HISTORY OF A SHIVER

THE SUBLIME IMPUDENCE OF MODERNISM

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Jed Rasula

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{ PREFACE }

The Language of the Listening Eye

In 1923, when dust jackets still adhered to an advertising model favoring verbal pitch over visual image, publisher Alfred A. Knopf provided a contextual note on the cover of *The Pilgrimage of Festus* by Conrad Aiken. "Festus is an Odyssey of the soul of modern man; it is *The Waste Land* set to a magical music, but sharing none of its bitterness." ▶ Aiken—T. S. Eliot's Harvard classmate—had reviewed *The Waste Land* for the *New Republic*, insisting on the integrity of its "emotional ensemble" as more important than any intellectual design accessed by the red herring of its footnotes. Aiken audaciously suggested that Eliot's poem succeeds "by virtue of its incoherence." "We 'accept' the poem as we would accept a powerful, melancholy tone-poem," he explained.[1]

Aiken's reference reflects his own pursuit of a "magical music" by literary means. In 1916, he'd published a book-length poem, *The Jig of Forslin*, subtitled "A Symphony." The same subtitle served another book-length poem, *The House of Dust*, in 1920. These two volumes were part of a longer sequence to which *The Pilgrimage of Festus* also belonged, the other parts being *Senlin: A Biography* and *The Charnel Rose*, the latter two issued in a single volume in 1918. When the five "symphonies" were gathered under the collective title *The Divine Pilgrim* in 1949, the book opened with a neopagan salute to the cosmos:

> She rose in moonlight, and stood, confronting sea,
> With her bare arms uplifted

So (roughly)[2] begins this belated and overripened product of the fin de siècle. The raised arms are a heraldic gesture reiterated by numerous artists of the time, shepherded into the twentieth century on calendars by Maxfield Parrish and in the photographic movement of pictorialism. Ecstatic supplication was a signature remonstrance as the century neared its end—arms raised in total exposure, surrender, and petition. At what date did this singular figure expire? Expire it did, whatever the date, and suddenly.

But *The Divine Pilgrim* is not dated by a single image alone. Aiken's presentation of the work as symphonic draws on a nineteenth-century aspiration to absorb musical qualities into the other arts. By the turn of the century,

galleries were filled with paintings called sonatas or bearing other markers of musical association, a trend that had largely subsided by the time Aiken was prefacing his symphonies with reference to absolute music, contrapuntal themes, harmony, and counterpoint. Asked by Harriet Monroe to review three of his own "symphonies" for *Poetry*, Aiken recounted his aspirations in terms that could have been plucked from a symbolist credo of the 1880s:

> I flatly give myself away as being in reality in quest of a sort of absolute poetry, a poetry in which the intention is not so much to arouse an emotion merely, or to persuade of a reality, as to employ such emotion or sense of reality (tangentially struck) with the same cool detachment with which a composer employs notes or chords. Not content to present emotions or things or sensations for their own sakes—as is the case with most poetry—this method takes only the most delicately evocative aspects of them, makes of them a keyboard, and plays upon them a music of which the chief characteristic is its elusiveness, its fleetingness, and its richness in the shimmering overtones of hint and suggestion.[3]

Traces of a long-vanished aestheticism are apparent here, but there's nothing to suggest Aiken imagined himself beholden to a moribund, antiquated outlook.

It could be argued that Aiken's lucid appraisal of *The Waste Land* (in the same year as this self-review) owed less to his friendship with the poem's author than to their shared debt to French symbolism, a milieu in which the rage for music was paramount, subsuming literature and art in an acute synesthetic convulsion. Yet during this same year, Swedish artist Viking Eggeling was completing his film *Diagonal Symphony*, which, unlike Aiken's verse, has long held pride of place as an inaugural event in the development of an ultramodern art form, abstract cinema. Following in its wake, a generation of artists sought to render music visible on-screen.

Aiken was not alone among poets of his generation in his pursuit of the musical analogy.[4] When the first of his symphonies was published in 1916, another volume of poetry with comparable aspirations appeared: *Goblins and Pagodas* by the imagist from Arkansas, John Gould Fletcher. It includes eleven poems called symphonies in various colors ("Blue Symphony," "Violet Symphony," "A Symphony in Scarlet," etc.). In a preface running to fourteen pages, Fletcher chronicles the foreground of his own efforts at symphonic poetry. "The second half of the nineteenth and the first fifteen years of the twentieth century have been a period of research, of experiment, of unrest and questioning," he begins. "In the arts, the tendency has been to strip each art of its inessentials and to disclose the underlying basis of pure form."[5] The purity of form he sought, it turned out, was more explicitly revealed in Eggeling's *Diagonal Symphony*, along with the scalar geometrics of painters Piet Mondrian, Kazimir Malevich, and other pioneers of first things first.

Ruminating on the practical means of such disclosure, Fletcher draws attention to the experience of color audition, that is, the provocation of a color by the sound of a musical note or chord. He refers his pursuit of such effects to "a Russian composer, Scriabine, [who] went so far as to construct color-scales, and an English scientist, Professor Wallace Rimington, [who] has built an organ which plays in colors, instead of notes." These examples fortify Fletcher's sense of purpose. "Poems can be written in major or minor keys, can be as full of dominant motif as a Wagner music-drama, and even susceptible of fugal treatment," he avows. When he reprinted these and other poems under the title *Preludes and Symphonies* in 1930, Fletcher acknowledged his debt to symbolism, suggesting that the "highly-orchestrated" nature of the verse shared Rimbaud's "methodical confusion of all the senses." But he wasn't backing down, reproaching critics with the gentle reminder that "color-vision in certain states of excitement, is far more common than most people suppose."[6]

Fletcher and Aiken were late participants in a discourse pervasive in the fin de siècle, when artistic aspiration in general had been beholden to the rising eminence of music for fifty years. In the process, "music" had been diffused into an evocative, intersensory *musicality*. So a deceptively simple question—to what sense is music addressed?—would have prompted surprising responses in the twilight years of the nineteenth century. "We now *hear* undeniable rays of light," poet Stéphane Mallarmé attested. "I mean that, since Wagner appeared, Music and Verse have combined to form Poetry." Richard Wagner, in such attributions, was not the Saxon composer of "music dramas" but a code name for a decisive reckoning with artistic destiny. Artist Maurice Denis compared the "orange motif" in a painting to "the seduction of the violins in the *Tannhäuser* overture" by Wagner. [7] The luminous palette of Denis's mentor, Paul Gauguin, mirrored his conviction that the function of color was to provoke "musical sensations," to solicit "the language of the listening eye."[8]

The prospect that music might be induced by a visual image reflected a widespread aspiration in which every art form was thought to petition the sensations specific to another art. Denis referred to a fellow painter with the stupefying neologism *polichrophilharmonique*.[9] It was a thoroughly reciprocal arrangement: Debussy's setting of Mallarmé's "Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun" transported the poet's atmospheric blur onstage, where Nijinsky brought the faun to life, photographed in situ by pictorialist photographers Baron Adolf de Meyer and Karl Struss. ▶ In this milieu, American composer Arthur Farwell wrote *Tone Pictures after Pastels in Prose* (1895) for piano. The turn of the century did little to quell such synesthetic formulas, although this eventually took on a somewhat anachronistic aura when it persisted after the Great War in solitary figures such as Aiken and Fletcher.

