant capital and commerce first and industrial capitalism only after that, that sees the various moments, in other words, as so many stages or progressions within the same process? The merit of Foucault (and his interest for us here) is then evidently to assign these moments to radically different historical systems, and to turn that very succession or progression into a historiographic and even a philosophical problem.

This is the moment to say something more about the Foucauldian break, so central to his whole philosophical

ideology, with its insistence on the message of discontinuity and its attacks on the continuities of humanist historiography (whether in the 'history of ideas' or in the 'stages' of the Stalinist dialectical materialism or evolutionism, which Foucault so often confused with Marxism *tout court*). These breaks – which Foucault inherited from Althusser's inheritance of Bachelard's famous 'coupure épistémologique' – are the very content of Foucault's vision of history (to use another reprehensibly humanist expression) and up to the very end (and the seemingly more humanist and mellow reflections on the self), each break officially posited seems to bring a flurry of new ones in its wake, as though in fear of eventual totalizations. For along with the breaks comes the insistence on the merely partial and incomplete, never-to-be-completed or totalized object of study: here for example Foucault wishes to stress the seemingly random and arbitrarily selected nature of his ostensible objects of study, namely language, life and labour (or in the older system, signs, natural history and riches), or, from some contemporary disciplinary standpoint, linguistics, biology and economics. (This insistence on partial sets then conveniently serves to distract us from the cunning formal symmetries and effects Foucault will derive from this selection.)

But what also needs to be stressed is that along with the ostentatiously anti-totalizing gesture, Foucault here proceeds in a profoundly dialectical manner. For one way in which the dialectic can be defined is as a conceptual coordination of incommensurabilities. Our first-level processes of abstraction, in other words, produce universals under which are ranged phenomena that exhibit similar or even identical dynamics and laws: such are the abstractions of traditional logic, and traditionally the relationship between universals and particulars, genus and species, concepts and exemplars,

## PART I: THE FOUR MAXIMS OF MODERNITY

have been thought of in this way as a collecting and a grouping of identities. With Hegel, however, the problem arises of the coordination of analogous phenomena that have wholly different internal dynamics and laws. The fundamental conceptual shock here comes from the discovery of the mode of production in the eighteenth century by the Scottish Enlightenment;<sup>55</sup> here we have an abstraction or a universal – the mode of production, as the organization and reproduction of any social formation whatsoever – each of the embodiments of which has its own unique inner dynamics and structure which are incomparable with any other, the inner laws of tribal society or feudalism, for example, operating in a wholly different way than those of capitalism. Meanwhile, as the structural elements or constituents of each mode of production are determined by their function, we cannot abstract them from either and assume simple equivalences between them from one mode to another: to grasp each element, such as this or that technology, or gold and currency, or property laws, we must first refer back to the totality of which they are functioning parts. The dialectic is thus proposed as a kind of new language strategy, in which both identity and difference are given their due in advance and systematically played off against each other (in ways that for non- or pre-dialectical thought will seem to break the law of non-contradiction). Thus even the term ‘mode of production’ is an abuse since the phenomena ranged under it are virtually by definition utterly unlike and indeed incommensurable. But the dialectic comes into being as an attempt to hold these contradictory features of structural analogy and the radical internal differences in dynamic and in historical causality together within the framework of a single thought or language.

But this is precisely what Foucault finds himself very self-

consciously doing; and indeed his moments or epistemes – which are alleged to describe only the historical systems of what counts as knowledge – function very much like modes of production in the older sense. This means that the classical and the humanist moments – the moment of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century representation and that of nineteenth- and twentieth-century vitalism and evolutionism – not only have radically different, indeed, incomparable inner structures, but also obey utterly different laws of causality. In our present context this means that the breaks between them, the transitions and the reconstructions, the passage on to new systems, will also not be comparable: but to pose a different type of historical causality for each such break is to demand a kind of thinking that only the dialectic can offer.

Yet as has been observed in passing, we must also acknowledge that Foucault cheats a bit in order to bring his *tour de force* off; and indeed his three levels or zones of reality – he calls them ‘systems of elements’, ‘codes of a culture’, or forms of ‘order’<sup>56</sup> – constitute the guiding thread or identity on which the radical historical changes can be rung and against which the mutations from one moment to another can be registered. Thus, in that first ‘modernity’ which is Foucault’s second or classical moment, we are asked to isolate three sectors or forms of knowledge which are those designated by the terms ‘riches’, ‘natural history’, and ‘signs’. These three sectors of reality are then demonstrated to be homologous, in the way in which each is organized around a static tableau, as most strikingly in the tables of the various zoological species. Time and history here take the form of a meditation on origins, as witnessed by the centrality of etymologies; and the crucial act of knowledge is found in the linguistic proposition, which affirms the

## PART I: THE FOUR MAXIMS OF MODERNITY

relationship between noun or name (the same word covers both in French) and thing.

About this extraordinary account, we have now to ask, first, how such a system comes into being: or in other words, how is this first break, between the pre-modern and this modern (the moment of Galileo and Descartes, of the Port-Royal Grammar, of Newton, indeed of the *Encyclopédie*), to be conceptualized (or narrated)? A disquisition on *Don Quixote* is offered in place of an answer to this question, which however clearly turns on the 'sundering of similitude from the sign'.<sup>57</sup>

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, during the period that has been termed, rightly or wrongly, the Baroque, thought ceases to move in the element of resemblance. Similitude is no longer the form of knowledge but rather the occasion of error, the danger to which one exposes oneself when one does not examine the obscure region of confusions. 'It is a frequent habit,' says Descartes, in the first lines of his *Regulae*, 'when we discover several resemblances between two things, to attribute to both equally, even on points in which they are in reality different, that which we have recognized to be true of only one of them.' The age of resemblance is drawing to a close. It is leaving nothing behind it but games.<sup>58</sup>

We may therefore imagine this transition as one in which the weakening of the omnipresent power of resemblance releases hitherto bound elements – such as the 'sign' – around which in time a whole new system will form. The other breaks or transitions in Foucault are more generously characterized: yet this one nonetheless allows us to make a preliminary observation about the transitional process in general in *Les Mots et les choses*. I am tempted to say that

in Foucault such breaks or transitions are neither conceptualized nor are they represented: a general scheme is laid in place, namely that the old system breaks up, and among its ruins (as in Piranesi's eighteenth-century views of classical Rome) a new system forms which has nothing to do with its predecessor. The latter does not figure in the former's genealogy, nor is it in any way the agent of its destruction. Indeed, causality seems to be absent from these purely structural descriptions, and this is why I have concluded that they are not conceptualized, and that Foucault does not offer us a theory of change or transition exactly. Rather, it seems to me that he gives us the elements with which to form our own representations of the processes (something I have largely done above, under the cautionary verb 'to imagine'). He does not himself offer full representations, rather his characteristic multiplicity of figures nudges us in this direction, while withholding any definitive figure of his own devising. It is a procedure that certainly causes us to wonder whether there is something fundamentally unrepresentable about such moments of radical structural change, of the break or the transition, in the first place.

Two other brief observations are worth making about this first or classical moment of modernity. Its episteme, which in other areas (such as physics and astronomy) certainly counts as what we would today recognize as knowledge, can at the very least, even in the three today-outmoded areas in question (value, animal species and grammar), and in particular by contrast with the situation that precedes it, be said to constitute a framework in which – 'for the first time' – meaning as such emerges.

The other point to be made is that consciousness has no place in the classical system (it should be noted that Foucault here reduces Descartes to a footnote, just as he does with

## PART I: THE FOUR MAXIMS OF MODERNITY

that ‘minor Ricardian’ Marx in the next historical system): it is a tabulation within which elements of the human are distributed here and there, but which does not – unlike our next historical moment – make ‘man’ the measure of all things (here Foucault sharply diverges from Heidegger’s account, which we have outlined above).

But this systemic absence is precisely what lends Foucault’s narrative its polemic force: for the account of the third moment – that of the invention of History, that of evolutionism in biology, of Marxism in economics, and of the great linguistic tradition of Bopp and Grimm – is something like an anti-humanist pamphlet, despite the fullness of scholarly detail. But here the nature of the transition (or the break between the classical and the historicist moment) is much more fully developed; and Foucault’s figuration is far more pronounced. I will summarize it briefly: the catastrophe that strikes the system of representation is the weakening and disappearance of homology, or in other words, of the structural parallelism that held the three levels together. We may note that there is a sense in which this disappearance is merely an intensification of what happened in the first transition: there it was resemblance that was weakened (and then logically absorbed into various local operations); now it is that form of structural resemblance called homology whose binding power is loosened and discredited. In this sense it is as though the movement of the historical narrative can also serve as a defence of Foucault’s valorization of the break, the discontinuity of radical Difference (and perhaps even of the dissolving power of Thanatos) as opposed to Identity, resemblance, sameness, continuity and the like.

Simultaneously with this dissolution – but one cannot say whether it is exactly to be grasped as an effect of the latter – there takes place an autonomization of the three areas. Each

begins to develop into a system in its own right, and the three slowly begin to move away from each other: it is a well-nigh geological process, and conveyed by the image of tectonics: layers of older continents shift and move apart, resulting in new land masses and the overlap of unstable plates, themselves doomed to further lawful and yet incomprehensible and unpredictable slippage. Meanwhile the distance between these three land masses will play a significant role in the new nineteenth-century developments.

Yet there is something of a sleight of hand in Foucault's rhetoric of difference and autonomization here: for it is clear enough, and on his own account, that the three new areas of linguistics, economics and biology have much in common with each other; and that that 'much' (which remains the homology between them) can be summed up in the word 'historicism', in particular as it is crystallized in various evolutionary theories (whether of economic crisis and development, sound change in linguistic history, or Darwinism itself). Oddly, however, Foucault does not take historicism on directly (to assign it to a specific historical system is already to deprive it of its truth claim), but rather focuses on its other face which is that of humanism and the emergence of a concept of 'man' or of human nature.

But this is precisely not a form of knowledge: it emerges in the interstices between the three positive forms of knowledge under investigation here. Human nature (and the various *Geisteswissenschaften* and humanist ideologies that accompany it) is something like the gap between them and the attempt to fill that gap as well and to construct a complete metaphysical system. We can say this another way by underscoring a shift in the very nature of knowledge itself, when it comes to the three positive domains of economics, biology and linguistics. For if knowledge in the

## PART I: THE FOUR MAXIMS OF MODERNITY

classical period always in one way or another sought to answer the question why? and to search for origins, that question has disappeared from this third historical moment in which only empirical facts and arbitrary and contingent laws remain. Such positivities are therefore also mysteries: life, labour and language; and they are non-human mysteries at that, to which alone such strange new anti-humanist 'methods' or disciplines like (structural) anthropology or ethnology and psychoanalysis correspond (significantly, Foucault finds no correspondingly 'economic' approach to the underside of the positivities).

What this whole account registers and stresses is a fundamental gap or split, in this second moment of the modern, between the empirical and the transcendental; a gap whose theorization puts us on the track of Foucault's ambition for this dense and unclassifiable book, neither history or philosophy exactly, but also pamphlet and aesthetic at the same time. The shadowy yet central and even preponderant role played by Kant here, particularly in the appropriate historical moment (the transition from representation to history) suggests that the writer imagines a similar historical position for himself in some late modern great transformation. I am thus tempted to say that, if the classical period was the moment in which meaning appeared, this new historicist or humanist period is that in which the limits of meaning now begin to emerge; in which the boundaries of what is humanly thinkable and indeed of knowledge itself become as obsessive and as problematic as the content of that knowledge. Foucault's operation, then, like Kant's, lies in tracing those boundaries and in mapping out what can count as thinking and what cannot. But like Kant's, Foucault's achievement overshoots the mark, and far from this very modest and reasonable programme, with its careful limits and precau-

tions and its sober catalogue of positivities, the marking of the limit exacerbates the will to transgress it and to pass over into what is forbidden.

It is that zone of non-knowledge which we have characterized above as something like a fourth historical moment, even though in another sense it coexists with our own daytime world of historicism and the human sciences as their photographic negative. We therefore here confront yet a third type of 'transition', if it can still be called that, a third kind of representational (or even dialectical) problem. For although this fourth moment is occasionally evoked in the prophetic mode – the famous 'effacement of man from the sand', the fleeting 1960s hope and glimpse of some new proto-structuralist transformation of thought and life which one finds briefly echoed in Lévi-Strauss and Derrida as well<sup>59</sup> – most often its promise is sought (and found) in the nooks and crannies of our own system: in the rediscovery of the great madmen, for example, of Hölderlin and Artaud; and the aesthetic foregrounding of a language beyond bourgeois consciousness, a language with the density of an existent, a language that wishes not to mean but to persist on the very limits of meaning, or beyond them. One here recognizes the affinities with the aesthetic of Maurice Blanchot (to which we will return in Part II), rather than with Heidegger (despite the solemnity of these evocations) – for that luminous and light-filled clearing promised by Heideggerian ontology and poetics has here become as dark and ominous as a black hole. To be sure, as in Heidegger, what is here prophetically demanded, as desperate need and Utopian vision alike, is the overcoming of humanism. It remains, however, to enquire whether this is the same as what at the high point of World War II the Japanese fatefully called 'the overcoming of modernity'.<sup>60</sup>

## PART I: THE FOUR MAXIMS OF MODERNITY

It is a question that returns us to the issue of the two breaks, in Foucault and Heidegger alike, and in the mystery of the two modernities. Foucault's scheme, indeed, makes clear what was obscured by Heidegger's insistence that the whole development of Western metaphysics up to our own time (and to himself) was already implicit in Descartes's inaugural gesture. In Foucault, it is as if this historical narrative of Heidegger's were split into two moments: the first one offers the modernity of simple representation, so to speak, the first modern or 'scientific' translation of the world into mathematical tables and signs. It is only in the second moment that the subject appears (or what we used to call self-consciousness): in good Lacanian and even Kantian spirit, it is inauthentic when claiming existence as a positivity – humanism, human nature, individuality, and so forth – and authentic only when registered as an impossible absence – either in the logic of the 'fourth moment' as a late aesthetic phenomenon, or as far back as the seventeenth century in the empty subject-positions of Velasquez's *Las Meniñas*. But the aesthetic – in both Foucault and Heidegger – seems to have more in common with modernism as such (or with that somewhat different thing, the aesthetic of modernism) than it does with anything postmodern that might conceivably lay claim to some more fundamental and decisive break with modernity as such. The trouble lies in the way in which a genuine repudiation of modernity's solemnities – for these modern philosophers a very solemn gesture indeed – seems on the contrary to demand the very opposite of solemnity, if not to say frivolity, trivialization, flippancy, camp, decoration, and the like: but that is a question better raised in our aesthetic enquiry into the matter in Part II.

Here, we need only to make two remarks in conclusion. The first is that at least one feature of Foucault's analysis of

## A SINGULAR MODERNITY

the modern will be retained and far more richly developed in another theoretical tradition. This is the idea that at least the second modernity is characterized by a logic of separation (most notably when the three realms of life, labour and language begin to move away from each other geologically and to become relatively autonomous). In a later section we will see that the interpretation of a break or gap in terms of separation is a promising starting point for a rather different theory of the modern.

As for the two breaks and yet some third one they seem to promise (in the uncertainty as to whether some fourth historical period will really be forthcoming), their proliferation has a crucial lesson for us in the peculiar inner dynamics of that narrative category called modernity itself. It is as though the intensification of our attention to modernity turned upon itself, and began to distinguish the detail of what was somehow less modern in modernity from what was more so, thereby generating a kind of pre-modern moment within modernity as such. The pre-bourgeois (seventeenth- and eighteenth-century) moderns are thus already modern and yet at one and the same time not yet so: the thinkers of the classical period are no longer part of some traditional world, and yet they are not fully admissible to what we recognize as the broad daylight of full modernity as the nineteenth and twentieth centuries lived and experienced it. Even when we turn to that more modern modernity, however, it can also begin to strike us as strangely antiquated and old-fashioned (and ever more stylistically obsolete the nearer it comes to us in time). It will be said that as the thinking of modernity folds back into the attempt to think temporality as such, it comes to encounter all the latter's antinomies and conceptual contradictions.

But this is to wash away all the unique structural peculi-

## PART I: THE FOUR MAXIMS OF MODERNITY

arities of the idea of the modern itself; and in particular to overlook the idiosyncratic rhythm of its thinking, which does not begin with the earliest facts and data like an archaeologist, but rather frames a global notion of the modern in the here-and-now, which is transferred wholesale to the past before the kinds of chronological doubts and discriminations embodied in the proliferation of breaks can begin to appear.

We can put this another way by suggesting that it is just this multiplicity of breaks that corresponds to what Hegel notoriously called 'the negation of the negation', but it is a negation which does not, as Engels and Stalin thought, govern the future, but rather the past, which it ceaselessly differentiates into ever further others of the other. It is a process that holds fully as much for breaks as for the periods themselves, which in any case as we have shown turn back and forth into one another by virtue of the same rhythm.

At this point, before proceeding we must lay in place the most systematic and rigorous model of the succession of modes of production, a theorization we owe to the Althusserians and in particular to Etienne Balibar. It has been said that you could consider Althusser a structuralist (despite his own protestations) only on condition you posit that for him there is only one structure, namely, the mode of production. The latter is therefore a universal set of elements and relationships, whose historical transformations ought to be susceptible to graphic description, and at the same time to evade the terminological and conceptual problems we associated with the dialectic above. In fact, the Althusserians take pains to stress precisely this dialectical nature of their objects of analysis: ‘we do not really find the same “concrete” elements when we move from one variant to the next. Nor is their particularity defined by a mere place, but rather as an effect of the structure, differing every time, i.e., an effect of the combination which constitutes the mode of production.’<sup>61</sup> In fact, what makes up the difficulty of the Althusserians’ rhetoric is the fact that they are fighting a war on two fronts, on the one hand against ‘structuralism’ (into which their Marxian analyses threaten to be swallowed without a trace), and on the other against the Hegelian dialectic (which they essentially associate with Stalin and with Soviet Marxism). Thus here Balibar systematically uses

the word 'combination' for the 'structuralist' word 'structure', and his deployment of it as a dialectical totality has the unintended side benefit of revealing the dialectical tendencies within structuralism itself.

The most obviously dialectical problem raised by the Marxian accounts of the mode of production is that having to do precisely with production itself, which is said to be a single element within the tripartite structure of the mode (along with distribution and consumption), while at one and the same time constituting the fundamental essence of all modes of production in general.<sup>62</sup> The second assertion makes production look like an old-fashioned universal, a general abstraction under which a number of different concrete phenomena are ranged; while the first assertion seems to allow for exactly the kind of dialectical variability stressed by Balibar in the passage just quoted. Meanwhile the seeming rigidity of the base/superstructure distinction (in any case only mentioned once by Marx, in a not very central place)<sup>63</sup> is loosened up by a play of oppositions between the 'determinant' (always production itself) and the 'dominant', which can take the form of religion, civic politics, kinship, and the like, thus giving each mode of production its own cultural and ideological specificity, if not indeed its own unique lawfulness and internal dynamic.

But the most troublesome passage in Marx has to do with the emergence of a new mode of production, or in other words very specifically with the problem of transition we have been discussing in the course of this whole section. The parturitional figure is well known although not absolutely indispensable: 'new, higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society'.<sup>64</sup> The organic overtones have often been an embarrassment, particularly

since the mother normally survives the birth of the child, while the older mode of production presumably does not.

Still, Balibar will try to give a more rigorous theoretical formulation of Marx's insight, combining the Althusserian analysis of social reproduction in general with the specific problem of transition (about which it does not seem quite right to insist, as Balibar does, that 'the forms of transition are in fact necessarily modes of production in themselves').<sup>65</sup> Briefly, we may sum up the results of this complicated analysis with a quotation:

Periods of transition are . . . characterized by the coexistence of several modes of production, as well as by these forms of non-correspondence. . . . Thus it seems that the dislocation between the connexions and instances in transition periods merely reflects the coexistence of two (or more) modes of production in a single 'simultaneity', and the dominance of one of them over the other.<sup>66</sup>

We thus have two distinct systems coexisting (means of production, forces of production, categories of property, etcetera) in such a way that the dominance of the first over the second will gradually be overturned into a dominance of the second over the first. It is clear that this scheme is motivated by the intent to exclude continuity and 'evolutionism': in it the elements of the old system do not gradually evolve and 'turn into' the elements of the new. Rather, they coexist from the outset, and it is merely the preponderance of the one set or combination over the other that changes.

But now it is much clearer where Foucault's images of transition come from. As Althusser cautiously puts it in a note to the English edition of *Reading Capital*: 'Foucault . . . was a pupil of mine, and "something" from my writings has passed into his.'<sup>67</sup> If indeed we remove the Marxist language

## PART I: THE FOUR MAXIMS OF MODERNITY

and conceptuality from Balibar's model of transition, it becomes very consistent with the more catastrophic figuration of the Foucauldian breaks: the ruins of the older system in the midst of which a newer system is in formation.

As for the time of the formation process, Lévi-Strauss had already pointed out that you never have a piece of a system without the rest: systems appear all at once, fully formed; even language must be assumed, as a synchrony, to have emerged completely and not piecemeal in some 'evolutionary' way. (Clearly enough, various notions of what is implicit in a system, what have to be developed or unfolded later on, can usefully complexify this rather stark and mythic picture of emergence.) The presupposition here is that synchrony is not a temporal category; and that if diachrony is to be considered such a category, it will have revealed itself as conceptually subsequent to and dependent on some logically prior notion of synchrony and system.

It is another great merit of the Althusserians to have spelled all this out in terms of history and the social: temporality as an existential phenomenon, as a modality of lived experience, is something generated by the mode of production itself. Each mode of production has its own system of temporalities. Indeed, 'instead of the structures of history depending on those of time, it is the structures of temporality which depend on those of history. The structures of temporality and their specific differences are produced in the process of constitution of the concept of history.'<sup>68</sup> And in fact, it turns out that the diachronic is itself not temporal or experiential at all: it is a specific mode of analysis, different from the synchronic one. So ultimately the Althusserians turn the tables on us, and withdraw the very problem itself from the agenda: synchrony now becomes the mode of analysis of a mode of production and its reproduction, while

'the concept of diachrony will . . . be reserved for the time of the transition from one mode of production to another, i.e., for the time determined by the replacement and transformation of the relations of production which constitute the double articulation of the structure'.<sup>69</sup>

None of this has as yet any immediate relevance for theories of modernity, unless one posits the obvious, namely that for Marx modernity is simply capitalism itself: a substitution that indeed dispels many of the theoretical issues confronted in the course of the preceding discussion, while reinforcing one's sense that the 'concept' of modernity raises more problems than it solves. On the other hand, the history of the uses of this word and of its ideological functions is real enough and is not to be disposed of so easily.

But now we must also point out that with the juxtaposition of Foucault's 'model' with that of Balibar a peculiar and striking coincidence strikes the eye,<sup>70</sup> namely, that in the latter's account of transition, the emergence of the new system remains as mythic and unaccountable, as uncaused and unprecedented, as in the case of Foucault's epistemes. Both are, after all, still engaged in a polemic against historicism and evolutionism, and the formulations of both take pains, in their very different ways, to foreclose any possibility of continuous change.

Yet Balibar's formulation does allow us to grasp the mechanisms of these narratives more fully: we have spoken of the way in which a mythic narrative – the emergence of the new *ex nihilo* or as a kind of cause of self – finds itself embedded within a ground that lends it a semblance of narrative form and continuity. This 'ground' or context is what the Russian Formalists called the 'motivation of the device', the way in which, after the fact, a narrative rationalization is supplied for a linguistic fact that otherwise

## PART I: THE FOUR MAXIMS OF MODERNITY

remains inexplicable. In Heidegger, we found this context to be that of medieval salvation; in Foucault, the previous historical moment, in its collapse, served as the framework for the event; here finally in Balibar we grasp it as the older mode of production as such, so that the newer emergence becomes associated with a new mode of production in its own right. This does not conceptualize the emergence as such; but it does suggest that periodization is not some optional narrative consideration one adds or subtracts according to one's own tastes and inclinations, but rather an essential feature of the narrative process itself.

The preceding discussion (or parenthesis) did not confront that feature of Foucault's analysis of the second modernity that seemed not only to mark it in radical disjunction from the homologies of the first modernity, but also to project another possible connection with the Marxian analysis of structure, I mean the idea of separation. In Foucault, separation was evoked to characterize the movement of the various disciplines henceforth autonomized as life, labour and language; but he insisted on the centrality to this development of finitude and death, and underscored their relationship to new and more onerous forms of labour.<sup>71</sup> In Marx, of course, it is the notion of separation that is used to characterize capitalist modernity and the new situation of the worker, 'freed' from his means of production, separated from land and tools and thrown upon the free market as a commodity (his henceforth saleable labour power). Indeed, the operative trope of separation is everywhere in Marx, and can be detected at work in the final tradition of modernity we will examine here.

Yet few enough of the thematic slogans of this tradition reflect the centrality of separation as such: Max Weber's conception of rationalization seems to focus on planning and organization; Lukács's theme of reification seems to refer back to Marx's commodity fetishism; Luhmann's differentiation alone is officially organized around a trope of separa-

## PART I: THE FOUR MAXIMS OF MODERNITY

tion, even though it seems at first glance to have more to do with the emergence of the separate disciplines than with the realities of everyday life.

But although Weber often took as his object of study the organization of the firm in late-nineteenth-century capitalism, and is most often considered to be the theoretician *par excellence* of bureaucracy, the affinities of his work with Taylorism and the reorganization of the labour process along 'rational' lines are equally significant.<sup>72</sup> For Weber, 'rationalization' is a process whose fundamental precondition lies in the dismantling of traditional activities, not least traditional forms of craft skills, as those survive on into the factor process. Separation is registered in Weber's theory as the *analysis* offered by Taylor and scientific management in the etymological sense of that word: the 'unloosing' of the parts from each other, the breaking into component segments of those traditional units of work which seemed natural and which were generally performed by a single person. The meaningless parts are now reshuffled according to criteria of efficiency: and Ford's assembly line comes into view, along with a considerable bonus for the manager in the loss of control over the process of the worker himself, who no longer sees and grasps it as a meaningful whole, or, as Lukács puts it, as a 'totality'. Now the 'separation' of manual and mental labour is completed by the passage of control and planning to the manager and the 'scientific' experts, while the worker is left with those segmentary and repetitive gestures that Frank Gilbreth called 'therbligs', the smallest indivisible units of kinetics most famously satirized by Chaplin in *Modern Times*. The process can be described as the bracketing of the Aristotelian final cause and the reorganization of the labour process in terms of the formal and material causes: a truncation the Frankfurt School memorably renamed

'instrumental reason', a reason reoriented exclusively around means rather than ends (and already dialectically foreshadowed in Hegel's notion of *Verstand* or understanding as that is opposed to *Vernunft* or reason).

Once this process has been isolated and identified in contemporary social life, where it can function as a radical break with the past and as a far more complex and philosophical theory of technological and industrial processes than most of what passes for a description of the so-called Industrial Revolution, its genealogies can then be sought for in the past: in particular, for Weber, the monasteries and the rules of certain religious orders mark the separation off of crucial enclaves in which 'rationalization' is cultivated (in everything from agriculture to the organization of the hours of the day).<sup>73</sup> But rationalization is also, in Weber, a mediatory concept, and the formal properties of the concept make it as suitable for the analysis of culture as for the investigation of the firm or the labour process: thus tonality in Western music becomes a fundamental symptom of the 'great transformation' taking place in Europe and in the West, but not in other parts of the world.<sup>74</sup>

Indeed, this relatively formal concept can function on both micro- and macro-levels; which lends an allegorical cast to Weber's thought. Thus, the break-up of the labour process can be seen as allegorical for the break-up of old or traditional organic communities and their 'instrumental' reorganization into the more purely quantitative groupings of the great industrial city.

Lukács's notion of reification (*Verdinglichung*) has more in common with Weber than it does with the original Marxian concept, which essentially characterized the substitution of the relationship between things for the relationship between people (the 'fetishism' of the commodity and in a

## PART I: THE FOUR MAXIMS OF MODERNITY

wider development the 'cash nexus'). For in Lukács the process of Weberian rationalization – now grasped, via the labour process, as the loss of any ability to totalize or to grasp the meaningful totality, not merely of the micro-process of labour, but also of the macro-phenomenon of capitalism itself – is theorized in terms of its effects on subjectivity. Lukács now sees that it is a global process which can leave no one untouched; and in his philosophical chapters he shows the way in which reification enters bourgeois consciousness and limits the latter's capacity to theorize and confront reality.<sup>75</sup> The mediatory exhibit here, the great symptom of reification of bourgeois consciousness, is found in the history of bourgeois philosophy and in its 'containment' operations, its inability after Hegel to confront and to conceptualize that ultimate reality that is capitalism and which Marx showed could only be grasped dialectically as a totality before its constituent movements and tendencies could be identified as such. Paradoxically, Lukács's diagnosis of the other consciousness, that of a working class that has been stripped even of its craft skills and productive knowledge, is far more positive: reduced to the commodity of sheer labour-power, this devastated proletariat will now alone of all the classes or groups of capitalist society have the structural capacity to grasp the capitalist social order as a whole, in that unity-of-theory-and-praxis that is Marxism.

Lukács can thus be said, in analogy to our previous discussions, to have marked a kind of 'second modernity' in the Weberian tradition, and to have added the modernity of the situation of the subject (but not of 'subjectivity' in our earlier sense) to the modernity of the rationalizing process (in much the same way that Foucault's historicism adds the emergence of the bourgeois subject to the modernity of his earlier moment of representation).

But this larger history, with its multiple breaks and stages, can also be set in place in other ways; and this is the moment to show the kinship between the Weberian notion of rationalization and that 'initial' moment of modernity we continue to associate with Descartes. It is, however, to a rather different aspect of Descartes's work than the cogito that we must turn here. Not consciousness, foundational proof, doubt and indubitability, will now be the guiding thread, but rather method, as it no doubt leads to the experiment of the *Meditations*, but also to his numerous other scientific and engineering inquiries. And here it is the second of Descartes's four working or methodological precepts that will be the crucial one: 'to divide each of the difficulties I wanted to examine into the smallest possible units necessary for their better resolution'.<sup>76</sup> Never mind what Descartes himself had in mind here (the unity of even the smallest of these units will surely be measured by the standard of the 'clear and distinct'): as it has been understood, this precept serves as the very foundation of empiricism as opposed to dialectical thought. It seems to recommend a building up into the eventual whole of the solutions of the parts of a problem, as opposed to the dialectical method, which begins with wholes and only after works down to the parts.

Still, the meaning of the precept for Descartes will become clear only from its context: and the historicist question about the conditions of possibility of such a maxim remains, I think, a useful guide. Unexpectedly, it is Anthony Giddens who has the elements of an answer for us here, in a historical investigation in which he no doubt follows Foucauldian disciplinary historiography but is also influenced by the recent fashion for a kind of military determination in history (or at least war and the military as a new kind of 'ultimately determining instance' of the modern). For Descartes spent a

## PART I: THE FOUR MAXIMS OF MODERNITY

significant and formative period in the armies of Protestant and Catholic forces alike on the eve of the Thirty Years' War; indeed, his famous philosophical illumination (and the fateful three dreams) took place in Ulm, in the camp of Maximilian, in November 1619. All of which can be taken as mere seventeenth-century local colour if not sheer coincidence; and yet the 22-year-old Descartes had his reasons for this excursus into military life and certainly observed it with curiosity and interest. Here at any rate is what Giddens has to say about the army in which Descartes spent the first year of his postgraduate travels:

[In the expansion of administrative power], the organization of the military played a prime role, influencing both the state apparatus and other organizations including, at a later date, business firms. For it was to a large extent in the military sphere that administrative power in its modern guise was pioneered. The innovations of Maurice of Nassau, the Prince of Orange, are both the most prominent example of this and at the same time exemplify more long-term trends in military organization. Maurice helped initiate two connected administrative changes later seen in all more bureaucratized organizations – the formation of a body of experts holding exclusive knowledge of certain essential administrative techniques, and the simultaneous creation of a 'de-skilled' population of ordinary soldiery. There is a very real sense in which, through Maurice's interventions, the techniques of Taylorism became well embedded in the sphere of the armed forces several hundred years before, in industrial production, they came to be known by such a label. As van Doorn remarks, comparing the two apparently quite contrasting figures, 'with both persons one is struck by the solid knowledge of the practice of their trade, their sharp analytical powers and a desire for experiment which was supported by a firm belief

## A SINGULAR MODERNITY

in the organisability and manipulability of human behaviour.' As Taylor was to do, Maurice divided the technical aspects of the work of soldiery into specific, regular sequences of single activities. Thus, building upon what had already been accomplished by the Spanish commanders, he produced flow charts for the handling of the musket and the pike, each part of the sequence of acts involved being clearly specified. Soldiers were required to practise these until they could automatically follow the 'correct' procedures. Rather than being treated as 'craftsmen', skilled in the use of weaponry, recruits were regarded as having to be drilled to acquire the necessary familiarity with handling military equipment. The members of a unit were taught to respond simultaneously to command instructions, so as to co-ordinate the movements of each individual with the group as a whole.<sup>77</sup>

The shift from break to period can be registered in the relative formalization of the description, which in this state of abstraction – 'experts', 'sequences of single activities', 'command', 'coordination', etcetera – can now be translated from one specific type of content to another (and in the process becomes applicable to cultural phenomena as well, unless, of course, one wants to consider that it is already profoundly cultural in its very nature as an empty form). Yet the alternative of a break and a beginning persists faintly in the evocation of Prince Maurice as an agent and a 'vanishing mediator'.

