From Time to Totality:
The Aesthetic Temporality of Objecthood

By

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Abstract

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This dissertation constructs a philosophy of perception that creates what I call a “perceptive ontology of objects.” This ontology emphasizes, not the subjective perspectivalism of human identity, but the dynamic emergence of objects into objecthood through impersonal modalities of space, time, light, and sound. Objecthood is an attempt to render perceptive experience as something neither wholly subjective nor wholly objective. Here objects are connected with subjectivity and yet still external. I argue that modernist authors present changeable, novelistic surfaces, which submit the novel’s material objects to epistemological doubt. This creates radically interruptive moments of heightened perception, rupturing immediate experience from the more conventionally mimetic, referential, and social surfaces of the novel found within literary realism. These perceptive experiences create representational effects which I call “the mimesis of sensation.” This creates a sensory surface in the story world through which the reader aligns with the perceptive experiences of characters. This form of readerly connection is distinct from either Aristotelian empathy on the one hand, or Brechtian estrangement, on the other. In what I call, following Woolf, “the moment,” a temporality distinct from the present, the modernist works of authors like Mallarmé, Woolf, Joyce, and Kafka foreground perception itself, altering visions of time to construct discrete and static temporalities. These discontinuous moments create forms of abstract continuity. They thus create a dialectical relationship with narrative.

These event-like ruptures, occurring through encounters with the surface of objects, offer two distinct notions of time that could serve as alternatives to the post-structuralist critique of the materiality of the signifier as seen in theorists like Derrida and Barthes. First, the surface of the text becomes an expansive medium of perception: a collection of perpetual gestures, interruptions, reflections, and possibilities which arises, not through linguistic play, but through a composite surface of language and perception. Secondly, a totality emerges through perceptive processes in relation to this medium, not through the infinite deferral of the signified, but through the ongoing logical recession of the object through epistemological immanence. Here I also take an important departure from the work of other theorists of modernity—Baudelaire, Bergson, Benjamin, and Deleuze, and others—who suggest an imagistic immediacy to the experience of non-chronological time. My notion of the modernist literary object is distinctively not a ready-to-point-to image. I critique the centrality of images in 20th-century theories of temporality, arguing that modernism constructs moments of readerly critical alignment not through the satisfaction of visual desire,
by foregrounding processes of apprehension, perception, and inquiry: attempting to decipher an object which is never quite fully known.

Even as the modernist techniques I study draw attention to the artifice of representation and the difficulties of constructing knowledge, they also frame objects of perception, constructing scenes of aesthetic totality—available to the spectator so long as she acknowledges the mediated lens through which she looks. I see totality as the possibility that perception could be made whole, the possibility that there is a form of subjectless experience in which perceptive inquiry creates order (as forms of abstract continuity). These totalities, perceivable not in chronologies of external perceptible phenomena, but within impersonal faculties of apprehension, as they coincide with these forms of deeper time, also invoke pathos (through the acknowledgment of dimensions of fate). In four chapters, each devoted to a respective modernist author, the project shows how the works of Mallarmé, Woolf, Joyce, and Kafka reveal relationships between what I call modernism’s “moments” and the receding totality of the object.

Chapter 1 of the dissertation argues that a relationship exists between Mallarmé’s reception of Impressionism and the poet’s linguistic theory. Here I examine Mallarmé’s writings on the Impressionist *plein air* technique in his essay, “The Impressionists and Édouard Manet” (1876). *Plein air* means more for Mallarmé than just painting outdoors. Air, in Mallarmé’s eyes, is a full presence. Atmosphere is the key to a deep and abstract form of naturalism in his work. Other subjects in this chapter include atmospheric modalities like breath or respiration, speech and the sounds of words, or aspects of nature like weather. In Chapter 2, the novelistic objects of perceptive ontology in Woolfian impressionism create a temporal rupture from realism’s more conventional referential representation. I argue that Woolf creates another type of realism through her experiments with time. Importantly, I break from the work of 20th-century continental theorists of radical time influenced by Bergson (like Deleuze) in which the image plays a central, functional role. Woolf’s moments challenge the idea of a Bergsonian image-form not subject to doubt in order to open the imaginative field of literature to what I call “the mimesis of sensation.” This sensible time is not a form of eternity, it is a form of “living in time” (Elizabeth Abel’s phrase). A sense of reality lies in the atmospheric diffusion of Woolf’s unfinished marks of time (my phrase) such as the floating “airs” Woolf mentions in *To The Lighthouse*. Chapter 3 begins with a look at Joyce’s notions of the “ineluctable modality of the visible” and the “ineluctable modality of the audible” from Chapter 3 (Proteus) of *Ulysses*. I define the ineluctable as that which overwhelms the cognitive work of Joyce’s characters. I argue that in Joyce’s work, visual modalities, for the most part, do not correspond to the ineluctable. I argue, sound does. I demonstrate that Joycean sound displays a certain tragic character which is moreover, non-anthropocentric. Sound thus seems to exceed the human point of view. Joycean sound thus surpasses narratological elements which take affect and the human lifespan as points of departure. I argue that the uncanny laughter in Joyce’s *Sirens* dismantles omniscience and anthropomorphic tragic surveillance (the assumption that the story world can be viewed by the all-seeing gaze of divine figuration). The fourth and final chapter of the dissertation argues that in Kafka’s *The Trial* epistemological operations bring about the gradual dawning of objects. Here I characterize an object as “dawning” because its state of emergence seems posited for a reader. In a challenge to critics like Adorno, Lukács, and more recently J. Hillis Miller, who see Kafka’s work as impenetrable to the spectator’s view of phenomena, I argue that in *The Trial*, Kafka’s representational effects reside in the protagonist’s sensory apprehension. The reader then aligns with this mimesis of the character’s perceptual experience.
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Figure 1. Gustave Courbet, *Jo La belle Irlandaise*, 1865-66.
Figure 2. Edgar Degas, *La Coiffure*, c. 1896.
Introduction

A Long Naturalism Breaks with Realism

This study focuses on literary modernism’s representational effects. I show how the works of Mallarmé, Woolf, Joyce, and Kafka share in a historical genealogy with impressionism, a representational history which draws significantly from naturalism’s challenge to realism. Ann Banfield demonstrates how a compelling historical genealogy exists linking the literary modernism of authors like Joyce and Woolf to 19th-century French impressionism, as well as naturalism. When Impressionist paintings were first exhibited in Paris, Hope Kingsley tells us, the word “impression” itself was used first “in Louis Leroy’s satirical 1874 review,” [but] Émile Zola referred to the painters as “naturalistes,’ and quite correctly, for the tenets of impressionism overlapped with naturalism and realism.