History of a Shiver recounts the attraction and impact of this moment on modernism, a moment captured in Jugendstil designer August Endell's conviction that "we are not just at the beginning of a new period style, we're witnessing the onset of a completely new art, an art with forms that designate nothing and depict nothing and recall nothing, but will be able to stir our souls so deeply, so powerfully, as before only music has been capable of doing with sounds."[10] When Endell published this vision in the journal *Dekorative Kunst* (*Decorative Art*) in 1897, the urge to extend the principles of decor to the presumptively higher arts was in full swing, but this immodest tendency would end up knocking all aesthetic principles off their pedestals in years to come, much as Endell's ex-wife, Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, would unsettle and reanimate the burgeoning Dada enclave in New York during the First World War. ▶

A locus classicus of modernism, the New York Dada scene accommodated artists (Marcel Duchamp, Francis Picabia, Man Ray), writers (Mina Loy, the Baroness Elsa, William Carlos Williams), and the composer Edgard Varèse. This circle, like so many others, reprised a milieu ripened in the drawing room of Mallarmé decades earlier, in whose Mardis (Tuesday evenings) could be found a heady mix of composers (Claude Debussy, Ernest Chausson) and painters (James McNeill Whistler, Paul Gauguin, Odilon Redon), in addition to his fellow writers. Édouard Manet painted Mallarmé's portrait, while the poet translated Whistler's "Ten o'Clock" lecture, and Debussy was called the "Whistler of music."[11]

The fabric dances of Loïe Fuller inspired Mallarmé to reconceive poetry as an art unfurling in space, with the page reconceived as a stage. Recognizing the exorbitant pressure exerted on all the arts by Wagner, Mallarmé sought to preserve some autonomy for poetry even as he conceded the necessity for poems to be as ambiguous yet as evocative as music. Composers, in turn, sought a pure poetry in their compositions, and painters welcomed Gauguin's initiative to awaken the language of the listening eye. The full title given by Paul Signac to his 1890 portrait of anarchist, editor, and critic Félix Fenéon is revealing: *Opus 217: Against the Enamel of a Background Rhythmic with Beats and Angles, Tones and Tints*. ▶

At its height, the urge to blend the arts was abetted by social conviviality. Artists, writers, musicians, dancers, and theatrical people simply hung out together, immersed in a common milieu, like the Montmartre cabaret Chat Noir, which spawned a series of exhibits under the name *Arts Incohérents*, courtesy of which Mona Lisa was blowing smoke rings out of a pipe more than thirty years before Marcel Duchamp added a mustache and goatee. One of its exhibitions in 1882 featured an all-black painting by Paul Bilhaud cheekily titled *Negroes Fighting in a Cellar at Night*, beating Kazimir Malevich to the punch, as it were, decades before his *Black Square*. ▶ Alphonse Allais followed up Bilhaud's gesture with *Album Primo-Avrilesque* (1897), with

monochromatic paintings in different colors, each cleverly titled to justify the omission of pictorial content. Hoaxes in one sense, such ventures bolstered a widespread incentive to resist artistic "expertise," to seek relief from the dictates of schools, academies, and official meddling. Gauguin, incensed at state-sponsored management of art, scornfully reproached public indifference to "a whole Pleiades of independent artists whom the official painters have anxiously been keeping track of," while keeping their distance. "All of twentieth-century art will derive from them," he claimed.[12] And he was right, allowing for the hyperbolic vigor of his "all."

The fin de siècle turns out to have been an inscrutable threshold, an obscure conduit through which items were passed, and what entered one side was unrecognizable when it emerged from the other. That uncanny transfiguration is registered in the rapport between Ezra Pound and William Butler Yeats, with a younger poet becoming the improbable tutor of an elder whose tutelage he sought. It was a rare moment when elders in every art conceded the field to their juniors, not in defeat but in rapt anticipation of what might ensue. A comparable imbalance attended the emergence of Arnold Schoenberg's pupils Anton Webern and Alban Berg, whose public success overlapped with his own.

Art historian Dario Gamboni speaks of "potential images" as a characteristic impetus behind modern art, but the notion can be extended to other arts, all of them converging on *potential art*, maybe even striking the *art* altogether, so nothing but sheer potentiality remains. The Dadaist rage for cancellation would qualifies as a big *no* prefacing an uninhibited *yes*. But even the fastidiously decorative exhibitions of the Vienna secession seem perched on the cusp of the new century as an invitational gesture. The uncluttered spaces in Joseph Olbrich's Secession Building emphasize the vacancy as much as the artwork on the walls. Generously spaced, the art seemed to suggest the distance that needed to be traversed as each art went in search of intelligible contact with another, like intergalactic travelers in search of other life forms. The Secession rooms were inspired by the Wagnerian quest for a totalized solution, the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. But where Wagner sought an encompassing absorption of all the arts into the grand spectacle of the music drama, the secessionists (like modernists in general) aspired not to summon and gather but rather to reconfigure any work of art as an index to other arts, road signs and way stations like the Prouns of El Lissitzky in Soviet Russia decades later. ▶

Under the pressure of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, each art was radically transformed, becoming in many respects more distinct, more autonomous, as it solicited a congregation of different senses. The craving for artistic transcendence found alliance with fourth-dimensional theory at one esoteric extreme and with the public spectacle of civic pageantry and barefoot dancing at the other. By the time Pound emitted his exhortation

Make It New (1934) as the title of a collection of essays, the storied phrase had a long retrospective application. "It is quite obvious that we do not all of us inhabit the same time," Pound ruefully observed.[13] Eighty years later, his point could be extended to modernism as such; its multitemporality keeps slithering out beyond the proprietary calipers poised to grasp it. Borrowing a term for this indeterminacy from the German romantics, I call it a sublime impudence. Its end is in its beginning, to borrow a perspective from Eliot's *Four Quartets*. So it's fitting to conclude this prelude where it began, courtesy of Eliot's friend Aiken: "ah the unspeakable voyage of the dead men," he writes,

> whispering yes, whispering no, greeting and permitting,
> touching and recalling, and with our eyes
> looking into the past to see if there the future
> might grow like a leaf, might grow like a bough with flowers,
> might grow like a tree with beneficent shade.[14]

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Sarah Posman, Rachel Blau DuPlessis, and Sascha Bru solicited some of the following publications, early drafts that grew into chapters of this book:

"'Listening to Incense': Melomania & the Pathos of Emancipation." *Journal of Modern Literature* 31, no. 1 (Fall 2007).

"Endless Melody." *Texas Studies in Language and Literature* 55, no. 1 (Spring 2013).

"Wagnerism: A Telephone from the Beyond." *The Georgia Review* LXV, no. 2 (Summer 2011).

"Visual Music—A Missing Link?" In *The Aesthetics of Matter: Modernism, the Avant-Garde and Material Exchange*, edited by Sarah Posman, Anne Reverseau, David Ayers, Sascha Bru, and Benedikt Hjartarson. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014.

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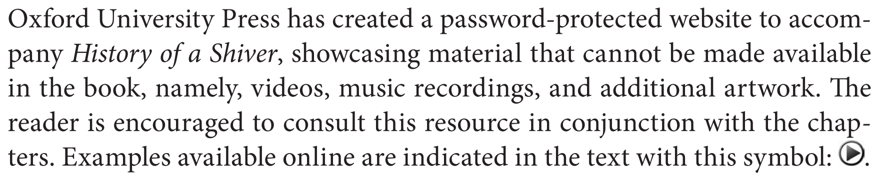

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Introduction

OBLIQUE MODERNISM

I was present—I dimly recognized—at the passage of an entire people out of one system into another.

—WYNDHAM LEWIS

What a weighty destiny: to be the hinge between this side and the other side, a hinge at the border of yesterday and today.