It is this alternative that has disappeared altogether when we move to the final form of the category of separation in Niklas Luhmann's even more formalized notion of differentiation. What is gained in the multiple possibilities for allegorical transfers onto all kinds of varying material – the state, subjective feelings like love, social groups, the market,

## PART I: THE FOUR MAXIMS OF MODERNITY

sociological theories themselves, etcetera – is paid for by the effacement of the place of a cause or a beginning, or even a dialectical or structural reorganization. Differentiation – like Galilean or Newtonian movement – simply continues until it meets some external obstacle: yet the nature of the process is such that (like capital) it cannot reproduce itself without constant expansion. Differentiation tends towards ever greater differentiation, without any end in sight.

And this is, on the one hand, why no beginning can be assigned to it in its own terms: what precedes it is simply a very different mode or logic of social reproduction, at an early stage 'segmentary differentiation', at a later stage 'stratification' and for our own society and modernity, 'functional differentiation'.<sup>78</sup> These are, however, the most rudimentary and even pre-Marxian classifications of human society: tribal societies, pre-capitalist states (organized around power, and generally loosely termed 'feudal'), and finally capitalism itself. 'Differentiation', therefore, no matter how attractive an ideological slogan it may be in the current situation in which its root has become a charged and popular political signifier, does not offer any unified field theory in terms of which the logic of other social systems can be thought in the same categories as this one. But this very precisely characterizes the theory of modernity in its most rudimentary form, as a mere sociological classification whose status is left unexamined. The novelty of Luhmann's thought lies in the transformation of earlier empirical features of 'modernity' into the language of an abstract formal process (with a subsequent and remarkable expansion of the variety of materials Luhmann is able to rewrite, in the extraordinary body of work he has left us).

For even if all three types of society involve degrees of intensity in the process of differentiation itself, a dialectic

must necessarily be posited whereby at any given moment the increase triggers a leap from quantity to quality and produces a radically new type of differentiation. But the concept of differentiation is a uniform one which is non-dialectical (even though Luhmann himself includes the dialectic in its genealogy as an early and oversimplified anticipation of 'differentiation' itself)<sup>79</sup> and cannot accommodate such radical leaps and breaks. The question of origins does not for all that disappear, and the periodizations referred to above are the standard ones, which identify the Renaissance as the general take-off point for differentiation (and its modernity) as such. But it is clear that the conceptions of the earlier stages are anthropological rather than sociological and do not even reach the sophistication of the Marxian theorization of modes of production.

The advantages of Luhmann's theory seem to me to lie elsewhere, in implications that the reminder of the older theme *separation* (particularly in its Foucauldian usage) brings out more sharply. For in fact differentiation, on Luhmann's account, consists in the gradual separation of areas of social life from each other, their disentanglement from some seemingly global and mythic (but more often religious) overall dynamic, and their reconstitution as distinct fields with distinct laws and dynamics. Thus economics begins to disengage itself from politics (and vice versa) as the market acquires a relative independence from the state. The same process obtains for the judicial and juridical systems, which gradually find themselves endowed with their own personnel and their own local history and precedents and traditions. This process is certainly one of modernity; and Luhmann's account conveys the nature of secularization in useful formal ways, which show, for example, how a now-privatized religion is itself differentiated from social

## PART I: THE FOUR MAXIMS OF MODERNITY

life as a whole and assigned its separate status and space. Indeed, the theory may itself be seen as a secularization of Foucault's rather more portentous one (in his account of the movement of the geological plates and templates of life, labour and language away from one another in the nineteenth century).

Still, I think it might be best to take another step further and to speak, instead of differentiation, of a process of autonomization (with stages of semi-autonomization in between). Here what is stressed is not the moment of separation itself, but what happens to the previous parts, now new entities and small-scale wholes and totalities in their own right, after the event of mitosis has taken place. (Thus the new formulation also allows for the return of the category of a break, even though it has become internalized as little more than the infinite repetition of the process itself.) At any rate this new formulation will prove useful later on, when it is a question of the aesthetic as such (whose own 'autonomization' from other levels and activities indeed becomes part of the story of some properly aesthetic 'modernity').

But the very suggestiveness of the scheme for rewriting older descriptions of modernity may alert us to its ideological character when appealed to for practical and future-oriented programmes or even judgements on the present. For as so often in theories of modernity (whose descriptions are then reappropriated for prescriptive purposes), the essentially regressive conceptuality of the modern is only too likely to confront any conceivable systemic changes with a resistance and an inertia: modernity describes what obtains within a given system, within a given historical moment, and can therefore not be counted on for reliable analyses of what negates it. So it is that from time to time we come upon

historical reflections which are in fact so many party political pronouncements about the present, about the market and the so-called triumph of capitalism, and about deregulation:

The obvious danger here is that we may replace the relatively large openness and variability of the classical, internal differentiation of the economic system by decision-making processes having too little selectivity and habitual and rigid premises. We would then let the economy sacrifice the maneuverability that became available after the external differentiation of the economy from the rest of society.<sup>80</sup>

In other words, the danger lies in the welfare state, not to speak of socialism itself. This is not particularly meant as a criticism of Luhmann, who has rarely been thought to be a leftist in any case, but it does mark the passage of his interesting and complex system – which promised to reintegrate postmodernity into older theories of the modern – over into sheer ideology.

For the passage not only amounts to a warning against ‘socialism’, but also rules out the maintenance of welfare-state-type mechanisms or the return to even those milder forms of government regulation that have come to seem sensible after the worst excesses of the free market period. In such passages, then, Luhmann’s ostensibly sociological theory of modernity can be seen to unmask itself as conventional free market rhetoric and the ideology of deregulation.

And to be complete about it, I would also wish to mention the persistence in his work of that now ancient category of self-consciousness – which he here depersonalizes in the form of some ‘reflexivity of the system’ itself – but which remains a kind of ghost in the machine for all theories of the modern. If you prefer, this is at least one clear dividing line between

## PART I: THE FOUR MAXIMS OF MODERNITY

the modern and the postmodern, namely, the refusal of concepts of self-consciousness, reflexivity, irony or self-reference in the postmodern aesthetic and also in postmodern values and philosophy as such, if there can be said to be such a thing. I imagine this also coincides with the disappearance of the slogan of freedom, whether in its bourgeois or anarchist sense: the feeling that the biological individual can no longer enjoy individualism as in the entrepreneurial stage of capitalism, but that he or she is integrated into a larger collective or institutional structure seems to me common both to contemporary conservative neo-Confucianism (of all types) as much as to the Marxist tradition. If so, then reflexivity of the system itself – on which Luhmann insists so strongly – would have to be imagined in a very different way from some older reflexivity of the individual consciousness, about whose conceptual incoherence we have in any case already remarked.

Such functional lapses are, however, to be seen as mere symptoms of a deeper conceptual problem, namely the insistence on maintaining older conceptions of modernity in the face of the situation of postmodernity, with its multiple transformations. I choose my terms carefully here for it is the situation that has changed and that demands a modified theoretical response, without necessarily imposing any particular ‘concept’ of postmodernity or even ruling out the argument that there has been no such transformation and that we are still in modernity itself, all indications to the contrary. That is why our fourth thesis must not decry the absence of a concept of the postmodern, but only the omission of any attempt to come to terms with the situation of postmodernity (whatever the eventual decision may turn out to be).<sup>81</sup> Just such an omission certifies Luhmann’s status as yet another ideologist of the modern as such.

## A SINGULAR MODERNITY

The fact is that Luhmann's concept can deal adequately neither with its antagonistic contradiction – the possibility of some system radically different from capitalist modernity – nor with its non-antagonistic contradiction – the coming into existence of a stage of capitalism that is no longer 'modern' in the traditional ways and that people have therefore begun to characterize as postmodern. But this problem now suggests a final (or fourth) maxim for the 'bon usage' of the term 'modernity', namely that

4. No 'theory' of modernity makes sense today unless it is able to come to terms with the hypothesis of a postmodern break with the modern.

If it does so come to terms, however, it unmask itself as a purely historiographic category and thereby seems to undo all its claims as a temporal category and as a vanguard concept of innovation.

We may now recapitulate the four theses of modernity:

1. One cannot not periodize.
2. Modernity is not a concept but rather a narrative category.
3. The one way not to narrate it is via subjectivity (thesis: subjectivity is unrepresentable). Only situations of modernity can be narrated.
4. No 'theory' of modernity makes sense today unless it comes to terms with the hypothesis of a postmodern break with the modern.

Still, there remains one usage of the modern whose immediacy and relevance for the present (no matter how complex and paradoxical) seem undeniable. This is its aesthetic cat-

## PART I: THE FOUR MAXIMS OF MODERNITY

egory or adaptation, which necessarily posits an experience of the work in the present, no matter what its historical origins. We must therefore now turn our attention to artistic modernism as such.



# Transitional Modes



With the various modernisms we are again tempted by conceptuality; we want to make them mean something, preferably something ahistorical and relatively transcultural. We again arrive at the frontier between philosophy and history, between system and existence; and we feel it would not be difficult, yet no small thing, to put some order into all these words or, better still, to show that there was always a deeper order and logic there in the first place. Why not simply posit modernity as the new historical situation, modernization as the process whereby we get there, and modernism as a reaction to that situation and that process alike, a reaction that can be aesthetic and philosophico-ideological, just as it can be negative as well as positive? It seems to me a good idea; unfortunately it is our idea, and not that of the various national traditions. 'In France, the modern is understood in the sense of that modernity which begins with Baudelaire and Nietzsche and thus includes nihilism: it has been ambivalent from the outset, in its relations with modernization and with history in particular, in its doubts and suspicions about progress. . . . In Germany, however, the modern begins with the Enlightenment, and to give it up would mean abandoning civilized ideals.'<sup>1</sup>

It is not only the sudden reimmersion in history and its chilly waters that makes up the shock here; it is also the unexpected appearance of a new actor, a new lexical player:

the epithet *modern, le moderne, die Moderne*. Once you remember to give this new term the self-sufficiency that is its due, the status of modernism itself abruptly changes: 'limiting ourselves to the technical use of the term "modernism" in connection with American literature, we are obliged to observe that until 1960 or even 1970 it is exceedingly infrequent by comparison with its relative "modern", which is, for its part, omnipresent'.<sup>2</sup> The point can be reinforced by the strategic use of the word 'modern' in Le Corbusier's CIAM (Congrès international de l'architecture moderne) in the early 1930s,<sup>3</sup> or in the development of American poetry and its programmatization by Allen Tate in the 1920s.<sup>4</sup> Our tripartite scheme was made up of substantives in structural opposition to each other; the adjective now throws a monkey wrench into the machinery.<sup>5</sup> (As for the first uses of the term 'modernist' in Swift and Rousseau, along with its various religious versions, these seem to have been largely reserved for invective.)

Would it not then be possible, and even desirable, to separate out the various national traditions, and to identify a certain order and logic specific to each one? Thus, even if you decide to agree that Baudelaire's inaugural concept of *modernité* simply means aesthetic modernism in the French tradition, there remains the scandal of Spanish usage. In fact, it is the Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío who first disseminates the term *modernismo* in 1888, where it is clearly enough a synonym for a style elsewhere identified as *symbolisme* or *Jugendstil*. Spanish thus marks some first break much more visibly than the other languages, but finds itself constricted by its own historical precocity when it comes to identifying the 'second' break (associated variously with futurism, the revolutionary year 1913, the machine age, and so forth). A debate subsequently rages within Spanish criticism, which

hesitates between the first, now archaic, and more strictly historicizing use of Darío, and an enlargement, by fiat, of the term's meaning to include everything which, more modern, has come to seem essentially modern.<sup>6</sup> (The option of introducing a new word – *vanguardismo* – is limited by the way this choice cuts short a tension within modernism itself between 'high moderns' and avant-gardes and thereby fore-closes an interesting and productive problem in advance.)

Meanwhile, this narrative also demonstrates the weaknesses of the theorization of the geopolitical in the classical or golden age of 'comparative literature': 'influence' is a feeble concept indeed, and the 'cross-cultural' is not achieved by adding the various 'national traditions' together. In the present instance, the adoption of *modernismo* by the generation of '98 in Spain itself – as striking an event as the transmission of the American notions of modern and modernist to Britain in the 1927 study *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* by Graves and Riding – marks the world-historical situation of the last empire in the new force field of modern imperialism, and stands as a symptom of the Cuban war of independence fully as much as an intimation of the emergent role of the United States. (Meanwhile the role of French culture in Darío's initial conception signals the appropriation of the different national culture in the service of a literary revolution against the colonial tradition.) All of which suggests that literary 'influence' looks rather different when, as today, cultural evolution is grasped as a symptom of the dynamics of an international capitalist system. Yet a dialectic does not yet exist that is capable of coordinating the incommensurable conceptualities of the national-literary and the international (an interference as structurally problematic as that appearance of the adjective 'modern' we have mentioned above).

## A SINGULAR MODERNITY

Considerations like these within the national traditions tend again to lead us outward towards the social realities detected in these new literary systems and constellations. Is it still necessary to remind ourselves that when Marx evokes 'the social determination of being' he is speaking of preconditions rather than causes (let alone 'determinisms')? Indeed, to look for the preconditions of cultural and artistic phenomena like modernism is to confront surprises and paradoxes for which the old reflection model of base and superstructure (if it ever existed!) scarcely prepared us. (The operation is then further complicated by the fact that what look like extrinsic 'realities' in the context of the artistic system or level of discourse are then internal and discursive when we move to the level on which that system is grasped as an ideology.)

Thus external history sometimes brutally interrupts the model of internal evolution complacently suggested by notions of this or that national tradition. So the modernisms of Germany are cut short by Nazism, and those – even more historically and formally interesting – of the Soviet cultural revolution of the 1920s are cut short by Stalinism and its official aesthetics. The paradox will be sharpened by the reminder that both movements are characterized, in very different ways, by intensified modernization; meanwhile, recent historians of both countries have been able archaeologically to detect and to excavate hitherto neglected currents that suggest directions in which those modernisms prolonged themselves underground.<sup>7</sup> The paradox is not fully resolved by the proposal made in Part II of this essay: namely that what was thereby 'missed' (to use Habermas' famous formulation) was not so much the practice of the various artistic modernisms as the theorization of that practice, or in other

words, the moment of emergence of some ideology of modernism as such.

But the impact of history can also be detected in more lateral and far-ranging, more properly synchronic, developments, which ought to constitute a more considerable scandal and stumbling block for any theory of the modern. We have already mentioned the emergence of the concept, not in the Spanish metropolis, but in its former Latin American colonies: Spain may well have been 'backward' in comparison with the modernizations of its European neighbours, but surely not more so than Nicaragua. Meanwhile, even though that former colony the United States was not exactly backward by comparison with its former imperial centre – to which it seems to have transmitted a lexicon of the modern which for some reason the latter failed to develop – the American South (in which that lexicon originated) was certainly more 'backward' and underdeveloped than the industrial North. No doubt, after it lost its world-historical competition with Britain at Waterloo, France chose the route of cultural innovation and export; it was thereby able to exercise an influence over the other 'advanced' nations of the European continent which extended to its former rival as well. But how was it that aesthetic modernism was less developed in England than in Scotland, let alone Britain's 'other island' whose extraordinary modernisms mark a sharp contrast with the commonsense empirical intellectual life of London or Cambridge and can indeed be characterized as properly postcolonial, in a situation in which the reminder that *Ulysses* is an epic set in a city under foreign military occupation has become as unavoidable as it is unnecessary? I have elsewhere proposed the substantive hypothesis that modernism is essentially a by-product of incomplete modern-

ization;<sup>8</sup> we will return to it, in altered form, in Part II. But the formal perspective of the present book, which is that of ideological analysis, does not admit such substantive propositions (and this one was in any case only meaningful in an argument designed to draw the conclusion that a tendentially more complete modernization in fact generates not modernism, but postmodernism).

In any case, such seemingly disparaging remarks about English cultural life and development stand wholly disarmed in the face of Virginia Woolf's astonishing certification, namely, that 'on or about December, 1910, human character changed'.<sup>9</sup> Yet the revival of interest in Woolf's writing in the wake of the feminism that has developed into trauma theory constitutes a significant displacement of the view of Woolf as the quintessential English 'modernist'. Nor is this merely to be grasped as a sign of the nominalism of the present age; it also documents the discomfort we feel at the deployment of such generic periodizing categories as this one. I take it as an exemplification of that more general philosophical crisis Foucault termed the transcendental-empirical gap,<sup>10</sup> which converts any discussion of the modernism of Woolf or Joyce, say, into an allegorical operation that is easily discredited. It is evident that any theory of modernism capacious enough to include Joyce along with Yeats or Proust, let alone alongside Vallejo, Biely, Gide or Bruno Schulz, is bound to be so vague and vacuous as to be intellectually inconsequential, let alone practically unproductive in the close textual reading of *Ulysses* 'line by line': bad history, even bad literary history, let alone inept criticism. Is it however equally certain that we can read Woolf or Joyce productively without implicitly ranging the text under some such general or universal category of the generic-periodizing type? Foucault's 'gap' would scarcely constitute a crisis if we could

## TRANSITIONAL MODES

so simply resolve it by cutting the knot and opting for some outright empiricism (or positivism) in the light of which Joyce's text can mean nothing beyond itself. The crisis, then, lies precisely in a situation in which Joyce cannot not mean something else – be a mere example of something else, of which it is somehow 'metaphorical'<sup>11</sup> or 'allegorical' – no matter how squeamish we may feel about the unabashed deployment of such a larger general concept.<sup>12</sup> (We may, in this formulation, begin to detect the re-emergence, in a new context and under a different form, of that first maxim proposed in Part I about periodization as such.)

One argues a proposition like this negatively, I think: and it is therefore appropriate to call on the testimony of a thinker who has been characterized not only as the Mallarmé of contemporary theory, but also as the implacable critic of 'literary history' in all its narrative forms, with their movements and tendencies, and their innumerable 'isms', which often make the reading of a characteristic page into a quasi-medieval agon between ghostly personifications.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, Paul de Man's attack on the immensely influential book of Hugo Friedrich, *The Structure of the Modern Lyric*, is a *locus classicus*, and the centrepiece of a set of essays that, in *Blindness and Insight*, anticipate the later full-blown demonstration of his idiosyncratic theory of allegory (in *Allegories of Reading*) at the same time that they mark a first approach to his identification with Derridean deconstruction (and perhaps offer a clue as to the motivations for that adherence).<sup>14</sup>

These essays, rich with lateral implications that make of them multiple theoretical and ideological statements,<sup>15</sup> have most commonly been flattened out and simplified into a plausible misreading (or perhaps I should say some first, possible, yet less interesting, reading) which would see in them yet another instance of that construction of aesthetic autonomy I will come back to at some length later on. On such a misreading, de Man's opposition between symbol and

allegory would be taken to be a simple binary opposition, in which 'symbolic' readings of texts would be based on their 'immediacy' and designate either representational interpretations (for modern or realistic texts) or conventional symbolism for the Romantic period. It is assumed that de Man's new conception of the allegorical would replace such readings with the 'correct' ones.

Meanwhile, the meaning he confers on the often-enigmatic term 'allegory' would be glossed by a remark about Yeats – 'modern poetry uses an imagery that is both symbol and allegory, that represents objects in nature but is actually taken from purely literary sources'<sup>16</sup> – in order to show that de Man is here in reality arguing for the autonomy of literary language. The supersession of the symbol by the allegorical would thus dramatize the overcoming of some first naïve and representational immediacy ('the poem is about nature') with a reflexivity that demystifies that immediacy and identifies its constituents as purely literary and linguistic realities. Indeed, de Man's first distinctive essay does exactly this: 'The Rhetoric of Temporality' undertakes to show<sup>17</sup> that the reading of Rousseau in terms of the periodizing category of this or that 'pre-romanticism' is a superficial one, whether staged in terms of period taste or in those of Rousseau's inner psychic tensions (temptation, restraint, *Entbehrung*, etcetera). Two landscapes are here juxtaposed: the wild and passionate nature of Meillerie, and that of Julie's own Elysium; and the demonstration that in fact the latter is constructed out of a tissue of literary allusions (and is thus allegorical) flows back on the reading of the former as symbolic to undermine it as well. Here the conclusion seems inescapable that what had been taken to be historical and somehow 'real' or referential was in reality only literary and rhetorical, or linguistic. Nor do I think this aestheticizing

misinterpretation of de Man altogether wrong, for it seems to me perfectly proper to resituate him in a historical context in which such anti-referential positions find their authority in the American New Criticism and its unique and complex claims for literary autonomy.

A second ideological consequence has then frequently enough been drawn from this one, namely that in that case de Man is arguing against history, which is to say, against historical and political interpretations of literary texts, if not even against History itself as a master category. Here further quotes may be adduced – ‘the impossibility of being historical’,<sup>18</sup> for example – which can easily be taken as an ontological proposition rather than the expression of an antinomy and a dilemma (‘painful knowledge’, he calls it elsewhere).<sup>19</sup> And of course there is the bold and scandalous leap of the final sentence of ‘Literary History and Literary Modernity’ to contend with: ‘If we extend this notion beyond literature, it merely confirms that the bases for historical knowledge are not empirical facts but written texts, even if these texts masquerade in the guise of wars or revolutions’.<sup>20</sup> It is unnecessary to decide the undecidable, and to conclude that the ‘misreading’ I have sketched above documents de Man’s ideology as a formalist (or better still a literary-autonomist) and an anti-historical one. It is enough to observe that these texts have been used in that spirit, and that to that degree the interpretation has some objective justification.

But, in reality, matters are much more complex than this. This is the moment in which to return to the attack on Hugo Friedrich’s historicism I evoked earlier. *The Structure of the Modern Lyric* attempted to grasp modernism, or better still the various modernisms, as a process: a model which allowed one to construct a developmental narrative (a telos) in which earlier stages are retroactively revealed to be tendencies only

more fully revealed and exemplified (and thereby identified) in the later ones. Yet this is not exactly genealogy, since the earlier moments – pre-eminently, Baudelaire himself – regain a certain priority insofar as they constitute the origins of the process: in fact the story – beginning in nineteenth-century France and fanning out across twentieth-century Spain, Italy and Germany – is marked by reversibility and by the capacity to mark any specific historic-poetic moment as a centre around which the entire narrative can be reorganized, and in that sense can be characterized as a kind of all-purpose teleology. In its narrower form, this gives us what Compagnon has called the standard or orthodox narrative of modernism, in which modernism is ‘interpreted as a gradual process’. De Man goes on to summarize Friedrich’s account of that process as follows: ‘Baudelaire continues trends implicitly present in Diderot; Mallarmé (as he himself stated) felt he had to begin where Baudelaire ended; Rimbaud takes an even further step in opening up the experimentalism of the surrealists – in short, the modernity of poetry occurs as a continuous historical movement.’<sup>21</sup>

But what is the content and the logic, the dynamic, of this process? It is the proposition that modernity in lyric poetry is constituted by ‘a loss of the representational function of poetry that goes parallel with the loss of a sense of selfhood’.<sup>22</sup> (I here follow de Man’s account; it systematizes and reorganizes what in Friedrich, as we shall see, was often little more than an empirical enumeration of features and traits, techniques and qualities.) De Man goes on: ‘Loss of representational reality [*Entrealisierung*] and loss of self [*Entpersonalisierung*] go hand in hand’; significantly adding, ‘Friedrich offers no theoretical reasons to explain why the loss of representation . . . and the loss of self . . . are thus linked.’ At this point, however, de Man shifts his focus to the more

intricate analyses performed by the Konstanz school (Jauss and Stierle) within this same historiographic paradigm, and in particular an essay that posits *Entrealisierung* in Mallarmé as a later stage of the process initiated by Baudelaire.

I think it is fair to assume that for de Man the general position of Friedrich here (and of those who accept his paradigm) reflects a more widespread and philistine attitude for which modern poetry is incomprehensible because it is no longer representational or mimetic; and that the quotient of historical pathos it discreetly entertains (see below) is also unacceptable. But he restrains these judgements to ironic understatements, and plays his argument faithfully out in his opponents' terms.

It takes the form of the juxtaposition of two moments we have already observed in the Rousseau discussion (above) and in the analysis of Baudelaire's famous definition of modernity:<sup>23</sup> two moments that we may expect to correspond to the (alleged) antithesis between symbol and allegory. Thus Stierle's 'first reading', or misreading: that Mallarmé's poetic items, taken one by one, are representational and fairly realistic, is followed by a second moment in which each is 'transcended into irreality by a movement that cannot be represented'. But de Man's conclusion is startling: 'this polysemic process can only be perceived by a reader willing to remain with a natural logic of representation'.<sup>24</sup> He drives the point home: 'it is important for our argument that these themes can only be reached if one admits the persistent presence, in the poetry, of levels of meaning that remain representational'.<sup>25</sup> But this position does not amount to a simple return to a pre-Friedrich assertion, in which the entire thesis of *Entrealisierung* is simply refuted and abandoned. On the contrary, it comes as a third position, beyond Friedrich (and Stierle), in which the

first or anti-representational misreading is to be included in its corrective cancellation. Leaving the meaning of the word 'allegorical' aside for a moment, we may now quote de Man's sweeping conclusion: 'all allegorical poetry must contain a representational element that invites and allows for understanding, only to discover that the understanding it reaches is necessarily in error'.<sup>26</sup> The paradox is only heightened by the (preceding) afterthought: 'all representational poetry is also allegorical'.

This conclusion entitles us to see in de Man's thematic opposition between symbol (or representation) and allegory something a good deal more complex than a mere static binary opposition; and in his analysis something far more intricately temporal than the option of correct and incorrect readings. In fact the initial moment of illusion or error is a necessary moment through which the reading must pass on its way of truth. 'Literature exists at the same time in the modes of error and truth; it both betrays and obeys its own mode of being.'<sup>27</sup> And this is a proposition that holds for literature under its twin forms of production and reception, in the ideology of the poets and that of their readers and critics alike.

But this is quite simply the dialectic itself, which, asserting the temporality of thought, then finds itself obliged to posit the prior necessity, for Truth, of error, illusion, appearance (and the 'first' reading). It is a requirement insisted on repeatedly throughout Hegel's *Logic*, where, for example, the reifications of *Verstand* (understanding) cannot simply be overleaped in order to arrive more quickly at *Vernunft* (reason or truth). The critique of immediacy throughout Hegel's philosophy is at one with this insistence that truth can only be reached through error. Thus, if one is willing to assert that all error contains its 'moment of truth', one must

also admit that error, cancelled and subsumed (*aufgehoben*) into truth, remains, not only a necessary moment (aspect) of truth as well, but also a necessary moment or stage in the latter's emergence. If it seems paradoxical, or even perverse, to reveal de Man to be a dialectical thinker, then one must go all the way with the insight and conclude that deconstruction (or at least its classical, 'negative' form) is itself profoundly dialectical. The movement we have traced here is largely consistent with the operation Derrida characterized as placing ideas or terms 'under erasure': it is a dialectics beyond the emergence of the theory of ideology (and thus a relatively more complex kind of analysis than what Hegel, lacking in any modern notion of ideology as such, had to carry out). Moreover, as Derrida implies in the fateful sentence in which he affirms the equivalence between 'différance' and history as such,<sup>28</sup> the Hegelian language of the dialectic may well be too familiar, too old-fashioned, too freighted with generations of historical misunderstanding, to do the job required today. At any rate, it is certain that the perplexity that has so often exasperated commonsense readers of Derrida and de Man alike is profoundly related to the scandals provoked over the years by the dialectic itself.

We could stop here, and draw the conclusion for which I have elaborated this lengthy negative demonstration, which was designed to put the necessity of general or generic-periodizing concepts to the test by examining the arguments against them by one of their pre-eminent theoretical adversaries. De Man's contempt for such concepts (characteristically ironized under the seemingly neutral term 'literary history') is beyond reproach. But we have been startled to find that his arguments do not result in any easy or non-dialectical, commonsense repudiation of them as sheer error and as false approaches which may be abandoned for the

preferable truths of *explication de texte* and the non-generic focus on the individual modernist work. On the contrary, the error of the critics was pursued into the text itself, where it proves to be a constituent feature of literature and literary structure itself. The historicist misreading thus turns out to be an unavoidable and indispensable moment of all reading, however many arguments one marshals against it. This would be quite enough to justify the renewed applicability of our first maxim, which in the context of the 'idea' of modernity we formulated as the inability to avoid periodization. Like it or not, 'modernism' is also necessarily a periodizing category as well, and whether it turns out to be affirmed or denied on some ultimate reading, it necessarily accompanies the individual modernist text as a ghostly allegorical dimension, in which each text comes before us as itself and as an allegory of the modern as such.

But I here use the word 'allegory' in a rather different sense than de Man, and it may be worthwhile to open a long concluding parenthesis or digression at this point in order to finish the story, and to say what 'allegory' means in his use (a demonstration that will itself have unexpected relevance for a different dimension of our topic).

The very title of *Allegories of Reading* offers us a first decisive clue in what proves to be a truly intricate philosophical performance. 'Allegory' here designates a temporal process, the process of reading itself, rather than any static object, such as a literary text; it is not a generic category but rather a temporal one: 'in the world of allegory, time is the originary constitutive category'.<sup>29</sup> But this does not mean that its opposite, the symbol, is spatial exactly, nor indeed<sup>30</sup> – and this is the crucial point for a description that rewrites de Man's text into what looks like a dialectic language involving two moments – is it really an opposite at all.

What we must rather insist on is a situation in which the same word stands for the whole and its part, the genre and its species:<sup>31</sup> for here 'allegory' means the second moment, the second reading, the moment distinguished from the first symbolic one; but it also designates the whole process as such, the temporality whereby the naïve symbolic or representational reading is superseded by the reflexive literary or rhetorical: 'it remains necessary, if there is to be allegory, that the allegorical sign refer to another sign that precedes it'.<sup>32</sup> And this is, clearly enough, why the two moments cannot simply be opposites in some binary equivalence (for example, of space to time): for the first, symbolic moment can stand by itself without reference to the second one; or, at the least, it claims the self-sufficiency of a full meaning, a full representation, a symbolic synchrony; whereas the second moment, abolishing that appearance, is necessarily of a very different kind and species.

But, looking into it more closely, what is the mechanism of this strange movement? How is it possible, and what is going on within it? The question is aimed at de Man's description or analysis, fully as much as at the thing itself; and seeks to identify his code, as it were, and the terms (such as 'symbol' and 'allegory') that receive a heightened and more specialized meaning within it. But we already have some idea of the nature of this code (which will later on in his work be complicated by the terminology of 'speech acts' and thereby demand a further examination which cannot be undertaken here): it is that of literature and literary reference (the way in which Rousseau's text borrows from the *Roman de la rose*) or literary system; but it is also that of rhetoric, and it is from classical rhetoric that the terms 'symbol' and 'allegory' (as well as 'irony', which I will also not discuss here) are taken.