Ferdinand Brunetière used the term “literary impressionism” first “in an 1879 essay on Alphonse Daudet,” which appeared in Brunetière’s Le roman naturaliste. For Brunetière, Banfield tells us, literary impressionism employs “a descriptive language, but [one] distinct from realist description.” Brunetière discusses how a “picturesque imperfect tense” serves to arrest time in a single moment. This style appears as early as Flaubert. In L’Education sentimentale (1870), Flaubert writes: “[l]a lumière, à de certaines places éclairant la lisière du bois, laissait des fonds dans l’ombre; ou bien, atténuée sur les premiers plans par une sorte de crépuscule, elle étalait dans les lointains des vapeurs violettes, une clarté blanche” (“the light, at certain places lighted the forest’s edge, leaving the background in shadow; or, attenuated in the foreground by a kind of twilight, it spread a violet haze into the distance, a white radiance”). Diffuse and variable light creates a distinct moment in naturalism. Banfield writes: “[t]he interludes of The Waves, the scenes described on the beach and in the house show objects sometimes with the vagueness Zola insists on, sometimes with the sharpness of detail Lukács attributes to Joyce. The difference in the rendering of an object is explained by “l’air vibrant qui l’entoure” (Zola’s words) that affects its appearance.” In Physics, the word vibration involves the oscillation of a substance. Naturalism shares with impressionism the creation of tremulous objects like Woolf’s “frail quivering sound” in Mrs. Dalloway.

These representational effects are quite different from realism’s. “Realism aimed to paint things in themselves,” Banfield writes, “[t]he atelier guaranteed it the ideal conditions that allowed realism to paint a hypothetical thing beneath its appearances. Impressionism represents appearances. Banfield writes:

Impressionism painted the surface of things, their appearances, prior to any interpretation: the way a cathedral looks from a particular point of view in a particular light at a particular moment and not the way it looks “eternally,” “in itself.” Impressionism aimed “to present the raw data of chaotic experience [. . . ] Meaning is not imposed on experience but found in it (Hay, 1975, 138)—Hay’s term “data” implying that sensation is given, “found” not created.

Roger Fry thought Impressionism was a necessary step—a kind of “analysis of sensation”—but it was not sufficient. Cézanne adopted Impressionism but connected it to a geometrical scaffolding, going back to the classicism of painters like Poussin. There is a time lag between a Post-Impressionist like Paul Cézanne and Woolf, for example, but her early modernist “experiments begin with Impressionism,” Banfield writes. “[K]nowing Roger Fry’s criticism of Impressionism as
analyzing commonsense appearances but destroying design, she adopted Fry’s dualist aesthetic,” a version of “Cézanne’s ‘Post-Impressionism.’” Meaning is not imposed on a figure; it emerges from experience. Order lies within a liberated geometry. Cézanne’s series of Le Mont Sainte-Victoire would be an example of this. Here “structure is still the primary consideration,” Fry tells us, “it still prevails over the ‘impression,’ but those accents which clamp the structure together no longer need to be heavily insisted on, the atmosphere becomes freer, lighter and more exhilarating.” Structure emerges from the object.

In Courbet’s realist painting of Whistler’s mistress, Joanna Hiffernan (Jo, La belle Irlandaise, 1866, see Fig. 1), the model’s act of combing her light auburn hair before a mirror introduces themes of social identity, comeliness, and vanity. Her hair is ideal, it is interpreted in advance by Courbet; stylized elements of beauty are imposed on her image.

In contrast, in Degas’s Impressionist canvas La Coiffure (see Fig. 2) an inquiry takes place into the nature of an appearance. In the painting, the hair’s centrality does not consist of realist qualities; this hair is central because a perceptive moment could be said to blossom outward from it. The painting is of a movement (la coiffure, the combing of hair) and yet the figures appear frozen in time. What does an action in a painting consist of when the painting’s style forecloses any next moment? How does one perceive what takes place if nothing happens next? Would this perceptive experience be timeless? Degas’ style infuses a static instant with an inner modality—a negative activity. This representational effect is distinct from action. By negative activity, I mean a subtle and general condition for the emergence of spectatorial inquiry into an impression (or into other forms of visuality)—distinct from definitive images. I define an image as a visual form which posits a sense of completion independently of the perception of it.

The presence of color, this aesthetic modality, means something. Red colors in the Degas painting, from the curtain to the wall, join with the figure of a young woman. Her facial expression is too subdued to be clear; she leans back with arms rigid, a domestic servant applies a brush to her hair—the red flow suggests to us that this is perhaps a moment unlike any other we have ever seen or will ever see. The hair is astonishing without being ideal.

Metaphor often means that one links an actual thing to a figurative one, but her hair embodies a metaphor—it is already a curtain, or a bulbous tail of fire, or some undetermined form—this hair disappears behind the comber’s thumb and reappears under her forearm. This hair evokes a general sphere of referential possibility. “The intent to literalize a metaphor,” Stanley Corngold writes when speaking of the Gregor of Kafka’s The Metamorphosis, “produces a being wholly divorced from reality.” Can art lose contact with reality? In Degas’ painting, the hair expresses another sense of reality. For Corngold, Kafka’s insect has nothing to do with the reality that one expects (a man could never wake up to find himself as an insect), the insect’s appearances do not exclude the possibility of being examined as if he were real. Nabokov saw this insect as an intricate visual phenomenon worthy of a lepidopterist’s attention. The details of the insect are referential for him (“he has a tremendous convex belly divided into segments and a hard rounded back suggestive of wing cases . . . . he has strong mandibles. He uses these organs to turn the key in a lock while standing erect on his hind legs, on his third pair of legs (a strong little pair), and this gives us the length of his body, which is about three feet long.” It is a new bug for Nabokov’s eyes. Degas’s painting does not go as far as Kafka’s representational transformations, but the hair in it creates a figure which the observer is encouraged to explore. It invokes spectators who would be capable of perceiving the hair in a way different from Realism.