—PAUL KLEE

Wyndham Lewis and Paul Klee[1] were of the same generation, coming of age at the turn of the century, but the epochal challenge to which they attest preceded them, and it persisted into what a character in Jonathan Lethem's novel *Chronic City* calls "too-late modernism."[2] In a 1987 lecture, Raymond Williams wondered, "When Was Modernism?" He wanted to reassess "the machinery of selective tradition," or the ideological blinders governing the canonical measure of modernism—alarmed, for instance, that "Ibsen and Strindberg are left behind," even as "Brecht dominates." Williams favored a more capacious historical frame, particularly one that "must start from the fact that the late nineteenth century was the occasion for the greatest changes ever seen in the media of cultural production."[3] Williams's untimely death prevented him from taking up the challenge, which in any case has become a transformative ingredient in the turn taken by modernist studies ever since.

Williams's question—when was modernism?—looms over projects such as Christopher Butler's *Early Modernism*, which he dates 1900–1916, and Tyrus Miller's *Late Modernism* (meaning the 1930s), while titles such as *Victorian Modernism* and *Pre-Modernism* have come along, heeding Peter Nicholls's insistence on charting "a pre-history of the various modernisms without which their own exemplary works can hardly be understood."[4] In Jacques Rancière's concise formulation, "the modern world is characterized by a gap between temporalities." This observation appears in a chapter of *Aisthesis* on the inaugural role played by Emerson and Whitman, announcing the "modernist ideal"—"the ideal of a new poetry and a new man."[5] But doesn't this

simply push a putative starting date back a bit farther than usual? Instead of a "gap," it may be more accurate to suggest that by hosting discrepant temporalities, modernity convenes a polytemporality.

Books featuring *modernism* or *modernist* in the title have numbered more than a hundred annually for several decades, though this retinue is vastly exceeded by those on the subject that refrain from using these keywords in the title. In any case, *modernism* is on a roll, just as *postmodernism* was several decades ago, when Arthur Kroker and David Cook in *The Postmodern Scene* extended *that* rubric all the way back to Saint Augustine. In a recent *touché*, Juan Suárez suggests that "modernism seems to have always been postmodern."[6] My epigraphs from Lewis and Klee add an existential character to Williams's question. A key factor in assessing the *when* of modernism, in Williams's view, is the great media transformation in cultural production, to which I would add the fantasies and expectations fueling that transformation long in advance. To be the hinge of an epochal change meant gazing back at the past and squinting into the future in equal measure, haunted always by uncertainty: was the door closing or opening?

Dates have played a leading role in the tale of modernism, with star billing going to 1922, the year *The Waste Land* and *Ulysses* were published, making modernism seem uniquely literary and Anglo-American to boot. F. Scott Fitzgerald, writing on the "Jazz Age" in November 1931, appended an exclamation point when dating the phenomenon: "May one offer in exhibit the year 1922!"[7] In November of that year, André Breton gave a lecture in Barcelona for the opening of a major exhibition by Francis Picabia at Galerie Dalmau, characterizing himself as being "at the dawn of 1922, in lovely, festive Montmartre … dreaming of what I might still become."[8] It was a mood he shared with a future collaborator of surrealism in Prague, where Karel Teige founded the Devětsil group, celebrating everyday life in modernity as the cradle of "poetism": "nonchalant, exuberant, fantastic, playful, nonheroic, and erotic," he wrote, dissolving traditional art categories in the process. "Clowns and dadaists taught us this aesthetic skepticism."[9] But modernism in 1922 was by no means confined to Europe. The legendary "Week of Modern Art" in São Paulo was held in February, an event compounded by the publication of Mário de Andrade's collection of poems *Paulicéia Desvairada* (*Hallucinated City*). ▶ In his "Extremely Interesting Preface" (often called the Bible of Brazilian modernism), Andrade speaks on behalf of his generation as "the primitives of a new epoch." "Our primitivism represents a new constructive phase," he suggests in the idiom of the time.[10] If classical art aspired to eternity, the ravenous avant-garde acclaimed the sufficiency of the present moment.

Not surprisingly, the famous year has gotten its scholarly due. The subtitle of Michael North's book *Reading 1922: A Return to the Scene of the Modern* plays on the scene of a crime that might as well be that depicted in *The Great Gatsby* (set in the summer of that fabled year). North's volume was supplemented by

Marc Manganaro's *Culture, 1922: The Emergence of a Concept* (2002). More recent is Kevin Jackson's *Constellation of Genius 1922: Modernism Year One* (2013), its pushy subtitle consigning much of what has counted as modernism to the dust heap, and a collection of essays edited by Jean-Michel Rabaté, *1922: Literature, Culture, Politics* (2015). Other years have also been nominated, including *1910: The Emancipation of Dissonance* by Thomas Harrison (1996), *In 1926: Living at the Edge of Time* by Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht (1997), *Vienna 1900 and the Heroes of Modernism* edited by Christian Brandstätter (2006), and *1913: The Cradle of Modernism* by Rabaté (2007). Rabaté cites no fewer than four other studies of 1913 (including a massive three-volume project edited by Liliane Brion-Guerry), while suggesting that his approach is more indebted to *The Futurist Moment* by Marjorie Perloff (1986), a "moment"—however configured historically—being more accommodating than a given year. Whether reckoned by moments or years, the zing of the instantaneous stands in sharp contrast to the panoramic leisure of the nineteenth century.

Assigning 1922 a foundational status privileges a single generation, whereas modernism was indisputably a multigenerational affair. To reduce modernism to a generation collapses it to a biological bulge like the baby boom or consigns it to the symptoms of mass behavior like the Roaring Twenties. Pinning a date on modernism risks reducing art to the artless by-product of fashion and historical determinism, a condition that undoubtedly applies to most art in any period. "How much of modernist poetry is merely up-to-date conduct-poetry?" wondered Laura Riding and Robert Graves in their 1927 *A Survey of Modernist Poetry*. They abhorred such a prospect and wanted to preserve the term for salutary application. "*Modernist*," they insisted, "should describe a quality in poetry which has nothing to do with the date or with responding to civilization." Rather, "its modernism would lie in its independence." Although they dismissed Ezra Pound as an opportunist and poseur, Riding and Graves couldn't help but echo his insistence on making it new by emphasizing "the *new* doings of poems," adding that "modernist poetry as such should mean no more than fresh poetry."[11] Even fresh produce has an expiration date, so this criterion is precariously if suitably perched at that juncture of fashion and classic Baudelaire specified as the condition of modernity ("the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable.") It's precisely because contemporary perishables add their share to the "timeless" that modernism has had to suffer the question of dates.[12] There's also the matter of the timely, especially as it pertains to the political allegiances endemic among members of the avant-garde after the Great War and the Russian Revolution.

In a famous proclamation, Virginia Woolf had the pluck to assign a specific date to the inauguration of modernism, so 1910 became a convenient way of making the subject seem emphatically twentieth-century. But Woolf's date has a hidden aspect, for she wasn't referring to something confined to

that year—rather, it commemorated her friend Roger Fry's "Manet and the Post-Impressionists" exhibition at the Grafton Galleries in London. The year famously nominated as the date human nature changed, then, was notable for its *reprise* of artistic activity in France from the previous three decades. Other years have been canonized in the scholarship, and where modernism is concerned, almost any year could be awarded a trophy, but always under contention is a start date and an end date, as if modernism were a subcontracted construction project with constant cost overruns. As the parable of Woolf's 1910 suggests, however, modernism is a leaky vessel. It's in the very nature of the adjective *modern* that whatever it modifies is continually shifting, so there can be no preeminently modern instant, however much the icons of modernism seem to nominate such instances—from *Les demoiselles d'Avignon* to *Ulysses* to *Potemkin*. In fact, Victorian photographers wrangling their collodion glass plates were immersed in a quintessentially modern technology, no less than the political photomontages that John Heartfield produced for *BIZ* during the rise of the Nazis. ▶