## TRANSITIONAL MODES

It is therefore scarcely surprising that the complex and puzzling temporality of the two moments (which is also the temporality of a kind of repetition, and ultimately, when one looks even more closely, the temporality of time itself, of temporal succession as such) should turn out to be clarified by a rhetorical explanation. How does allegory pass from its restricted meaning as the name for the second moment in a two-stage process to the more general idea enveloping the whole process itself? This is achieved, de Man tells us, by the 'metaphorical thematization of the predicament'.<sup>33</sup> In other words, metaphor makes the two separate moments of reading (the two moments of a preliminary error and a more conclusive truth) into a single system and a single movement, in the process seeming to transform their opposition into something that looks like a more continuous temporality. But at this point we understand that this is not at all temporality understood in the existential sense, some real or phenomenological time of reading in which we first think one thing and then, later on or immediately thereafter, think another. Rather, 'this movement does not take place as an actual sequence in time; to represent it as such is merely a metaphor making a sequence out of what occurs in fact as a synchronic juxtaposition'.<sup>34</sup> Now the unification of the two moments – hitherto called allegory in honour of the second, decisive moment of revelation and clarification – is renamed metaphorization; and we glimpse the possibility of separating what we have called the restricted idea of allegory from its general designation of a process which can now also be called metaphor. But that separation must not be maintained in any absolute or definitive way: for rhetoric includes both and specifies the way in which somehow allegory and metaphor are deeply and internally complicitous, the machinery of allegory including a metaphorical moment and

the movement of metaphor becoming subsumed under allegory.

At any rate, this account makes it clear why it is frustrating to attempt to 'define' what de Man means by allegory as though it were a concept of some kind (or a term which we might then enter in a handbook of literary terms and critical methods). It also explains why, for all of us, reading de Man is so often a difficult and perplexing experience, in which some reflexivity of language itself constantly resists the attempts of the representational or conceptual, philosophical faculty (one is tempted to identify it with Hegelian *Verstand*) to reduce the matter to logical clarity and simplicity.

It also problematizes any easy identification between this operation and what is generally called Derridean deconstruction. Even though de Man himself found an ideological justification for his own work in just that philosophical authority, it seems probable that any comparably close reading of these latter texts (something that would take us far afield from the present inquiry) would end up emphasizing their internal textual differences rather than their generic similarities.

But we have not completed the description until we account for the nature of the error that is overcome by this new movement of truth (or 'lucidity', as de Man often calls it), and yet which persists as a necessary moment in that movement and which, as we have seen, must be affirmed and even desired as a necessary stage, without which the final clarification loses all its force (in other words, which requires 'a reader willing to remain within a natural logic of representation').<sup>35</sup> Here we discover a whole properly de Manian theory of ideology, and the operation of some properly literary or rhetorical 'bad faith' or self-deceit: 'A defensive strategy that tries to hide from this negative self-

knowledge',<sup>36</sup> 'an illusory identification with the non-self',<sup>37</sup> a 'tenacious self-mystification'<sup>38</sup> whose content will take different forms and thematizations depending on the literary and historical context, but which can perhaps be more generally characterized, in familiar contemporary terms, as an ideology of representation and of the possibility of full symbolic embodiment and meaning (a 'natural logic'). According to the thematization of this ideology, then, the 'rhetorical' method that demystifies it will lead us either back into literature or toward some more general poststructural philosophical area.

I want to justify this long digression by suggesting that it throws a certain light on the narrative presuppositions that underlie the present study. Indeed, I am myself now tempted to substitute the term 'narrativization' for that of 'metaphorization' in de Man: what the unification of the two moments achieves is in fact not so much a metaphor of allegory, as rather a new narrative in which the moments of symbol and allegory are linked together by virtue of instruments or mechanisms implicit in the second designation: thus, the whole process becomes allegorical not only of reading but also of allegory itself. But the operation, I now want to argue, is best seen as a narrative one.

Yet to appeal to the primacy of narrative in this way (as to some 'ultimately determining instance' or terminology of last resort) is to raise again all those unnerving questions about truth and verification or falsification, about relativism and the utter arbitrariness of any attempt to ground a proposition or an interpretation in this or that philosophical system – questions that always seem to arise at this point in 'postmodern' discussions and to threaten us with that 'painful knowledge'<sup>39</sup> de Man promised us as the outcome of his analysis. For is not his own analysis ultimately grounded in

the unjustifiable positing of rhetoric as just such an 'ultimately determining stance' or explanatory code? And is not the 'master code' of Marxism also grounded in some such equally arbitrary narrative of the sequence of the modes of production and of the privileged status of capitalism as an epistemological standpoint?

I think that the complex apparatus of de Manian narrativization also has some answers for this problem: the synchronic and non-narrative 'moments' of the mode of production are in fact 'narrativized' by capitalism, which now designates two things all at once, the specialized or restricted moment of its own synchronic system, and the generalized or allegorical 'metaphorization' of the sequence as an overall historical process. To be sure, the epistemological privilege of this particular 'allegory' – namely, the synchronic system of capitalism as such – will then be justified by the completeness of its levels which, relating to each other by way of difference, can lay claim to encompass everything expressed or excluded by other 'philosophical systems'. But that is a different argument and another story.

We have apparently travelled away from the problem of modernism in the arts and literature (and in history); in reality, however, the problem has itself been usefully restructured in the process, and we are now in a position to reassert its necessity, even as some faulty diachronic category (a first moment, in which the individual work is exemplary or symbolic of 'modernism' as a generic-periodizing concept) finds itself undermined and dissolved by the second moment of close textual reading, which dispels the first, general category of modernism at the same time that it gives it specificity by transforming it into a larger allegorical process in the de Manian sense. Now the empty insight that one cannot not periodize acquires more troubling content, and suggests that we cannot now even read such texts closely without at one and the same time activating the unsatisfactory generic operation of attempting to see them as examples or exemplars of some more general diachronic idea of modernism that can have no other conceivable function than to allow us synchronically to return to the text itself.

Leaving de Manian language behind us, we may then justifiably want to ask how this general idea of modernism is to be considered as a narrative category, and in what way it is diachronic. The answer is forthcoming at once, and to that degree it is a little pat. For we all know what precedes modernism, or at least we say we know (and we think we

know): it can be none other than realism, about which it is surely obvious that it constitutes the raw material that modernism cancels and surcharges. If realism is grasped as the expression of some commonsense experience of a recognizably real world, then empirical examination of any work we care to categorize as 'modernist' will reveal a starting point in that conventional real world, a realist core as it were, which the various telltale modernist deformations and 'unrealistic' distortions, sublimations or gross caricaturizations, take as their pretext and their raw material, and without which their alleged 'obscurity' and 'incomprehensibility' would not be possible. This is as true of Malevich's *Black Square* fully as much as it is of the musical material deployed in atonality, and at that point means nothing more startling than the inner-worldly existence and ontological origin of everything in the work of art, modernist or not, and the ultimate reason why the work of art and the realm of art itself can never become truly autonomous. Indeed, it was precisely this that Paul de Man demonstrated about Mallarmé's sonnet, in his argument that, whatever the complexity and 'obscurity' of the final product, all of its initial elements were 'representational'.

This would now seem to provide a satisfactorily narrative structure: a first naïve realism is posited in such a way that a 'modernist' transformation can be identified as its cancellation, if not its complete negation. What is missing in this narrative, however, is narrative causality as such: what is the content of the transformation in question? And what motivated it or gave it aesthetic justification? And will these causalities be theorized on a purely artistic or intrinsic level, or will they appeal to extra-aesthetic spheres and developments? Finally, will they all be utterly distinct and limited to one moment only of artistic change? Or can they be some-

how described in an abstract way that allows us to subsume all of the distinct, empirical changes in question (new paints and colours, for example, or new human relationships, new kinds of stories, new kinds of sound) under a single global process?

Clearly, we will not have a concept of modernism at all if this last question is not answered affirmatively. But the earlier ones also raise problems of abstraction as well: would, for example, Friedrich's two overall categories, loss of representational reality and loss of self, offer a suitable thematization of this historical narrative and a satisfactory frame for the narration of modernism? Or are they still too thematic, too closely bound up with this or that specific historico-aesthetic situation, to allow the kind of generalization required for the construction of an overall concept of modernism? Historically, in fact, in the debates over modernism, a far more abstract notion of change has won out over all its rivals; and the victory was so complete as to render the new account commonplace and virtually self-evident. This is that well-known dynamic called innovation; and it is eternalized in Pound's great dictum 'Make it new': and in the supreme value of the New that seems to preside over any specific or local modernism worth its salt. How the new can be eternal, however, is another question, and perhaps accounts for the equally eternal enigma of Baudelaire's inaugural definition: '*le transitoire, le fugitif, le contingent, la moitié de l'art, dont l'autre moitié est l'éternel et l'immuable*'.<sup>40</sup> Yet innovation does seem to have its self-sufficiency as a concept and as a process: implying that over time all innovations grow old, in the form either of the conventional or the habitual, in either of which cases they call out for their own destruction and supersession. This would then be a kind of autopoiesis or self-perpetuating

dynamic (like Luhmannian differentiation itself), which, once set in motion, knows no end and needs no further justification.

But it is the beginning that concerns us here for the moment: and this makes for problems, particularly when we have to do with that widespread and fairly conventionalized narrative of the emergence of modernism that posits a fundamental inaugural break with what is called realism. The problem lies not only and not even in the motivation of that break, but in the very assertion of its existence in the first place. For the motivation can be with whatever degree of ingenuity factored back into the master narrative as follows: we have described realism as 'the expression' – but here we might better have said the literary and linguistic expression – 'the literary expression of some common-sense experience of a recognizably real world'. Yet any neophyte today will spot the flaw at once; and if it is a flaw in the definition, it is unfortunately equally a flaw in realism itself. For what we called the 'common-sense experience of a recognizably real world' is easily unmasked as little more than a cultural paradigm in its own turn. The word 'recognizably' indeed sends us back to the literary and linguistic prototypes that make up that paradigm (in the Symbolic Order, as Lacan might say); and as far as 'experience' is concerned, it cannot designate any subject/object immediacy and must therefore be unmasked as sheer representation, as a socially constructed and transmitted 'picture of life' which is itself literary in nature. Thus, the dynamic whereby modernist innovation cancels its pre-existing literary paradigms and representations extends back to its beginnings, in which it confronts and cancels this first of all literary paradigms which is realism itself.

The problem is that all consequential realisms themselves

do exactly this, and that looked at more closely, and replaced in its own specific context, each successive realism can also be said, in this sense, to have been a modernism in its own right. Each realism is also by definition new: and aims at conquering a whole new area of content for its representation. Each wishes to annex what has not yet been represented, what has not yet ever been named or found its voice. (And this is why, throughout and beyond the age of modernism, there are still new and vibrant realisms to be heard and to be recognized, in parts of the world and areas of the social totality into which representation has not yet penetrated.) This is to say not only that each new realism arises out of dissatisfaction with the limits of the realisms that preceded it, but also and more fundamentally that realism itself in general shares precisely that dynamic of innovation we ascribed to modernism as its uniquely distinguishing feature. The realisms also cancel their immediate predecessors, and consign those already-existing realisms into some outer darkness of romance and wishful thinking: as witness that Spanish work so often adduced as the inaugural realism, whose gesture of the cancellation of pre-existing paradigms has so often been considered to be paradigmatic of realism as such.<sup>41</sup> But insofar as this beginning has been shown to be 'the same' as the beginning ascribed to the inaugural gesture of modernism, it is only fair to recognize that it presents the same problems and offers an equally unsatisfactory narrative of its own origins.

But the whole issue may well be dismissed as a false problem: perhaps we may venture the hypothesis that viewed through the lens of the innovation theory of modernism, even pre-existing realisms turn into so many earlier modernisms. Indeed, I have always thought it would be interesting to return the favour, and to show how, through the prism of

realist innovation theory, all later modernisms can be revealed to be in reality so many unwitting realisms (was this not in fact Robbe-Grillet's defence of his own *nouveau roman*?).<sup>42</sup> There is a good reason for this confusion, which ought to make the false problem a productive one in spite of itself: namely, that the two concepts of modernism and realism are not on all fours with each other. As I have suggested elsewhere,<sup>43</sup> the two terms, whether considered to be concepts or categories, are drawn from two unrelated systems, and like those two well-known lines which, prolonged into infinity, never meet, they are incommensurable with each other. Modernism is an aesthetic category and realism is an epistemological one; the truth claim of the latter is irreconcilable with the formal dynamic of the former. The attempt to combine the two into a single master narrative must therefore necessarily fail, yet its failure produces the more productive problem which is that of the model of innovation which underwrites both and to which we must now turn.

What is decisive and original is now not this narrative itself, which offers little enough to distinguish it from any garden-variety story of change, such as the success stories of scientific discoveries and technological inventions, the naïve (but justified) bemusement mixed with admiration whereby we contemplate the seeming emergence *ex nihilo* of the great idea, whether it be the law of gravity or the filaments in the light bulb. (The idea of 'natural genius' will flow into the void that seems to precede this absolute event, while the rest of the story evolves on under its own momentum into the shabbier spectacle of the genius turning into the businessman.) Such a narrative can only be decisively marked as modernity if invention is itself fetishized and if some older situation is somehow 'revolutionized' by the very presence

of the new existent. It is clearly not enough simply to respecify the nature of this new existent as a work of art, rather than a scientific discovery or a technological apparatus: something scarcely able to aestheticize these last, and much more likely to turn the artistic innovation back into a fact of scientific or technological history.

What is decisive is rather the interiorization of the narrative, which is now not only drawn within the work of art but transformed into the latter's fundamental structure. What was diachronic has now become synchronic, and the succession of events in time has unexpectedly become a coexistence of various elements whose act of restructuration is seized and arrested, as in some filmic freeze-frame (not to speak of Benjamin's 'dialectics at a standstill').<sup>44</sup> This is the inversion of the process described by de Man, in which a synchronic juxtaposition is metaphorized out into a diachronic narrative. Now the latter, the relatively disreputable and diachronic literary-historical tale of one ism evolving into another one, is suddenly drawn back into the text – into each individual text worthy of being characterized as modernist – which thereby encapsulates and eternalizes the process as a whole. Each text is then the frozen allegory of modernism as a whole and as a vast movement in time which no one can see or adequately represent. Each text thus 'makes it new' in its turn; the palpable contradiction between the absolute claim for novelty and the inevitable repetition, the eternal return, of the same gesture of innovation over and over again, does not disqualify the characterization but rather lends it a mesmerizing, forever perplexing and fascinating, spell.

All our more sober questions and ideological probes and doubts simply feed the flames of that charm and augment its mysterious prestige. How is it that the aesthetic innovation

of yesteryear, long since outmoded by more streamlined artistic technologies, remains new? The question appropriates the prestige of the classical by inverting the latter's mode of wonderment which answered its own question with the affirmation of eternal or timeless value; modernism's jaded palate can be said to be modern in the very way its own appetite for passing fashion and the present moment, tantalized and forever unsatisfied, postpones answer and question alike.

For the answer is certainly not that of the ideology that supports this internalized narrative: it is not because the modern work invents new techniques that it remains fresh and seemingly timeless; no more convincing is the frequent claim as to discoveries of vast new and unexplored areas of content – new kinds of feelings and emotions, new human relationships, new pathologies and unconscious desires or fantasies, new worlds even, beyond the imagination. These all at once become extrinsic facts, whose claims to novelty and whose very existence must be verified outside the work of art; worse than that, once outside, like mysteriously preserved bodies suddenly exposed to the effects of the open air, they are subject to the most rapid and irrevocable deterioration, and that under the impact of the very dynamic of temporal change to which they appealed in the first place.

We will conclude, then, that this model of innovation remains too positive for its own good; it makes substantive claims that are in the long run extra-aesthetic; and it incorporates a gamble on the future that is destined for banality when that future inevitably turns into just another present. This is why Adorno's negative counterproposal (which we will examine in more detail later) is far more satisfactory: he suggests, indeed, that we should think of the quintessential modern gesture as one of taboo rather than of discovery; or

rather, that what look like innovations are, in the modern, the result of a desperate attempt to find substitutes for what has been tabooed.<sup>45</sup> It is a model and a restructuration that shifts the burden of proof from the future to the past: modernism is seen as originating in an ever-keener distaste for what is conventional and outmoded, rather than an exploratory appetite for the unexplored and undiscovered. The emphasis is on the Ennui that Baudelaire's traveller is fleeing, rather than the 'nouveau' he claims passionately to seek. The reversal has the theoretical advantage of impeding the slippage of its terms and tokens towards the extra-aesthetic, for the taboo is very explicitly a taboo on previous kinds of representational form and content: not the oldness of the older emotions as such, but the conventions of their expression; not the disappearance of this or that kind of human relationship, but rather the intolerable common-places with which it had become so intimately associated as to have been indistinguishable. It is then precisely this seeming indistinguishability that secures the intrinsic dynamic of the model, generating taboos on what remain aesthetic representations; whereas the discovery or exploratory model of innovation was subject to an immediate slippage, in which the new representations pass insensibly over into the novelty of new extra-aesthetic phenomena. This is not to say that the hypothesis of an aesthetic taboo cannot also be reformulated in extra-aesthetic terms as well. The outmoded and conventionalized literary expression, now identified as sentimentality, can also be seen to designate the obsolescence of a certain emotion in and of itself; and the analysis by way of taboo to offer a mediatory instrument for a more specifically social symptomatology. But most often those outmoded emotions live on in social life itself long after modernism has pronounced its judgement on them; whence the intensifying

## A SINGULAR MODERNITY

suspicion of an elitism built into the very framework of this art, and also the sense that, whatever new areas of feeling and expression modernism has opened up, its representational focus spans an ever-dwindling sphere of social and class relationships.

Adorno's model is an ingenious graft onto that ideology of modernism we will examine later on, which in effect pleads for special treatment of certain works over others. Its plausibility rests on our capacity to feel the innovative mechanism at work within the work of art itself and in the reading process, rather than by way of external consultation of some handbook on the evolution of literary techniques. It is a possibility that not only once again recalls Hegelian *Aufhebung*, but of which the latter may be said to have been a kind of conceptual anticipation: for the older technique or content must somehow subsist within the work as what is cancelled or overwritten, modified, inverted or negated, in order for us to feel the force, in the present, of what is alleged to have once been an innovation. At best, then, the narrative gesture or trope of a rewriting of literary history is here interiorized as an operation within the text which has become a figure; and which is then available for re-externalization as an allegory of literary history, rendering this indispensable dimension of modernism doubly a narrative category.

The preceding account seems to have left us with the feeling that modernism is an immense negative process, a kind of *fuite en avant*, like Benjamin's angel blown backwards by the storm wind: and that the storm wind, which he identified with history, or in other words with capitalism, is to be imagined as increasing in intensity from year to year and period to period. This transfer of the temporality of capitalism – with its ever-more-rapid style and fashion changes, and the boom-and-bust cycle of some desperate movement from markets saturated with commodities to new markets and new commodities alike – to the dynamics of artistic modernism is plausible in its analogies, but fairly empty and unspecific as to its content. It tends to confirm Hugo Friedrich's complaint, in the work on poetic modernism already referred to, that only 'negative categories' seem available for describing modernism.<sup>46</sup> It is a complaint he documents by way of a list of standard traits rehearsed in various national traditions in efforts to circumscribe the slippery phenomenon in question:

Disorientation, disintegration of the familiar, loss of order, incoherence, fragmentism [*sic!*], reversibility, additive style, depoeticized poetry, bolts of annihilation, strident imagery, brutal abruptness, dislocation, astigmatism, alienation.<sup>47</sup>

The enumeration, unequally suggestive, certainly goes a long way towards confirming Adorno's insight that modernist innovation is best described negatively, in terms of taboo, rather than in terms of any positive achievement. Yet the suspicious drift of Friedrich's reflections on this matter may well give us pause: for despite his insistence that (at least in his own work) such seemingly negative features are to be considered 'definitional, not pejorative', he nonetheless goes on to conclude that the 'ultimate nonassimilability' of this poetry to positive categories betrays 'the existence of abnormality'.<sup>48</sup> This characterization is not particularly redeemed by his conclusion, which suggests that it is precisely this 'inner consistency in a striving away from reality and normality, as well as the despotism of even the boldest warpings of language',<sup>49</sup> that opens up some alternate world of imagination and metaphor alongside this one (we will deal at much greater length with this characteristic motif of the autonomy of art and poetry later on). One may therefore simply note that Friedrich has shifted the unwanted yet inevitable 'pejorative' note from the poetry to the world around it, something reflected in the ambiguity of the final term in his long list. I call the sudden appearance of the term 'alienation' suspicious because – despite its rigorous philosophical deployment in everyone from Hegel and Marx to Lukács and the Frankfurt School – it has become a staple of the late capitalist 'culture critique' and indeed an infallible sign that we are in the presence of that particular degraded genre and discourse. The telltale word 'alienation' now becomes the expression of a pathos inherent in the traditional romantic diatribe against 'modernity' and its ills, an affective charge whose very function lies in the systematic exclusion of precisely that concrete socio-economic analysis that could alone account for them. It is a tone that threatens

to turn Friedrich's literary history inside out, and to transform his own specifically poetic readings into so many pieces of evidence in what can now be taken as yet another not so implicit indictment of the modern world.

The stereotypical picture that results of the modern artist as outsider and rebel, marginal and renegade, is so familiar and conventional as to do little more real political damage in the present day and age. What is more important for us in our current context is that it signals yet another way in which the thematics of subjectivity tend illicitly to contaminate 'theories' of modernity as such. Until now, we have only deplored the positive and celebratory forms of this contamination, and the promotion of features like freedom, individuality and reflexivity as bonuses and benefits of the very structure of (Western) modernity as such. Now, however, it becomes clear that the critique of modernity can also be questioned from the same perspective, and that the latter's pathos is no less a sign of this undesirable subjectification, whose putative sufferings are no less acceptable than its heroic glamour. Friedrich thus teaches us that the motif of subjectivity must also be excluded from discussions of artistic modernism as well, and this is no small order when one surveys the length and breadth of studies that in one way or another take the well-known 'inward turn' of modernism as their explanatory thread.

It is thus ironic and paradoxical that he should also put us on the path of some more productive use of such thematics. Indeed, his fundamental theme – that loss of representational reality (de Man's translation of *Entrealisierung*) that accompanies an *Entpersonalisierung* (which I prefer to translate as *depersonalization*) – suggests that, as with the narrative of modernism itself, the taboo on the representation of subjectivity can now, in the area of modern

art, be recognized to have itself been interiorized within the work of art, in such a way as to offer a new account of its alleged telos. Now it will become evident that it is the work of art itself that perpetuates precisely that implacable taboo on the subjective that we have hitherto merely recommended as a check on its various histories. It is an unexpected turn which may distantly recall de Man's frequent suggestion that it is not we who 'deconstruct' the work, it has already deconstructed itself in advance. Yet something like this, I believe, characterizes the treatment of subjectivity and its representation in modernism as well.

Meanwhile, in the light of all the things that have been said and shown about Friedrich's work, it may well seem perverse to end up endorsing and indeed adopting his own central theme of depersonalization in our own inquiry. The about-face may indeed seem all the more reprehensible in view of the fact that this is only one of Friedrich's many themes, which it is then our own responsibility to have transformed into some monolithic causal factor. Yet precisely that multiplicity of themes was the mark of his empiricism, which cannot however be overcome simply by combining them all into some grand synthesis, to be rebaptized a 'theory'. For when it is a question of production, such scattered empirical traits are unified in a different direction, by way of the situation to which they are a response and the dilemma they confront in the form of a henceforth-coordinated gesture. It is only by way of the unity of such a situation that the unity of the various aspects of a given response – whether positive or negative, replicative or oppositional – can be grasped.

In the present context, the task would insist in showing everything that is energizing and active about a depersonalizing tendency that has too often been discussed in terms of

loss and incapacitation; in demonstrating how such a renunciation of subjectivity, far from amounting to some resignation to an impossibly 'alienating' condition, stands on the contrary as an original and productive response to it.

That condition has often been described in terms of the tendential reduction in the possibilities of human praxis. The Frankfurt School often staged the situation of bourgeois individualism allegorically, by way of the narrative of the shrinking positions available in the new capitalist economy of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: the trajectory runs from the autonomous burghers and merchants memorialized by Thomas Mann through the heroic entrepreneurs of the dawning monopoly era, all the way to the precarious situation of small business in the Depression and the emergence of the figure of 'organization man' after World War II.<sup>50</sup> In this narrative, it is the economy itself that determines a concrete depersonalization and desubjectification, in the form of the constraints on action and creativity imposed by the emergence of the monopolies and their new conglomerates.

The poststructuralist (and French) slogan of the 'death of the subject' had a quite different emphasis, and in effect celebrated this eclipse of bourgeois individualism, which it also grasped as a new freedom for intellectuals thereby enabled to escape the crushing burdens of individual intellection into the freedom and renewal of 'l'acéphale' and the liberating rituals of political praxis. Lacan's psychoanalysis may well offer a bridge between these two very different visions of history (neither of which can be adequately evaluated without a sociology of the respective national intellectuals in question). For Lacan, following Wilhelm Reich and in opposition to so-called ego therapy, considered the 'self' and the ego as a defence mechanism, into which modern

individuals (most often bourgeois individuals) tended to entrench and immure themselves, thereby cutting themselves off from the world and from productive action at the same time that they sheltered themselves from it.<sup>51</sup> This coordinated model now allows us to grasp both an ossification of the 'centred subject' and the precariousness of its situation; it also enables some first glimpse of how the depersonalization of the subject – a breaking down of the fortress of the ego and the self – might also constitute a liberation.

But the fate of the bourgeois subject is by no means an adequate framework in which to tell the story of that global 'situation of modernity' from which artistic modernism emerged. In a path-breaking essay,<sup>52</sup> Perry Anderson proposes a framework that is much more suggestive for our present purposes. In effect, he triangulates modernism within the force field of several distinct emergent currents in late-nineteenth-century European society. The onset of industrialization, although still geographically limited, seems to promise a whole new dynamic. In all the arts, meanwhile, conventionalism and beaux-arts academism prolong a widespread sense of suffocation and dissatisfaction, from which as yet unthematized breaks are longed for on all sides. Finally, immense new social forces, political suffrage and the growth of the labour unions and the various socialist and anarchist movements, seem to menace the stifling closure of high bourgeois culture, and to announce some impending enlargement of social space itself. The proposition is not that the artists of the modern occupy the same space as these new social forces,<sup>53</sup> nor even manifest any ideological sympathy for or existential knowledge of them; but rather that they feel that force of gravity at a distance, and that their own vocation for aesthetic change and new and more radical artistic practices finds itself powerfully reinforced and inten-

## TRANSITIONAL MODES

sified by the dawning conviction that radical change is simultaneously at large in the social world outside.

Indeed, what is at stake in both areas – in art as well as in social life and economic reality – is not some mere sense of change as such, a sense of things passing away and other things arising, a flow more characteristic of a time of decay and growth and more reminiscent of natural processes than of the new non-natural forms of production. It is rather the radical transformation of the world itself that spreads through the end of the nineteenth century, in Utopian and prophetic impulses of all kinds. This is then why the older ideologies of the modern have been misleading in their insistence on some ‘inward turn’ of the modern or on its increasing subjectivization of reality. At best, there stirs here everywhere an apocalyptic dissatisfaction with subjectivity itself and the older forms of the self. Rilke’s monitory angels are not to be understood psychologically:<sup>54</sup>

Sir kämen denn  
bei Nacht zu dir, dich ringender zu prüfen,  
und gingen wie Entzürnte durch das Haus  
und griffen dich als ob sie dich erschüfen  
und brächen dich aus deiner Form heraus.

Any close inspection of the texts will in fact betray a radical depersonalization of the bourgeois subject, a programmatic movement away from the psychological and from personal identity itself:

Not I, not I, but the wind that blows through me!  
A fine wind is blowing the new direction of Time.  
If only I let it bear me, carry me, if only it carry me!

J'ai vu des archipels sidéraux: et des îles  
Dont les cieux délirants sont ouverts au vogueur:

## A SINGULAR MODERNITY

– Est-ce en ces nuits sans fonds que tu dors et t'exiles,  
Million d'oiseaux d'or, o future Vigueur?<sup>55</sup>

It is on the face of it perverse not to hear the great modernist evocations of subjectivity as so much longing for depersonalization, and very precisely for some new existence outside the self, in a world radically transformed and worthy of ecstasy. What has so often been described as a new and deeper, richer subjectivity, is in fact this call to change which always resonates through it: not subjectivity as such, but its transfiguration. This is then the sense in which I propose to consider modernist 'subjectivity' as allegorical of the transformation of the world itself, and therefore of what is called revolution. The forms of this allegory are multiple; yet all the anecdotal psychologies in which it finds itself dressed – in their stylistic, cultural and characterological differences – have in common that they evoke a momentum that cannot find resolution within the self, but that must be completed by a Utopian and revolutionary transmutation of the world of actuality itself. As Anderson reminds us, it is only because such revolutionary change is already indwelling and stirring convulsively within the present that its impulses can find figuration in such unique psychic allegory, which does not posit mere individual affects and faculties, but imperiously demands whole new kinds of human beings fit for a world poised on the edge of some thoroughgoing metamorphosis.

No matter that it is for the most part only in the forms left behind by modernism that we detect the traces of this momentous moment – one of whose tendencies, the technological one, was shattered by World War I, the other, that of social ferment, arrested and exhausted at the end of the 1930s by Stalinism and Nazism. Yet the forms still, as symbolic acts, testify to immense gestures of liberation and new construction which we can only glimpse retrospectively, by historical reconstruction.

Nor is the aesthetic the only realm in which such deperson-

alization is active. We have surely here to do with a wisdom that long predates the modern as such, and can for example be found in most of the great religions. 'Le moi est haïssable' (Pascal) is not only the last authentic rediscovery of the meaning of the Christian doctrine of pride; it is a recurrent ethic (Epicurus) and a metaphysical vision most apocalyptically deployed in Buddhism, which may be said to be an anticipation of the wholly distinct adventure of modernism itself. For the religions recuperated depersonalization and, leaving its consequences for the social world itself aside, deflected its energies into therapeutic techniques on the one hand and the construction of so many inner-worldly ecclesiastic rules and institutions on the other. Only the secular modernity of industrial capitalism vouchsafed a glimpse of the new collective and historical praxis such a mutation of the self was capable of promising.

Meanwhile, I think it can be affirmed without contradiction that all the great new and original modern philosophies since Nietzsche swim in the great stream that carries aesthetic modernism forward; all involve or project, in their very different ways, methods of radical depersonalization, from pragmatism to Wittgenstein, from Heidegger to symbolic logic, and all the way to the various structuralisms and poststructuralisms; not excluding phenomenology itself, whose practice of the *epochē*, seemingly committed to 'consciousness' in its most traditional deep-subjective form, is as self-punishing and depersonalizing a discipline as Freudian free association. Indeed, we may ascertain in all these very different movements away from the self and the bourgeois personality or individuality an even older logic at work which is that of nominalism and of the dialectic of universals and particulars. The taboo on reified figurations of subjectivity reflects the agonies of the universal: outworn nomenclature for the emotions and the passions become suspect precisely owing to the quotient of universality they carry within themselves; and it is on the basis of an intensifying nominalism that they must be discarded in favour of seemingly more

## A SINGULAR MODERNITY

objective or particular language. The very movement towards language itself, in modernist practice as well as in contemporary philosophy, betrays this obligatory detour through the object world, that is, through matter and space. For inner models of subjectivity, external trajectories are substituted, which cunningly espouse the syntax of the sentence as their own temporality. The resurgence of rhetoric and of the system of the tropes is to be understood in this way, as a repudiation of psychology that attempts to transfer its operations to some non-subjective realm, while its own inner spatiality (for the very theorization of the tropes finds its condition of possibility in a sublimation of space itself, and its positions and relations) is thereby enabled to model the external forms and figures through which modernist representation is driven. It would be tempting, indeed, to go on to show how even the forms of modern literary criticism are unable to evade the dynamic of depersonalization. But with our three methodological correctives secured (periodization, narrative, depersonalization), we are now in a position to construct a model of modernism as a whole, and to tell the story of its fate.