“A woman reclines, another combs her hair,” such a phrase can’t grasp the painting’s meanings—one begins to say different things in a discussion which emerges from form, light, color and time. Shadows appear reversed. Light and space become unique; redness precedes the hair. The bright darkness of the shadows, these miniscule, tangible abysses come forward to meet the
eyes of the viewer. Her pose (passive and precise) is haunting, immobilized, perhaps like the sudden burials at the site of volcano remains. Whatever the temporal ideas are, they seem to be unsettling. The body’s angular pose creates a tension with the atmosphere’s vague horror. The time which is introduced brackets the entire person’s life (or life itself undergoing a strange metamorphosis) in this instant.

And yet the only thing which happens, if we blind ourselves to the color and form of a hyperbolic tragedy of colors which never even takes place, is that a woman reclines, a servant combs her hair. Or, “Rien n’aura lieu que le lieu” (“Nothing will take place but the place”), as Mallarmé states in *Un Coup de dés (A Throw of the Dice)*. The way in which we might try to know the forms in this painting by Degas, the kind of representation which is at stake—all of this changes the longer one looks. For example, what do the shadows, which outline the figures so distinctly, mean? Does their strange illumination carry a meaning? What would be the value of this meaning and how would it relate to the value of perception? One could pretend that nothing happens to the figures. Clearly something happens to Degas, the painter, and now to the painting’s spectators.

For Degas, visuality creates *light meaning* (I take it as a variation of Jean-Claude Milner’s idea of *weak meaning*). In Mallarmé, Milner calls this “the weakest possible thought.” Milner draws from Descartes’ idea of thought as the unextended. Descartes’ idea of extension applies to physical matter. I am not interested in physical things; instead, I am interested in how impressionism captures the aura of sensible (as opposed to physical) light. In my interpretation, in the painting and literature of the modernist period, a *subtle type of meaning* evades conventional lexical definition. In the phrase *light meaning*, light refers to what is seen or heard. Here the light is in the diaphanous, the gossamer, the open-air, the momentary, the gesture, color, silence, the outer reaches of sensation, but it can also be fixed around distinct objects. These objects anchor perception, not in realism, but in a referential tendency grounded in perceptive experiences of the external world. Realism believes in physical objects, whereas impressionism is interested in sensible objects or sensation, or as G. E. Moore and Russell would say, “sense-data.” Sensation is in the viewer; sense-data is what the viewer senses. Physical objects can’t be directly sensed. Within light meaning, sound and visuality perform subtle and rarefied conditions of possibility for thinking itself—the meanings are stranger than a very concise thought performed on a page (as in Milner’s reading of *Un Coup de dés*). So despite my focus on objects of perception, I think meaning can be in the air; it can be absolutely pervasive. The literary modernists I discuss in this study open up questions of meaning through the impersonal suggestiveness of represented perceptions.

**Changing Bodies or Abstract Perceptions?**

Recent criticism like Fredric Jameson’s *The Antinomies of Realism* finds that the body, as an absolute historical object, changes around the time of Baudelaire and Flaubert (the 1840’s). The two “stand as the markers for . . . a transformation of the sensorium,” they help to represent the “historic emergence of the bourgeois body which [Jameson claims he] want[s] outrageously to affirm . . . as a historical fact and date.” Literature then uses numerous resources to represent these changes to the body. Jameson’s argument involves time: “our interest in affect lies primarily in the combinations it forms with the longer range temporalities of storytelling, of récit and of destiny.” Due to changes in the conditions of experience, the human body undergoes a change, Jameson argues, which alters the nature of literary time and meaning.

This idea interests me, but my accent does not fall in the same way on how the body might change. My thesis emphasizes how the representation of *appearances* changes in modernism. I focus on words like perception and experience, life as a temporal abstraction, the object, inquiry, and modality. For Jameson, the primacy of a historically new type of bodily sensory configuration
presents a shift away from narration in mid-19th-century literary aesthetics toward longer forms of

time. I do not know if the body changes in the modern period, but I do see the body as an

epistemological construct, a construct which changes over time. My focus is not on the body, but on how

human thought relates to the problem of reality. In modernism, the way in which the nature of

reality is approached by art and philosophy changes. In modernism, an epistemic shift occurs:

modernism is concerned with epistemological forms, the units (such as sense-data in philosophy or

represented perceptions in literature) in which are recorded the information to make sense of how

an object appears. I will discuss the notion of represented perceptions more fully later. My general

point is that the modernist turn is in perception.

In modernism, perception’s epistemological relation to objectivity, subjectivity, linguistic

form, meaning, life and death, and a host of other concepts changes. I don’t believe this is rooted in

the physical body changing; it is an epistemological shift. The latter can’t be limited to Baudelaire’s

dodging the crowds of Haussmannian Paris with his seemingly newly electrified body in “La foule,”
or creating poetic diffusions of the referent when he discusses perfume in “Parfum exotique,” or his

evoking the sound of logs falling in “Chant d’automne” (Jameson discusses the latter poem in his

eyssay, “Baudelaire as Modernist and Postmodernist: The Dissolution of the Referent and the

Artificial Sublime”). I don’t wish to say that Jameson is wrong. Bodies do not create represented

perceptions; instead, the latter are epistemological linguistic forms. This influences how we conceive

of the body’s relation to things like linguistic techniques. I do not wish to describe the relationship

(if there is one) between a represented perception and the body’s overall state within reality. We can

only describe represented perceptions. The physical origins are harder to determine.

Abstraction: Forms of Continuity and Temporal Order

Abstract configurations are formed on the basis of perception. As in Degas’ painting, there

are places in the literary modernism of Mallarmé, Woolf, Joyce, and Kafka, places where moments (a

term I borrow from Woolf) take place as modes of perceptive experience. By a place, I mean the

representation of a physical scene where the literary depiction of authorial or characterological

experiential perception is foregrounded more than action. Here an abstract notion of life is invoked.