As early as 1939, artist Jean Charlot felt the need to remind his peers, "We live in a world streamlined by the influence of those very men of 1910 whose work we now pretend is obsolete."[13] The challenge is bridging the gap between now and then, a gap always expanding. One foot on the receding past, the other nudging like an arrow into the future, brings on vertigo and seasickness together. The sensation of occupying discrepant temporalities at once is the discomfiting thrall of modernity. Henry James explored this sensation frequently, and in the late tale "The Jolly Corner," an architect returning to New York after a lifetime abroad experiences his childhood home as existentially predatory. Confronted by the "swagger things, the modern, the monstrous" in the unfamiliar metropolis, figured as "some vast ledger-page" with its "dreadful multiplied numberings"—an alternative universe representing all he would have become had he stayed—he retreats into the sanctuary of his family manse, where he takes to prowling the empty rooms night after night until he's overcome by "a sensation more complex than had ever before found itself consistent with sanity."[14]

A simultaneous apprehension of discrepant times, like a bundle of wheat sheaves, can also feel restorative, as in William Carlos Williams's realization that "the primitives are not back in some remote age" but right here, right now. And yet the claim of the remote past on attention lingers like an opiate. "How easy to slip / into the old mode, how hard to / cling firmly to the advance," Williams admits.[15] "An inkling of the future is passing us by," surmised Serbian poet Srečko Kosovel.[16] Paul de Man summarized the predicament (resentfully labeled "the demon of progress" by Lewis) in his essay "Literary History and Literary Modernity." "Modernity and history relate to each other in a curiously contradictory way that goes beyond antithesis or opposition," de Man observed. "If history is not to become sheer regression or

paralysis, it depends on modernity for its duration and renewal; but modernity cannot assert itself without being at once swallowed up and reintegrated into a regressive historical process."[17] The radical edge is inexorably slipped back into a protective sheath.

"We are so accustomed, by now," wrote Sacheverell Sitwell in *Dance of the Quick and the Dead*, "to be surrounded in our lives by the stolen images from other ages that it scarcely dawns upon us that this will be the only age we shall ever see with our own eyes. All the past died in the year of our birth. Let us look at this present, then, as if it is about to die!" Such a prospect, Sitwell admits, is almost impossible to sustain, but he cites Baudelaire's famous essay "The Painter of Modern Life" as an exception. The challenge of modernity has reverberated down to the present in Karl Marx's salient phrase "all that is solid melts into air." For Sitwell, the "lost elegancies of [Baudelaire's] age are as remote from us as the farthingale of Queen Elizabeth. For objects that are just removed from the touch of our hands are much more distant than things that could never by any temporal possibility have come within our reach."[18] Today, for instance, we can easily picture a horse-drawn carriage but struggle to comprehend a television set without a remote or commerce without credit cards. Entire vocabularies crumble, leaving raw material for lexicographers and grammarians of the future to piece together. With the demise of the LP, the adjective *groovy* sheds its material base. Clark Kent would now be hard put to find a phone booth in which he could change into his Superman outfit.

It requires the tenacity of the archaeologist to trace buried links between the present and the recent past, and that's what Walter Benjamin aspired to do in *The Arcades Project*, a work historically situated between the suburban shopping malls he did not live to see and those Parisian arcades that Sitwell says "are as remote from us as the farthingale of Queen Elizabeth." ▶ And yet, as Benjamin surmised, the past and the present somehow snuggle together under the sheets, and twenty-first-century life is layered with relics of Benjamin's day testifying to a seemingly archaic realm, just as the bibelots of the Second Empire struck him as practically prehistoric.

It takes a special resolve to disentangle the archaic from the modern, filtered as they are through the screen of the recent past. And yet the archaic and the present moment may overlap in a taunting palimpsest. Like Pound, whose familiar adage "Make it new" actually applied to the past, English composer and occultist Cyril Scott thought that "when a thing is sufficiently old, its effect, on being resuscitated, is new again." He looked to "Mr Smith, Unlearner" (via fourth-dimension theorist C. H. Hinton) for an aesthetic compass. "I contend that unlearning is one of the most important and difficult faculties for every creator to acquire, because, although it is tolerably easy to learn, yet to unlearn, it requires almost a genius: and certainly it requires an unlearner to create a genius."[19]

In Scott, we find a complex blend of seemingly progressive and regressive tendencies characteristic of the fin de siècle. Scott studied composition in Germany, where he became a member of the elite circle around poet Stefan George, who had himself attended Stéphane Mallarmé's legendary Tuesdays in Paris. Like George, Scott housed himself in an "ecclesiastical atmosphere" with stained-glass windows, Gothic furniture, and incense.[20] A dashing and sartorially flamboyant figure, as a concert pianist, Scott epitomized the musical vanguard in the early years of the twentieth century. His piano pieces such as "Lotus Land" and "Danse Nègre" heralded a long string of commercial successes in the minor idiom. ▶ At the same time, he was publishing poetry, collected under such titles as *The Shadows of Silence* and *The Grave of Eros.* A section of his 1912 collection, *The Vales of Unity*, is titled "The Garden of Soul-Sympathy," reflecting his lifelong debt to occult wisdom, Vedanta, and alternative medicine. He published translations of George and Baudelaire and regarded J. S. Bach and Richard Wagner as the two uncontested masters of music, while deploring the futurism of rival pianist-composer Leo Ornstein: "such music is the outcome of association with the lower levels of the astral plane, the slums, as it were, of that region."[21]

At the same time, in his book *The Philosophy of Modernism*, Scott could avow the radical prospect of abandoning the entire code of Western music: "Why limit our inspiration to this hampering fetter of key? why have any key at all?" he asked, "or why not invent new scales, or regard the whole of tonality as chromatic? Thus some of us have abolished key-signature altogether, and have bid farewell to an old convention." Alan Hull opened his 1918 biography of the composer with the claim "The dominant feature of Cyril Scott's music is its originality, that is to say, its modernity. He is an innovator." While deploring the ubiquity of the term *modernism*, Hull insists: "Modernism is nothing more than innovation. Further, *Ultra-modernism*, if anything, should express merely the *degree* of the orientation of the artist's outlook towards the future."[22]

In *The Relation of Ultramodern to Archaic Music* (1921), pianist Katherine Ruth Heyman appreciatively followed Scott's precepts and, like him, affirmed the potential of ultramodern music to achieve "mana-consciousness," transmitting the light of Asia to the West. ▶ Heyman was a friend of Pound, and her book includes a chapter on imagism as a companion movement to ultramodern music. Music and poetry converge in a renaissance of the archaic, she finds, quoting Cambridge classicist Jane Ellen Harrison: " 'Art in these latter days, goes back as it were, on her own steps, recrossing the ritual bridge back to life.' For Art, 'coming out of a perception of unknown things,' is ready in this new age to complete a cycle and return to its source, whence, in the great Rhythm, it must again emerge."[23]

Scott, too, affirmed the "great Rhythm," and like many in his generation, he regarded himself as a romantic, occupying a temperate zone between

the austerities of the classical and the monstrosities of futurism. For him, "the romanticist believes in newness *within* limits, the futurist believes in newness *without* limits. Thus the divine discontent of the romantic school (divine being a synonym for beauty) has become a satanic discontent in the futuristic one."[24] To regard Italian futurism as satanic is a useful reminder of the temperamental affinities of Scott's generation, readily availing itself of nineteenth-century Prometheanism ("divine discontent") as a reference point for artistic striving.