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PART II

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Modernism as Ideology



In principle, it ought to be possible to construct the model of totality (and a totality that is itself a process) by beginning with any feature and eventually working our way through and around to all the others in a trajectory different from all the other possible ones and yet somehow still the same, or at least projecting and marking the contours of the same complex unrepresentable phenomenon. But since the premise of the preceding discussion has been that of the preliminary requirement to reconstruct the situation of modernism, it seems appropriate to start with that, and to propose the hypothesis that what we call artistic or aesthetic 'modernism' essentially corresponds to a situation of incomplete modernization.

It is a situation that has now begun to have its historians, supremely, for many of us, in Arno Mayer's *The Persistence of the Old Regime*,<sup>1</sup> which documents the astonishingly belated survival of modernity's feudal context in some European countries up to the very end of World War II: and by the same token, modernity's first emergence in limited enclaves of social as well as technological modernization and commodification. The new bourgeoisies of the properly capitalist era (which in this period will be described as monopoly capitalism or Lenin's imperialism) are still relatively small segments of the overall and still predominantly peasant population. This traditional peasantry (which will only much

## A SINGULAR MODERNITY

later be reduced in number and transformed into what today we would call the farmworkers or the agricultural proletariat of a properly industrial agriculture) is still a feudal caste (along with the more fragmentarily surviving older agricultural nobility, now called great landowners, themselves not yet displaced by agribusiness) and has not yet been assimilated to one of those two properly capitalist groups that can alone be identified as social classes in the technical sense.

This makes for a world that is still organized around two distinct temporalities: that of the new industrial big city and that of the peasant countryside. And I will remark in passing that one of the great themes which has conventionally been identified as a dominant in literary modernism – namely temporality itself, and that ‘deep time’ that Bergson thought he could conceptualize and into which so many modern writers have attempted to peer as into a fundamental mystery – is very precisely a mode in which this transitional economic structure of incomplete capitalism can be registered and identified as such. In this transitional era, people – but it would be better to say, intellectuals, and the writers and the ideologists who are part of that category – still live in two distinct worlds simultaneously. This simultaneity can no doubt for the moment be cast in terms of some distinction between the metropolis and the provinces; but it might better be imagined in terms of a situation in which individuals originate in a ‘*pays*’, a local village or region to which they periodically return, while pursuing their life work in the very different world of the big city. That those writers who are unabashedly urban – one thinks of Proust or Joyce, for example – feel beyond their urban experience the presence of something radically other that completes it if it does not indeed in part determine it, can be judged by Proust’s rather artificial ‘learned’ celebration of some deep-French medieval

tradition, or by Joyce's irritation in the confrontation with the various forms of Irish and Gaelic nationalism: it is a necessary, indeed obligatory confrontation, which *Finnegans Wake* may be taken as an attempt to outflank by a bold universalization.

Yet characteristically any attempt to characterize the 'persistence of the old regime' in social class terms tends fatally to slip, across the geographical and regional phenomena, into some more openly technological phenomenon: it is a suspicious slippage, about which we will shortly need to take our precautions.

But initially technology – the 'industrial' dimension of so-called industrial capitalism – seems to have an autonomy and an inner logic of its own which is abundantly registered in the art and thinking of the period, not least in Luddite or Ruskinian hostility to the machine as the source of social misery and aesthetic ignominy (and it is of course crucial to include the spread of mass media and their forms in this category of technology as such): thus the later separation of high art and mass culture is no less an anti-technological gesture than the more obvious early ones. (Anti-modernity is also a possible feature of modernism.)

The phenomenological experience to be registered here is precisely that of the industrial or technological enclave. The new technological machinery brings with it its own aesthetic shock, in the way in which it erupts without warning into the older pastoral and feudal landscape: it has all the awesome strangeness and fearsomeness of the appearance of the first tanks on the Western front in 1916; and yet poetic attempts to mythologize it – in Zola's novels, for example, where the mine is a great animal, with its own mythic powers, or in the bedazzlement of Apollinaire's celebration of the lethal and toxic shellbursts of World War I – are not

for long paths that artists can productively follow (although these paths remain open well into the 1930s in the Soviet and US celebrations of factories).

I believe that the most revealing account of this process is still to be found in Heidegger's belated theory of technology, less a philosophical or conceptual solution than an ideological and poetic one. For Heidegger takes pains to describe technological emergence in a way that formally echoes and negates that very different emergence of the work of art, namely, the temple, as the point around which a landscape and a world is organized, rather than, as with technology, that at which it is interrupted.<sup>2</sup> Heidegger theorizes emergent technology not merely as an enclave but as a new form of the storage of energy (*Bestand* or 'standing reserve'), thereby marking the 'mystery' of the new power sources in something other than a mythic fashion. His theory has some distant kinship with those recent conceptions of the origins of state power in the surplus and the granary, as well as with Marx's dialectical idea of a primitive accumulation on the level of capital itself: but better than either of those, Heidegger's theory offers the useful perspective of an emergence of technological modernity within a decidedly unmodern landscape. It reverses the usual view of uneven development in which 'tradition' is marked as what will inevitably give way to the new that is destined to overcome and replace it. Here, as in the Italy of the Futurists, precisely the familiarity of what can only anachronistically be called the pre-modern, or underdevelopment, confers on the violence of the new its capacity for arousing fear or excitement; and it will have been understood from the previous discussion that what matters is not so much the positive or negative valence of this reaction, but rather the aesthetic epistemology of the shock itself, which could not be registered against a back-

ground in which machinery had already become familiar and domesticated.

Two features of this historical emergence now demand comment: the first is that such technological developments take place under the long shadow of what we have called the trope of modernity, and in particular of its irrepressible search for the break, for the 'first time', for the beginning. As we have already seen, there can be no question of deciding on any 'true' beginning of modernity as such: nor is it only that there are too many contenders for that honour. The alleged break is itself merely a narrative effect, susceptible of a displacement which lies within the province of the historian's inaugural decisions. But what is clear is that technological development lends itself irresistibly to subsumption under the empty narrative form of the break: it offers itself as content for the formal beginning as do few other types of historical material. Form and content – the narrative concept of modernity, the implantation of the first industrial machines – come together with a well-nigh gravitational impact, and thereafter seem indissoluble, even in our own historiographically far more self-conscious era, when everyone decries a 'technological determinism' that they secretly harbour in their heart of hearts.

We must therefore also evoke the autonomy, or at least the semi-autonomy, of technology itself, which sustains this particular illusion. The ground of this autonomy will vary over history, as 'science' (now in its usual disciplinary sense) begins life in an applied form, the handmaiden of the new technologies; then wins its own provisional autonomy as 'pure' or research science; and now in our own period, as private businesses and corporations begin ever-increasingly to use the university and its research laboratories as mere testing grounds for all kinds of new products, seems on its

way to some new form of ancillary status under the predominant investment in R & D. The point is, however, that the explanatory value of 'technological determinism' is itself determined by just such autonomization and its vicissitudes.

This is, then, the moment to speak of autonomization as such, a working concept whose adaptation from Luhmannian differentiation I have already underscored. For what seems to me genuinely productive for the cultural and historiographic areas (or the culture-historiographic area, if you prefer) is precisely this other face of the process Luhmann chose to theorize as an unremitting dynamic of interminable scissiparity whose eventual consequences can never be foreseen. Luhmann's is thus an extraordinary negative and diagnostic conceptual instrument, which has the drawback of simultaneously constituting a rather complacent ideology. As 'differentiation' descends into the smallest pores of the social substance, it may well no longer be accompanied by the production of ever more numerous autonomous or semi-autonomous levels or domains, such as those we can observe in the earlier periods of modernization (and virtually up to our own time), and for which I have invented my complementary concept. For it is certain that in this first period, not only do we observe the separation of the machine from the tool – in such a way as to constitute a kind of autonomy of the technological – we can also observe the same process at work in language itself and in representation: and this is surely an even more relevant development for any theory of artistic modernism.

The linguistic historians tell us that unwritten languages are somehow embedded in their ecologies and their social contexts in an indiscriminacy which makes the very idea of a grammar inconceivable and reveals all its anachronism: is it even possible to evoke language change of a lawful evolu-

tionary type when writing is not present to secure and to document the stages of the process? The emergence of writing thus comes as some first differentiation within language, some first autonomization of two distinct zones of what surely already knew a variety of social differentiations (gender, age, even the rudiments of class, which are often marked by different pronouns, different verb forms, and even different syntactic structures).

The point of such speculations is simply to authorize a further, 'modern' one, according to which the multiple differentiations of nineteenth-century language, across the uneven development of the European nation-states, project not merely the radically different and semi-autonomous realms of aristocratic and bourgeois languages, learned and popular languages, the languages of high literature and oratory, the languages of the incipient mass press and of commercial exchange, but also, beyond all of those, a kind of empty Utopian domain of language as non-existent and yet as demonstrable and conjectural as non-Euclidean geometry. This is then the space in which the new language specialists work, and in which, by modifying the original Euclidean postulates and axioms of the various forms of everyday speech (reference, communicability, etcetera), they deduce and develop the invisible outlines of whole new language structures never before seen on earth and heaven.<sup>3</sup> Once again, it does not matter what the ideological valences of such a production are (and the poets themselves supply their own accompanying ideological excuses and justifications). For Friedrich, as we have seen, all this bewildering linguistic autonomization has something to do with 'alienation'. For another tradition – authorized by Mallarmé's immortal definition 'Donner un sens plus pur aux mots de la tribu' – the realm of non-Euclidean language thereby pro-

duced has a powerful Utopian vocation, in an environment of degraded commercial speech everywhere: it offers to reclaim, redeem, transform and transfigure the koiné of a capitalist daily life into an Ur-speech in which our authentic relationship to the world and to Being can be reinvented. Yet that is not the historical meaning of modernism but only its aesthetic and, as I will argue shortly, its ideology. Or at least one of its ideologies: for as the autonomization of language proceeds, bleaker 'motivations' of its non-communicativity, its non-signification, emerge, as in Foucault's late modern aesthetic of the other, non-human, side of language. One can, to be sure, write a history of these varied ideological appropriations of the process of linguistic differentiation and autonomization, but such a history would be distinct from that of the process itself, as the alternating celebration of 'poetic' or non-Euclidean language as either pure ideality or pure materiality testifies.

We may here as well register certain 'beginnings', which then become so much fodder and nourishment and new attempts at telling the story of emergence (whether it is that of modernity or modernism proper).<sup>4</sup> I believe that the richest and most suggestive proposal in this area is to be found in Roland Barthes's still-extraordinary *Degré zéro de l'écriture*, about which one may say that only its final prognosis or prophecy (about so-called white or bleached writing) has been outmoded and outrun by time itself.<sup>5</sup> The narrative I will here retain from Barthes is his account of the replacement of rhetoric by style: an older, indeed immemorial oratorical and essentially decorative deployment of language (very often as a symbolic rehearsal of political power or social class) gives way, in the period of the French Revolution, to a very different kind of speech (Wordsworth's plain or democratic language is only one marker), whose

qualities must now be perceived, not in terms of Identity, and their approximation to the florid periods of the ancients, but rather in terms of differences that gradually come to be grasped as those of the various subjective individualities and understood as so many *styles*. The later historical eclipse of style, and indeed of the personal individuality of the centred subject itself, is then to be understood not so much as the arrival of *écriture*, in any of the then current senses, which quickly multiplied far beyond Barthes's own early proposal, as rather the supersession of modernism by postmodernism and postmodernity, a story we will not recapitulate here. However, the emergence of the category of style is not to be confused with some new historical evolution of subjectivity, but is, rather, part of the history of the autonomization of language as such.

That such autonomization then has momentous consequences for representation and other kinds of artistic 'meanings' is obvious enough; and the differentiation of the figure from the medium of painting is certainly one of the most dramatic ways in which this story can be told, as we shall see. But related instances could be explored within the conceptual language of philosophy as, with Nietzsche, it too becomes 'modern'; as well as in the 'invention' of the Unconscious, or in the use of the non- or post-mimetic building materials of iron, reinforced concrete, glass and the like.<sup>6</sup> For the layman, the analogous developments in musical material are likely to be apprehended more crudely as the eclipse of the melody and the obsolescence of tonal harmony: unless indeed it is the very invention of tonality that is grasped as musical modernity.<sup>7</sup> But for all these breaks and beginnings, rigid designators are available: Baudelaire, Manet, Wagner, Paxton and the Crystal Palace, and so on.

What is less obvious is the way in which, at that point,

for the theory of modernism as well, there sets in that same dialectic of breaks and periods we identified in discussions of modernity. The matter of an absolute beginning is never a problem here: for the trope exists precisely to provoke astonishment and the scandal of the new theory, the break further back than we imagined, the uncanonized name suddenly arising to overshadow the only too familiar one. What is more disturbing, however, is the tendency of such breaks to multiply; and we here only isolate one example of a 'second' break, which is nonetheless still a lively source of historiographic controversy and also plays itself out across all the arts (including philosophy). This is the problem of *symbolisme*, whose organic forms and vegetal decorations – although certainly modernist in some sense – are evidently different in spirit from the machine-age violences and celebrations of futurism and everything that follows it. It is a historical differentiation one finds replicated in architecture (Jugendstil versus the Bauhaus), in music (the early neurotic Schoenberg, whose melodies Brecht famously thought were 'too sweet', versus the later theoretician of the twelve-tone system); in painting (Impressionism versus Cubism); and so on down the line (in philosophy the equivalent would no doubt be the opposition between the content of late-nineteenth-century vitalism and the purer formalisms of everything from pragmatism and phenomenology all the way to structuralism and communication theory).

It thus seems to me that it is perfectly proper to speak of two moments of modernism in this sense, provided one remains complacent about the inevitable dynamics of the process, which is bound to generate more breaks virtually *ad infinitum*. We will thus here shortly adduce a moment of late modernism, in contrast to modernism proper (even in the latter's 'two forms'); while for the late modernists them-

selves, what is often called postmodernism or postmodernity will simply document yet a further internal break and the production of yet another, even later, still essentially modernist moment.

The subsequent proliferation of such breaks is then conventionally ascribed (as we have already seen) to the so-called telos of modernism, that is to say, to some inner dynamic of perpetual innovation, which – like the restless and irrepressible expansion of capitalism itself – necessarily pushes ever further beyond its boundaries, into new ‘techniques’ as well as new kinds of content. The micronarratives of such a telos are familiar (and themselves multiply whenever a given ‘modernist’ artistic phenomenon is magnified on closer inspection). The emergence out of Baudelaire of the putative and parallel traditions of Mallarmé and Rimbaud, of pure poetry and surrealism, can be matched in the novel by the emergence out of Flaubert of Joyce on the one hand, and of Proust or Kafka on the other; and in painting in the lines fanning out from Manet into Impressionism or Cubism; in music in the multiple lineages of Wagner. Any one of these moments of ‘influence’ and transfer can be parleyed into a break by the energetic intervention of a manifesto, which then, as with Pound or the surrealists, or Schoenberg, or Kandinsky, rewrites the past in the form of a new genealogy. Here, the force of the imperative to innovate or to ‘make it new’, the powerful and central presiding value of the New as such, has always seemed to constitute the fundamental logic of modernism, which replicates Schelling’s dynamic of modernity in its powerful expulsion of the past in the name of a search for innovation as such and for its own sake, which can often seem to be an empty and formalist fetish. The historical mystery of this impulse can be measured by its persistence well beyond the life span of

## A SINGULAR MODERNITY

modernism itself, which in the 1950s and 1960s seemed to touch a kind of limit and to have exhausted all available and conceivable novelties (in this also offering something of a caricature of capitalism itself, as the ultimate limit of a saturated world market becomes thinkable); the point being that postmodernism, despite its systematic and thoroughgoing rejection of all the features it could identify with high modernism and modernism proper, seems utterly unable to divest itself of this final requirement of originality.

Those who find this persistence self-evident and even perfectly natural and inevitable can be shown to think within the framework of a market that outlasted modernism proper and accompanied capital, in however differentiated a form – new types of museums now joining the more traditional art galleries along with new types of collective art projects and exhibitions – on into its third or postmodern, globalized stage. Yet a theory (or narrative) that threatens to swallow up ‘postmodernity’ as such retroactively as simply one even more extensive modernist innovation, thereby canceling the break on which the notion of a later stage was founded, clearly foregrounds the omnipresence of the commodity form as its explanatory mechanism. The modernist telos in art replicates the restless telos of fashion as such, in which the rhythms of commodity production are inscribed. The market narrative (to which we will return in a moment) is a persuasive one, which becomes more satisfying if, with Adorno, we inscribe the process of commodification within the work of art itself, now grasped as a resistance to that content which homeopathically adopts its form. The work of art thus seeks by ever greater objectivation to generate a substantiality that cannot be absorbed by commodity logic. This theory has in addition the merit of grounding and overdetermining that depersonalization, that movement from subjective expression

to objecthood, which has already been identified as a fundamental feature of modernity and modernism alike. Perhaps, however, the narrative would be even further enhanced from the perspective of Luhmann's differentiation, which might posit a scission within the commodity form itself, something of its objectal form separated out and installed as an independent force within the newly autonomous or semi-autonomous realm of art as (accompanied by its shadow image in advertising and mass culture) it hives off from commercial life and everyday language alike.

But it seems to me that the power of the teleological narrative is not fully secured by notions of the market and the commodity form: or perhaps one might better say that persistent and deeply entrenched narratives of this kind are likely to be overdetermined and invested by a number of different kinds of explanatory energies. Thus, the technological motif can also be seen to return here (no matter that the teleological narrative of technological progress is fully as much a construct as this artistic one of modernism as such), insofar as the option of framing aesthetic analyses in terms of technique makes the pull of this particular interpretive centre of gravity inevitable, even though posing problems for the language arts, whose alleged techniques are conjectural in comparison with painting, music or architecture. These problems, however, turn out to be productive ones: for it is as though in return for the acknowledgement, by the other arts and media, of the supremacy of poetry and poetic language in the modernist system of the beaux-arts, poetry graciously returned the compliment by a willingness to adopt, however metaphorically, the technical and material accounts the other arts gave of their own structure and internal dynamics (we will return to this interesting exchange agreement later on).

But once the decision has been made not only to read change as innovation, but also to transcode the latter in terms of technique and of technical developments within the medium itself, the transfer is complete, and the modernist teleology can be celebrated perfectly adequately and with a new force within the framework of technological (and sometimes even of scientific) progress as such. This is to say that the various defences and apologia of an emergent modern art can now borrow the force of an already-existent technological ideology, which becomes a blind behind which the more embarrassing logic of the commodity form and the market can operate.

However, in the perpetual back-and-forth between form and content, the latter inevitably asserts its rights and poses the problem of how an explanation of modernism in terms of poetic technology could account for anything more than poetry about machines (futurism) or, in a pinch, about urban renewal (as in Baudelaire's inaugural 'Tableaux parisiens'). What does technology have to do, in other words, with that other claim that modernism innovates in the subjective realm as well, pushing back the boundaries of the known world of the soul, and exploring feelings and passions, emanations from the unconscious, that had hitherto remained respectably concealed from view?

It is a momentous objection, which is not convincingly addressed by the purely negative principle of depersonalization that has so far been proposed. In order to grasp this dimension of the phenomenon, we find ourselves obliged to return to that 'crisis of representation' which was only briefly touched on in the discussion of language, but which now suggests the hypothesis of a moment in which the conventional and traditional linguistic codes of feeling and emotion

begin to separate themselves off from their objects. Better still, some earlier and traditional contextual unity between words, places, bodies and gestures, a situational unity in which language does not yet entertain an independent, let alone an autonomous, existence, is here posited in slow disaggregation under the forces of differentiation and separation.

One can also speak (as we have, above) of the onset of a nominalism which has the paradoxical effect of 'making strange' both the word and its object, both now emerging into a peculiar new semi-autonomous existence. The traditional or even early modern treatises on the subject deal with feelings and emotions in the form of linguistic systems of a structural kind: the various named emotions are lined up against each other in pairs and clusters, positive, negative and intermediary (whether in Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics* or in Descartes's *Treatise of the Passions*). It is very much like those systems of colour that always formed the first great example of Lévi-Strauss's structuralist doctrine. One must not imagine any linguistic deficiency seizing on an individual emotion-word, even though new ones tentatively appear from time to time to modify the system, while older ones are occasionally renamed; rather what happens in 'modern' times is that the whole system of such words enters into crisis and, as it disintegrates, saps the representational force of any individual one of its elements. The problem of naming these now unfamiliar and unnamed 'feelings' and 'emotions' (the latter also being abstract 'names' that no longer really correspond to identifiable entities) then flings subjective content as such into the well-known 'crisis of representation' and, by making representational 'solutions' provisional and unauthorized by forms of social and collec-

tive sovereignty (that have in any case themselves been undermined during the revolutionary period), releases such solutions to the teleological logic of fashion as well.

But we must also briefly register a reciprocal process for in the kind of linguistic separation and differentiation we are examining here, it must not be thought that the new linguistic configurations do not exercise a shaping influence of their own on the subjective materials they are supposed to be only more adequately naming. It is one of the self-promoting glories of modernism that it often creates its objects and subjective references by virtue of the very power of its names. Nor is this process merely a matter of suggestibility and the Girardian mimetic and imitative behaviour. The Russian Formalists were perhaps the first to discover, in what they called the 'motivation of the device', that an empty figure can often summon up a reality with which to fill itself out. It is something, on the aesthetic level, akin to the paradoxes of the old James-Lange theory of emotion (for which the subjective experience *follows* the gesture of expression rather than preceding and causing it), and rehearsed again only recently in Paul de Man's now scandalous chapter on 'Excuses', in which the 'authenticity' of the subject is grasped as little more than the after-effect of the posture and syntax of his (or her) speech act.<sup>8</sup>

Most often, however, the autonomization of representation, and the concomitant de-subjectivization of artistic language, is discernible in the increasingly spatial detours through which the new sentence must pass in its effort to reconstruct some former feeling in a way that successfully eludes and evades its pre-existent form as a convention and as a cliché, at least for a time.

This is the point at which we must return to Adorno's extraordinary reversal of the conventional account of mod-

## PART II: MODERNISM AS IDEOLOGY

ernist innovation. As has already been shown, it is not a matter of new materials so much as the continuous invention of new taboos on the older positivities. This is a decisive intervention, evidently modelled on the old Horkheimer/Adorno *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, according to which each supposed advance in knowledge and science is grasped as a kind of defamiliarization which relegates the previous moment of rationality to the status of a superstition, eventually leading on into an anti-theoretical wasteland of positivism. This new explanatory perspective now grounds the alleged telos of modernist innovation (and the fetishization of the New) in a far more satisfactory and intelligible process. Each subsequent generation, beginning, if you like, with the Romantics, feels the unsatisfactory inherited linguistic schema of subjectivity to be an artificial convention, which it is challenged to replace with some newer representational substitute. What looked like the progressive uncovering of new realms of subjectivity – from Baudelaire's ambivalent sado-masochist 'satanism' on down through Rimbauldian ecstasy and Dostoyevskian self-abnegation and abjection all the way to the various collective unnameables of twentieth-century literature – is now seen to be a perpetual process of unnamings and refiguration which has no foreseeable stopping point (until, with the end of the modern itself, it reaches exhaustion).

But this is the point at which to introduce the public or the audience, and to open this process up onto a wider social context. We did not need to wait for Pierre Bourdieu's therapeutic demystification of the pretences of the aesthetic to grasp what is at stake in all this for the artist's personal motivations. 'Baudelaire's problem,' Paul Valéry observed, in what was taken at the time to be his practitioner's cynicism, 'must have . . . posed itself in these terms: "How

to be a great poet, but neither a Lamartine nor a Hugo nor a Musset".<sup>9</sup> This imperative, which Valéry terms Baudelaire's *raison d'état*, need not, however, be taken as a debunking of the poetic inventions of the modernists: it is inherent in the crisis of subjective representation which is itself but a sub-set of what we have called the autonomization of non-Euclidean language.

It also corresponds to what is sometimes improperly called a crisis in reception or of the public itself. Yet we need not posit some hitherto-unified public which is then gradually fragmented throughout the period of hegemony of a bourgeoisie ever more firmly in control of power and culture. For the strength of Luhmann's concept of differentiation lies in the way in which it posits formation and rearticulation together and at one within the same process: the public begins to differentiate at the very moment in which it comes into being as a newly identifiable social institution: the emergence of the new bourgeois reading public is at one with its fragmentation into articulated sub-groups that gradually become autonomous in their own right. This is why the new bourgeois art – the new modernist art – is at once confronted with a *public introuvable*. In its crudest form we may assert that at the very moment in which it conceives its vocation as high art, the latter finds its public confiscated by mass culture: which is not to say that the vocation is not itself inspired and thematized by the coming into being of mass culture as such, itself an inevitable result and by-product of the cultural differentiations we have in mind here. Thus, Balzac was a writer of bestsellers and Hugo very much a popular poet: something that will no longer be possible for their followers.

But this situation now leads us on into another feature of modernism in the arts, which is as formative and as deter-

## PART II: MODERNISM AS IDEOLOGY

minant as anything we have mentioned hitherto. This is what is often called the autoreferentiality or self-designation of the modern, and the way in which modernist works can so often be seen, implicitly or explicitly, to be allegories of their own production. The point is not only that the emergent artists of modernism have no social status or institutional social role except as ill-defined positions within the *bohème*, not yet even intellectuals in any strict sense; it is also that their works are increasingly unclassifiable, and begin to resist the commercial categories of the genres in the effort to distinguish themselves from commodity forms at the same time that they invent various mythic and ideological claims for some unique formal status which has no social recognition or acknowledgement. In this void, they are obliged to recognize and acknowledge themselves; and autoreferentiality is the very dynamic of this process, in which the work of art designates itself and supplies the criteria whereby it is supposed to be used and evaluated. It is not necessary to see this level of the work's meaning as an exclusive one; rather it constitutes one allegorical level – for the artists themselves, no doubt, the anagogical one – among many others.

Still, this level tempts the artists on to conceive of their ambitions on an ever-greater scale, which will culminate in the 'book of the world' itself, that Book as which, according to Mallarmé, the world is destined to end up. And this is then the moment to evoke, however unseasonable it may seem today, that ultimate claim of modernism to a relationship with what André Malraux called the Absolute. Indeed, on a wholly different scale from the great manifestos of the time (from Breton back to Cézanne's, Rimbaud's and Mallarmé's letters), Malraux's *Voices of Silence*, along with Giedion's *Space, Time and Architecture*, can be considered

to be one of the great ideological apologies for modernism in general, for the most part considerably more substantial than most of what has passed for philosophical aesthetics (save no doubt for Adorno and for Kant himself).

We can convey the claims for the absolute more modestly and recognizably by quoting Adorno one last time, to the effect that 'in order for the work of art to be purely and fully a work of art, it must be more than a work of art'.<sup>10</sup> The purely aesthetic is in other words indissolubly linked to the requirement that it be ultimately impure. We thus here touch on the ultimate ambiguity of the slogans of differentiation and autonomization: language, and the aesthetic itself, can never be fully autonomous without passing over into autism and schizophrenia, gobbledygook and the sheerest 'inanité sonore': even nonsense rhyme (Lewis Carroll) or the autonomous superlanguage of a Khlebnikov must retain that thin final thread of reference that requires us to rephrase the characterization 'autonomous' into that of semi-autonomy. The Absolute is precisely this last tenuous thread, the most powerful of all, which connects even the most non-Euclidean art, from Mallarmé to Jackson Pollock, with all the other differentiated worlds of reference and thereby, in an extraordinary dialectical reversal, endows it with its revolutionary power.

We have sought, following our maxims, to reconstruct that historical situation of ‘modernity’ in which artistic modernism can be grasped as an intelligible social process; and we have drawn on any number of coordinates and elements of the older theories of modernism, while attempting vigorously to rewrite those in ways usable for our own very different situation.

Now it is time to return to those older theories, which I will henceforth designate simply as the ideology of modernism as such, its own ideology as it were (and not something historically reconstructed after the fact, as we have tried to do in the preceding section). This ideology can be easily recognized and identified: it is first and foremost that which posits the autonomy of the aesthetic, the supreme value without which, however committed the various critics and practitioners may be to art itself and its specificities and inassimilable experiences, such commitment cannot really be identified as the ideology of the modern. Another way of saying this is that the arguments proposed and marshalled by ideologues of the modern in this specifically limited historical sense all turn around the problem of the justification of the autonomy of art itself. They do not merely seek to foreground a specific kind of artistic technique or experience, or to argue for one kind of art or medium as against another – even for a newer art as against a conventional or

traditional kind. They argue not only for a philosophical differentiation – whether phenomenological or structural, material or experiential – between art and other kinds of experience or other zones or levels of social life and structure. Descriptions of that kind are here always pressed into the service of a more fundamental aim, namely to endow the aesthetic with a transcendental value which is incomparable (and indeed which does not need to be completed with descriptions of the structure of other kinds of experience, social or psychological; which stands on its own and needs no external justification).

But I have pronounced the fateful word ‘differentiation’, so omnipresent in the preceding discussion; and it can now be seen (leaving Luhmann and his particular linguistic codes and slogans aside) to be a constant feature of the history of the various philosophical aesthetics as such from Aristotle to Lukács. Why single out modern critics and aestheticians – modernist critics and aestheticians and theorists – for some specific historical judgement which is not simply applicable to all the (Western) aestheticians in the history of philosophy? It is a question that can be narrowed and reinforced by the present context: for have we not here very specifically deployed the notion of an autonomization of the aesthetic field for the account of modernism in the preceding section? And does this account not simply confirm the conclusion we are here attributing to the ideologues of modernism, namely the autonomy of aesthetics as such? Is the most visible difference, namely that I have posited this autonomy as the end result of a historical process, whereas on the whole the aestheticians of the modern see it as a transhistorical or timeless and eternal status – is this difference really the crucial one? Is it the only one?

No, the fundamental distinction lies elsewhere, on that

## PART II: MODERNISM AS IDEOLOGY

barely perceptible line between the notion of autonomy and that designation named the semi-autonomous: it is a slippage (from adjective to substantive, if you like, from the structural and the descriptive to the ontological) which is no doubt deeply embedded, like a faint hairline crack, within this cluster of words (Luhmann's differentiation does not register it at all on its apparatuses); but it marks a fundamental borderline, a frontier on which the ideologues of modernism take their stand in a telltale embattled formation which sometimes leaves the rest of us perplexed.

We can shake off this perplexity by remembering that other perplexing feature of our own description, namely the Absolute. This last in fact stands for whatever extra-aesthetic justifications are finally evoked in order to ground and to remotivate what we have been calling the semi-autonomy of the aesthetic: such justifications – whether they lie in human psychology, in history or in society, or even in religion itself – must necessarily be refused and repudiated by the ideologues of the modern. But the refusal is sometimes masked by the position that it is art and the aesthetic itself which in fact for them constitutes the Absolute, a position that is then vulgarized in terms of this or that 'religion' of art and similar slogans, all of them internally contradictory and ultimately meaningless. It is not only that art is not religion, and could only be pressed into the latter's service as a submission to an external authority and value; the very term Absolute, if it means anything, designates a transcendental motivation, an appeal to something outside the practice in question and enveloping it. But it is also certain that in our time, religion is so vague and tenuous a discursive field that its vocabulary can itself be appropriated by other causes; indeed, where it is most closely associated with the aesthetic one most often discovers that it is little

more than an excuse for the thoroughgoing autonomization of the latter. A comparison of these aestheticizing (mostly) Christian rhetorics with T.S. Eliot makes the difference at once clear and palpable: Eliot's work points to a genuine Absolute, that is to say, a vision of a total social transformation which includes a return of art to some putative earlier wholeness. The religion of our contemporaries is a conservative containment strategy without content, a reaction to the intellectual, if not the political, threat of progressive and revolutionary positions.

It will have become minimally clear that the affirmation of the autonomy of the aesthetic is a contradictory one, which it requires a good deal of (ideological) footwork to sustain. We will examine its dynamic and requirements in a moment, after positing several other hypotheses designed to situate this aesthetic ideology of the modern (or of modernism) historically. Indeed, in what follows, I will argue that this ideology – even as a theorization of modernist artistic practices – was not contemporaneous with the modern movement itself, as I have described it in the preceding section. It is a belated product, and essentially an invention and an innovation of the years following World War II. This assertion raises several conceptual problems about ideology itself: namely, the problem of its relationship to practice (in this case artistic practice), and the problem of the relationship of both ideology and practice to the historical situation in question.