The emphasis falls on the viewer, the person hearing or thinking they hear, or hyperbolic sensory

time events which come to occupy novelistic space. In the 1920’s novels which I discuss (by Woolf,

Joyce, and Kafka), characters can be special spectators. These experiences of sound and visuality—
faint, diffuse and atmospheric like the plein air technique of the Impressionists, even imperfect,

razor-sharp like a shriek, singular—represented perceptions are at front and center. I call this the mimesis of sensation: at midnight Mallarmé’s Igitur stares overlong into a mirror, at drapery, and

furniture in his room (throughout the staging of Igitur, which resembles a short play more than a

poem, minor sounds are also very suggestive). In Woolf’s The Waves, while they wait in a restaurant

for a friend who is fated to die (Percival), the characters stare out at a fateful, oscillating door and

bare tablecloth. Joyce’s Stephen Dedalus listens and hears, contemplating ineluctable modalities on

Sandymount Strand. Joseph K.’s gaze lingers on candles and darkness in the cathedral scene of

Kafka’s The Trial, as if to unlock something just from the visible alone. From these experiences,

from these moments, and from the amplification of sound and visuality— a temporal philosophy

arises. This is important for literary modernism because out of these perceptive fragments another

continuity or order is posited—in the place of conventional stories.
Perceptions structure life in a temporal way. In the Proteus chapter of *Ulysses*, Stephen Dedalus takes a walk on the beach and there are, in a sense, two interwoven modes of time which buttress his contemplation of fate (yet another version of time) as he stares at things like seaweed and rusty jetsam. First, discrete, little, gem-like time aspects exist apart from patent plotting, these are moments of hyperbolic sensibility to what is seen and what is heard, the quality of perception can be almost objective here, but at other times fog-like—shot through with a hyperbolic human sensory engagement which leads the viewer to a strange kind of impersonality. Then, the place of the little moment enters into a process, and as we will see with other modernists, it is inflected by Stephen’s own biography (but a biography in which, and this is especially the case in Mallarmé, the individual wedges into abstract totalities). Stephen thinks about figures like Aristotle, Blake, Lessing, and Berkeley, Irish folk lyrics, etc.—and thus to a certain degree for Joyce the moment also entails the history of literature. On the subject of these larger forms of time, Mallarmé’s work “Bucolique” is striking. This autobiographical short piece suggests not a narrative coherence per se, but a continuity which had an impact on Mallarmé’s own life, first the influence of nature (“intrinsie, still unseen because of its material state”), and then music (“a blazing, volatile distillation in lines meeting each other—now close to thought—in more than the abolition of text, and the image extracted from it”).

In this place of Mallarmé’s, two modes interact (visuality and sound) and a larger sense of continuity emerges. In “Bucolique,” “the central void” (the original nothingness of nature) is a body of water: “here the illusion of space comes into its own. Satisfaction is procured by looks meeting each other through the thickets and many a day drawing to a close, in legendary glory, in the waters of the lake.” The body of water stands for a consistent development through repetition that coincides with Mallarmé’s inquiry into the representational effects of the visual. A day at the beach is an opportunity to consider deeper patterns within perceptive experience. Mallarmé writes: “[w]e who have always seen through the exotic lies and illusions of world tours, with the mind’s eye and those that look out of our faces, we simply go to the very edge of the Ocean, where only a pale and blurred line can be seen, to behold what is beyond our usual dwelling place: the infinite and nothing.” The aesthetic moment holds a multiplicity of times within it (“once the days have materialized in majestic suspense”) and posits a fleeting geometry within this perception of things: “the funeral pyre is lit, in the virginal hope of forbidding interpretation by the decipherer of horizons.” The sea expresses a magnitude of referential sublimity: “The sea, of which it is better to say nothing than inscribe it in a parenthesis, unless the firmament enters there with it—also dissociates itself from nature, making a clean break of it. (Some exceptional drama holds sway between them, which occurs independently of anyone).”

One might also consider one of Joyce’s moments, where there is the presence of “the snot green sea.” The modality of the sea, and the abstract modalities which the color green generates in *Ulysses*, change the nature of meaning in a general sense (from the sea in Telemachus as a “dull green mass of liquid” to the “green sluggish bile” haunting Stephen, to the “slow cool dim seagreen sliding depth of shadow, eau de Nil” of the lieutenant’s uniform in Sirens). In novels like Woolf’s *The Waves* and *Ulysses*, the abstract time expressed by vast waters is deeper than a realist plot. The little moment opens to create a certain horizon call—here impersonality and death circulate almost like points of reference for a deeper time—a moment which is also immediately before one’s eyes. The outer reaches of sensation are invoked, summoned in a way where it is unclear, especially in Joyce’s Sirens, who (as in a narrator or character) is attempting to convene the represented perceptions: they are impersonal and seem to exist mainly for the sake of the reader’s engagement with this new mimesis of sensation. Represented perceptions like “green” abbreviate reality for the
reader. I think that these more abbreviated, abstract sensations in literature might grasp time. To use Woolf’s term, within the moment, everything is experienced as a whole. Through the mimesis of sensation, the reader views a sense of broader time. This time is more abstract than human life. Yet, I wish to argue, it does not correspond to the timelessness of eternity.

* * *

**A Time Beyond Death / The Container**

What type of time is this? For one, it is non-anthropocentric. On the subject of literary modernism, Foucault discusses “the being of language” which “gives prominence, in all [its] empirical veracity, to the fundamental forms of finitude.” Modernism reaches “the summit of all possible speech,” he writes, where “[man] arrives not at the very heart of himself but at the brink of that which limits him; in that region where death prows, where thought is extinguished, where the promise of the origin interminably recedes.” Foucault’s version of *place* is a theoretical medium where issues of language, experience, impersonality, and death are inextricable. For Foucault, this struggle is anthropocentric—a type of illness results (“it is within madness that it [finitude] manifested itself”).

The bounding presence of finitude precedes language, it “posit[s] itself in [it].” This boundary is the bigger issue. “[B]efore it, preceding it, as that formless, mute unsignifying region,” finitude, the absolute container, is “where language can find its freedom,” but for Foucault, freedom is *only within a finitude*. Here the modernists write on the walls of death as if thundering to enter the sarcophagus of the knowledge of death. For Foucault, the vague mystery of mortality represents the transcendent disorder of this finitude. In contrast, I think the modernists created containers for reality, they were able to refer to life in new ways. A container would be the poet’s body in Mallarmé’s work as a vibratory instrument for dispersed perceptive experiences, the color green in Joyce, or a door in Woolf’s *The Waves*. These are finite objects which when invoked or repeated, create abstract continuity for the reader. These objects are abbreviations for life itself. Literary modernism orders life in a new way.