A clue to Scott's ambivalence concerning modernism can be found in William Butler Yeats's famous account of the premiere of Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi* in Paris, at the end of which comes his resounding litany: "After Stephane Mallarmé, after Paul Verlaine, after Gustave Moreau, after Puvis de Chavannes, after our own verse, after all our subtle color and nervous rhythm, after the faint mixed tints of Conder, what more is possible? After us the Savage God."[25] ▶ This passage from Yeats' autobiographical *The Trembling of the Veil* concludes the chapter on "The Tragic Generation." As with Scott, Yeats's occultism led him to regard artist provocateurs as nothing less than "a procession of the Gods": "Arthur Symons brought back from Paris stories of Verhaeren and Maeterlinck, and so brought me confirmation, and I began to announce a poetry like that of the Sufi's." For Yeats, the hermetic tradition cast a sanctified aura over literature, so he had not just predecessors but masters. Conceding that he thought William Morris's verse mediocre, Yeats admitted that "if some angel offered me the choice, I would choose to live his life, poetry and all, rather than my own or any other man's."[26] Despite such idolatry, Yeats's generation was a vital conduit for modernism as it emerged.

Two figures sure to be named as avatars of the ultramodern at the turn of the century were Yeats's generational peers Maurice Maeterlinck and Loïe Fuller (the subject of his famous line about telling the dancer from the dance). Maeterlinck's work provided the mediumistic atmosphere through which the twentieth century emerged, and Fuller's fabric dances served Mallarmé as an inspirational model for transforming the printed page. Claude Debussy, whose setting of Mallarmé's *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun* was only one of his numerous services to an emerging modernism, championed the music of none other than Scott. Also born within a year or two of Yeats (1865) were Edvard Munch, Wassily Kandinsky, and Alfred Stieglitz in the visual arts; architects Frank Lloyd Wright and Henry van de Velde; Art Nouveau designer Charles Rennie Mackintosh; maverick composers Erik Satie and Ferruccio Busoni; Luigi Pirandello and Konstantin Stanislavsky and theater design revolutionary Adolphe Appia.

The generational contours are revealingly expanded by adding Max Weber, diagnostician of Protestant capitalism, along with eminent entrepreneurs Henry Ford and Carl Laemmle (film pioneer and founder of Universal Studio), scientist Marie Curie, and musician Scott Joplin, the face if not the

founder of ragtime. A host of public intellectuals could be summoned, from H. G. Wells and W. E. B. Du Bois to Miguel de Unamuno, Roger Fry, and Sadakichi Hartmann to Count Harry Kessler, Hermann Bahr, and Yeats's friend and ally Arthur Symons—men proximate to artistic paroxysm and graciously receptive to potential. Adding composers Richard Strauss, Jean Sibelius, and Carl Nielsen to the roster gives the progressive/regressive aspect of Yeats a sonic background (even Sibelius's Fourth Symphony could be perceived as "cubist music" in 1913).[27] If the generation born fifteen or twenty years later is the one that sent up the flare of 1922, Yeats and his peers serve as a reminder that the rolling thunder of modernism was audible before the turn of the century. To answer Raymond Williams's question of when was modernism, we benefit by taking the long view.

"Modernity has many beginnings, many endings," Henri Meschonnic observes in *Modernité Modernité*, and attempting to rein them in with determinate dates is to indulge in what he calls "para-historical fetishism," a practice he mocks in his title, using the French term for *modernism* as if it were not a noun but a salt shaker aimed at a wound.[28] And yet we continue to live with a sense of historical succession. One time follows another, even if unevenly developed, suggesting that modernism as a temporal indicator should eventually present a canceled ticket. And that's where Meschonnic's instructive doubling comes into play; for the moment the ticket is canceled, it's renewed.

Modernism canceled (*Relâche* in the ballet of Picabia and Satie) is the recurrent jack-in-the-box, bouncing back from every defeat, every denial, each repudiation and reproach—paramount among which may be Walter Mehring's proposal: "Pre-Dadaism consisted of the shame of a century incapable of becoming the twentieth."[29] What, then, was Dada? A bluff, conceded Raoul Hausmann, one of its most ardent agitators in Berlin. However, "the bluff is no ethical principle, but a practical means of self-detoxification."[30] Where does such pluck come from? Like Dada, modernism has always been multiple, whether used as a pejorative, as a descriptively neutral term, or as a rallying cry. Its vitality requires the full compass of these associations. Modernism, the ultimate shapeshifter—upside down, backward, inside out, left and right, progressive and regressive, primitive and futuristic all at once, over and over again. Zombie modernism, a relentless metabolism.

"Man is an over-complicated organism," wrote Pound in one of his less cantankerous moods as he watched the world lurch toward another world war. "If he is doomed to extinction he will die out for want of simplicity."[31] Allen Shawn, introducing his book on Arnold Schoenberg—composer of notoriously gritty works such as *Pierrot Lunaire* and *Moses and Aron*—makes the beguiling suggestion that "perhaps Schoenberg's work deserves a more superficial treatment than it has hitherto received."[32] I've appreciated this stimulating proposal when thinking about the modernism for which the Vienna school seems so emblematic. Schoenberg's twelve-tone shadow over

so much twentieth-century music too easily obscures his roots in the century in which he lived the first twenty-six years of his life, years in which he saw *each* of Wagner's operas several dozen times.

Schoenberg, like so many of his generation, entered the twentieth century with a heavy load of nineteenth-century luggage. Many of his major compositions use nineteenth-century texts. *The Book of the Hanging Gardens* is a cycle of poems by George (an intimate of Mallarmé's famous Tuesday evenings), and another poem by George was worked into his second string quartet. The *Gurre-Lieder* draws on Jens Peter Jacobsen (about whom Rainer Maria Rilke thought of writing a monograph). *Pelleas and Melisande* revisits Maeterlinck's influential play as an orchestral score. And *Pierrot Lunaire* is based on translations from the Belgian symbolist Albert Giraud. ▶ Schoenberg is usually approached as a sort of Einstein of musical physics, leaping free from the realm of familiar Newtonian sonorities with his "emancipation of dissonance." But if his head was in the stratosphere, what were his feet doing, planted so squarely in nineteenth-century muck?

History of a Shiver addresses that question in broader terms (Schoenberg was not alone), by adhering to the spirit of a "superficial treatment." I don't mean "simplistic"; this is not *Modernism for Dummies*. For the clan of modernists, the twentieth century had immense symbolic potential: to greet the new century, in 1900, felt like standing on the foredeck of a great ocean liner, as if even the passage of time could be credited to human ingenuity. In a way, it was, but the resolve of the nations participating in the 1884 Prime Meridian Conference to establish a global index of temporality was still a work in progress at the dawn of the new century, and it was not until July 1, 1913, that the first time signal was transmitted around the globe, from the Eiffel Tower. ▶ Much as the twentieth century bore symbolic weight, everything it symbolized was the palpable product of what preceded it. In fact, the generation(s) of modernists was born and raised in the *nineteenth* century. Straddling two centuries, they couldn't help but envision the twentieth with the resources of the nineteenth. It's prudent to supplement *modern* and *-ism* with *modernity* as "a process of historical fits and starts," with Lynda Nead's proviso that "thoroughfare urbanism was always attended by side-street historicism."[33]

Modernism, experienced obliquely, is the way it was most often experienced by those who have become known as modernists. They found themselves in situations and guessed their way through and beyond them. Cubism had no agenda; it was an impromptu partnership between a Spaniard and a Frenchman in a harrowing expedition. Dada began as desperado guesswork played out in public, night after night, at Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich. Surrealism was a devil-may-care social slalom, with all the self-absorption of adolescence, but conducted with the fussy exactitude of maverick scientists. And then there was all the improvised footwork between the brick-and-mortar avant-garde and the expansive territory that beckoned beyond organization

or even intent. There were individuals who "modernized" themselves on their own, as Pound enviously observed of T. S. Eliot.[34]

There were also historical oddities like Charles Ives, who even today seems futuristic while recognizably a man of Reconstruction-era brass bands in village parades. The composer and piano virtuoso Busoni, with one foot in the commedia dell'arte of the Ancien Régime and another kicking down the barricades, envisioned a musical future of microtones inaccessible to the Western keyboard. And then there was Sigmund Freud, a figure typecast as the intimidating gatekeeper of the twentieth century, as if starring in Franz Kafka's parable "The Judgment"; but Freud's prominence obscures the intrepid introspection bequeathed by Friedrich Nietzsche to the new century like an anarchist's bomb in a swank cafe. In short, *History of a Shiver* concedes a distraction as its premise. Gazing into the heart of modernism, it fidgets, beguiled by a buzz of activity around the edges of the picture frame. When the frame gets big enough, it's clear that the frame *was* the picture all along.