For instance: if the ideology of modernism was not devised by the modernist artists themselves, as the theory of their artistic practice, what was *their* ideology? And if the ideology of modernism was a belated construct, which did not correspond to the practice of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century artists and writers whom we think of as

## PART II: MODERNISM AS IDEOLOGY

quintessentially modern, to whose practice did it correspond? And what are we to call these last, how are we to distinguish them from what it would be embarrassing to call the 'genuine' modernists or the 'real' modernists? Let's deal with this last at once. I will call the postwar artists 'late modernists'; and in a final section I will sketch in an account of the structural differences between their production and that of classical modernism, whose practitioners I will (not without some hesitation) refer to as 'high modernists'.

Working back from that conclusion, in a penultimate section I will have to characterize the 'uneven development' of the ideology of modernism itself, the varying national situations in which in equally various forms it arose, and the quite different national ideologues who developed such forms. But before considering the various aesthetics through which an ideology of modernism emerged in the various post-1945 nation-states, as well as the artistic climate of that late modernist practice to which they most immediately corresponded, I must give a little more specificity to that ideology itself.

The first thing one wants to say about the ideology of modernism is that it is an American invention, and that it had some very specific historical determinants. I hasten to add that we want to distinguish between external and internal determinants, between pressure of events and political situations and those of aesthetic form itself. Both will be dealt with here, in that order.

Late modernism is a product of the Cold War, but in all kinds of complicated ways. Thus, the Cold War spelled the end of a whole era of social transformation and indeed of Utopian desires and anticipations. For the emergence of consumerism and the spread of a culture of consumption throughout this whole period is evidently not at all the same

as the heroic moment of the conquest of productivity that preceded it (and which did not even, in the two protagonists of the Cold War, end with the destruction of World War II). Now, what was wanted in the West and in the Stalinist East alike, except for revolutionary China, was a stabilization of the existing systems and an end to that form of properly modernist transformation enacted under the sign and slogan of modernity as such, or in other words, classical or high modernism. Now the Absolutes of the latter have been reduced to the more basic programme of modernization – which is simply a new word for that old thing, the bourgeois conception of progress. As has already been observed, modernization stands for the transfer and/or implementation of industrial technology already developed; for its replication rather than its invention (stamped out of the ground or born full-grown from Zeus's brow). Politics must therefore now be carefully monitored, and new social impulses repressed or disciplined. These new forms of control are symbolically re-enacted in later modernism, which transforms the older modernist experimentation into an arsenal of tried and true techniques, no longer striving after aesthetic totality or the systemic and Utopian metamorphosis of forms. And yet – and this is the point of conferring the new term 'late modernism' on a whole historical period – such proto-modernist aesthetic modernization continues a while longer after World War II, until the 1960s puts an end and a full stop to the postwar itself and to what Habermas might call a modernist catching-up or retrieval, to a continuation of the modern that wants to think of itself as the latter's completion and fulfilment. But what form can the attempt to continue and complete the unfulfilled promise of modernism have taken?

Let's go back to the world situation confronted by the artistic United States and its ideologues after the German

## PART II: MODERNISM AS IDEOLOGY

defeat in 1945. As far as modernism is concerned, we certainly must register a kind of aesthetic 'uneven development' on a world scale. For obvious reasons, the Axis powers missed their moment of modernism, as did the Soviet Union. All three countries (I omit Japan) had vibrant modernisms in the 1920s and until they were abruptly cut short around the same time in the early 1930s. On the aesthetic level, this situation certainly justifies Habermas's well-known slogan of modernism as an unfulfilled promise, as an unfinished project. What is crucial for us is not only that they did not develop artistically, but that they also failed to reach their moment of theorization, which is to say, in our present context, the moment in which some properly 'modernist' aesthetic practice could be codified in the form of an ideology of modernism. Meanwhile, in the so-called Western democracies this moment is also absent, but for different reasons. Indeed, in the Anglo-American core countries modernism remains a secondary or fairly minor impulse until after World War II. In France things are different yet again: although Baudelaire's seminal use of the word 'modernité' marks the centrality of French art in the modern period, the ugly word 'modernisme' has only come into use in the last few years, marking a strange kind of theoretical belatedness to which I will briefly return later on. The single exception is that of architecture, where the CIAM and Le Corbusier aggressively popularize the slogan of the modern and work diligently at constructing its ideology. (As we have seen, however, it is important to distinguish between the symptomatic value of the adjective 'modern', which crops up in aesthetic discussions well before the period in question, and the slogan of modernism as such, a substantive that is not even very current in the architectural field.)

What the Cold War situation offers, then, is not so much

an artistic as an ideological opportunity. Certainly abstract expressionism in painting was a very great and durable achievement. But when I suggest that late modernism was an American phenomenon (or more properly a US one), I have in mind the theory of art, the ideology of modernism, which it was the very role of abstract expressionism pre-eminently to have generated and which then accompanied it everywhere abroad as a specifically North American cultural imperialism. The story is brilliantly told in Serge Guilbaut's classic book *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*, and I will not repeat it here. The development is replicated, but on a more limited national scale, in American poetry, where the rich and complex oeuvre of Wallace Stevens begins to displace those of Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot, both of them tarnished by politics, or in other words by extrinsic, and extrapoetic, extraliterary concerns. But the politics of Pound and Eliot (as suspicious and right-wing as both may have been) was the sign that they were genuine modernists, that is to say, that they held to the Absolute and to Utopianism, in ways no longer so appropriate for the postwar era (although it has also been said that the Europeanism of the American poet Eliot could function as a kind of aesthetic NATO ideology and prepare the British integration into the postwar continent).

Stevens meanwhile is abstract enough to enable transfers and translations, export strategies, being in this utterly different from the far-too-American William Carlos Williams (although, in another sense, Stevens, who said of himself that he was the last American never to have visited Europe, offered indigenous credentials of a high-cultural 'vernacular' order). Stevens's poetry can be seen as literature and as theory alike; his practice is essentially what he himself, along with the influential New Criticism, made theory of: which is

## PART II: MODERNISM AS IDEOLOGY

to say that both Stevens and the New Criticism prepared the space in which an ideology of modernism could emerge.

But it is now time to say what that ideology was. It is to be found in the New Criticism, but above all in the criticism that emerged from the American painting of the period; and it is associated with the name of the major theoretical figure of the late modern age and indeed that theoretician who more than any other can be credited as having invented the ideology of modernism full-blown and out of whole cloth, I mean Clement Greenberg. It is indeed supremely ironic that it should be the very isolationism of the 'ideologies of autonomy' in the various arts that has obscured the historic achievement of Greenberg until very recently indeed, so that his paradigmatic relevance for, say, doctrines of poetic language was rarely acknowledged at the time. I will quote a few passages designed to give the flavour of his intervention as well as to demonstrate the way in which a theory of aesthetic autonomy could be constructed in the areas of the visual arts:

It was not to be an about-face towards a new society, but an emigration to a Bohemia which was to be art's sanctuary from capitalism. It was to be the task of the avant-garde to perform in opposition to bourgeois society the function of finding new and adequate cultural forms for the expression of that same society, without at the same time succumbing to its ideological divisions and its refusal to permit the arts to be their own justification. The avant-garde, both child and negation of Romanticism, becomes the embodiment of art's instinct of self-preservation. . . .

As the first and most important item upon its agenda the avant-garde saw the necessity of an escape from ideas, which were infecting the arts with the ideological struggles of society. Ideas came to mean subject-matter in gen-

## A SINGULAR MODERNITY

eral. . . . This meant a new and greater emphasis upon form, and it also involved the assertion of the arts, as independent vocations, disciplines and crafts, absolutely autonomous, and entitled to respect for their own sakes.<sup>11</sup>

The history of avant-garde painting is that of a progressive surrender to the resistance of its medium; which resistance consists chiefly in the flat picture plane's denial of efforts to 'hole through' it for realistic perspectival space.<sup>12</sup>

Two discussions are necessary here – one on Greenberg's historical and political situation and one on the complex phenomenon of the transfer of a theory of painting to the other arts and media – before we come to some more general understanding of the way in which an idea of aesthetic autonomy gets constructed in the first place.

Greenberg's initial Marxism is well-known, and also the Trotskyist position from which a disillusion with Stalinism determines his separation of art from politics in general. These are, however, two relatively distinct frameworks. The Marxian stance posits an antagonism between modernism in the arts and its bourgeois context; and the levels within Marxism itself enable a slippage of the interpretation of that antagonism from an anti-capitalist position to an anti-bourgeois rhetoric. The latter, then, no longer grounded in an analysis of the socio-economic system, can easily deteriorate into social antipathies that no longer determine a politics at all, marking out an enclave position within bourgeois society which Greenberg's contemporary disciples have found themselves able to characterize as that of a 'loyal opposition to the bourgeoisie'. (This ingenious and risible twist would seem better to fit the role of many postmodern artists within an omnipresent commercialism, than that of either high or late modernism as such.)

## PART II: MODERNISM AS IDEOLOGY

The anti-Stalinist development, then, tends to overlay this anti-bourgeois position in such a way as to combine both left political praxis and the bourgeois public sphere into a single entity, identified as extrinsic to the work of art. Both the left insistence on politics and the bourgeois rhetoric of freedom get assimilated as 'the ideological struggles of society' in the passage quoted above. The latter constitute then 'content', or what Greenberg here calls 'ideas' or 'subject-matter'; and they make it possible to identify as politics itself, of whatever ideological persuasion, what must be excised from the work of art in order for it to become something more purely aesthetic (it being understood that the slogan of purity or 'pure poetry' is an older language).

But two advantages are thereby secured. First, the Marxian model can now be retained and developed in a new and startling form: the purification of the work and the extirpation of everything extrinsic to it can now be seen as the way in which art defends itself against a hostile environment (whether that be capitalism or simply middle-class prejudice). Greenberg's aesthetic programme can now be celebrated as 'art's instinct of self-preservation' against all the forces hostile to it, whether political or social alike.

Then too the new process – whereby art's true subject-matter becomes 'intrinsic' and is discovered to be the material medium itself – can now be reidentified with the modernist telos and with the New and innovation, and for its emergence a new genealogy can be constructed whose narrative turns precisely around this tendential elimination of the extrinsic (now grasped as figuration), on the way to some more complete 'surrender to the resistance of its medium'. This new teleological narrative – which can now organize and coordinate the various spasmodic claims for innovation in the classical period – also accounts for the

equally startling appropriation by Greenberg of the old term 'avant-garde', designed to transform his aesthetic into a manifesto and the painters he appreciates into a full-blown collective movement. But the older avant-gardes were scarcely pure or formalistic in this sense, and very specifically emphasized and passionately championed just that political mission and content (of whatever type) that Greenberg equally passionately wishes to banish from art.

Greenberg's greatness as an ideologist (if one can really distinguish it from his perceptual genius as a critic) was not only to have seen how to parlay these dilemmas in the social and political area into new aesthetic solutions in their own right; nor only to have found a way to reconstruct a modernist tradition in such a way that the new solutions come as the very climax of his new ideological narrative; but also to have known how to seize the day, and to have grasped the onset of the Cold War not as the end of hope and the paralysis of the productive energies of the preceding period, but rather as the signal opportunity to forge a brand-new ideology that co-opts and reawakens those energies and offers a whole new (aesthetic) blueprint for the future.

The second comment will deal with the problems posed by the transfer of such an ideology and such an aesthetic – so apparently medium-specific – to the other arts. It is a two-way street: we have to show not only how a celebration of the materials of oil painting and the surface of the canvas can possibly find any equivalents in, say, the language arts; but also why those arts should need the transfer in the first place, why they could not simply develop their own ideologies of autonomy independently (as indeed the New Critics seemed to have done for literature).

For we face a paradoxical situation in which literature, but even more specifically lyric poetry, non-narrative poetic

## PART II: MODERNISM AS IDEOLOGY

discourse, is positioned at the very centre (or summit) of some modernist *système des beaux arts*. It is a misleading claim, to the degree to which the representation of this putative status of the autonomy of art is itself unrepresentable. For does not poetry itself 'aspire to the condition of music'? Yet when one turns one's representational attention to music itself, is it not rather to be described as a poetic discourse from which the extrinsic dimension of meaning has been sublimated to the point of ineffability? Music is then figured as a kind of signification without content, a kind of absolute language which says nothing: except, in the next ideological move, itself, which it designates absolutely, in the void as it were. Thus, in a kind of circular flight, the various arts – better still, the media of the various arts – affirm their absolute quality only by borrowing representational features from the next (thus, Schelling famously said, 'architecture is a kind of frozen music'; and so forth).

So it is that if the autonomy of art means some absolute spiritualization or sublimation beyond the figural, it can dialectically equally well be represented in terms of an absolute materiality (Being and Nothingness, as Hegel pointed out, amounting to the same thing). The most paradoxical form of the equation will be that in which the materiality of language is affirmed, something that is surely meant to evoke a type of being a good deal loftier than those mere 'vibrations in the air' (of which Marx spoke) or that 'acoustic image' to which Saussure will consign his conception of the dimension of the Signifier (unaware of the extraordinary theoretical destiny reserved for this concept in more recent times). Surely the most consequential proponents of the materiality of language turn out to be those (from their different perspectives, Paul de Man and Jean-François Lyotard) who go all the way and affirm the ultimately

scandalous position that language is inhuman. The scandal is itself a two-way street: for the proposition can now effortlessly be appropriated by any number of spiritualisms (technically inhuman is then also the breath that God infused into his mortal and organic creation). But most often this materiality – the ultimate mind/body problem at this stage, in which a material language reveals its radical incompatibility with that other human capacity *par excellence* which is ‘consciousness’ – suggests the bestial. Thus Lacan’s notion of the emergence of the human organism into the alien element of the Symbolic Order has most often science-fictional overtones; language then becomes a strange property inflicted by a race of extraterrestrial travellers on the unhappy human animals they found wandering about the planet during their brief visit.

In reality, however, it is the demands of ideological representation that are acknowledged in such theories: the material ‘languages’ of Greenberg’s oil paint, the tangible gestuality required by canvas and the ‘painterly’ surface, lend the concept of the autonomous work of art a certain dramatic content, and enable us to talk about technique in some non-instrumental way. This is the sense in which literature, or a purely literary aesthetic, suffers from a profound envy of the other arts; it longs for the solidity of their teleological histories, and for the certainties and reassurances of their selected materialities. Literature – in the age of commodification – wishes it could be a thing, as the objects of the other arts seem to be; like Saint Anthony at the end of Flaubert’s vision it constantly murmurs its deepest longing: ‘Etre la matière!’

And this is why, after the very significant flirtation with the enviably substantial modernist aesthetic of painting, it fastens on that substitute or second-degree materiality of

## PART II: MODERNISM AS IDEOLOGY

artistic language as such, namely poetry and poetic language, which is then promoted to centrality over the other forms of the language arts. For all self-respecting ideologists of a literary modernism, then, a purely poetic discourse will constitute that fixed star towards which all other linguistic phenomena navigate at their peril; and the impossible ideal of some 'definition' of poetic language as such will become the better mousetrap of all modernist critics from the New Criticism onwards (and back behind them, of the older Russian and Czech Formalists). So it was that the first great crack in the edifice of modernist ideology is witnessed as early as 1957, when Northrop Frye (in *The Anatomy of Criticism*) asserts the equal primacy of narrative itself, followed in that by Barthes, the structuralists and semioticians, a rediscovered Bakhtin, certain Freudianisms, all of whom have offered so many nails for the coffin of the specifically modernist literary ideology.

But now we need to return to the preconditions of the construction of such an ideology in the first place. It might be argued that all of philosophical aesthetics was moving in this direction since Kant; or indeed that Kant himself is the very philosophical inventor of a doctrine that finds its historical fulfilment very precisely in these late ideologies of the modern. It is an important objection, founded on a historiography that organizes the historical record into continuities rather than reconstructing it as so many breaks and gaps; and it deserves a more extensive answer than I am able to give here.<sup>13</sup> I believe that Kant's aesthetics freed art from feudal decoration and positioned a new bourgeois art to carry Utopian and, later, modernist values. But it seems to me a historical mistake to reappropriate the Kantian system for an anti-political and purely aestheticizing late modernist ideology. This is yet another case in which, as so many

contemporary thinkers and historians have shown us, tradition is in fact a modern and even a contemporary, a postcontemporary or postmodern invention, and the citation of authorities from the past is little more than a kind of pastiche. The autonomy of art today stands for little more than high literature as such, which is to say modernism and its canon.

But I need to support these opinions – for expressed in this way they are little more than personal opinions – with some account of the operations whereby the notion of autonomy is constructed in the first place, the enabling act that is its precondition.

One would think it was an easy matter: the autonomy of art is surely secured by separating art from non-art; by purging it of its extrinsic elements, such as the sociological or the political; by reclaiming aesthetic purity from the morass of real life, of business and money, and bourgeois daily life, all around it. This is, however, in my opinion not the case at all, even though the ideologists of the aesthetic have described their achievement in that way and have made such separation of the aesthetic from everything non-aesthetic (and all the other academic disciplines) the cornerstone of their position and the very definition of aesthetic autonomy as such.

What remains true in this position is only the act of separation or disjunction as such, but it does not take place exactly where they designated it. The autonomy of the aesthetic is not secured by separating the aesthetic from a real life of which Kant showed it was never a part in the first place. Rather, it is achieved by a radical dissociation within the aesthetic itself: by the radical disjunction and separation of literature and art from culture. (This is for example why

## PART II: MODERNISM AS IDEOLOGY

T.S. Eliot's project of a restoration of culture is not congenial for late modernism.)

For what is called culture in all its forms is rather an identification of the aesthetic with this or that type of daily life. It is therefore from culture that art as such – high art, great art, however you wish to celebrate it – must be differentiated; and this operation takes place historically only at the very beginning of the television age, when what will later on be stigmatized as mass culture is in its infancy.

In fact, however, all the great theoreticians and ideologists of the autonomy of art, the ideologists of modernism (as opposed to its genuine practitioners), from Greenberg to Adorno, and passing through the American New Criticism, are in agreement that the concept of culture is the true enemy of art as such; and that if one opens the door to 'culture', everything currently reviled under the term of cultural studies pours in and leaves pure art and pure literature irredeemably tainted. But it should be obvious that this monitory differentiation is very far indeed from a separation between the aesthetic and the non-aesthetic: rather it is a disjunction internal to the very sphere of the cultural itself, internal to the aesthetic in its widest sense, for high art and literature are in that sense as cultural as television, while advertising and pop culture are as aesthetic as Wallace Stevens or Joyce.

Nor is it difficult to see why this foundational move needs to be made: culture, from Schiller and Hegel on (and as late as Eliot), is pre-eminently the space of mediation between society or everyday life and art as such. Culture is the place where these dimensions interact in either direction: art ennobling everyday life (as Matthew Arnold wished), or social life on the contrary trivializing and degrading art and the aesthetic. Culture thus stands as the blurring of the bound-

aries and the space of passages and movements back and forth, the locus of transmutation and translation from one level or dimension to the other. If one sees this ambiguous space as mediation, as the greatest artists have always done, then the social pole of culture stands not only as content and raw material, it also offers the fundamental context in which art, even in its modernist form as the Absolute – especially in its modernist form as the Absolute – has a genuine function to redeem and transfigure a fallen society. If on the other hand, like the critics and theorists I mentioned, one feels a malaise in the face of this blurring of the boundaries, an anxiety about the indeterminacy in which it necessarily leaves the work of art itself, it then becomes crucial to break the link, to sever this dialectical movement, to challenge and philosophically to discredit the concept of culture, in order to protect the space of art against further incursions or contamination. I should add that the specialists on the other side of this new boundary – the social scientists – are not necessarily hostile to such a move on the part of the aestheticizing modernist critics. For this radical disjunction protects their disciplines as well: it makes of culture some minor realm of inquiry in sociology, but above all it cleanses and purifies their various theories and inquiries from all those questions about culture and ideology and consciousness that are so messy and troublesome and that threaten to reintroduce the non-quantifiables of human freedom back into a carefully delimited and positivizing, testable, falsifiable, area of tests and questionnaires, of statistics. It should be added that the disjunction of culture and art, which in the eyes of the social scientists restores art and the aesthetic to that sandbox in which they rightly belong, has the added advantage of shielding their disciplines from that onslaught of sheer theory that has emanated from the so-called human

## PART II: MODERNISM AS IDEOLOGY

sciences over the last forty years. Thus, on all sides, the will arises to reduce culture to a pejorative word: culture is bad culture, mass culture, commercial culture. The humanists can surrender it without qualms to autopsy by the social sciences, leaving literature untouched and out of reach, in an area in which its own specialists can continue their work undisturbed by extrinsic questions.

But this Literature is in fact a new invention: it does not stand for the immense archive of representational and cultural (indeed overwhelmingly religious) material accumulated over the ages of human history: rather it is in fact that quite delimited historical phenomenon called modernism (along with such fragments of the past as modernism has chosen to rewrite in its own image). So we have here several identifications: high literature and high art mean the aesthetic minus culture, the aesthetic field radically cleansed and purified of culture (which mainly stands for mass culture). The fighting slogan of this new value has developed in recent years (at least in the United States) into that new and old expression 'the canon', which is to say simply the list of great books, 'the best of all that has been thought and said', as our right-wingers like to quote Matthew Arnold. The term and concept has the advantage of proposing an alliance between the older philologists (if there are any left), who have a genuine historical interest in and commitment to the past, and the newer aesthetes who are the true ideologists of some (late) modern. It thus serves to disguise the basic reality I want to insist on here, namely that this purely aesthetic or artistic canon, on closer inspection, stands revealed as little more than modernism itself.

But if it cannot be deduced, as a kind of organic and evolutionary development, out of the aesthetic heritage of Kant, what we are now calling the ideology of modernism must be thought of as an ideological project, on which any number of individuals have laboured collectively, without necessarily being aware of the historic task in which they are severally involved. More than that, it must be seen as a project that re-emerges over and over again with the various national situations as a specific and unique national-literary task or imperative, whose cross-cultural kinship with its neighbours is not always evident (either at home or abroad). And when we reckon in that unevenness of development of which we have already spoken above, the non-synchronous dynamic of various belated or premature modernisms, their 'catching-up' (in Habermassian terminology) or indeed their untimely exhaustion, a multitemporal and multilineal picture of the construction of the ideology of modernism emerges which cannot be flattened out into any simple model of influence or of cultural and poetic imperialism, of cross-cultural diffusion or of teleological virtuality (even though all these options offer locally satisfying narratives).

We are obliged, therefore, to exercise selectivity and to sketch in just a few of these parallel yet utterly distinct and historically specific trajectories. We have already, in very

different contexts, touched on the late aesthetics of both Paul de Man and T.W. Adorno, and indeed each is certainly to be counted as a modernist in his own fashion (as are, philosophically and aesthetically, yet in their various unique ways, Deleuze, Lyotard and Foucault, whose 'poststructuralism' – to raise a flag of heated debate and passionate discord – might rather have seemed consistent with some larger narrative of the postmodern).

But what is important in de Man and Adorno (in the present context) is the way in which in their late work a full-throated ideology of the modern reaches a moment of true self-critical and 'reflexive' ambiguity which can be said to cast doubt on the whole ideological project, but as it were from the other side, and after having gone all the way through it. Their stories can thus be told in two distinct ways: and the option that consists in seeing them as supreme and richly conceptual exponents of some more widely shared late modernist aestheticism is surely far less interesting than the reading according to which each keeps faith with a deeply rooted dissatisfaction with the trivializations of the merely aesthetic which propels them towards a deconstruction of the autonomy of art on the one hand and a reinvention of the classical modernist Absolute on the other: in short, an effort to articulate the vocation of art to be somehow more than mere art.

These positions are therefore too complex to serve as mere illustrations of a trend or tendency, and I propose therefore to spend a moment or two on other ideological constructs – no less rigorously conceptualized and of genuine philosophical intensity – which more clearly mark the specificity of the French and the German post-1945 literary situations respectively. These situations are, to be sure, virtually the reverse of each other as far as modernism is concerned: for we

conventionally assume that the French tradition of modernism is in many ways the oldest of all, going back to Baudelaire and Flaubert and the pre-revolutionary 1840s; while in Germany, current (post-1989) convention has it that the rich modernisms of the Weimar period are not really reinvented or completed even with the Gruppe 47 after World War II, now seen as having been too political or politicized to have laid the basis for some truly aesthetic late modernist renewal.

To put it this way, however, implies the existence of a norm for the development of modernism and its aesthetics: some master evolutionary line from which each of these national developments can be grasped as a kind of deviation (however historically determined). I have said that the ideology of modernism is in many ways an American phenomenon and an American invention; but this will (justifiably) be discounted as an American point of view on the matter. What I would rather argue here is a position that takes its lead from Marx's description of capitalism, for which each national trajectory – including the central illustration, and the oldest one, of British capitalism as such – is uniquely overdetermined by the empirical specificities of the national cultural and historical situation as such, in such a way that – although in the abstraction there exists an inescapable and irreversible dynamic of the development of capitalism as such – there is no 'basic' historical paradigm, all the paths of capitalist development are unique and unrepeatable. What is dialectical about this argument can be formulated as a very different conception of the relationship between universals and particulars to what obtains for bourgeois empiricism or common sense, namely that the particular is something you range beneath a universal as its mere example, and the universal is something under which you range the particular as a mere type. For the dialectic the universal is a conceptual

construction that can never know any empirical embodiment or realization: all of its particulars are also specific and historically unique, and the function of the universal in analysis is not to reduce them all to identity but rather to allow each to be perceived in its historical difference.

This is at any rate the spirit in which I wish to argue that it is in the work of Maurice Blanchot that we will observe the most suggestive and enlightening construction of some properly French 'ideology of modernism' or 'ideology of aesthetic autonomy'. To be sure, such an argument involves a powerful and provocative renarrativization of a long and complicated career, of which many alternate versions already exist. Blanchot can be (and has been) seen as a novelist who gradually became a critic and a literary theorist, either because of the formal exhaustion of his initial Kafkaesque forms, or (what amounts perhaps to the same thing) because of the gradual intensification of his consciousness of the pure act of writing as such. He can be seen (which is also true) as a right-wing nationalist and ideologist in the 1930s, whose anti-German and anti-Hitlerian nationalism leads him to political disillusionment and depoliticization early enough in the game for honour to be saved, and who rediscovers the pure form of the collective political gesture in the postwar movement of protest against the Algerian war and in the great convulsion of May '68 that eventually followed. He can, finally, be seen as the quintessential literary theorist (or ideologist) of a certain poststructuralist textuality or textualization, the productivity of his eclectic groundwork acknowledged from their very different perspectives by Foucault and Derrida alike.<sup>14</sup>

These are all, as I observed, viable and persuasive narratives, which do satisfying work within the contexts for which they are constructed. Mine will be quite different, and will

concentrate on those purely literary essays (mostly review columns for various reviews and journals) which marked the relatively fallow period between the bitter end of Blanchot's fascist commitment and the onset of the great wars of national independence of the postwar period. The collections in which these essays are largely assembled, *Faux pas* and *La Part du feu*, are generally neglected in favour of the more mystical and absolute statements of the early structuralist years, such as *L'Espace littéraire* and *Le Livre à venir*, if not for even more pronounced poststructuralist (and even post-poststructuralist) statements such as *L'Amitié*, *L'Écriture du désastre*, or *La Communauté inopérante*. There is an obvious reason for this neglect: with two single exceptions (one in each book), the earlier essays are all very narrowly critical and author- or text-specific, ranging from local studies of Balzac and Molière, or Pascal and Mallarmé, Baudelaire and Lautréamont, to appreciations of Kafka and Hölderlin, Henry Miller and Nietzsche, Kierkegaard and Faulkner, Musil and Rilke, Jünger and Uwe Johnson, Blake and the Hindu scriptures. Blanchot has interesting things to say about all these foreigners (as well as about his own classics), but the reader may be excused for ultimately coming to the conclusion that what he has to say about all of them is somehow always the same, and that the interest is an interest in one single omnipresent yet perhaps narrow and specialized thought, which has to do with the paradoxes of the text or of reading, in the so-called poststructuralist period.<sup>15</sup> The various writers and literary texts may then easily be taken to be so many vehicles or pretexts for the restatement of a philosophical experience he then attempts to formulate head-on in some less mediated way, in the two theoretical essays entitled 'De l'angoisse au langage' (in *Faux*

*pas*) and ‘La littérature et le droit à la mort’ (in *La Part du feu*).

But it is first of all precisely this process of reduction and precisely this monotony that is our exhibit here: and this can be shown to be an operation with two indispensable moments or steps. In the first, the narrower circle of an autonomous French culture and literary history is opened up to the larger postwar international community that at the end of World War II replaced the essentially European space of the great rival powers of both world wars; and this is a more dramatic gesture than the mere addition of this or that foreign title (it is well known that writers like Faulkner and Hammett already had an enthusiastic French readership in the 1930s). One does not have to raise the cliché of some earlier French chauvinism or cultural Malthusianism to see how Blanchot’s remarkable appreciations placed the Americans centre-stage after the war (and with them any number of other potentially exciting foreign and international literary traditions); and also to grasp the value of the gesture that resituates German literature itself at once immediately after the Occupation. This is, then, first a powerful reconstruction of a literary canon which had in prewar days been almost exclusively French.

That he should then say ‘the same thing’ about all these different books, that he should celebrate each one in its turn as a rehearsal of the interminable paradoxes of the act of writing itself – this is then the crucial second step. For each work then, whatever its period or language, whatever its immediate national or cultural-political situation, is also seen as participating in a ritual that is forever the same, the ritual of literary writing, the celebration of what we are here calling the autonomy of art. For this is the true originality of

Blanchot: if it is said that Mallarmé, or after him Valéry, developed this notion of the reflexivity of the act of writing long before Blanchot, then it must be added that for them such self-consciousness projected a new kind of literature which remained to be produced, and for which their aesthetics stood as a kind of manifesto. For Blanchot, on the other hand, every act of writing is posited as already presupposing and including just such reflexivity, which is a moment of all literature, and not just 'le livre à venir'. Yet these essays, of a seemingly modest and topical ambition, do in fact project a programme in their own right: but it is an aesthetic, or better still, an aesthetico-ideological, programme, and not a stylistic or literary one: it involves the construction of a new concept of literature, very different from that of the (specifically French) schools and movements (symbolisme, existentialism), which had governed the writing of literary history hitherto. Nor does this simply mean an enlargement of a French canon to an international one: it involves the replacement of a national conception of the various arts along with conflicting ideological positions on their various social and historical functions with a new conception of the autonomy of the aesthetic in which Blanchot is able shrewdly to acknowledge the content of these various social and historical, ideological and political, levels, at the same time that he transforms them all, by an extraordinary sleight of hand, into a single eternal gesture of literary writing and the literary act.

But how is this achieved? For it was achieved in France, and so universally and imperceptibly that the *nouveau roman*, when it replaced the literary existentialisms with its own more literary and aesthetic forms, scarcely acknowledged Blanchot's preparation of the terrain and scarcely seemed to need to do so.

The titles of the two programme essays I mentioned before give us clues as to the nature of the operation. For the word 'angoisse' in the first title clearly enough designates the central concept of Sartrean existentialism (which I have long thought was better translated as 'anxiety' rather than 'anguish'); while the appearance of 'la mort' in the second turns out to reference the French revolutionary tradition and in particular Hegel's description of the Terror. Yet as extra-literary or extrinsic as both of these philosophical concepts may at first seem, it must be understood that formally each dramatizes a certain kind of autonomy: for Sartre, anxiety, as the consciousness of freedom, has no content and is perpetually with me, underneath the surface, where I try to keep it concealed and from which it erupts, in a movement that wipes the slate clean and is somehow absolute; while Hegel's Terror is in fact absolute, a pure revolutionary freedom which threatens the content of all individual lives universally and thereby those of its instigators and the very life of the Revolution itself as well. These are apparently overly dramatic equivalents indeed for the purely literary gesture.