Death preoccupies authors like “Kafka, Bataille, and Blanchot” in Foucault’s formulation, but I think modernism engages with stranger concepts: “what I need for my writing is seclusion,” Kafka writes, “not ‘like a hermit,’ that would not be enough, but like the dead. Writing, in this sense, is a sleep deeper than that of death.” The space-time boundaries which language outlines for Kafka are more extensive than mortality: death is just one crucial point. What occurs when the boundary for novelistic characterization is no longer death? What happens when the container for the novel is not human life, and if not human life, then what might it be? I would like to ask how this scenario is articulated through the epistemological apparatus of impersonal perception and subjectless novelistic techniques. For Foucault, a linguistic intimacy with death is a form of knowledge—the greatest one that the modernists could have. But if there is a writing beyond death in modernism, then this generates new kinds of relationships between perceptive experience and epistemology. For example, life is seen more in terms of the repetitions of objects which constitute perceptive experience. Perception engages with a larger tendency. Represented perceptions are grounded in external reality, not the human identity which dies. Modernism turns outwards.

**Objecthood is an Attempt to Render Reality as Something neither Wholly Subjective nor Wholly Objective**

Such a modernist experience presents itself through the paradox of the object. Objects are on the other side of language like Frege’s *Bedeutungen*, registered by words in the way that Foucault describes finitude being registered, but the object is registered in different ways and according to a completely different idea of the subject. In modernism, objects are connected to subjectivity and yet still external. And importantly, I think objects persist in this way. Objects are “ineluctable,” as Joyce
states in *Ulysses*. They reference something difficult to grasp: one can’t avoid confronting them (or coming up against them), but they present a kind of opaqueness that can’t be penetrated. Objects tremble with a degree of autonomy at the outer reaches of sensation.

**Philosophies of Experience related to Represented Perceptions**

Philosophies of experience clarify the nature of represented perceptions. In “Does ‘Consciousness’ Exist?” William James presents perceptive experience as something immanent within knowledge. Here perceptive experience structures epistemology—separate mental entities such as consciousness do not exist for him. This undoes a binary relationship between “consciousness” and “objective” things. The result is that “a given undivided portion of experience . . . can figure in both groups simultaneously [as both ‘knower’ and ‘known’],” so that “we have every right to speak of it as subjective and objective both at once.” In place of mental entities, James defines this experience as a set of relations: “there is only one primal stuff or material in the world, a stuff of which everything is composed, and if we call that stuff ‘pure experience,’ then knowing can be explained as a particular sort of relation towards one another into which portions of pure experience may enter.” The emphasis falls on how perception maintains relationships with external objects, and importantly, “[t]he relation itself is a part of pure experience, one of its ‘terms’ becomes the subject or bearer of the knowledge, the knower, the other becomes the object known.” My dissertation interrogates this “relation,” as a form of epistemological experience, and how this experience plays out in the relations between objecthood, characterological perceptive experience and readers within modernist literary aesthetics.

In my dissertation, I see modernism seeking to posit, through represented perceptions, a new knowledge of reality distinct from widely shared knowledge (*Erfahrung*) and subjective perspectives (*Erlebnis*). Epistemologically, modernism reframes subjectivity and objectivity through subjectless linguistic techniques, techniques Martin Jay discusses in the essay “Experience without a Subject: Walter Benjamin and the Novel.” For Jay, Benjamin’s religiously-inflected turn to language is a strategy to overcome the *Erlebnis/Erfahrung* binary. Jay writes:

> Here language reveals itself as more than a mere tool of communication in which the feelings, observations or thoughts of a subjective interiority reveal themselves to another subject. Here the divine word manifests itself ontologically, prior to the subjective conventionalism of human name-giving.

This language takes place without the intervention of speaking subjects. Represented speech and thought (*style indirect libre or erlebte Rede*), the style so exploited by the modernist novel, Jay argues, is the type of subjectless discourse Benjamin may have been seeking although he never offered evidence of a critical familiarity with it.

On the question of subjectless speech, Banfield’s work is definitive. Jay quotes Banfield’s work on the subject at length in his essay. “Represented thought,” Banfield argues, “is an attempt to render thought as nonspeech through the medium of language. Language makes this attempt feasible because it is not synonymous with speech or communication, because speaker and self are distinct concepts, both required by linguistic theory and, hence, both posited as part of the speaker’s internalized linguistic knowledge.” Banfield shows that subjectless linguistic techniques exist. I will not address represented speech and thought directly, although I sometimes discuss passages which take place within or in close proximity to it. The forms I discuss are closer to what Banfield calls “represented perceptions,” a subcategory of non-reflective consciousness. These perceptions share certain characteristics of represented thought, Banfield demonstrates, but the two forms are not
Represented perceptions are forms of non-reflective consciousness, while represented thought is reflective.

Represented perceptions often refer to objects. In objecthood, the location of experience (especially in relation to perception and representation) is no longer in a direct or indirect relationship with a subject, as in James’s work. Objecthood also posits the representational effect of a sense of place. The nature of this external space can be clarified by a consideration of objectivity.

Objectivity

Modernist literary experiments register the late 19th-century emergence of scientific objectivity’s “epistemic virtues” (Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison’s term). In 2007, Daston and Galison dared to posit the idea that objectivity might be an important concern for humanistic theory. The term “objectivity” is a controversial one in the humanities. One more recent attempt at a refutation of objectivity might be seen in Derrida’s maxim: “[i]l n’y a pas de hors-texte” (“there is no outside-text”). I think it is important to consider the role which objectivity can play in relation to mimesis. I do not consider objectivity as a fixed and authoritative reality, but rather as a method by means of which authors try to record impressions in ways which are not limited to subjectivity or textuality. Like the turn to imperfect visual particulars in Daston and Galison’s research on scientific atlas images, modernist literature dismantles “ideal, absolute symmetry,” to reveal the accidental, jagged form of objects in a way that at times might “be[a]r no trace of the knower.” My research focuses on how literary modernism’s meaning-making highlights these asymmetrical aspects of reality. To borrow Frege’s terminology, modernist linguistic experiments eschew sense—the underlying type or class of a thing. These experiments instead forge imperfect notions of reference—they engage with the non-ideal, obsessively locating themselves through alignments with sound and visuality. The referential object is often irregular and ambiguous, but things emerge from this discontinuity which seem to resemble continuous objects of knowledge. These “impressionist” works, in not focusing on the ideal, want to capture the particular, the object of a deictic this. The object is this flower, at this moment, and not a flower.