For half a century, *modernism* has been an institutionally sanctioned honorific. The question now is what it means to persist in making the customary ablutions. *Modernism*. Is it a term foreclosed by prior usage? An official category for artistic excess or extremity circa … when? 1855? 1895? 1910? *Modernity* is accepted as a historical condition, but adds to this condition a fecund insinuation, a hyperbolic assertion of first principles, a mutant distress of the everyday, an "emancipation of dissonance" and more: its claims (which are legion) are themselves excessive, a "grand, hyperbolic undertaking."[35] The aura of rupture courted in *The Waste Land*, the overloaded narrative aspirations of Marcel Proust and Robert Musil and James Joyce, the assiduous discontinuities rising to paroxysm in *The Rite of Spring, Potemkin*, and *Guernica*—all these generic signifiers of modernism now seem paradoxically comfortable with the agonies they signify, at repose in their distress.

It is imperative, given its familiarity, to retain something of the basic *incoherence* of this outcome, because, in Clifford Geertz's pertinent reminder, "coherence cannot be the major test of validity for a cultural description." Minimal coherence is necessary, of course. "But there is nothing so coherent as a paranoid's delusion or a swindler's story," Geertz pungently observes. His influential advocacy of "thick description" (a term he takes from philosopher Gilbert Ryle) as antidote to an eagle's-eye overview can, of course, be taken as promoting a kind of procedural obscurantism. Instead of lucid appraisal, let's mess around. But I take him to be protesting against tendencies in anthropology to which the study of modernism has also been susceptible. "Nothing has done more," he suggests, "to discredit cultural analysis than the construction of impeccable depictions of formal order in whose actual existence nobody can quite believe."[36]

Anthropology, as Geertz's frequent references to modernist figures suggest, is itself a discipline contemporaneous with modernism. *The Interpretation of*

Cultures concludes with the influential chapter "Deep Play," in which Geertz construes the social behavior of the Balinese cockfight as a pragmatic model of aesthetic play.

> Like any art form—for that, finally, is what we are dealing with—the cockfight renders ordinary, everyday experience comprehensible by presenting it in terms of acts and objects which have had their practical consequences removed and been reduced (or, if you prefer, raised) to the level of sheer appearances, where their meaning can be more powerfully articulated and more exactly perceived.[37]

This passage is preceded by a citation of W. H. Auden's elegy for Yeats, with its infamous line "Poetry makes nothing happen." Geertz, with anthropological curiosity, notes something usually overlooked by literary critics: the verb *make*. The cockfight then becomes his model of *making* nothing happen, for the energies it symbolically mobilizes are otherwise purely destructive (which they are, he admits, to the birds themselves). It's a community service, securely grounded in Aristotelian catharsis. But can the bloodbath of the cockfight be reciprocally reinvested in the aesthetic paradigm? If the cockfight is an art form, is the art form a cockfight?

When Wallace Stevens's snowman melts, the "nothing that is not there and the nothing that is" coalesce, paradoxically, into something missing.[38] Grammar supplies a substantive even where there is none; but then, isn't this what art does? "Any expressive form works (when it works), by disarranging semantic contexts in such a way that properties conventionally ascribed to certain things are unconventionally ascribed to others, which are then seen to actually possess them." Geertz's terms suggest, in part, a source of much that is misleading in literary exegesis and art history, where the tendency is to discern convention precisely in those acts that Geertz calls "unconventionally ascribed." To make a convention of the unconventional abets the dangerous presumption that artists produce their works *in order to* conform to some normative pattern unavailable to the artist but somehow accessible to the critic. "To call the wind a cripple, as Stevens does, to fix tone and manipulate timbre, as Schoenberg does," Geertz goes on, "is to cross conceptual wires," with the result that phenomena "are clothed in signifiers which normally point to other referents."[39]

The familiar model of imperious genius flying in the face of public taste is inadequate to the modernist crossing of conceptual wires. That's why I've found it worthwhile to dwell at length on the preparatory moods emanating from Wagnerism (the first *ism* and launching pad of the modern as *ism*), which agitated a craving for—and thereby nurtured the receptivity to—these crossed wires. The pursuit of synesthesia in the nineteenth century gradually shed its various theosophical and other period associations until, by "1910," it was understood in the simple exhortation to *make it new*, whatever it was.

Of course, Wagnerism had its own foreground in romanticism and aftermath in symbolism—Wagnerism as the fading aroma of a heady distress—but attempts to elucidate the modernist debt to romanticism have generally foundered to the extent that they've overlooked Wagnerism as the great transmitter, the power station that, in effect, pumped a purified concentrate of romantic initiatives into the twentieth century.[40] And as for romanticism, its rallying cry was the word *modern*, a terminological choice that could linger for decades, its meaning never needing to be consistent with prior usage.

Wagnerism is my umbrella term for the crescendo of nineteenth-century preoccupations that achieved an apotheosis only with the technological and political conflagrations of the twentieth century. Wagnerism is distinct from Richard Wagner, his works and beliefs, and even his eminence as a world-historical figure. Scots poet Hugh MacDiarmid nicely caught the perplexing juncture between man and mission in his poem "Wagner," which ends in a stanza adopting the composer's voice:

> All I want is a pig's life personally;
> Plenty of women and wine—though of course
> I'm vastly amused at the thought of being
> Incidentally an historical force.[41]

Wagnerism alleviates the pig from all the heady distress. The *ism* portends the cascade of *isms* that cling like magnets to the lodestar of modernism, however defined. The attribution is not mine. There were chroniclers all along. George Bernard Shaw, for one, published his assessment of the *Ring* cycle in *The Perfect Wagnerite* in 1898, having previously extracted *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* in 1891. Unlike Wagner, who cast his shadow across much of the nineteenth century, the precipitate of an *ism* from Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906) was, as Shaw recognized, a fin de siècle affair, in which to name one guiding light could conjure a constellation. In 1882, painter Paul Signac anointed his canoe with the triplicate name "Manet–Zola–Wagner"—a portent of Oswald Spengler's reckoning of a deep affinity between Wagner and Édouard Manet in *The Decline of the West* in 1918.

Imagine Ibsen and Maeterlinck depicted in a sculptural frieze (by Auguste Rodin) framing the gateway of the new century. As soon as these two take their places, a host of delegates rushes to their aid. Elderly as they may seem, James McNeill Whistler (b. 1834) and Henry James (b. 1843) served notice in their respective arts that a differential calculus was in play, as Nietzsche (b. 1844) had also emphatically made clear—in part as an acolyte of Wagnerism, then as its gadfly opponent. Mallarmé (b. 1842) painstakingly elucidated the implications for poetry laboring under the shadow of Wagner, and the fin de siècle push of his generation was consolidated by a Francocentric tribe including Émile Zola, Claude Monet, Rodin, Odilon Redon, Joris-Karl Huysmans, Paul Gauguin, and August Strindberg. These and others were associated with

epithets such as *nihilism, anarchism, vitalism, symbolism, decadence*—all variants of what a twentieth-century jazz tune simply called "Crazeology."