Yet both essays pursue an unremitting and unequalled, implacable, rooting out of the various 'interests' that could taint or sully the Kantian disinterested act. Everything that could conceivably *motivate* the act of writing – from self-expression to communication, and running the gamut of all the conventional justifications for art as such – is unmasked as an impossible contradiction. Even the conclusion 'he writes to say nothing and because he has nothing to say, he writes to demonstrate the impossibility of writing' is itself undermined, and the absolute negativity with which we are thereby left – 'le non qui n'est pas non à ceci, à cela, à tout, mais le non pur et simple'<sup>16</sup> – is itself meaningless. Blanchot's

greatness lies in this absolute excess, whereby the logic of the autonomous and the intrinsic is pushed to its ultimate limit and its ultimate meaninglessness (without, however, the pathos of thematization, and without threatening to undermine the aesthetic position itself, as it risks doing in de Man or Adorno).

Now we can better appreciate the function of the existential or revolutionary analogy. Each of these concepts – anxiety and the Terror – has already achieved a thoroughgoing purification of that extrinsic outside world in which it operates: the variety of human feelings and emotions is obliterated in its differences and into an intense consciousness of freedom that has no content; while the Terror achieves much the same absolute and democratic formalism for society itself (and also for History).<sup>17</sup> Now the new ideology will be sealed by an exchange between these terms: that of aesthetic autonomy will be ratified by its replication in the form of the existential or the political, which promotes it to something like a supreme value; while the very content of the existential and the political categories will be imperceptibly withdrawn and volatilized by their aesthetic analogue, leaving an ambiguous situation in which modernist affirmation can still be endowed with political or existential justification when need be, but where existential commitment and political praxis to come (May '68) are somehow already suspiciously 'aestheticized', as Benjamin put it in a memorable pre-war moment.

The German case will be altogether different from this one. The 'incomplete modernity' of the German situation and its forced opening onto the outside (in philosophy and sociology as well as in literature) make a crash course in cosmopolitanism unnecessary, but render a detour through the past and a reconstruction of a properly German way to

modernism indispensable. Karl-Heinz Bohrer, editor of the *Merkur* and a conservative polemicist of incisive vigour, offers an anti-dialectical aesthetic which is both original and characteristic, notably in his essays in *Plötzlichkeit* (translated as *Suddenness: On the Moment of Aesthetic Appearance*).<sup>18</sup> The antipolitical thrust of this aesthetic is necessarily more overt, owing not only to the 'engagement' of postwar German literature and the existence of a German Democratic Republic next door, but more immediately to the Marxian orientation of the then hegemonic Frankfurt School. (Habermas's parallel effort, on the left, aims rather at transforming these still powerfully dialectical positions into an undialectical, essentially social-democratic and reformist, theory of modernity in the famous doctrine of a recovery of modernity's 'incomplete project'; Habermas's conception of the aesthetic as such is a secondary and ancillary one.) Yet the existence of an influential secondary and oppositional current in the German tradition, in Romanticism and the Schlegels as well as in Schelling, and in Nietzsche as well as in Heidegger and Carl Schmitt, makes it possible to assimilate related features of the contemporaneous French poststructuralism to some properly indigenous stance; at the same time the centrality and prestige of German philosophy make it necessary to accompany a sharply anti-historicist and anti-political argument (unnecessary in that form either in France or in the United States) with a decisive differentiation of the aesthetic from philosophy as such (a rather different inaugural autonomization, paradoxically secured by the properly philosophical authorization of Kant's exclusion of the 'concept' from aesthetic appearance and judgement).

The conception of 'suddenness', the radical temporal break, the rewriting of the new in terms of a concrete experience of time, and of the phenomenological identifica-

tion of a temporality that supersedes the time of continuity and of historical elaboration, now enables Bohrer to disengage a pure form, that of the moment or the instant, around which the new aesthetic can be organized. His work then shuttles back and forth between the contingent experience of 'suddenness' (a novel and productive instrument, as he observes, for the analysis of fictional as well as poetic texts) and the abstract concept of the moment as a basis for the rewriting of more properly aesthetic categories. Yet this very mediatory possibility is what sets fateful limits to this operation at the same time that it enables a range of historical and philosophical references.

The very violence with which the experience of suddenness tears the present of time out of its continuum and allows it to subsist in a kind of strange autonomy can then be transferred onto the conceptual level, where the now-dominant form of the moment declares its independence from the synchronic as well as the diachronic texture of history and historical temporality. This is the point at which the concept of the moment can be autonomized as that of 'aesthetic appearance divorced from being . . . [and] bought at the price of the surrender of historical categories'<sup>19</sup> (an argument for which Nietzsche is the central figure and exemplar); or, more exactly, at which the more restricted claim can be made that 'the concept of appearance is . . . compatible with history, but its "phenomenal" character resists any temporal determination'.<sup>20</sup> This is then a construction of the autonomy of the aesthetic in terms of temporality, rather than in terms of some implicit notion of the incommensurable levels of social life, and it enables a rather different argument against history and the political than what is to be found in Greenberg. The appropriation of the Benjamin of the final 'Theses on History' is characteristic and may be seen as an

aesthetization of Benjaminian 'political decisionism' and of the denunciation of progress and continuous time (concepts most commonly read as Benjamin's critique of Second International and Stalinist conceptions of history):

If we look at Benjamin's metaphor of the moment in the light of [European literary modernism], then our task is to emphasize its nature as moment without resorting to the concept of an actual Messiah. Put in terms of these literary models, the topos of the suddenly appearing moment does not point to a Messiah but rather is the moment of a political aesthetics of perception.<sup>21</sup>

The position is far bolder than analogous contemporary 'post-Benjaminian' reflections on Messianism (let alone on 'literary communism'), and makes the agenda a good deal clearer. For Bohrer will now adduce the momentaneities of the classical moderns (Proust, Joyce's epiphanies, Musil's 'other state') to posit the transfer of a properly Utopian moment from Utopian (and revolutionary) politics in real time to that of the realm of aesthetic appearance.

Yet the very possibility of such a 'transfer' demands closer examination: we have been using the notion of transfer as a way of theorizing the reinvestment of energy from one paradigm to another as one of the conditions of possibility of the emergence of the new structure (here, and elsewhere in our present context, that of aesthetic autonomy). Bohrer's return to the Romantics, however, identifies the situation of the transfer with greater historical precision, and offers a historical genealogy of that 'mode' which he will characterize as an 'aesthetic of perception':

That mode guaranteed or at least anticipated something structurally new, and it also corresponded directly to Schlegel's and Kleist's reflections on the French Revolu-

tion. Suddenness, the category of radical temporalization so central to the modern literary awareness, is no esoteric cipher but has a concrete and elementary reference. The fragmentary nature of romantic literature – Adorno described it formalistically as a method and an intellectual style; it is commonly misunderstood as random association – this fragmentary nature is the appearance of the sudden in prose. It is only through suddenness that the constellation is created with which the aesthetic figures of romantic prose – paradox, cipher, irony in Schlegel, and emotional excitement and astonishment in Kleist – are always firmly bound to the perception or intelligibility of an event in the historical, revolutionary process. The despised romantic ‘occasionalism’ is the morality of the split second, the annunciation of the potentially universal for the particular. At certain times, however, specific sentences are more dangerous than general principles. That is true of Kleist’s sentence: ‘Perhaps, in this manner, it was finally the twitch of an upper lip or the ambiguous fingering of a cuff that actually toppled the order of things in France.’<sup>22</sup>

It is characteristic, and supremely revealing, that Bohrer’s trajectory should here intersect with that of Blanchot, traced above. For the evocation of the French Revolution as the very prototype of that ‘instant’ that will then reorganize aesthetics and literature (in its modernist ‘suddenness’) alike, is, as we have seen, more precisely identified by Blanchot as the Terror (as it is theorized famously by Hegel). The appeal to this foundational moment – a moment in time and in history, which is nonetheless grasped as a moment that finally separates itself from time and from history – is evidently grounded in an even more preliminary choice between two paradigms of revolution as such, and in the

supersession of notions of revolution as process by that of Revolution as a single apocalyptic moment.

This is why it is important to affirm, over against Bohrer, that although his depoliticized and indeed anti-political aesthetic of the moment may well 'resist any temporal determination', it cannot do without historical preconditions. Even if the aesthetic moment is itself outside of time, even if the conception of artistic modernism as a stepping out of time and history be accepted, it is an experience that is surely not available or accessible at every moment of history, but only at certain moments of possibility which have their own unique and characteristic structure, which history has itself 'determined'. This is the sense in which even the ahistorical must be historically explained; and Bohrer's victory over Marxism's alleged propensity to ground the modernist works in their historical situation is short-lived indeed.

Two more comments will conclude our discussion of this original and provocative construction of a belated ideology of the modern in the German post-1960s. The first is that Bohrer's moment out of time is a singularly unstable proposition which risks either falling backwards into the timelessness of aesthetics that lay claim to cover all aesthetic experience from the ancient Greeks to the present (today, such an aesthetic would have to be expanded to envelop other cultures altogether); or being capsized prematurely into spiritualism and some properly Bergsonian doctrine of eternity (for Bergson, in analogy to the aesthetics of Baudelaire himself, the present in time is doubled by a strange and identical present out of time which is explicitly identified as eternity).

Deleuze is not referenced in Bohrer's work here; yet an analogy with the Deleuzian return to Bergson may be pertinent and revealing above and beyond that interesting nation-

alist impulse that leads both writers to search out indigenous precursors for their essentially post-historical systems. The first intimations of Bergsonianism in Deleuze can perhaps be found retrospectively in the well-known conception of an ideal schizophrenia proposed by the *Anti-Oedipus*: already a perpetual present, outside 'normal' phenomenological time, and a liberation and disengagement from the shackles of the past (the family, and its alleged reinforcement by Freudianism) and of the future (work and the capitalist routine). We may leave aside the question of whether this prophetic concept – in which, as opposed to the ego-fortress of the paranoid, the Deleuzian schizophrenic stands as a hero of true freedom – does not simply replicate one of the most fundamental rhythms of capitalism, namely its reduction to the present, rather than constituting a critique of it. At any rate, Deleuze tells us that he abandoned the notion in the face of all the tragedies and devastation of the drug culture among his students in the 1970s,<sup>23</sup> replacing it with the more interestingly collective concept of the nomadic horde or guerrilla unit. It is a move that suggests that the ideological and paradigmatic alternative to the aesthetization of the moment lies in a revival of anarchism. But I believe that the older atemporal temptation resurfaces in one of the most enigmatic and yet central innovations of late Deleuze (essentially in the film books) as what he calls virtuality. This is as it were a new and different way of making the present self-sufficient and independent from those dimensions of past and future from which the earlier concept of the schizophrenic also wished to escape: and this very precisely by way of Bergsonian idealism, in which a flimsy present comes gradually to be thickened and autonomized by the complementary reality of eternity itself. Deleuzian virtuality has been saluted as the first new philosophical conceptualization

of the computer and cyberspace, but its spiritualist and Bergsonian origins put a more suspicious face on the matter, and minimally suggest that it is not so easy to find a materialist way out of time or indeed out of history (even after the latter has 'ended').

The other comment has to do with the fate of an aesthetic like Bohrer's in some new postmodern dispensation from which the very effort to re-create an ideology of the modern and of aesthetic autonomy has evaporated. But as the example of Deleuze suggests, the attempt to theorize a powerful form of the moment outside of time may well survive its purely philosophico-aesthetic context and live on in other related areas. I by no means intend to replay the *ad hominem* (and essentially East German) attacks on Bohrer as the author of an impressive and elaborate study on Ernst Jünger and his 'aesthetics of terror';<sup>24</sup> but we do not have to characterize Jünger as a Nazi writer to underscore, as Bohrer does consistently, the intimate relationship between violence as content and the 'moment' as form. For there is a demonstrable slippage between the temporal violence with which the empty form of the moment is disengaged from the continuum of time and the awareness that it is the very experience of empirical violence itself that offers a supremely privileged content for the representation of such a form. Ironically, in postmodernity, the loftier status of the example of the French Revolution is here replaced by the proliferation of what can be called violence pornography in mass culture. This historical and contemporary development then augurs poorly for the outcome of that call for a reinvention of classical modernism in our time that the aesthetics of Bohrer (like Lyotard's cyclical account of postmodernism) so eloquently stages.

It would be tempting to conclude this sketch of ideologies

## A SINGULAR MODERNITY

of modernism and of aesthetic autonomy with a return to the source, as it were, and a consideration of the aesthetics of Wallace Stevens, supremely the example of such a construction in the 'original' US context. Perhaps Harold Bloom's account of the way in which Stevens's work has as its precondition the repression and transformation of Whitman can serve to suggest the direction such a discussion might have taken.<sup>25</sup> In any case, the name of Stevens, as the originator of poetry that is at one and the same time modernist theory, and of theory that is at one and the same time modernist poetry, can serve as a bridge to our next and last section.

For it is now time to conclude by sketching in the concrete context in which the ideology of modernism came into being. Indeed, ideology is not only to be characterized negatively as what used to be called ‘false consciousness’, it is also, positively and necessarily, always the theory of a practice; and in the current instance, the ideology of modernism and of the autonomy of art is the theory of that practice we have called late modernism or neo-modernism,<sup>26</sup> the survival and transformation of more properly modernist creative impulses after World War II.

To be sure, at this stage in our argument we can retrospectively grasp the distinction between a theory of the modern and a practice of late modernism as an artificial one, imposed on us by the demands of exposition (or *Darstellung*). For insofar as the neo-modern is a replay and a repetition of high modernist practice as such, what guides such practice and enables it in the first place is very precisely that moment in which the modern has been theorized and conceptually named and identified in terms of the autonomy of the aesthetic. Thus, it is the very emergence of some full-blown ideology of modernism that differentiates the practices of the late modern from modernism proper.

This very theoretical certainty – the codification of the older modernist practices and their organization into a convention that serves as a model – has often been characterized

## A SINGULAR MODERNITY

as a kind of reflexivity which is then projected backwards onto some initial modernist practice itself. But that reflexivity is in fact utterly distinct from the autoreferentiality or self-designation we have identified in the moderns themselves; and before touching briefly on two paradigm cases of the neo-modern – in the works of Nabokov and Beckett – we need to grasp the fundamental difference between these two historical moments.

The classical moderns – to continue to use this rather unsatisfactory designation whose awkward and problematic status itself derives from the very historical difference we here seek to clarify, insofar as it reflects the difference between an untheorized and nameless practice and the newly theorized and conceptually identified and conventionally named and recognized productions – the high moderns as such were reflexive or self-conscious about representation itself. Most often they allowed representation to follow its own semi-autonomous course, according to its own inner logic: that is to say that they allowed it to separate itself from its content and its object, and as it were to deconstruct itself. They were content to foreground what we may call the arbitrariness of the signifier (rather than that of the sign), releasing the signifying material to demonstrate its own dilemmas and internal contradictions, those – following Greenberg's terminology – of the medium itself rather than whatever object it might have sought to 'represent'.

But the reflexivity I want to attribute to the late modernists is very different from this one (which of course also continues to inform their own work): the late modernist reflexivity has to do with the status of the artist as modernist, and involves a constant and self-conscious return to art about art, and art about the creation of art. This status is a fundamentally different one, psychologically and socially,

from the modernist and proto-modernist or Romantic notion of the artist as seer or as the guardian of the Absolute.

Yet the late modernists took that modern vision of the artist who is more than a mere artist as their model: and here we meet the paradoxes of repetition, which, as has so often been said, can never take place in any first time, but is always second when it first happens. I can try to say this another way by suggesting that the situation of the first or classical modernists can never be repeated since they themselves already exist. The classical modernists came into a world without models (or at best with religious and prophetic ones), a world without any pre-existing social role to fill. For they did not for the most part wish to become professional artists in any standard nineteenth-century sense of the *métier* and the apprenticeship. Nor did they wish to endorse a system of artistic genres in which the task of the artist is simply to replicate a given form and to supply new examples of it (with whatever distinctive twist). These first moderns seek support in patronage wherever possible, rather than in the market; and for the learning of the *métier*, they substitute fantasmatic images of the supreme works of the past, such as Dante's *Commedia*. Their freedoms are utterly blind and groping; they know no identifiable public ('I write for myself and for strangers,' Gertrude Stein famously said). And in the absence of any determinate social status or function – they are neither artists in the conventional sense nor intellectuals – they borrow all kinds of windy notions of genius and inspiration from the Romantic era, and surround themselves as much as possible with disciples who endorse these private languages and offer a simulacrum of the new Utopian community.

So my fundamental point is this: that the first modernists had to operate in a world in which no acknowledged or

codified social role existed for them and in which the very form and concept of their own specific 'works of art' were lacking. But for those I have been calling late modernists, this is no longer the case at all; and Nabokov is unlike Joyce first and foremost by virtue of the fact that Joyce already existed and that he can serve as a model, not to speak of a scripture and the space of some 'subject supposed to know', some absolute Other.

Such imitation was unavailable to the classical modernists, whose works designate their process of production as an analogical level of allegory, in order to make a place for themselves in a world which does not contain their 'idea'; this formal autoreferentiality is then utterly different from the poems about poetry and novels about artists in which the late modernists designate themselves in their content. This is not to minimize the extraordinary qualities of the late moderns but merely to insist on their more classifiable relationship to the new concept of modernism itself.

The ostentation with which Nabokov re-enacts his aesthetic certainties is as symptomatic of this new situation as is Beckett's reticence and the *pudeu* with which (in German) he permits himself the theorizations of his 'Letter to Axel Kaun',<sup>27</sup> not to speak of his even more unspoken discomfort with everything 'allegorical' about *Waiting for Godot*. This discomfort no doubt has to do with the externalities of the Lucky-Pozzo episodes, as distinguished from the quite different representational schema of the Vladimir-Estragon frame, whose doubling in the form of the pseudo-couple precludes allegorical events just as surely as it evades subjective expression and anything that could be psychologically interpreted. That dimension (which will triumphantly be rewritten as *Endgame*) spells out in advance the operations

necessary for the construction of an autonomous work: the pure repetitive loop from which content is decisively excluded (the master–slave format passing over into the Hamm–Clov relationship as one of ‘mere’ neurotic dependency motivated by the physical handicaps borrowed from Vladimir and Estragon). We will have understood something fundamental about late modernism by grasping everything that came to seem unacceptable to Beckett himself in the allegorical schema that staged the British Empire (Pozzo) in its relationship to its colonies in general and Ireland in particular (Lucky): to be sure, this schema also included the dramatization of self-expression and thinking – Lucky’s incomprehensible monologue, which is also explicitly a command performance, and in which that extraordinary development of Irish modernism is re-enacted, from which Beckett himself emerged, but from which he equally wished to free and to distance himself (by continental exile). Evidently this kind of historical and national self-designation in the figure of an artist who is also literally a ‘lackey of imperialism’ was formally undesirable; yet we must inevitably juxtapose it with the formal splendour of the same kind of national allegory in Nabokov’s *Lolita*, one of the rare and unquestionable masterpieces of the late modern.

Here too, as has so often been observed, we confront an allegory of the passionate attraction, for a world-weary and overcultured (high literary) Europe, of that brash and vulgar adolescent United States and its mass culture: the personification, for that sealed and doomed Europe, no longer the centre of the world but definitively marginalized by the Marshall Plan and the Cold War, of an America whose unpredictable future Hegel himself had already celebrated, in a famous passage of the *Philosophy of History*:

America is therefore the land of the future, where, in the ages that lie before us, the burden of the World's History shall reveal itself – perhaps in a contest between North and South America. It is a land of desire for all those who are weary of the historical lumber-room of old Europe. Napoleon is reported to have said: 'Cette vieille Europe m'ennuie.' It is for America to abandon the ground on which hitherto the History of the World has developed itself. What *has* taken place in the New World up to the present time is only an echo of the Old World – the expression of a foreign Life; and as a Land of the Future, it has no interest for us here, for, as regards *History*, our concern must be with that which has been and that which is. In regard to *Philosophy*, on the other hand, we have to do with that which (strictly speaking) is neither past nor future, but with that which is, which has an eternal existence – with Reason; and this is quite sufficient to occupy us.<sup>28</sup>

*Lolita's* overtly allegorical structure could not be disguised or sublimated by the more fantastic embroideries of *Pale Fire*, where it persists in the double plot linking the American poet and the 'Balkan' king-in-exile. Nor, given Nabokov's equally ostentatious repudiation of Freudian psychoanalysis as sheer content, is the overlay of the libidinal – something like a relatively innocent and unperverse, newly named 'perversion' in the caricatural form of an 'attraction' to 'nymphets' – any more explicable in its own terms, without the assimilation of the *Lolita* figure to an allegory, not only of art but of the new world-language-to-be, American English; and the transfer of the dialectic of modernist teleology – the aesthetic taboos, the rhythms of technique and transgression – onto more officially moral and sexual prohibitions. Both Beckett's and Nabokov's allegorical 'solutions'

## PART II: MODERNISM AS IDEOLOGY

are unstable and one-time affairs: but where Nabokov's realization is unrepeatable, and followed by more predictable imitations of the masters (in particular, with the pretentious *Ada*), we will see that Beckett's form proves propitious for a transition into a more productive late modern area.

The condition of possibility of both allegories is exile itself: and we now need to specify the historical differences between this constitutive condition of the late modern and the seemingly analogous situations of the earlier modern writers (not to speak of the more obvious break when, later on, exile becomes migration as such, and the pathos of the political refugee becomes the multiculturalism of the 'guest worker'). For Joyce was evidently still in Ireland throughout his 'exile', while Proust was just as surely in exile in his Paris apartment; Judaism was surely a more fundamental form of exile for Kafka than the political vicissitudes that dogged Beckett's life in France, let alone those that drove Nabokov to America, or immobilized Gombrowicz in Buenos Aires.

I think that it is Deleuze's theory of the 'minor language' that will help us clarify these distinctions in a more intrinsic and purely literary way.<sup>29</sup> The theory in fact remains a modernist one for, as I have observed, Deleuze remained essentially a modernist, and everything prophetically 'post-modern' about the second volume of the film books is then withdrawn by their aestheticist framework and that very open philosophical commitment to art and to the New that makes it incongruous to characterize Deleuze as a 'closet' modernist: however much he may have been an 'apartment' modernist and a sedentary one, quite different in his own life and practices from that nomadic condition he famously celebrated (and which one is tempted to juxtapose to Ortega's famous speculation on the kind of figure Goethe would have been had he chosen a 'weather-beaten' nomadic

existence more open and receptive to all the social and historical currents of his age). The theorization of a minor language is appropriate here because it posits the elaboration of an autonomous artistic language from within the daily hegemonic one, a linguistic space subtly and imperceptibly differentiated from the koiné of the masters, in a kind of concealed and invisible out-trumping of Mallarmé's call for outright poetic secession from the fallen speech of daily life.

The point to be made is a crudely tangible one: namely, that that subtle and untheorized construction – radically specific in the unique language-situation of each true 'modernist' writer – of what Deleuze politicized as the emergence of a 'minor language', but which I have preferred to identify more generally as the differentiation of a non-Euclidean linguistic realm and logic, has here, in the situation of the late moderns, been materialized as the brute fact of the confrontation with another language altogether: for Nabokov of American English, for Beckett of French. It is as though that 'alien word' that Bakhtin prophetically detected in the absent presence of dead languages within liturgical speech,<sup>30</sup> has now, in the internationalism of the Cold War, become the reality of the contingent fact of the existence of multiple national languages. But where this scandalous multiplicity (after Babel) propelled writers like Mallarmé (and Benjamin) to project some unfallen universal 'language as such' beyond the individual real languages, for the late moderns the empirical availability of the foreign language opens up a space for the elaboration of poetic autonomy as the sheerest imitation of internal modernist constructions.

It is an autonomy that will then be formally acted out on the two levels of plot and style as what I will call a closing of the circuit. The doubles by which Nabokov seals his narrative (Quilty as a bad double of Humbert Humbert) are

replicated by the circularities of the later Beckett plays and novels; both of them posited rather awkwardly in the form, yet ultimately allegorical of late modernism itself in its historical situation as generalized repetition. Meanwhile the very power of Nabokov's extraordinary sentences – I quote my favourite one, about the refrigerator: 'It roared at me viciously while I removed the ice from its heart'<sup>31</sup> – is derived from the imperative to make each sentence autonomous in its own right, and to close the circuit or seal the loop of internal reference by the hiving off of a complete new linguistic event from a purely empirical and insignificant one. Here the individual sentences all mean the Sentence itself.

In Beckett, however, it is the incomplete sentence that constitutes the mechanism: a kind of aphasia in which the syntactic conclusion, known in advance, does not have to be given. This movement is then acted out in the well-known unfinished anecdotes or conversational gambits of *Waiting for Godot*, which get completed only later on, in the next scene, and which model the empty present of existential temporality. Yet if Beckett's unfinished utterances are ultimately more productive than the extraordinary closures of Nabokov's linguistic inventions, it is because the former enable a transition – a momentary overlap and coincidence in which a fundamental transfer can be effectuated – which is that of two distinct moments of literary history. The unfinished sentence, which first carried the whole pathos of existential anxiety and marked a time of waiting which is never fulfilled, can now be re-functioned as the bearer of a structural and textual logic from which all existential affect has been removed: the sentence as time becoming the sentence as text and securing Beckett an equally fetishistic value in the next, or structuralist and poststructuralist, period.

A seemingly more marginal similarity between the two

writers will now put us on the track of a final feature of late modernist practice. No one can have missed the multitudinous disabilities and physical handicaps in Beckett's work in general, but perhaps one of the most poignant moments in *Lolita* has been less discussed. I mean the deafness of her 'real' husband, the young man she marries when she also 'grows up' at the end of the novel.<sup>32</sup> He is to be sure 'deaf' to her whole painful and embarrassing prehistory: but I think the marker also extends to the very realm of content itself in both writers, to the universal disability of reality itself as what you have to say, despite the putative autonomy of a late modern linguistic realm in which you ought by definition to have 'nothing to say' (Blanchot). This maiming in the content, this ostentatious incapacitation of 'reality', which is to say, of the raw material from which the work is to be constructed, must now be traced into the form itself, where it takes the form of the philosophical category of contingency.

It will be said, with justification, that the problem of contingency can be detected much earlier, in all the original modernisms themselves, as a sign of the failure of the form completely to master and to appropriate the content the work has assigned itself (or better still, which it has assigned and proposed itself as the task of the work to incorporate). The concept of contingency is of course an even older one, emerging in medieval theology, where it is the unique existence of a thing that is scandalously inassimilable to that universal which is its idea and which is associated with the divine. Contingency is thus the word for a failure of the idea, the name for what is radically unintelligible, and it belongs to the conceptual field of ontology, rather than that of the various epistemologies that succeed and displace an ontological philosophy in the 'modern' period (or since Descartes).

## PART II: MODERNISM AS IDEOLOGY

The medieval reference is thus very useful indeed, insofar as it underscores the temporality of the concept, its ebb and flow in the vicissitudes of history, as a signal of some breakdown of the conceptual process or system. But the crisis of epistemology signalled by the re-emergence of the problem of contingency in the nineteenth century (or since Kant) is perhaps at first masked by the prestige of emergent science and by the transfer of epistemological claims to that whole new realm of intellectual production that does not begin to experience its own epistemological crisis until well into the twentieth century. At any rate I want to posit a subtle yet fundamental distinction between the aesthetic preoccupations with chance and accident, as those informed high modernism, and the less thematic and more formal and representational problems posed by contingency in what I have been calling late modernism.

It is a tricky argument to stage: the old medieval idea (is it really a concept in any positive sense?) is strategically revived by the new existentialisms, and most emphatically restaged by Sartre, who tells us that it had something to do with movie-going as a child:<sup>33</sup> to come out of a theatre of human and humanly produced images was to undergo the shock of the existence of a real world of noisy and chaotic urban daylight. The experience of contingency is thus not only dependent on a certain perception of the world, it also has as its fundamental precondition an experience of form with which that world is dramatically juxtaposed.

But was not Cubism already an attempt to confront such an experience, by multiplying the shards of form into which the old stable everyday object began to shatter? And does not every line of *Ulysses* bear witness to an ever-changing empirical reality which Joyce's multiple forms (from the *Odyssey* parallel on down to chapter form and sentence

structure themselves) are unable to master? What I want overhastily to argue here is that, in the moderns, such form is never given in advance: it is generated experimentally in the encounter, leading on into formations that could never have been predicted (and whose incomplete and interminable multiplicities the innumerable high modernisms amply display).

The next step of my argument will then be obvious: it posits a change in dynamic when the structure of the form is known in advance, as a given and as a set of requirements to which the raw empiricities of the content already selected in advance must dutifully submit. That form can be simply characterized as the autonomy of the aesthetic or of the work of art: and it has been our argument here that as an ideal and a prescription, a supreme value as well as a regulatory principle, aesthetic autonomy did not yet exist in the modernist period, or only as a by-product and an after-thought. 'Everything in the world exists,' Mallarmé famously said, 'in order to end up as a Book'; and it is certain that the late modernist experience of contingency can begin to construct its genealogy here. What separates late modernism's certainties from Mallarmé's groping discoveries is precisely the historical Mallarmé himself and his lapidary hints, which they already know in advance and repeat. An experiment whose necessary failure he emblemized in the shipwreck of *Un coup de dès* (which fails to abolish chance as such) is in late modernism drawn inside the work and domesticated as sheer thematics (or in de Man's useful expression is now *thematized*). So the open and endless, interminable combination process of that solemn aesthetic high mass he called *Le Livre* becomes, in Robbe-Grillet, a combination scheme whose successive results are always in a kind of monotonous

triumphalism assimilated to the image and at length, definitively, to the sentence itself.

In both Nabokov and Beckett alike the sign of this new aesthetic contingency can be read in the new category of the anecdote. An anecdotal core or given always marks the inassimilable empirical content which was to have been the pretext for sheer form. Indeed, this is what made up the paradigmatic nature of Beckett's late plays: the shock lies in discovering, at the heart of these eternally recurring spectacles, an empirical situation – unhappy marriage, intolerable youthful memories, a banal family structure, with irreducible names and characters, the bourgeois dwelling at a certain date, the punctual biographical events that stand out unredeemably from the failure of a drab and sorry life – which might have offered the material of a dreary realist novel and instead persists as the indigestible brute facts to which the form reverts over and over again in its vain attempt to dissolve them. The form itself – autonomy – and the anecdotal content on which it depends yet which it cannot manage to appropriate into its own substance – these stand in a necessary dialectical relation with each other and indeed produce each other reciprocally. Late modernist contingency is then precisely this dialectical process and constitutes the experience of the failure of autonomy to go all the way and fulfil its aesthetic programme.

This is, however, a fortunate failure: for the replacement of the varied and incomprehensible Absolutes of modernism by the far more modest and comprehensible aesthetic autonomies of the late modern not only opens up the space and possibility for that theorization we have characterized as the ideology of modernism, it also enables and authorizes the production of a far more accessible literature of what can

## A SINGULAR MODERNITY

then be called a middlebrow type. This can no longer be said to be a popular literature, in the older strict sense of the term; but then, in the postwar situation of an emergent mass or commercial culture, such a popular literature no longer exists anyway. It does not seem unduly restrictive, in an age of mass education, to suggest that the public of such a middlebrow late modernist literature and culture can be identified as the class fraction of college students (and their academic trainers), whose bookshelves, after graduation into 'real life', preserve the souvenirs of this historically distinctive consumption which the surviving high modernist aesthetes and intellectuals have baptized as the canon, or Literature as such. But that canon is simply modernism, as the late modernists have selected and rewritten it in their own image. Its 'greatness' and timeless permanence is the very sign of its historical impermanence; and it is with this late modernism that postmodernism attempts radically to break, imagining that it is thereby breaking with classical modernism, or even modernity, in general and as such.

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## CONCLUSION

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‘Il faut être absolument moderne!’

Ironic or not, Rimbaud’s great cry has always been felt to be exciting: probably because it does not limit itself to assuring us that we are modern already, but gives us something to do.