Objecthood is a form of pathos which invokes order

The modernist modes of meaning we see in Daston and Galison’s concept of objectivity suggests links between this 19th-century scientific way of looking and contemporary interpretations of Freud. This is important because it suggests a homology between the asymmetry of a more pronounced referential scene in literature and unconscious phenomena. I do not wish to call objecthood a psychoanalytic form; nevertheless modernism’s indeterminate referential tendency often involves that which is not ordinarily perceived. In Jacques Rancière’s words, “meaning [is discovered] in what seems not to have any meaning,” a “confused knowledge” arises which creates “the thought of that which does not think” (his emphasis)—here analytic thinking exists alongside an embrace of the ambiguity and jaggedness of phenomena. Similarly, I will argue in my dissertation that objecthood arises from unlabeled existence. In the temporal aesthetics of the moment, non-semantic background details (irregular things) are meaningful. In literary modernism, objects often are background details. Rancière sees the diminutive objects of modernism “speaking to no one and saying nothing but the unconscious conditions of speech itself.” Unconsciousness is located in the object itself.

Within the realm of these “epistemic virtues” which embrace discontinuous appearances, modernism creates remainders of affect, mainly in the form of pathos. This involves a style of thinking. For Rancière, “the pathos of thought” is “a thought that acts by its very inertia.” Instead
of Foucault’s idea of finitude unfolding within language, here Rancière turns to Freud’s idea of ‘another language’ within language.”45 Rancière appears to rely on Lyotard’s The Inhuman: Reflections on Time, when he calls this “a pathos irreducible to any logos.”46 The existence of this pathos underlying modernism is Rancière’s main point in The Aesthetic Unconscious.47 “Oedipus,” as the emblem of Rancière’s aesthetic regime of art, “is proof of a certain existential savagery of thought, a definition of knowing not as the subjective act of grasping an objective ideality but as the affection, passion, or even sickness of a living being.”48 Rancière correlates an untamed type of thought with feeling. I would argue that in modernism, the point is for the feeling to be contained and to find expression in an abstract form which exceeds the limited reality of a three-dimensional physical object.

In objects, something like pathos exists in the modernist moment, but I approach it differently than Rancière, who describes an “identity between knowing and not knowing, between activity and passivity,” which “is the very fact of art in the aesthetic regime; it radicalizes what Baumgarten called ‘confused clarity’ into an identity of contraries.”49 The problem with this idea is that it seems to linger within the realm of impressionist aesthetics—a stream of impersonal data without much in the way of order to it. Rancière’s idea of epistemology is more disordered than objecthood.

Neutral Monism and the Objective Correlative

There is yet another way to arrive at the order of pathos. If the hypothetical objects of realism can no longer be assumed, the modernist novel must build its objects through a process. In Banfield’s study of Woolf and analytic philosophy, The Phantom Table, there is a philosophical term from analytic philosophy which sheds light on this tendency toward the neutrality of the represented perceptions within modernism. Banfield writes: “[t]he privately localized and temporalized reduced subjectivity receives an objectivity Russell alternately calls neutral and impersonal. ‘Neutrality’ derives from the ‘neutral monism’ Russell temporarily adopts c.1919 from William James and Mach.”50 The possibility of neutral data has important implications for Russell. The neutral thing provides a way to bridge physics and psychology:

Instead of ‘divid[ing] the known world into mind and matter,’ ‘[t]he view [of neutral monism] . . . is that both mind and matter are structures composed of a more primitive stuff which is neither mental nor material” (OP, 303). Neutrality means that ‘[t]he datum is a datum equally for physics and for psychology; it is a meeting point for the two. It is neither mental nor physical, . . . but it is part of the raw material of both the mental and the physical worlds’ (OP, 217).51

The point is to make a perception more objective, without calling it something material.

The object must then be a product of a “logical construction” through “correlation.”52 Relying only on the private sense-data of one person would make it impossible to assert the existence of any public object. In a passage that perhaps illuminates certain passages from Woolf’s The Waves, Russell writes, “[o]ne great reason why we must secure a physical object in addition to the sense-data, is that we want the same object for different people. When ten people are sitting around a dinner-table, it seems preposterous to maintain that they are not seeing the same tablecloth, the same knives and forks and spoons and glasses. But sense-data are private to each separate person.”53

The reality of the physical object must be created out of these separate perceptions. There are a “multitude of three-dimensional spaces in the world” but no single space will offer anything but three-dimensions.54 A physical object must be created from the different three-dimensional spaces of different perceivers. Banfield writes: “[p]laces in [these spaces] none of which are in common, are ‘correlated’ in a ‘three-dimensional order’ into ‘members (or aspects) of one physical thing’ (ML,
133-4), ‘correlation’ being the way to make ‘the transition from perception to physics’ (Matter, 333).”

Reality is something more abstract which arises from different viewpoints which meet at the place of the perceived object (a built multitude of perspectives). “[T]his one ‘space of the real world is a space of six dimensions’ in which ‘there is plenty of room for all the particulars for which we want to find positions,’ [ML, 133] by contrast with the three-dimensional space of one man’s sensible objects.55

In the world of literary characters, the correlations within Russell’s six dimensional object create a physical construct upon which a new sense of literary emotion can be inscribed. “Here T.S. Eliot’s term ‘objective correlative,’ Banfield writes, “can be understood as a Russellan one.”55 Out of forms of discontinuous things, the literary work can create an emotion which is not the same thing as Aristotle’s cathartic identification with the characters. The emotion results from the meeting of exterior things within a more abstract sense of space. “The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art,” Eliot writes in “Hamlet and His Problems,” “is by finding an ‘objective correlative’: in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.”55 Lady Macbeth is successful in creating such effects. Different sensations and events evenly correlate. “The artistic ‘inevitability,’” Eliot writes, “lies in this complete adequacy of the external to the emotion; and this is precisely what is deficient in Hamlet. Hamlet (the man) is dominated by an emotion which is inexpressible, because it is in excess of the facts as they appear.” Since “the state of mind of Lady Macbeth walking in her sleep has been communicated to [the spectator] by a skillful accumulation of imagined sensory impressions,” the emotion appears objective.55 Perceptive facts or objects corresponding to emotions have been arranged in the right way. I will discuss emotion further, when I turn shortly to pathos.