What Wagnerism brandishes above all is the *ism*, an appendage applied by art historian Belinda Thomson to the city of light, "Parisianism."[42] But I look back to the example of an audacious treatise on the subject of modernism, *Ismos* by Ramón Gómez de la Serna, an approach so fecund that the first edition of 1931 expanded from 386 pages to 448 pages by 1943. As a participant observer, Gómez de la Serna allowed himself the conceptual extravagance of coining his own *isms*, so what might have been a dull plod through the usual suspects is enlivened by profiles of *Estantifermismo* (*Shelfwornism*), *Novelismo* (*Novelism*), *Tubularismo* (*Tubism*—on Fernand Léger), and others, which made a fetching platform for a commemorative 2002 exhibition at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid. In his spirit, I'd say that modernism is framed by *isms* but not restricted to those we know in the standard rotation—after all, the term itself shelters its own *ism* like Aeneas fleeing burning Troy with his father on his back.

Gómez de la Serna recognized that modernism bestows an extra dimension of identity, something now known by the commercial model of "branding."[43] By the old calculus, Pablo Picasso was a painter, like Rembrandt or Francisco Goya. In *Ismos*, we get instead the phenomenon *Picassismo*. Gómez de la Serna even conceived of his own doubling in the 1923 book *Ramonismo*. To cast this doubling in terms of *isms* is to recognize that an *ism*, identifying *movements*, sanctions *movement*. So the radiance around modernist works differs from that previously attributed to the "masterpiece"; even *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land* could be regarded as epochal without being accorded the status of masterpieces like the *Mona Lisa* or the Laocoon. But it's precisely this subtle difference that renders them *isms* of their own, as if they were not stable but on the move, tending toward a condition rather than embodying it. The posthumous publication of drafts and notebooks of these works only enhances the indeterminacy, rendering them animistic—bestial in their propensity to be on the prowl—or, better yet, *mediumistic* in the sense suggested by Suárez, calling *The Waste Land* "essentially a D. J. session that treats the literary tradition as a sound archive to be manipulated by means of gramophone technology," taking its place in an arsenal of texts that behave more like "random text generators" than leather-bound volumes on a shelf.[44]

Modernism has proven to be such a slippery concept because it's the realm of the sui generis. Its canonical works have been unrepeatable, one of a kind, forcing the question, can the unrepeatable be inaugural? The inaugural force clearly emanates from romanticism, a "permanent revolution" as it's been called.[45] The German romantics' call for each artwork to inaugurate its own form and define its own generic purpose eventually took hold as the leading intuition of modernist initiatives in all the arts. In his preface to *Cromwell* (1827), Victor Hugo acknowledged the new plenitude. Like G. W. F. Hegel, he

saw that tradition was limited to a humanistic framework, while the creative prospect at hand was energized by the ugly and the grotesque, "details of a grand design which surpasses our understanding, harmonizing not with man himself, but with the whole of creation." Accordingly, the "modern spirit is born out of this fecund union of the categories of the grotesque and the sublime: a spirit complex, and infinitely varied in its manifestations, inexhaustible in its creativity, totally opposed to the simplicity of the genius of the Ancients."[46]

Infusing the arts with boundless amplitude has itself proven to be an inaugural strategy that is perpetually self-replenishing. A familiar tendency to regard modernism and romanticism as antithetical fails to recognize the persistence of this creative outlook. The clutter of *isms* can seem an impediment, of course, by which I mean in this case not the modern avant-gardes but romanticism and realism and naturalism and symbolism, which in various ways are like providers of industrial-grade raw material poured into the titanic furnaces of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*. But the purity of the initial aspiration persisted. In 1919, Russian artist Kazimir Malevich affirmed the principle: "I wish to create the new signs of my inner movement, for the way of the world is in me."[47]

By the dawn of the twentieth century, there was a distinct if unofficial consensus about a constellation of characters notable for disturbing the cultural peace. Consider the repertoire of a French writer in 1893, as he parses the names like a deck of cards, pairing them as if calculating a hand: "Dostoyevsky makes us accept Tolstoy, Strindberg convinces us of the genius of Ibsen, Nietzsche makes us indulgers of Maeterlinck."[48] These were not merely authors, they were talismans, and their names facilitated a lingua franca for the intelligentsia and the general public alike as they came to grips with "modern tendencies" or, as in Havelock Ellis's 1890 book title, *The New Spirit*.[49] When Horace B. Samuel (author, the title page informs us, of such titles as *The Land and Yourself* and *The Insurance Act and Yourself*) took the cultural temperature in *Modernities* in 1913, he surveyed the work of Stendhal, Heine, Benjamin Disraeli, Nietzsche, Strindberg, Arcangelo Corelli, Frank Wedekind, Arthur Schnitzler, Emile Verhaeren, and the then-recent phenomenon of Italian futurism. No wonder he made no attempt to synthesize "the spirit of modernity," content with suggesting that "it is a spirit of energy, of fearlessness in analysis, whose sole *raison d'être* and whose sole ideal is actual life itself."[50] A comparably sensible outlook agitated Remy de Gourmont to wonder, in his essay on the late-departed Mallarmé, "how have we come to regard as a peril every real innovation in art or in literature?"[51]

To the casual eye, it would seem that any motley cast of characters could be summoned to denote modernism in all the arts. Much as the names now roll off the tongue, they signify differently, not because of the obvious historical distance from us now but because their canonization has been inseparable

from those institutions that had a stake in canonizing them in order to consolidate their own status: universities, museums, concert venues, and conservatories. Modern art was convened amid a flux of consternation about the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, Wagner's hope for a reunification of all the arts in a single enterprise; but the institutional reception of modernism has been invested in the opposite practice of segregating the arts into discipline-specific objects of scholarly scrutiny.[52]

So at the center of the phenomenon that we call modernism—which should, above all, denote a hive of interarts animation and mutual attraction—there is a terra incognita, relatively speaking. It might be gleaned by echolocation, bat squeaks bouncing off compendia such as *The Oxford Handbook of Modernisms* (Brooker et al., 2010) on one side and the catalog for the Victoria and Albert Museum exhibit "Modernism: Designing a New World 1914–1939" (2006) on the other. Capacious as these resources are, their contents suggest a grand parade of sealed vessels. Literature, art, dance, music, fashion, industrial design, architecture—they're all there but hovering just out of reach of one another, like academic departments on a college campus. As a result, pundits and sightseers gather at prominent venues as though modernism were under the administration of the National Parks Service, taking it on faith that each scenic viewpoint (honorifically named Woolf or Mondrian, Le Corbusier or Stravinsky) convenes the space around it like Wallace Stevens's jar in Tennessee. Such an approach can yield a photo op, but it's worth remembering that the usual suspects never imagined they were living in a land called Modernism. More important, they did not live in a world parceled out into the disciplinary configurations that now prevail.

The Schlegel sisters in E. M. Forster's *Howards End*, for instance, are completely absorbed in music, attending concerts being a normal thing to do, especially for members of their class. But they're neither musicians nor professional critics. Isadora Duncan, inspired by Whitman and Nietzsche, wasn't attempting to "contribute" something new to the art of dance; she was bent on a thoroughgoing renovation of *embodiment* as such. The humanist and scholastic education of Hans Castorp in Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* reflects the pedagogic background of those who ended up writing books such as *The Cantos* and *The Man without Qualities*. Other breakthroughs that signify "modernism," such as Kandinsky's embrace of abstraction, were predicated on decidedly unmodern belief systems such as theosophy and saturated with a characteristic nineteenth-century hankering after synesthesia. It makes sense, then, to proceed with curiosity, feeling our way along the surfaces of creative activity in various arts as practitioners felt their medium dissolving and reforming into something else. A term such as *accidental modernism* may be more accurate than *modernism* plain and simple. Modernism ranges without distinction from programmatic agitation (Ibsen, F. T. Marinetti) to a Promethean compulsion to tinker (Picasso, Joyce); from a utopian embrace of

new materials (László Moholy-Nagy) to projects of recovering and recycling the past (Pound, Stravinsky). A big club, in other words, with no entrance fee, no membership card.