It is worth remembering those states that, at their moment in the past, were universally considered to be the most modern: Frederick the Great’s Prussia, Lenin’s system of the soviets, and a little later, the party-cum-dictator system of Mussolini’s fascism. All confirm Max Weber’s prophetic judgement that bureaucracy is the most modern form of social organization. If we no longer think of them as modern in this way (with the possible exception of the first named), it is because, woefully, they turned out not to match the degree of efficiency also promised somewhere in the stereotype of modernity. But the United States today is not very efficient either. What is more significant in all these cases is that the modernity of the states in question is a modernity for other peoples, an optical illusion nourished by envy and hope, by inferiority feelings and the need for emulation. Alongside all the other paradoxes built into this strange concept, this one is the most fatal: that modernity is always a concept of otherness.

As for efficiency, it also involves the other, but in a rather different way. The West has long since found itself unable to think the category of the ‘great collective project’ in terms of

social revolution and social transformation. But we have a convenient substitute, in any case far less demanding on the imagination: for us, and as far back in 'modernity' as we can determine, the great collective project – the 'moral equivalent of war' – is simply war itself. It is finally as a war machine that the efficiency of a state is judged; and no doubt modern warfare offers a very advanced form of collective organization indeed. But a fundamental structural and ideological limit on our Utopian imagination is surely demonstrated by this lack of alternatives, and by the persistence of World War II in the American mind as the great Utopian moment of national unification and the lost object of our political desire.

Can we compare the excitement 'modernity' has seemed to arouse in different historical periods? The question seems to imply and to contain another one, about the authenticity of that excitement and of the concept from which it derives, or to which it seems to be an existential response. How to compare these reactions, or even deduce and reconstruct them individually on the basis of historical evidence? But literary texts have always seemed to pose this problem, which then becomes one of the 'horizon of expectation' (Gadamer) and of the comparability of contemporaneous readings with our own.

In fact, this is why the question of aesthetic modernism and the corpus of modernist texts of all kinds has been so useful in the elaboration and reconstruction of the various ideologies of modernity (if not in the arguments themselves). If we can still read Baudelaire today with the requisite intensity, or so this hidden premise seems to run, we also ought to be able to reconstruct the various other non-aesthetic modernities afoot in his period.

The challenge is worth considering, particularly if we

CONCLUSION: 'IL FAUT ÊTRE ABSOLUMENT MODERNE!'

disregard the ubiquitous characterizations of the New, of innovation and emergence, and focus on an aspect less often (if at all) mentioned, namely measurement. Thus, anyone familiar with the life work of Ezra Pound is familiar with the intentness with which he scrutinized the 'present age' for signs of modernist energies, partial breakthroughs, innovations and also local destructions of the outmoded (in verse or prose); for new thoughts (comparable in degree to those achieved by Cavalcanti or John Adams); for intensities promising a whole new culture (George Antheil, Mussolini).<sup>1</sup> These measurements are of an epochal kind, never mind their coordinates (sociability plus poetic electrification). They do not express some vague hope for the future; they scan the public sphere for signs and clues whose precision matches that very aesthetic ideal of precision around which Pound's poetics were organized.

Or take Walter Benjamin, in his astonishing geopolitical measurement of the modernity of another, neighbouring culture:

Intellectual currents can generate a sufficient head of water for the critic to install his power station on them. The necessary gradient, in the case of Surrealism, is produced by the difference in intellectual level between France and Germany. What sprang up in 1919 in France in a small circle of literati . . . may have been a meagre stream, fed on the damp boredom of postwar Europe and the last trickle of French decadence. . . . [But] the German observer is not standing at the head of the stream. That is his opportunity. He is in the valley. He can gauge the energies of the moment.<sup>2</sup>

Something of the rudderlessness of the postmodern can be glimpsed in its desperate attempts to reconstruct such oper-

ations and to detect innovation in works that have explicitly renounced originality.

But perhaps we are better off without such measurements, such attempts to read 'the barometer of modern reason', as Vincent Descombes terms it in a recent contribution to the backlash against contemporary theory. Descombes stages his argument as a differentiation between 'ontologies of the present' (what he also calls 'philosophies of current events') and (following Habermas) 'discourses of and on modernity'. It is a distinction that greatly clarifies my own position, which is the opposite of his and which recommends that we very much continue the project of an ontology of the present, while abandoning the sterile attempts to reinvent a discourse of modernity. It should be added that Descombes not only grounds his opinion of ontology, following Rorty, on repudiation of philosophical ambitions in general, he also frames this particular philosophical project in an exceedingly narrow way, substituting what Heidegger would call the ontic for the ontological ('the present *as* present . . . time *as* time . . . the unaccomplished *as* unaccomplished . . . the past *as* past').<sup>3</sup> A true ontology would not only wish to register the forces of past and future within that present; but would also be intent on diagnosing, as I am, the enfeeblement and virtual eclipse of those forces within our current present.

One cannot recommend the wholesale abandonment of a term like 'modernity' without assuming the ridiculous position of those obsessives about whom one's acquaintances warn us not to use the offensive word in their presence. I have in any case suggested that, when applied exclusively to the past, 'modernity' is a useful trope for generating alternate historical narratives, despite the charge of ideology it necessarily continues to bear. As for the ontology of the present, however, it is best to accustom oneself to thinking of 'the

## CONCLUSION: 'IL FAUT ÊTRE ABSOLUMENT MODERNE!'

modern' as a one-dimensional concept (or pseudo-concept) which has nothing of historicity or futurity about it. This means that 'postmodern' does not designate a future either (but when properly used, our own present), while 'non-modern' is unavoidably drawn back into a force field in which it tends to connote the 'pre-modern' exclusively (and to designate it in our own global present as well). Radical alternatives, systemic transformations, cannot be theorized or even imagined within the conceptual field governed by the word 'modern'. This is probably the case with the notion of capitalism as well: but if I recommend the experimental procedure of substituting capitalism for modernity in all the contexts in which the latter appears, this is a therapeutic rather than a dogmatic recommendation, designed to exclude old problems (and to produce new and more interesting ones). What we really need is a wholesale displacement of the thematics of modernity by the desire called Utopia. We need to combine a Poundian mission to identify Utopian tendencies with a Benjaminian geography of their sources and a gauging of their pressure at what are now multiple sea levels. Ontologies of the present demand archeologies of the future, not forecasts of the past.



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## NOTES

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### PREFACE

1. We are told that in the last few years, more positions in ethics have opened up in US philosophy departments than for any other branch of philosophy. However, the new problems in the life sciences (cloning, genetics, etc.) that such positions often reflect seem to me more political than ethical, and at any rate too important to entrust to philosophers (with the exception of Alain Badiou's exciting new political ethics).
2. The older political philosophy was always grounded on a conception of human nature for which a psychological motivation (fear for Hobbes or Spinoza, 'trust' for contemporary market ideologues) grounds the emergence of the collectivity; a newer political theory (as in Ernesto Laclau, for example) is organized around representation and signifiers rather than around psychology.
3. See famously Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1980). Jonathan Arac has rewritten the Lyotardian opposition as 'tall tales' versus 'white lies'. Perhaps a Benjaminian anticipation might also shed some light: 'The constructions of History are comparable to the institutions of the military, which browbeat daily life and assign it to barracks. Over against that, the anecdotal is like a street fight or an insurrection.' (Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades*)

- Project*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard, 1999; or Suhrkamp, 1983, S la, 3).
4. See my *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), pp. 366–9.
  5. Gilles Deleuze, *Différence et répétition* (Paris, PUF, 1968), p. 4.
  6. Walter Benjamin, ‘Theses on History’, in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken, 1968).
  7. J.-F. Lyotard, ‘Réponse à la question, qu’ est-ce que le postmoderne?’ in *Le Postmoderne expliqué aux enfants* (Paris: Seuil, 1986), pp. 29–33.
  8. See my ‘Introduction’ to Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*.
  9. Thus I would want to correct my remarks in *Marxism and Form* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), pp. 332–3, by observing that the New Critics’ a- or anti-historicism masks a deeper operative and ideological historical narrative or ‘philosophy of history’.
  10. Oskar Lafontaine, *Das Herz schlägt links* (Econ, 1999).
  11. Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 3.
  12. But we must make a sharp distinction between the deceptive visions of genuine cultural differences (as opposed to the Disneyfied cultural revivals springing up all over the world in postmodernity), and that completely different concept that names the alternate historical paths to modernity (or capitalism) in all the countries of the world. The position here (and many of us believe that it was that of Marx, and that ‘England’ was itself only one of those paths and not the normative model) is that all paths to capitalism are unique and ‘exceptional’, contingent and determined by a unique national situation. See also page 233, Transitional Modes, note 31, below.
  13. Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

PART I

1. I here follow the useful overview of Hans-Robert Jauss, 'Literarische Tradition und gegenwärtiges Bewusstsein der Modernität', in *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970), pp. 11-57. Jauss breaks off with Baudelaire (the afterthought on Benjamin is scarcely conclusive). The polemic dimension of the article is directed against Ernst Robert Curtius's position, in *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, that modernity is something of a 'literary constant'. His own central research lies in the area of the 'Querelle des anciens et des modernes' (begun on 27 January 1687), for which see the facsimile reproduction of Perrault's *Parallèle des anciens et des modernes* (1688-97) (Munich: Eidos, 1964), with Jauss's extensive introduction (pp. 8-64). Jauss's source for late antiquity and the twelfth century is Walter Freund, *Moderne und andere Zeitbegriffe des Mittelalters* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1957).
2. Freund, p. 39.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
4. See above all Jost Trier, *Der deutsche Wortschatz im Sinnabzirk des Verstandes* (Heidelberg: C. Winter 1932); and also the remarks in my *Prison-House of Language* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), pp. 18-20.
5. Freund, p. 25.
6. See, for example, Reinhart Kosselek, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985).
7. 'D'une certaine manière, il est toujours trop tard pour poser la question du temps.' Jacques Derrida, *Marges de la philosophie* (Paris: Minuit, 1972), p. 47.

8. ‘The concept of the shifter has seemed to me for some time to be one of the cornerstones of linguistics, although it has not been sufficiently appreciated in the past and therefore demands more attentive elaboration. The general meaning of the grammatical form called “shifter” is characterized by a reference back to the given speech act, the speech act that uses this form. Thus the past tense is a shifter because it literally designates an event that precedes the given act of speech. The first-person form of a verb, or the first-person pronoun, is a shifter because the basic meaning of the first person involves a reference back to the author of the given act of speech. Similarly, the second-person pronoun contains a reference to the addressee to whom the speech act in question is directed. If the addressers and addressees change in the course of the conversation, then the material content of the form *I* and *you* also changes. They shift.’ Roman Jakobson, in *Dialogues with Krystyna Pomorska* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT: 1983), pp. 78–9.
9. G.W.F. Hegel, *Phaenomenologie des Geistes*, A-1, on ‘Sense certainty’. The entire work is a polemic against ‘immediacy’; this opening section constitutes a refutation of the latter’s concreteness.
10. Jauss, ‘Literarische Tradition’, p. 20.
11. Rabelais, *Pantagruel*, the ‘Lettre de Gargantua’, in *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Pléiade, 1955), p. 226.
12. Jauss, ‘Literarische Tradition’, pp. 51–3.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 34.
14. See my *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), pp. xii–xiii.
15. Cited in Jauss, ‘Literarische Tradition’, pp. 15–16.
16. See Enrique Dussel, *1492: El encubrimiento del Otro* (Madrid: Nueva Utopía, 1992). This wide-ranging work is significantly subtitled ‘hacia el origen del mito de la modernidad’.
17. I here draw on the arguments of Arthur Danto, in *Narra-*

- tion and Knowledge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985). For me the unfinished theoretical question turns on the difference between ‘narrative sentences’ and narrative in the Aristotelian sense of ‘completed story’ (beginning, middle, end, ‘in whatever order’, as Godard puts it).
18. Roman Jakobson, ‘Linguistics and Poetics’, in *Language in Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard, 1987), p. 71. See also Barthes’s ‘two codes’, in ‘The Structural Analysis of Narrative’, in *Image Music Text* (New York: Noonday, 1977), p. 123.
  19. Thus, in his *Story of Art*, E.H. Gombrich adduces some sketches of a monkey by Pisanello as an index of the modern: such artists, he says, ‘were no longer content with the newly acquired mastery of painting such details as flowers or animals from nature; they wanted to explore the laws of vision, and to acquire sufficient knowledge of the human body to build it up in their statues and pictures as the Greeks had done. Once their interest took this turn, medieval art was really at an end.’ *The Story of Art* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1950), p. 166.
  20. See for example the discussions and references in David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).
  21. See note 72 below.
  22. Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 1994), pp. 109–126.
  23. See Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject* (London: Verso, 1999), pp. 211–12.
  24. ‘Rational harmonious music . . . [is] known only in the Occident’ – Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1930), pp. 14–15; see also Weber, *The Rational and Social Foundation of Music* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press, 1977).

25. Marcel Proust, *Within a Budding Grove*, trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin (New York: Vintage, 1982), p. 694; or *A L'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs* (Paris: Pléiade, Volume II, 1988), p. 6. This passage is quoted by Walter Benjamin in the *Passagenarbeit* (S10a), and one may read his own translation in *Gesammelte Schriften, Supplement II* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1987), p. 220.
26. Descartes, 'Discours de la Méthode', in *Oeuvres et Lettres* (Paris: Pléiade, 1953), p. 131.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 135.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 284: 'Je fermerai maintenant les yeux,' etc.
29. Colin McGinn, *The Mysterious Flame* (New York: Basic, 1999), p. 43.
30. Žižek, Chapter 2.
31. See for example Jacques Lacan, *Seminar II*, (Paris: Seuil, 1978), p. 144 (or New York: Norton, 1988, p. 117).
32. But see Claudia Brodsky-Latour's stimulating defence of the line as opposed to Karl Jaspers's traditional reading of the cogito as a point: *Lines of Thought* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996).
33. See Žižek's pages on Fichte and Schelling in *The Ticklish Subject*, pp. 44–5, 87–8.
34. See in particular Heidegger's *Nietzsche* (Pfullingen: Neske: 1961), Vol. II, pp. 31–256 (which has been published separately as *Der Europaeische Nihilismus*); and also 'Die Zeit des Weltbildes', in *Holzwege* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1980), pp. 73–110.
35. Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, pp. 155–7.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 151.
37. See, for example, Jean-Louis Comolli, 'Technique and Ideology: Camera, Perspective, Depth of Field' in ed., Bill Nichols, *Movies and Methods*, Volume II (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 40–57.
38. Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, pp. 152–3.

39. *Ibid.*, pp. 153–5, 160.
40. *Ibid.*, pp. 164–5.
41. Althusser's notorious formula is to be found in the *Réponse à John Lewis* (Paris: Maspero, 1973), p. 91.
42. This is Heidegger's argument in 'Die Zeit des Weltbildes'.
43. Heidegger, *Holzwege*, p. 105; *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper, 1992), pp. 148–9. Original text as follows:

Diese Befreiung befreit sich jedoch, ohne es zu wissen, immer noch aus der Bindung durch die Offenbarungswahrheit, in der dem Menschen das Heil seiner Seele gewiß gemacht und gesichert wird. Die Befreiung *aus* der offenbarungsmäßigen Heilsgewißheit mußte daher in sich eine Befreiung *zu* einer Gewißheit sein, in der sich der Mensch das Wahre als das Gewußte seines eigenen Wissens sichert. Das war nur so möglich, daß der sich befreiende Mensch die Gewißheit des Wißbaren selbst verbürgte. Solches konnte jedoch nur geschehen, insofern der Mensch von sich aus und für sich entschied, was für ihn wißbar sein und was Wissen und Sicherung des Gewußten, d.h. Gewißheit, bedeuten soll. Die metaphysische Aufgabe Descartes' wurde diese: der Befreiung des Menschen zu der Freiheit als der ihrer selbst gewissen Selbstbestimmung den metaphysischen Grund zu schaffen. Dieser Grund mußte aber nicht nur selbst ein gewisser sein, sondern er mußte, weil jede Maßgabe aus anderen Bezirken verwehrt war, zugleich solcher Art sein, daß durch ihn das Wesen der beanspruchten Freiheit als Selbstgewißheit gesetzt wurde. Alles aus sich selbst Gewisse muß jedoch zugleich jenes Seiende als gewiß mitsichern, für das solches Wissen gewiß und durch das alles Wißbare gesichert sein soll. Das fundamentum, der Grund dieser Freiheit, das ihr zum Grunde Liegende, das Subjectum muß ein Gewisses sein, das den genannten Wesensforderungen genügt. Ein nach allen diesen Hinsichten ausgezeichnetes Subjectum wird notwendig.

44. Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, p. 146; see also note 41. This is no doubt the starting point for Hans Blumenberg's argument in *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1966; Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 1983).
45. Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, op. cit., pp. 163–4; English translation, p. 115. Original text as follows:

Wir haben hier das greifbarste Beispiel für die Überlagerung eines neuen Beginns des metaphysischen Denkens durch das bisherige. Eine historische Berichterstattung über die Lehrmeinung und Lehrart des Descartes muß dies feststellen. Die geschichtliche Besinnung auf das eigentliche Fragen dagegen muß darauf dringen, den von Descartes selbst gewollten Sinn seiner Sätze und Begriffe zu denken, selbst wenn es dazu nötig sein sollte, seine eigenen aussagen in eine andere 'Sprache' zu übersetzen.

46. See the second Meditation: 'et cependent que vois-je de cette fenêtre, sinon des chapeaux et des manteaux, qui peuvent couvrir des hommes feints?' *Oeuvres et lettres* op. cit., p. 281.
47. Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Über Wahrheit und Lüge im aussermoralischen Sinn', *Werke* (Munich: Hanser, 1956), volume III, pp. 310–21.
48. G.W.F. Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik*, II-A, 'Das Wesen als Grund der Existenz'. And see also my *Brecht and Method* (London: Verso, 1998), pp. 80–84.
49. Heidegger, 'Das Ursprung des Kunstwerkes', in *Holzwege*, p. 7; or, in English, *Basic Writings*, p. 153. Original text as follows:

Diese Benennungen sind keine beliebigen Namen. In ihnen spricht, was hier nicht mehr zu zeigen ist, die griechische Grunderfahrung des Seins des Seienden im Sinne der Anwesenheit. Durch diese Bestimmungen aber wird die fortan maßgebende Auslegung der Dingheit des Dinges gegründet und die abendländische Auslegung des

Seins des Seienden festgelegt. Sie beginnt mit der Übernahme der griechischen Wörter in das römisch-lateinische Denken. ‘Hupokeimenon’ wird zu *subiectum*; ‘hurostasis’ wird zu *substantia*; ‘sumbebekos’ wird zu *accidens*. Diese Übersetzung der griechischen Namen in die lateinische Sprache ist keineswegs der folgenlose Vorgang, für den er noch heutigentags gehalten wird. Vielmehr verbirgt sich hinter der anscheinend wörtlichen und somit bewahrenden Übersetzung ein Übersetzen griechischer Erfahrung in eine andere Denkungsart. *Das römische Denken übernimmt die griechischen Wörter ohne die entsprechende gleichursprüngliche Erfahrung dessen, was sie sagen, ohne das griechische Wort.* Die Bodenlosigkeit des abendländischen Denkens beginnt mit diesem Übersetzen.

50. See for example Heidegger, ‘Die Frage nach der Technik’, in *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1985), pp. 16–27.
51. See for example Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, II, p. 165: ‘In diesen Tagen sind wir selbst die Zeugen eines geheimnisvollen Gesetzes der Geschichte, dass ein Volk eines Tages der Metaphysik, die aus seiner eigenen Geschichte entsprungen, nicht mehr gewachsen ist . . .’
52. Michel Foucault, *Les Mots et les choses* (Paris: Seuil, 1966), pp. 32–40; *The Order of Things* (Vintage, 1970), pp. 17–25.
53. *Les Mots*, p. 55; *The Order*, p. 40.
54. *Les Mots*, p. 398; *The Order*, p. 387.
55. See Ronald L. Meek, *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).
56. *Les Mots*, p. 11; *The Order*, p. xx.
57. *Les Mots*, p. 62; *The Order*, p. 49.
58. *Les Mots*, p. 65; *The Order*, p. 51.
59. See for example the ‘Overture’ to Lévi-Strauss’s *Le Cru et le cuit*; or the very project of the ‘grammatology’ itself.

60. See on this Harry Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), Chapter 2.
61. Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital* (London: Verso, 1970), p. 241.
62. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse* (Economic Manuscripts of 1857–58, ‘Introduction’, p. 27, in *Collected Works*, Volume 28 (Moscow: International, 1986).
63. In the ‘Author’s Preface’ to the *Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy*. (Moscow: International, 1904), pp. 11–13.
64. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
65. Althusser and Balibar, p. 302.
66. *Ibid.*, p. 307; and see also pp. 242–3.
67. *Ibid.*, p. 323.
68. *Ibid.*, p. 287.
69. *Ibid.*, pp. 297–8.
70. ‘Model’ is however a merely ideological concept for the Althusserians; see *ibid.* p. 255.
71. *Les Mots*, p. 271; *The Order*, p. 259.
72. See Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital* (New York: Monthly Review, 1976).
73. See Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, pp. 118–21. It should be added that Weber’s well-known theory of social change is relatively undecidable: for it posits the intervention in one series (social tradition) of an event from a different (religious and political) series altogether in which the emergence of the so-called charismatic or prophetic figure leaves the traditional situation in shambles and allows a completely new situation to form in its place. This is the concept of the ‘vanishing mediator’, for which see F. Jameson, ‘The Vanishing Mediator; or, Max Weber as Storyteller’, in *The Ideologies of Theory*, vol. II (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1988), pp. 8–34.
74. ‘A product of European civilization, studying any problem

- of universal history, is bound to ask himself to what combination of circumstances the fact should be attributed that in Western civilization, and in Western civilization only, cultural phenomena have appeared which (as we like to think) lie in a line of development having *universal* significance and value.’ Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, p. 13.
75. Georg Lukács, ‘Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat’ in *History and Class Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 1971), especially part II.
  76. Descartes, *Oeuvres et lettres*, p. 138.
  77. Anthony Giddens, *Violence and the Nation State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), pp. 113–14. Stephen Gaukroger sees the experience as imposing little more than ‘ideas of self-discipline and of obedience as a *decorum*’: *Descartes: An Intellectual Biography* (Oxford: Oxford, 1995), p. 66.
  78. Niklas Luhmann, *The Differentiation of Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 263.
  79. *Ibid.*, pp. 305–6.
  80. *Ibid.*, p. 363.
  81. *Beobachtungen der moderne* (Opladen: Westdeutsche Verlag, 1992) constitutes Luhmann’s repudiation of the concept of the postmodern. Yet in the posthumous *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1998), a few tentative speculations on its possible admissibility are ventured (pp. 1143–49): ‘the problematization of differences and distinctions, and the temporalization of the forms that marked them’ (1149) are changes that include the ‘grounding’ of anti-foundationalist philosophy in paradox, narrativity and irony as such, and above all dedifferentiation. Yet Luhmann seems confident that a social description based on differentiation can nonetheless absorb these new features without abandoning its conception of modernity as such.

## TRANSITIONAL MODES

1. Antoine Compagnon, *Cinq paradoxes de la modernité* (Paris: Seuil, 1990), p. 173; I have discussed this stimulating book in *The Cultural Turn* (London: Verso, 1998), pp. 113–21.
2. Jean-Claude Barat, ‘De la notion de “Modernism” dans la littérature américaine’, p. 89, in *Ce que modernité veut dire*, I, ed. Yves Vade, in *Modernités 5* (Bordeaux, 1994). I must here underscore the value of this collection and its successor (*Ce que modernité veut dire* II, in *Modernités 6*) as well as the usefulness of Matei Calinescu, *The Five Faces of Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987). The bibliography on modernism, which I will not attempt to reconstruct here, has been augmented in recent years by a revival of interest probably related to the resurrection of ‘modernity’ discussed in my Preface. Meanwhile, as far as artistic modernism is concerned, I have the feeling that the only durable contributions to its theory during its own lifetime, with the signal exception of Ortega y Gasset, were made by the practitioners themselves, such as Paul Valéry. As I will argue in what follows, however, they did not identify the object of their theorization as modernism, but rather as art in general.
3. Its fundamental manifesto is of course Siegfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982, first edition 1941).
4. The situation is summed up succinctly in a letter by Stan Smith to the *London Review of Books* (7 June 2001): ‘According to Ian Hamilton (*LRB*, 24 May), in the late 1920s Allen Tate “took to describing himself as Modernism’s gift to the Old South”. More than this, he can be credited with the invention of the term “Modernism”, at least as a sobriquet for the Eliot/Pound literary revolution. The word seems first to have been used in this sense in

correspondence between Tate and fellow editors of *The Fugitive* in the early 1920s, and appears in print in an editorial in *The Fugitive* on “The Future of Poetry” by John Crowe Ransom in February 1924. When Tate’s protégée Laura Riding introduced the word to British culture in 1927, in her joint study with Robert Graves, *A Survey of Modernist Poetry*, it was rapidly taken up by the clique around Auden, and subsequently surfaces in the writings of Spender, MacNeice and others from this school. Via this route and, in the United States, through the criticism of another graduate of the Vanderbilt/*Fugitive* stable, Randall Jarrell, the epithet entered academia in the late 1950s and by the mid-1960s had become standard usage. In a sense, then, it is the Old South which invented “Modernism”, described as late as 1937 by Ezra Pound as “a movement to which no name has ever been given”. See also Smith’s book, *The Origins of Modernism* (Brighton: Harvester, 1994), which provides rich and suggestive documentation on the chronological fantasies of the modernists themselves.

5. The word ‘modernization’ is not innocent either, for it was an active propaganda word during the Cold War, and constituted the principal US contribution to its various Third World allies and clients and even to Europe itself during the period of the Marshall Plan. The Soviets’ foreign policy turned essentially on the same stakes, even if they did not use the word, and there was a Stalinist modernization, an insistence on technology and the export of heavy industry, on catching up with the alleged modern states, which was not different in spirit and ideology from the American version. The reminder of this term is useful for us in several ways. First of all, it underscores the unavailability of the question of technology in all this – in aesthetics, think of the admiration of Le Corbusier for the ocean liner or of Brecht for the airplane! – and alerts us as well to the dangers of reifying the technological (and indeed the

scientific) level, and the importance of writing a narrative of both art and social history that does not fall back into the temptation of the standard history of ideas (*Geistesgeschichte*) as that fetishizes great scientific discoveries and great industrial and technological revolutions. The theme of technology then also suggests a solution to this problem of levels and mediations by suggesting links with the narrative of imperialism, inasmuch as technological innovation always raises the question of diffusion, of the spread, by theft, sale, or grant, of the various inventions in question: and it is well known to what degree technological know-how itself (and its scientific cousin) tend to lock the receiver into relations of dependency with the donor countries. The central figure in American modernization theory describes the process in terms of 'the ratio of inanimate to animate sources of power': 'I regard a society as modernized whenever small decreases in uses of inanimate sources of power could not be made up by increases in animate sources of power without far-reaching social changes' (Marion J. Levy, Jr. *Modernization: Latecomers and Survivors*, New York: Basic, 1972, p. 3, note 1). The approach of Levy's book, a good deal more readable than his two-volume magnum opus *Modernization and the Structure of Societies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), suggests a pessimism about the chances of the 'latecomers' that complicates any full-throated ideological celebration of the process. He goes on to list some twelve features, which can just as well be taken to be parameters of his definition of modernity as such: '1/ education for an unknown future, 2/ fast change versus slow change, 3/ strangers, 4/ exotic organizational contexts, 5/ high levels of centralization, 6/ the use of money and the distribution of income, 7/ the relation between towns and villages, 8/ education for modernization, 9/ recreation and politics, 10/ a sexual

revolution, 11/ relationship aspects, and 12/ demographic changes' (*Modernization: Latecomers and Survivors*, pp. 32–3).

Finally, the very term 'modernization' raises the possibility of the further existence of something we may well want to call postmodernization. If the age of technology we associate with artistic modernism is that of the great factories and energy sources of the late-nineteenth-century industrial era, then presumably the advent of our wholly different cybernetic and nuclear technologies – with their modifications in production and the workforce – suggests the relevance of a form of technological innovation and export that deserves a distinct name of its own. Indeed what is often today evoked around the world as 'modernity' is very often the result of just such postmodernization – the spread of communications technologies – rather than of the older kind.

6. See Beatriz Chenot, 'Le *Modernismo* hispano-americain', in *Modernités IV*, pp. 29–48; and Calinescu, pp. 69–78.
7. Italy and Japan, for example, did have properly fascist modernisms.
8. See my *Postmodernism: or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), pp. 309–10.
9. See 'Character in Fiction', in Virginia Woolf, *Collected Essays*, Volume III, ed. Andrew McNeillie (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1988), p. 421.
10. See Michel Foucault, *Les Mots et les choses* op. cit., pp. 329–33; English translation, *The Order of Things* op. cit., pp. 318–22. He means to designate that fundamental contradiction within the 'human sciences' constituted by the gap between value and fact, or meaning and contingency.
11. T.J. Clark's term in *Farewell to an Idea* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999): for example, pp. 45–8. And see my

- discussion of his use in *Anything*, ed. Cynthia Davidson (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 2001): ‘From Metaphor to Allegory’, pp. 24–36.
12. See Régis Salado, ‘Ulysses de Joyce et la constitution du credo moderniste’, in *Modernités VI*, pp. 49–90.
  13. And this not in the worst but in the best such histories, as witness the classic *Modern Architecture* of Manfredo Tafuri and Francesco Dal Co (New York: Abrams, 1979); see my discussion referenced in note 11 above. The paradigm of such -isms is of course the rich tabulation of doctrinal and theological heresy, whose terms – Donatism, Pelagianism, Arianism, Nicodemism, Erastianism, Arminianism, Socinianism, etc. – serve to hone the nuances of aberrant opinion with well-nigh sculptural precision.
  14. ‘Literary History and Literary Modernity’, ‘Lyric and Modernity’, ‘The Rhetoric of Temporality’, in Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1997).
  15. I will only enumerate four such further implications: the notion of temporal continuity as a projection of the Oedipal relationship between father and son; the unique incomprehensibility of Baudelaire as a ‘dark zone’ in literary history; the attack on any coherent philosophical aesthetic or literary ‘system’ as such; the essential ambivalence of the act of writing as such (compare the discussion of Blanchot, below, in Part II).
  16. De Man, *Blindness*, p. 171.
  17. See *ibid.*, pp. 200–206.
  18. *Ibid.*, p. 211.
  19. *Ibid.*, p. 207.
  20. *Ibid.*, p. 165.
  21. *Ibid.*, pp. 182–3.
  22. *Ibid.*, p. 172.
  23. *Ibid.*, pp. 182–3; and see note 41 below.
  24. *Ibid.*, p. 179.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 181.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 185.
27. *Ibid.*, pp. 163–4.
28. ‘Sur une certaine face d’elle-même, la différence n’est certes que le déploiement historique et époqual de l’être ou de la différence ontologique’: ‘La différence’, in Jacques Derrida, *Marges de la philosophie* (Paris: Minuit, 1972), p. 23.
29. De Man, *Blindness*, p. 207.
30. The preceding passage is suitably cautious in this respect: ‘Their relationship is one of simultaneity, which, in truth, is spatial in kind, and in which the intervention of time is merely a matter of contingency, whereas, in the world of allegory, time is the originary constitutive category.’
31. What is dialectical here is not the binary opposition (real or apparent), but rather the way in which the procedure echoes Marx’s paradigmatic ‘Introduction’ to the *Grundrisse* (Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, Volume 28, Moscow: International, 1986): where production is one of three subordinate categories which also include distribution and consumption, at the same time that it is the overall category for all three, thereby including itself as a subset (pp. 17–24). And see Slavoj Žižek’s discussion of the universal in dialectics, in *The Ticklish Subject*, op. cit., pp. 98–103.
32. De Man, *Blindness*, p. 207.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 162.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 163.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 179.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 208.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 207.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 208.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 207.
40. Charles Baudelaire, *Oeuvres I* (Paris: Pléiade, 1976), p. 695.
41. See for example Harry Levin, *The Gates of Horn* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966).