It is possible that in Telemachus, Joyce creates something like an objective correlative for the sequence of feelings around his dead mother. Emotion is contained in a sequence by objects which correlate with the sequence of feelings. The inability to objectify the protagonist’s emotions is where Shakespeare fails in his formulation of Hamlet’s emotions, a protagonist who has “a feeling which he cannot understand,” Eliot writes, “he cannot objectify it, and it therefore remains to poison life and obstruct action.”55

Like Eliot’s “objective correlative,” an object emerges from the representational effects of sensation and the reader’s alignment with them. Objecthood emerges as a kind of supplement to a character’s fate. (The characters in The Waves are unsettled by Percival’s absence from the table at the restaurant, and this is manifested in their different acts of perception, Stephen’s gloom flickers in the Dublin Bay landscape of Telemachus; Joseph K. is, in a way, looking for freedom from the law when he fixates on visual slivers.) Represented perceptions in these moments are presented, I argue, as if they had an added quality of objectivity. The reader does not empathize with suffering—the reader aligns with a perceptive form which is more precise. This spectator aligns with a more abstract construction of pathos unveiled by tragedy.

Post-Impressionism

This objective pathos grows interesting in terms of novelistic design, or, more specifically, when juxtaposed with a post-impressionistic aesthetic dynamic. The Impressionism of someone like Monet can present a spectator with individual represented perceptions, but it is in fact Post-Impressionism (the work of Cézanne especially) which confers order on these impressions: “[h]e [Cézanne] it was who first, among moderns at all events, conceived this method of organizing the infinite complexity of appearance by referring it to a geometrical scaffolding.”56 This difference is
central to Banfield’s reading of Woolf. She writes, “the mathematical perfection Russell attributes to being is Fry’s theory of Post-Impressionism . . . [which gives] “formal design to life without destroying it.” In literary modernism, I think that an order, perhaps like post-impressionist design but not identical to it, is in a dialectic with pathos.

“I was quite unable to deal with the pain of discovering that people hurt each other; that a man I had seen had killed himself. The sense of horror held me powerless,” Woolf writes in A Sketch of the Past. This is how she discovers what she calls “shocks.” “That is the whole,” Woolf then states about a flower she sees. This is something she controls: “I felt that I had made a discovery. I felt that I had put away in my mind something that I should go back [to], to turn over and explore.” This is very different from the “despair” she feels from other childhood experiences. The earlier experiences have something to do with perception being fragmentary, a lack of design or purpose, because the latter is something that must emerge from reflection. It is a way to make the ineluctable shock into a form—a way of grappling with the powerlessness one might feel in the face of reality. The way she sees the flower brings this “satisfaction,” but why?

Objecthood is contrary to estrangement

First of all, the objective pathos of the mimesis of sensation is not estrangement, but the structure seems to resemble a Brechtian dramaturgical (and visual) structure. With Brecht, positive meaning is possible, but only on the other side of alienation. Verfremdung, the estrangement effect, produces an arresting, critical time of intellection, freezing the scene into an image capable of being analyzed. There is a strong relationship here between representation, the experience of spectators (and their perception of an event) and then the possibility of a mode of thinking. The playwright employs a literary technique and hopes that it will create critical alienation from bourgeois life. The playwright exhorts his/her audience to realize the underlying conditions of the world in which they live. The Woolfian moment does not posit a time of intellection outside of itself—the process is internal to the object.

Totality is within perception; it is singular; objects are probably distinct from post-impressionist design

In objecthood, the technique is inextricable from perception itself. Woolf builds a sense of inquiry into perception, this modality is strange—it is not didactic like Brecht’s Verfremdung. It is also her own experience (as in Mallarmé’s Bucolique, as well as in the respective cases of the rather intimate protagonists presented by Joyce and Kafka). This perceptive experience creates the sense of a “whole” for her. “But in the case of the flower,” Woolf writes, “I found a reason; and was thus able to deal with the sensation. I was not powerless. I was conscious—if only at a distance—that I should in time explain it.” A meaning had been created. By 1939, the flower from A Sketch of the Past is a flower she has held in her mind for her entire life. I do not see the totality represented by the flower as a collection. I see totality as the possibility that perception could be made whole, the possibility that there is a form of subjectless experience in which the sufferings of thought change into an order. This is not palliative for a subject. The satisfaction derives from the fact that inquiry takes place. It is the dawning of the object as a mode of thought in a moment of clarity. Banfield describes a “logical economy” in Woolf’s work, a form of “saturation” which will, in Woolf’s words, “give the moment whole; whatever it includes. Say that the moment is a combination of thought; sensation; the voice of the sea.” Woolf discusses this moment in her diaries from 1929. In “A Sketch of the Past” (begun, again, in 1939), when she discusses the flower as a whole, it even seems to stand out somewhat from this composite saturation. The flower as an object is distinctly in the external world, tied to a subject,
but floating on its own accord. There may be a kind of wholeness to the very perception of just the one flower within this example not fully explicable by post-impressionism.

Especially in Kafka (in the case of objects that K. perceives in *The Trial*), there is often a singularity to the wholeness of the perceptive thing, in this unity of the perceptive ontology of the object, which distinguishes it at times from a fusion Eliot describes of “seemingly disparate experiences into an organic unity.” Ordinarily, Eliot writes, someone “falls in love, or reads Spinoza, and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with the noise of the typewriter or the smell of cooking; in the mind of the poet these experiences are always forming new wholes.” When Eliot describes these particular experiences, they do not seem defamiliarized, except perhaps by the arrangements which they form with one another. The poet does re-arrange tradition, but it seems as if almost any experience might be included within his composite. In objecthood, the underlying aspects of even just one single perceptive experience become very surprising. When Mallarmé describes the succession of his experiences of nature and music in *Bucolique*, both experiences, judged retro-actively, are highly distilled aspects of the poet’s fate—nothing else could take their places. In Joyce, “the noise of the typewriter” (from Eliot’s sentence) might be the printing machinery in *Aeolus* which stands out, not as a fragment of a whole, but as a raucous singularity. As with a pipe, the human face, furniture, a flower, or a fan in Mallarmé, it is very often the one object in question which acquires a profound standing. Literary modernists (often but not always) gather delicate and precise surfaces about the infinite recession of one object or even one color, with an intellectual consideration that lingers: “[t]his is what equals the act of creation: the notion of an object, escaping, that we need,” Mallarmé writes in “Music and Letters.”

Moreover, modernist literature also takes the post-impressionist focus on the single object much more into the night. There is a focus not just on design, but also, disappearance. This representational effect (evidenced by Joyce’s use of the color green in *Ulysses* in particular) captures the movement of vision into blindness (or what one might call the movement of color into the darkness of the novelistic words themselves—in *Sirens* for example, through the emphasis on particular prefixes: “inexquisite contrast, contrast inexquisite nonexquisite, slow cool dim seagreen sliding depth of shadow”). Kafka also displays his own obsessions with light and dark in *The Trial*.