Because I'm compulsively intrigued, where modernism is concerned, by the fact that there's so much more to be considered than guides and summaries let on, *History of a Shiver* pricks up its ears over obscurities, wary of the prevailing assumption that one may bask unremittingly in the aura of the Great Authors, Composers, and Artists with little regard for the long retinue of service staff who apparently supported their causes. Canonical intimidation is a by-product of the teaching syllabus, however, not a reflection of some innate ontology. When *The Waste Land* was received as simultaneously a hoax and the bully pulpit of its era, Eliot was deeply chagrined at the reputation of his "private grumblings." That's not to say it isn't among the most ambitious poems of the century; rather, the ambition was personal, the consequences public. Over and over again, surveying artistic activity, we find that the whole effort is in actually *making* something (in words, in stone, in pigment, in tones, with moving bodies), with the underlying ethos being Admiral Farragut's resounding credo, "Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead." But the custodial model has resembled that of a country club, in which it's casually assumed that anybody who isn't a member would surely want to be. Whether or not Picasso longed for admission to the Jockey Club, the scholarship makes it seem so because of the painter's eminence, substituting *canon* for *Jockey Club*. A by-product of this system is the virtual disappearance of someone like Thomas Wilfred, a pioneer in the development of "visual music," an intermedia art left unmarked in the middle of that terra incognita.

Despite major retrospectives of this phenomenon at the Centre Pompidou (2004) and the Hirshhorn Museum (2005)—and its role in the exhibition "Vom Klang der Bilder" in Stuttgart (1985)—visual music had no walk-on part in the otherwise sensibly curated "Inventing Abstraction" show at the Museum of Modern Art (2012). Chapter 1 of *History of a Shiver*, "Listening to Incense," attempts to place visual music with respect to broader aspirations in the arts at the dawn of the twentieth century. Visual music is one of those phenomena that disclose much about the prehistory of modernism, especially insofar as it dispels the mirage of a sudden radical break, a convulsive series of shock tactics by the art brigade, as the most characteristic face of modernism. If *that* were modernism, then by *modernism* we'd mean simply avant-garde, a formidable topic in its own right; but casual usage and even more casual assumptions have cast a looser net, and singling out "high modernism" doesn't do much but reconvene the embarrassing presumption that a half dozen major personae are enough to close the deal on the subject—like the Great Authors approach ridiculed by Musil, "whose works consequently become the savings bank, as it were, of the national cultural economy," and,

in his colorful image, a tribe of scholars "relieve themselves all over the great man."[53]

Despite their status as classics, modernist works are multiple, like figures in the chronophotography of Étienne-Jules Marey or Eadweard Muybridge, orchestrating rhythmic poses in which succession and simultaneity are arrayed as if to demonstrate Stevens's "Metaphors of a Magnifico," in which

> Twenty men crossing a bridge,
> Into a village,
> Are twenty men crossing twenty bridges,
> Into twenty villages,
> Or one man
> Crossing a single bridge into a village.[54]

It can't be a masterpiece if it can't stay still, and it can't stay still because it's obliged to do two things at once: "the modern artist's struggle," suggests Hans Belting in *The Invisible Masterpiece*, is "not merely a continuation of the artist's perennial effort of self-expression" because it's augmented by the need to demonstrate its own artistic criteria. "From now on a new work was by definition a kind of program that was judged as an argument for a general theory of art," Belting says of modernism.[55]

Another art historian, Arnold Hauser, made the same point in his magisterial *Social History of Art* in 1952: "The conscious attention of the artist is directed no longer merely to choosing the means best adapted to his artistic purpose, but also to defining the artistic purpose itself."[56] Responding to the autotelic potential of art was the emancipating burden (a characteristically ambivalent state) of German romantic poetics; its petition to render every work a genre unto itself (the subject of chapter 2, "Sublime Impudence") provides a useful compass for taking the bearings of modernism. Although Hauser regarded modernism as the second coming of mannerism, not romanticism, his perspective is insightful. Both mannerism and modernism disclose "an incurable split [that] runs through all things," a rupture reflecting the sense of "living at the end of a period and in a disintegrating civilization." "The vital factor in the form and content of the new art," he wrote, "is a sense of a second reality, inseparably connected with that of ordinary experience, but nevertheless so different from it that only negative statements can be made about it and its existence can be indicated only by gaps and deficiencies in the context of ordinary experience."[57] The artwork, then, is always shadowed by the aura of its legislative potentiality, a conceptual *as if* revealing the risk (the rift) involved in sanctioning a modernist masterpiece. Are *Ulysses* and *The Rite of Spring* masterpieces because of their unrepeatable singularity or because they exert so much pressure on subsequent works? In terms of the "new Laocoon" that so alarmed Irving Babbitt (see chapter 2), such polymorphous productions overflowed their generic banks, contaminating

even the other arts. *Ulysses* was a book threatening to become an oratorio, a mural, and maybe even an image floating up from a photographic print in the developer tray.

History of a Shiver focuses on the consequences for modernism of this legacy, indebted to German romantic theory, which identified the production of the work as coextensive with its rationale. With the advent of pictorial abstraction after 1912, the subject of a painting could be said to be nothing less than the theory of itself. A painting did not depict a tree or a face, but it demonstrated what a painting was, what it could do and be. A title such as *In the Hold* by Vorticist David Bomberg might evoke an experience, though no one could discern a ship's hold from its fractured visual components. ▶ Titles such as *Composition* and *Figure* proliferated amid others that invited synesthetic switching, such as *Fugue* or *Sonata*, evidence of the insistent role of music in the nineteenth century to induce more fluid compositional means in the other arts and even to urge an impetuous pursuit of "musical" effects in paint or in words. Abstract painting, along with cubism, distended the instantaneous quality of the glance, reconvening a spatial art as temporal and therefore more proximate to the sensation of music.

Chapters 1 and 2 visit various scenarios conjured by the artistic fantasy of synesthesia, the evil spawn of romanticism in Babbitt's view. By the fin de siècle, talk about synesthesia meant indulging in reveries of interchange, the convertibility of one sense into another, seeing sounds and hearing colors, for instance, from which artistic consequences became evident. If a painting by Whistler could be called a symphony, maybe a symphony could be a novel (as Theodor Adorno thought about Gustav Mahler's symphonies). But what did it even mean to entertain such thoughts? Amid all this swirl of synesthetic speculation, a space emerged in various arts as a kind of breathing room, a resistance to further escalating the hypnotic Wagnerian dream of the total artwork. I call this initiative "drawing a blank" and make a case in chapter 4 ("Drawing a Blank") for this inaugural erasure as the enduring gift of symbolism to modernism.

Another conceptual space that seemed to nurture new art forms was approached by way of the fourth dimension, a popular topic at the turn of the century. Talk of the fourth dimension brought physics, mysticism, and art together in a speculative trance. Chapter 6 ("Fourth Dimension, Sixth Sense") pointedly abstains from attempting an overview of fourth-dimension hypotheses—a subject comprehensively undertaken by others—opting instead to consider how casual references by a range of modernists offer clues to artistic aspiration. A new sense of magnitude, inspired by fourth-dimension theory, proved fertile ground for the development of modernism across the arts. To some degree, the fourth dimension supplemented earlier fixations on music as aesthetic beacon. Thanks to Wagner, it wasn't the formal elegance and expedience of musical gestures that set the bar for other arts; rather, it