42. See *Pour un nouveau roman* (Paris: Minuit, 1963).
43. In my *Signatures of the Visible* (Routledge, 1990), pp. 158–77.
44. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard, 1999), pp. 462–3 [N3, 1]; or Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1983, pp. 577–8).
45. T.W. Adorno, *Aesthetisch Theorie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970), pp. 36–48; *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. R. Hullot-Kentnor (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1997), pp. 20–27.
46. Hugo Friedrich, *The Structure of the Modern Lyric*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), p. 7; originally published as *Die Struktur der modernen Lyrik* (Rowohlt, 1956), p. 21.
47. *Structure*, pp. 8–9; *Struktur*, p. 22.
48. *Structure*, p. 9; *Struktur*, p. 23.
49. *Structure*, p. 169; *Struktur*, p. 213.
50. T.W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1986), pp. 181–4; translated by J. Cumming as *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972, pp. 202–4).
51. Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire*, I and II (Paris: Seuil, 1975, 1978). Needless to say, Lacan loathed the rhetoric and politics of ‘liberation’ in Marcuse’s sense.
52. Perry Anderson, ‘Modernity and Revolution’, in *A Zone of Engagement* (London: Verso, 1992).
53. But T.J. Clark has documented the radical sympathies of many of these artists; see his chapter on Pissarro in *Farewell to an Idea*. I interpret Anderson’s point in terms of fundamental social and ideological action at distance, what Sartre describes in *Search for a Method* as follows: ‘Mais ce qui commençait à me changer, par contre, c’était la *réalité* du marxisme, la lourde présence, à mon horizon, des masses ouvrières, corps enorme et sombre qui *vivait* le marxisme, qui le *pratiquait*, et qui exerçait à distance une irrésistible

attraction sur les intellectuels petits-bourgeois.’ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique de la raison dialectique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985), Vol. I p. 28 or *Search for a Method* (New York: Basic, 1968), p. 18.

54. Rainer-Maria Rilke, ‘Der Engel’ (*Neue Gedichte* [Frankfurt: Insel, 1974] p.37), trans. Edward Snow, in Rilke, *New Poems* [Boston: North Point Press, 1984], p. 83):

Otherwise they’ll come at night  
to you to test you with a fiercer grip  
and go like someone angry through your house  
and seize you as if they’d created you  
and break you out of your mold.

55. D.H. Lawrence, ‘Song of a Man Who Has Come Through’; Arthur Rimbaud, ‘Le Bateau ivre’.

## PART II

1. Arno Mayer, *The Persistence of the Old Regime* (New York: Pantheon, 1981).
2. Martin Heidegger, ‘Die Frage nach der Technik’, in *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1954). The reference to the temple is to be found in ‘Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes’, in *Holzwege* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1950).
3. The scientific analogy might be considerably enlarged by the inclusion of what Arkady Plotinsky calls ‘non-classical science’: see *The Knowable and the Unknowable* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002).
4. And see also Edward Said, *Beginnings* (New York: Basic, 1975), especially pp. 29–78.
5. Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967). His own examples – Camus and Robbe-Grillet – seem less ideologically neutral over the course of

- time, while the dynamics of the impersonal in postmodernism are of a different nature altogether.
6. See Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 'Convolute F (Iron Construction)' (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard, 1999; or Suhrkamp, 1983), as well as Siegfried Giedion, *Bauen in Frankreich* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1928).
  7. T.W. Adorno, *Philosophie der neuen Musik* (Frankfurt: Europaeische Verlagsanstalt, 1958); and also Max Weber, *The Rational and Social Foundations of Music* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1977).
  8. Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading* (New Haven: Yale, 1979), Chapter 12.
  9. Quoted by Benjamin in *Arcades*, p. 228 (German, p. 301).
  10. T.W. Adorno, *Aesthetische Theorie* (Suhrkamp, 1970), p. 17; *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. R. Hullot-Kentnor (Minnesota, 1997), p. 6.
  11. Clement Greenberg, 'Towards a newer Laokoon' (1940), in *Collected Essays*, Vol. I (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 28.
  12. *Ibid.*, p. 34.
  13. Greenberg's own appeal to Kant passes through the First rather than the Third Critique; see 'Modernist Painting', in *Collected Essays*, (New York: Columbia University Press), Volume IV (1993), p. 85.
  14. See the biography of Blanchot by Christophe Bident (Paris: Champ Vallon, 1998); and see Michel Foucault, 'La Pensée du dehors', in *Dits et écrits*, Vol. I (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), pp. 522–39; and Jacques Derrida, *Parages* (Paris: Galilée, 1986).
  15. See Paul de Man's essay on Blanchot in *Blindness and Insight*, (Minnesota, 1997). However, this seeming monotony is not incompatible with substantive insights, as when in Blanchot's essay on *La Nausée* ('Les romans de Sartre', in his *La Part du feu* [Paris: Gallimard, 1949]), he observes

- that a novel whose ‘thesis’ is being itself can only be classified as a ‘thesis novel’ with some difficulty.
16. Maurice Blanchot, *Faux pas* (Paris: Gallimard, 1943, 1971), p. 11.
  17. Maurice Blanchot, *La part du feu*, pp. 322–5. (There is no doubt here a hidden mediation by way of Jean Paulhan, *Les fleurs de Tarbes*.)
  18. Karl-Heinz Bohrer, *Plötzlichkeit*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1981; *Suddenness*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.
  19. *Plötzlichkeit*, p. 138; *Suddenness*, p. 139.
  20. *Plötzlichkeit* p. 213; *Suddenness*, p. 227.
  21. *Plötzlichkeit*, p. 184; *Suddenness*, p. 201: ‘Versteht man die Metaphorik des Benjaminischen “Augenblicks” or dem Hintergrund dieser literarischen Verzeitlichung von Zeit, dann hat man ihren Momentanismus herauszuheben ohne dabei einen substantiellen “Messias” Begriff in Anspruch nehmen zu müssen. Im Sinne dieser literarischen Vorbilder formuliert: Der Topos des plötzlich eintretenden “Augenblicks” verweist auf keinen “Messias”, sondern ist der Moment einer politisierten Wahrnehmungs-Aesthetik.’
  22. *Plötzlichkeit*, p. 28; *Suddenness*, p. 11 (the quote is from Kleist’s ‘Über die allmähliche Verfertigung des Denkens beim Reden’). See also the crucial essay ‘Deutsche Romantik und französische Revolution’, in Karl-Heinz Bohrer, *Das absolute Präsenz* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1994, pp. 8–31; where he celebrates ‘das revolutionäre Prinzip selbst, das zu Prinzip der Moderne werden wird: das dynamische Prinzip des permanent sich verwandelnden Ereignisses’ (31).
  23. Deleuze tells us this in his television interviews, *L’Abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze*, only released after his death.
  24. The title of his Jünger book (Munich: Ullstein, 1983).

25. See, among many other possible references, Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 66-8, and 134-6; or the first chapter of his *Wallace Stevens: The Poems of Our Climate* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977). My essay 'Wallace Stevens' (*New Orleans Review*, X, 1, Spring, 1984) will be reprinted in a companion volume of modernist case studies.
26. 'Late modernism' is used here in a different sense than in that of Charles Jenck's (*The New Moderns*, New York: Rizzoli, 1990), which characterizes a high-technological architecture running parallel with postmodernism, or that of Tyrus Miller in *Late Modernism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), which designates an oppositional current within high or classical modernism itself. The term 'neo-modern' seems to have been invented by Frank Kermode in the 1950s.
27. Samuel Beckett, *Disjecta* (New York: Grove, 1984), pp. 51-4.
28. G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy and History* (New York: Dover, 1956), pp. 86-7.
29. See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guatarri, *Kafka: pour une littérature mineure* (Paris: Minuit, 1975).
30. Bakhtin, writing as V.N. Volosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 74.
31. Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita* (New York: Putnam, 1955), p. 98.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 275.
33. See Simone de Beauvoir, *La Cérémonie des adieux* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981), p. 181.

## CONCLUSION

1. See, for example, Ezra Pound, 'How to Read', in *Literary Essays* (New York: New Directions, 1954): 'And we could,

presumably, apply to the study of literature a little of the common sense that we currently apply to physics or to biology. In poetry there are simple procedures, and there are known discoveries, clearly marked,' etc. (p. 19). See also his *The ABC of Reading* (New York: New Directions, n.d.) and *A Guide to Kulchur* (New York: New Directions, n.d.).

2. Walter Benjamin, 'Surrealism', in *One-Way Street* (London: Verso, 1979), p. 225.
3. Vincent Descombes, *The Barometer of Modern Reason: On the Philosophies of Current Events* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 18.



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## INDEX

---

- Absolute, the 159–60, 163–4,  
178, 181, 199, 209
- Adams, John 213
- Adorno, Theodor. W. 126–8,  
130, 152, 156–7, 160, 177,  
181, 188, 234, 236
- Dialectic of Enlightenment* (with  
Max Horkheimer) 157
- Karl-Heinz Bohrer on 192
- modernism negatively defined  
130, 157
- advertising 177
- aesthetics, return of 3
- agriculture, industrialization of 12
- Algerian war 183
- alienation 130–3, 147
- allegory 105, 107, 113–6, 118,  
125, 203
- Althusser, Louis 33, 49, 51, 57,  
64, 76, 78–80, 223, 226
- Reading Capital* 78
- on Foucault 78
- America, as future 202
- Americas, conquest of 31
- Anderson, Perry 134, 234
- anecdote 209
- Antheil, George 213
- anti-humanism 55
- anti-modernity 143
- anti-narrative 5–6
- Apollinaire, Guillaume 143
- Aristotle 162
- Nicomachean Ethics* 155
- Arnold, Matthew 177, 179
- Arrighi, Giovanni 37, 221
- art 177
- autonomy of 153, 176–7, 161,  
173, 176, 183, 190, 196, 208,  
209
- Artaud, Antonin 72
- asceticism 1
- Auden, W.H. 229
- authoritarianism 1
- autism 160
- autonomization 91, 146, 160
- of art 162, 163–4
- of concept of the moment 190
- of language 149
- of non-Euclidean language 158
- of representation 156
- Bachelard, Gaston 64
- Bacon, Francis 63
- Bakhtin, Mikhail M. 175, 204,  
238
- Balibar, Etienne 27–8, 76–81,  
226
- Balzac, Honoré de 158, 184
- Barat, Jean-Claude 228
- Barthes, Roland 175, 221, 235

## INDEX

- Barthes, Roland (*cont.*)  
*Degré zéro de l'écriture* 148  
 base/superstructure 77, 102  
 Baudelaire, Charles 21, 25, 99,  
 100, 109, 110, 127, 140, 151,  
 154, 157–8, 167, 182, 184,  
 212, 219, 232, 233  
 Bauhaus 150  
 beauty 3  
 Beckett, Samuel 198, 200–203,  
 204, 205, 206, 209, 238  
*Endgame* 200–2  
*Waiting For Godot* 200–1,  
 205  
 Benjamin, Walter 4–5, 125, 129,  
 188, 204, 213, 218, 219  
*Arcades* 217, 222, 234, 236  
 Karl-Heinz Bohrer on 190–1  
 on surrealism 239  
 Bergson, Henri 142, 193–5  
 Bident, Christopher 236  
 Biely, Andrey 104  
 Blackburn, David (*The  
 Peculiarities of German  
 History*, with Geoff Eley) 221  
 Blake, William 184  
 Blanchot, Maurice 72, 183–8,  
 192, 206, 232, 236–7  
 Bloom, Harold 196, 238  
 Blumenberg, Hans 240  
 Bohrer, Karl-Heinz 189–93, 195,  
 237  
 on Jünger 195  
 Bopp, Franz 69  
 Bourdieu, Pierre 157  
 his critique of disciplines 1–2  
 Braverman, Harry 226  
 Brecht, Bertolt 150, 229  
 Brodsky-Latour, Claudia 222  
 Buddhism, as anticipation of the  
 adventure of modernism 137  
 Burckhardt, Jakob 18  
 Calinescu, Matei 228  
 Camus, Albert 235  
 canon 179, 185–6, 210  
 capitalism 12–3, 39–40  
 as allegory 118  
 as superior analytic term to  
 ‘modernity’ 80, 215  
 as unique and unrepeatable  
 process 182–3, 218  
 Carroll, Lewis 160  
 Cassiodorus 17, 20, 27  
 causality 33  
 Cavalcanti, Guido 213  
 Chaplin, Charles 83  
 Chenot, Beatriz 231  
 Clark, T.J. 231–2  
*Farewell To An Idea* 234  
 classic/romantic distinction 21  
 cogito 31, 42–5, 46–9, 52, 55  
 Cold War 172, 201, 204, 229  
 as cause of late modernism  
 165–8  
 commodity fetishism 82, 84  
 communications theory 150  
 Comolli, Jean-Louis 222  
 Compagnon, Antoine 99, 109,  
 228  
 competition 215  
 conceptuality, as temptation 99  
 contingency 206–7  
 Crystal Palace 149  
 Cubism 150, 207  
 cultural studies 177  
 culture 177–9  
 Curtius, Ernst Robert 219  
 cyclical thinking 4–5, 20, 21, 195

## INDEX

- Dal Co, Francesco 232  
 Dante Alighieri 199  
 Danto, Arthur 40, 220–1  
 Darío, Rubén 100–1  
 Darwinism 70  
 de Beauvoir, Simone 238  
 de Man, Paul 106–118, 119,  
     120, 125, 131–2, 156,  
     173–4, 181, 188, 208–9,  
     232–3, 236  
*Allegories of Reading* 106,  
     113–6  
 ‘Literary History and Literary  
     Modernity’ 108  
 ‘The Rhetoric of Temporality’  
     107  
 his critique of Friedrich Hugo  
     106, 109–111  
 as dialectical thinker 112  
 as difficult and perplexing 116  
 on Blanchot 236  
 his theory of ideology 116–7  
 deconstruction 116, 132  
     as profoundly dialectical 112  
 Deleuze, Gilles 4, 181, 203–4,  
     218, 237, 238  
*Anti-Oedipus* (with Félix  
     Guattari) 194  
 as modernist 203  
 his return to Bergson 193–5  
 Derrida, Jacques 19, 72, 106, 116,  
     183, 219, 236  
 as profoundly dialectical 112  
 his debt to Heidegger 59–60  
 Descartes, René 31, 42, 47, 48,  
     51–2, 59–60, 63, 67, 73, 86,  
     87, 206, 222, 227  
*Treatise of the Passions* 155  
 automata 54  
 Foucault on 67, 68  
 inaugurator of modern subject/  
     object split 43  
 his task defined by Heidegger  
     50–1  
 Descombes, Vincent 214, 239  
 determinism, technological 145–6  
 dialectics 64–5  
     difference and 89–90  
     Foucauldian 64–5  
     Hegelian, as Stalinist 76, 111,  
         137  
     as opposite of common sense  
         112–3  
 Diderot, Denis 109  
 differentiation 89–90, 146, 153,  
     156, 158, 160, 162, 204  
 Disney, Walt 218  
*Don Quixote* 67, 123  
 Dostoyevsky, Fyodor Mikhailovich  
     157  
 doubt 47  
 drug culture 194  
 Dussel, Enrique 220  
 dwarves 4, 20  
 ego as defence mechanism 134  
 Eley, Geoff (*The Peculiarities of  
     German History*, with David  
     Blackbourn) 221  
 Eliot, T.S. 5, 164, 168, 177, 228  
 Engels, Friedrich 75  
 Enlightenment 31, 99  
     Scottish 65  
 Ennui 127  
 Epicurus 137  
 Epigonentum 17–18, 25  
 epoche 42, 137  
 error, as path to truth 111–2  
 eternity, problem of in art 121–8  
 ethics, return of 2

## INDEX

- evolutionism 64  
 exile 203  
 existentialism 3, 186, 187, 207
- fashion 152
- Faulkner, William 184, 185
- feudalism 36–7, 39–40, 141–2
- Fichte, Johann Gottlieb 45, 48, 222
- film theory 46
- Flaubert, Gustave 151, 174, 182
- Ford, Henry 29, 83
- Formalism 39, 80, 156, 175
- Foucault, Michel 51, 60–75, 78–9, 80, 81, 82, 85, 86, 90, 91, 104–5, 236  
*The Order of Things (Les Mots et les choses)* 32, 61–75, 225, 226, 231
- on Descartes 67
- epistemes compared to modes of production 66
- on Marx 69
- misconstrual of Marxism 64
- on the pre-modern 61
- as profoundly dialectical 64
- Frankfurt School 49, 130, 133, 189
- on instrumental reason 83–4
- Frederick the Great 211
- freedom 53, 54, 93, 171
- French Revolution 31, 148–9, 187, 191–2, 195
- Freud, Sigmund 44, 53, 137, 175, 194, 202
- Freund, Walter 18, 219
- Friedman, Milton 2–3
- Friedrich, Hugo 106, 108–111, 121, 147, 234
- Frye, Northrop (*The Anatomy of Criticism*) 175  
*Fugitive, The* 229  
 futurism 100, 144, 154
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg 212
- Galileo 31, 67, 89
- Gasset, Ortega y 203–4, 228
- Gelasius I, Pope 17
- genius, cult of 1
- Germany 26–7, 36–7, 99, 182, 189, 203–4, 221
- as incompletely modern 188–9
- Gestalt* Philosophy 21, 33
- Giddens, Anthony 86–8, 218, 227  
*The Consequences of Modernity* 11–12
- Gide, André 104
- Giedion, Siegfried 228  
*Space, Time and Architecture* 159–60
- Gilbreth, Frank B. 83
- globalization 12–3, 40
- Godard, Jean-Luc 221
- Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von 203–4
- Gombrich, E.H. 221
- Gombrowicz, Witold 203
- Graves, Robert 101, 229
- Greenberg, Clement 169–72, 174, 177, 190, 198, 236
- Grimm, Jakob and Wilhelm 69
- Gruppe 47, 182
- Guattari, Félix 238
- Guilbaut, Serge (*How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*) 168
- Gulf War 4

## INDEX

- Habermas, Jürgen 11, 102, 166,  
167, 180, 189, 214
- Hammett, Dashiell 185
- Harootunian, Harry 226
- Hayek, Friedrich 2–3
- Hegel, G.W.F. 4, 21, 57, 65, 85,  
128, 130, 173, 177, 224, 238  
*Phenomenology of Spirit* 19,  
220  
*Philosophy of History* 201–2  
on America 202  
negation of the negation 75  
on terror 187, 192  
truth through error 111–12  
on *Verstand/Vernunft* 84, 116
- Heidegger, Martin 42–3, 45–53,  
56, 58–61, 62, 60–1, 69, 62,  
69, 72, 73, 81, 137, 189, 214,  
223, 224–5, 235  
on Descartes 60  
on Nietzsche 222  
periodization and 51–2  
theory of reification 58–61  
theory of ‘standing reserve’ 60,  
144  
theory of technology 60, 144
- Heimat* (film) 37
- Hindu scriptures 184
- historicism 24, 70  
in Spengler 28
- history 26, 108
- Hitler, Adolf 36  
as ‘vanishing mediator’ 37
- Hobbes, Thomas 217
- Hölderlin, Johann Christian  
Friedrich 72, 184
- Holocaust 36
- Horkheimer, Max 157, 234
- Hugo, Victor 158
- Hugo, Friedrich 129–31
- Hume, David 4
- Huntington, Samuel 12, 218
- ideology, as theory of modernist  
practice 197
- Impressionism 150
- individualism 93
- individuality 54
- Industrial Revolution 84
- information revolution 12
- intersubjectivity 55
- Ireland, oppression of 103
- Jakobson, Roman 34, 219, 221
- James, Henry 52
- James, William 156
- Jameson, Fredric  
‘Introduction’ to Lyotard’s *The  
Postmodern Condition* 220  
*Postmodernism, or the Cultural  
Logic of Late Capitalism* 218,  
231  
*Signature of the Visible* 234  
‘The Vanishing Mediator; or,  
Max Weber as Storyteller’  
226  
‘Wallace Stevens’ 238  
on T.J. Clark 232
- Jarrell, Randall 229
- Jaspers, Karl 57, 222
- Jauss, Hans-Robert 20–2, 25,  
110, 219, 220
- Jenck, Charles 238
- Jespersen, Otto 19
- Johnson, Uwe 184
- Joyce, James 104, 105, 142–3,  
151, 177, 191, 200, 203  
*Finnegans Wake* 143  
*Ulysses* 103–5, 207–8

## INDEX

- Joyce, James (*cont.*)  
*Jugendstil* 150  
 Jünger, Ernst 184, 195, 237
- Kafka, Franz 183, 184, 203  
 Kandinsky, Wassily 151  
 Kant, Immanuel 4, 44, 47, 71, 73,  
 160, 180, 187, 189, 206, 236  
   on aesthetics 175, 176  
   noumenon/phenomenon  
   distinction 44  
 Kermode, Frank 238  
 Khlebnikov, Velimir 160  
 Kierkegaard, Søren 37–8, 184  
 Kleist, Heinrich von 191–2  
 Konstanz School 110  
 Kosselek, Reinhart 19, 219
- Lacan, Jacques 43, 44, 73, 122,  
 133–4, 174, 222  
   versus Herbert Marcuse's  
   concept of liberty 234  
 Laclau, Ernest 217  
 Lafontaine, Oskar 9, 218  
 Lange, C.G. 156  
 Lautréamont, Comte de 184  
 Lawrence, D.H. 135, 235  
 Le Corbusier 100, 167, 229  
 Leavis, F.R. 5  
 Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm 4  
 Lenin, V.I. 141, 211  
 Lévi-Strauss, Claude 72, 79, 155  
   *The Raw and the Cooked* 225  
 Levin, Harry 233  
 Levy, Marion J. (*Modernization:  
 Latecomers and Survivors*)  
 230  
 literature 179  
   as celebration of artistic  
   autonomy 185
- Paul de Man on 111  
*London Review of Books* 228–9  
 Luddism 143  
 Luhmann, Niklas 55, 82–3,  
 88–94, 122, 146, 153, 158,  
 162, 227  
 Lukács, Georg 36, 63, 82–5, 130,  
 162, 163, 227  
   concept of reification 84–5  
 Luther, Martin 36  
 Lyotard, Jean-Francois 3–5, 11,  
 173–4, 181, 195, 217, 218
- madness 72  
 Malevich, Casimir (*Black Square*)  
 120  
 Mallarmé, Stéphane 109, 110,  
 120, 147, 151, 159, 160, 184,  
 186, 204  
   *Un coup de dès* 208  
   on world destined to end in a  
   book 159, 208  
 Malraux, André (*Voices of Silence*)  
 159–60  
 Manet, Edouard 149, 151  
 Mann, Thomas 133  
 Marcuse, Herbert 234  
 Marshall Plan 201, 229  
 Marx, Karl Heinrich 4, 60, 80,  
 82, 84, 85, 90, 130, 144, 170,  
 171, 182, 218  
   *Grundrisse* 226, 233  
   *Zur Kritik* 77, 226  
   base/superstructure 77, 102  
   misconstrual by Foucault 69  
   on music 173  
   'social determination of being'  
   102  
   on transition between modes of  
   production 77–8

## INDEX

- Marxism 3, 28  
   as arbitrary 118  
   compared to neo-Confucianism 93  
   misconstrued by Foucault 64  
 mass culture 177  
 Maurice of Nassau, Prince of Orange 87–8  
 May '68 183, 188  
 Mayer, Arno 235  
   *The Persistence of the Old Regime* 141  
 McGinn, Colin 43–4, 222  
 McLuhan, Marshall 31  
 Middle Ages 27  
 middlebrow literature, emergence of 209–10  
 militarism 86–8, 212  
 Miller, Henry 184  
 Miller, Tyrus 238  
 minimalism 1  
 mode of production 65–6, 76, 77, 80–1, 118  
 modernism 28, 99, 113, 119, 123, 124, 127–8, 136–8, 141, 146–8, 150–3, 158–9, 160, 161, 180, 196  
   as anti-bourgeois 170  
   as apocalyptic dissatisfaction with inwardness 135  
   as autoreferentiality 159, 186, 198  
   as belated construction 164, 193  
   fascist 231  
   French and German 99  
   high 165, 197, 208, 210  
   as insult 100  
   late 150–1, 165–8, 197, 200, 203, 207, 209  
   as narrative 119, 128, 131  
   nihilism and 99  
   origins of its ideology 197–200  
   as process 108–9, 161  
*modernismo* 100  
*modernité* 21  
 modernity 31, 89, 91, 99, 109–10, 113, 141, 150, 161, 211–2  
   as ideology 214  
   as illusory possession of the West 8  
   as jargon used by free-marketeters 9–10  
   history of 17–22  
   modernization and 7, 229–301  
   as narrative 40–1, 45, 55, 145  
   recrudescence of as postmodern 7  
   as situation 57  
   as trope 34–7, 40, 145, 214  
 modernization 7, 99, 104  
*modernus* 17–19, 20  
 Molière, Jean-Baptiste Poquelin 184  
 music 38, 84, 149  
   Marx on 173  
 Musil, Robert 184, 191  
 Mussolini, Benito 211, 213  
  
 Nabokov, Vladimir 198, 200–3, 203, 204, 209, 238  
   *Ada* 203  
   *Lolita* 201–2, 204–5, 206  
   *Pale Fire* 202  
 narrative 33–4, 45, 55–57, 61  
   as Paul de Man's 'metaphor' 117  
   as return of the repressed 6, 29  
   internalized 125–6

## INDEX

- narrativity 32–3
- Nazism 36–7, 195  
     versus artistic modernism 102, 136
- negation of the negation 75
- neo-Confucianism 12, 93
- neo-modernism 237
- New, the 121, 151, 157, 171, 212  
     postmodernity dependent on 5, 152, 203
- New Criticism 5, 108, 168–9, 172, 175, 177
- Newton, Isaac 67, 89
- Nietzsche, Friedrich 4, 29, 32, 51, 56, 99, 137, 149, 184, 189, 190, 224  
     Heidegger on 222
- non-modern, as pre-modern 215
- non-narrative, as concealing ideological narrative 6
- noumenon/phenomenon distinction 44
- nouveau roman* 124  
     as product of *l'art pour l'art* 186
- novelty, problem of in art 121–8
- originality, postmodernism  
     dependent on concept of 152
- Pascal, Blaise 137, 184
- Paxton, Joseph 149
- peasantry 141–2
- periodization 28–9, 81, 105, 113  
     Heidegger as a thinker of 51–2
- Petrarch 27
- phallocentrism 1
- phenomenology 3, 137, 150, 189, 190
- philosophy, return of 2
- Piranesi, Giovanni Battista 68
- Plotinsky, Arkady 235
- poetry 56, 130, 148, 153, 172–3, 196, 204
- Pollock, Jackson 160
- pop culture 177
- Popper, Karl 2–3
- post-structuralism 181
- postmodernism, break with late-modernist canon rather than with modernism 210  
     dependent on concept of originality 152  
     rudderless 214  
     as variant of modernism 151, 170
- postmodernity 6, 93–4, 117, 151–2, 215  
     beyond left and right 6  
     critique of the modern 1  
     essential to understanding modernity 92–4  
     Jean-François Lyotard and 4–5  
     reaction against 7
- postmodernization 231
- poststructuralism 55, 183, 184, 189, 204  
     ‘death of the subject’ 133
- Pound, Ezra 121, 151, 168, 213, 228–9, 238
- pragmatism 150
- pre-modernism, in Foucault 61
- progress 7–8
- Proust, Marcel 38–9, 104, 142–3, 151, 191, 203, 222
- psychoanalysis 44, 53, 137, 175, 194, 202
- Rabelais, François 220
- Ransom, John Crowe 229

## INDEX

- rationalization 82, 83–6  
 reality, loss of 121  
 realism 122–4  
   as modernism's predecessor  
   120  
 Reformation 31  
 Reich, Wilhelm 133–4  
 reification 58–60, 82, 84–5  
 Reisz, Edgar 37  
 relativism, danger of 32  
 religion, as excuse for art's  
   autonomy 163–4  
   wisdom of 137  
 Renaissance 20, 25, 26, 27, 60,  
   61, 62–3, 90  
 Riding, Laura 101, 229  
 Rilke, Rainer-Maria 135, 184,  
   235  
 Rimbaud, Arthur 109, 135–6,  
   151, 157, 211, 235  
 Robbe-Grillet, Alain 124, 208–9,  
   235  
 romantic/classic distinction 21  
 Rorty, Richard 214  
   *Philosophy and the Mirror of  
   Nature* 1  
 Rousseau, Jean-Jacques 100, 107,  
   110, 114  
 Ruskin, John 143  
 Russian Revolution 32
- Said, Edward 235  
 Saint-Pierre, Abbé Bernardin de  
   22, 26  
 Salado, Régis 232  
 salvation 56, 81  
 Sartre, Jean-Paul 26, 57, 187,  
   207  
   *Les Séquestrés d'Altona* 26  
   *Search for a Method* 234–5
- Saussure, Ferdinand de 173  
 Schelling, Friedrich Wilhelm  
   Joseph von 24–5, 42, 45, 48,  
   173, 151, 189, 222  
 Schiller, Johann Christoph  
   Friedrich von 177  
 schizophrenia 160, 194  
 Schlegel, Friedrich 191–2  
 Schmitt, Carl 189  
 Schoenberg, Arnold 150, 151  
 Schroeder, Gerhard 9  
 Schulz, Bruno 104  
 Second International 191  
 secularization 90–1  
 self, critique of, as invoking of  
   mediaeval and neo-platonic  
   logic 137–8  
   irresolvable in modernity  
   without revolutionary  
   transformation of actuality  
   136  
   loss of 121  
 separation 82–3, 90  
 self-consciousness 54–5, 92–3,  
   186  
 Shelley, Percy Bysshe 5  
 shifters 19  
   Roman Jakobson on 220  
 Smith, Adam 31  
 Smith, Stan (*The Origins of  
 Modernism*) 228–9  
 social science 178  
 socialism, as dangerous 92  
 Spengler, Oswald 28  
 Spinoza, Benedict 217  
 Stalin, Joseph 75  
 Stalinism 166, 171, 191  
   versus artistic modernism 102,  
   136  
 Stein, Gertrude 199

## INDEX

- Stendhal, Henri Beyle 22  
 Stevens, Wallace 168–9, 177, 196  
 Stierle, Karlheinz 110  
 structuralism 76–77, 150, 204  
     as dialectical 77  
 subject 47–8  
     ‘poststructuralist’ critique of 55  
 subjectivity 55–6, 85, 133–136  
 surrealism 151  
     Benjamin on 213  
 Swift, Jonathan 100  
*symbolisme* 150
- Tafuri, Manfredo 232  
 Tate, Allen 100, 228  
 Taylorism 83, 87–8  
 technological determinism 145–6  
 technology 229–230  
     as ideology for modern art 154  
 teleology 1  
 television 177  
*Tel Quel* 46  
 Terror, the 187–8, 192  
 Thirty Years War 87  
 time 142  
 tonality 38, 84, 149  
 totality 83  
     as inconceivable by bourgeoisie 85  
     as process 141  
 Toynbee, Arnold 12  
 trains, as symbol of modernity 38–9  
 Trier, Jost 219  
 Truth, disappearance of 32  
     through error 111–2
- Unconscious, the 53, 149  
     colonization of 12
- Valéry, Paul 186, 228  
     on Baudelaire 157–8  
 Vallejo, César 104  
 Velasquez, Diego Rodriguez de Silva (*Las Meninas*) 73  
 value 32  
*vanguardismo* 101  
 violence as mass-culture  
     pornography 195  
 Voloshinov, V.N. 204, 238
- Wagner, Richard 149, 151  
 war 86, 212  
 Waterloo 103  
 Weber, Max 32, 38, 82–4, 85, 86, 211, 221, 226–7, 235–6  
 welfare state, as dangerous 92  
 Whitman, Walt 196  
 Williams, Raymond 37  
 Williams, William Carlos 168  
 Wittgenstein, Ludwig 56, 137  
 Woolf, Virginia 231  
     on change 104  
 Wordsworth, William 148  
 workers councils 211  
 World War I 143  
     impact on progress 7  
 World War II 133, 141, 164, 165, 167, 182, 185  
     as Utopian moment in American mind 212  
 writing, emergence of 147
- Yeats, William Butler 104, 107
- Žižek, Slavoj 44, 221, 222  
     *The Ticklish Subject* 233  
 Zola, Émile 143