At the level of particular words, another modernist novelist, Proust, found that there were already invisible linguistic designs of order and pathos in Baudelaire’s diction. In *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, he calls them “formes inouïes” (“unprecedented forms”) but also “sacs” (“bags”):

Il semble qu’il éternise par la force extraordinaire, inouïe du verbe (cent fois plus fort, malgré tout ce qu’on dit, que celui de Hugo), un sentiment qu’il s’efforce de ne pas ressentir au moment où il le nomme, où il le peint plutôt qu’il ne l’exprime. Il trouve pour toutes les douleurs, pour toutes les douceurs, de ces formes inouïes, ravies à son monde spirituel à lui et qui ne se trouveront jamais dans aucun autre, formes d’une planète où lui seul a habité et qui ne ressemblerait à rien de ce que nous connaissons. Sur chaque catégorie de personnes, il pose toute chaude et suave, pleine de liqueur et de parfum, une de ces grandes formes, de ces sacs qui pourraient contenir une bouteille ou un jambon, mais s’il le dit avec des lèvres bruyantes comme le tonnerre, on dirait qu’il s’efforce de ne le dire qu’avec les lèvres, quoiqu’on sente qu’il a tout ressenti, tout compris, qu’il est la plus frémissante sensibilité, la plus profonde intelligence.
Through the extraordinary, unprecedented force of the verb (a hundred times more powerful, despite all they say, than Hugo’s) he appears to immortalize a feeling he endeavors not to feel at the moment when he names it, when he paints it more than he expresses it. He finds for all forms of suffering and gentleness these unprecedented forms, torn from his own spiritual universe proper to him alone and that we will never find in any other, forms from a planet where he alone has lived, one that bears no relationship to any that we know of. Upon each category of person he places with warmth and softness, full of liquor and perfume, one of these grand forms, these bags which could contain a bottle or a ham, but if he speaks it with lips that resound like thunder, one could say that he tries hard not to say it except with the lips alone, although one senses that he has felt everything, understood everything, and that he possesses the most tremulous sensibility, the most profound intelligence.

Proust states that Baudelaire’s work consists of startlingly new techniques where a dialectic exists between impersonality and the idea of a discrete authorial, experiential universe. The condition of possibility for the technique is a place. Baudelaire takes forms from there, and he uses them to describe the world’s pathos in a way that is subjectless and exterior. The containers (“the bags”) are meant to contain a form of value and the innovation assigns this value to the human condition. The container says something necessary, in this context it is diction from the poem “Le Soleil,” and the suffering in question is the poverty of the faubourg. It is possible that Baudelaire uses French verbs like someone from beyond our atmosphere, but this is not Proust’s main point. The point is that the verbs simply work better to capture the human condition than when used normally and ascribe a meaning to it. It is the precision of the verb and the value it adds to the world that matters—so apposite, so sensitive, as to make the world itself newly touched.

On a more autobiographical level, Joyce does something similar with Stephen’s memory of his mother’s death in Ulysses. The narrator structures the visual reality of the opening vignette around her traumatic bowl of bile. The technique orders suffering in such a way as to draw an image of it again as a morning landscape (Dublin Bay), as life dawning in all its vicissitudes. Order removes Stephen’s suffering from the realm of non-thought. This technique of the container, like Woolf’s flower, like language, makes certain kinds of thought and certain kinds of meaning possible. Although (in Joyce) something like displacement might be at work, the reader also subtly knows that the new object is a new container, thus it is not a distortion or a hieroglyphic. In Joyce, the bowl is an object which include the landscape, not a metaphor, but a form of speaking through visuality in a way that, like represented speech and thought, the subject cannot speak. It is a mute secret seemingly capable of recognizing everything. In Ulysses, this may also be a form of impersonal pathos shared in the background between the narrator and the character’s predicament.

Mallarmé’s approach to a flower in “Crise de vers” suggests that a certain kind of speech corresponds to the mode of reference at stake within the representational effects of perceptive experience. The speech which he describes is near the high point of abstraction in this study. Mallarmé writes: “Je dis: une fleur! et, hors de l’oubli où ma voix relègue aucun contour, en tant que quelque chose d’autre que les calices sus, musicalement se lève, idée même et suave, l’absente de tous bouquets.” / “I say: a flower! and, far from the oblivion where my voice relegates any contour, as something other than known calices, musically there rises, the idea itself and fine, the one absent from all bouquets.” In one of Mallarmé’s most famous (allegedly formalist) proclamations, he
places a large emphasis on the speaking voice of the first-person. This speaker is naming the representational effect of a flower, and thus, a reference is being made. The reference to speech places an accent on the atmospheric quality of the word or the idea of a virtual presence. He advances this subtle notion of reference which relies not on any particular flower but on its virtual existence—the reality of the flower, “in-effect.” This effect is homologous with the representational effects of seeing an appearance. I call “virtuality” the effect itself of something visual—to the point where it almost seems as if the effect itself is being referenced. This is particularly the case in Mallarmé’s work. Visuality is more general than virtuality: it is a scene of visual perceptions, as when Woolf sees the flower, or when Joseph K. stares at small visual shapes or the darkness of the pulpit in *The Trial*. Visuality and virtuality are distinct from images. I tend to conflate the notion of an image with realism. An image is a visual form which does not appear subject to doubt. An image does not undergo the transformative metamorphosis of reflection.

*Chapter Overview*

Chapter 1 of the dissertation, entitled “Mallarmé’s Literary Aesthetics of Atmosphere,” demonstrates a relationship between Mallarmé’s reception of Impressionism and the poet’s linguistic theory. Here I examine Mallarmé’s writings on the Impressionist *plein air* technique in his essay, “The Impressionists and Édouard Manet” (1876). I read *plein air* in Mallarmé’s essay not just as the technique of painting outdoors, but as the positing of atmosphere (or air) as a full (*plein*) presence. Atmosphere and presence are the fundamental concepts in this chapter. In my view, these are external aspects of a deep and abstract kind of naturalism. I also focus on other impersonal atmospheric modalities like breath or respiration, speech and the sounds of words, or aspects of nature like weather. A main argument of this chapter is that Mallarmé’s theory of totality is not formalist. Philippe Sollers and Derrida see totality in Mallarmé’s work as a product of textuality. For Mallarmé, represented perceptions are what create a sense of the whole.

I examine, in Mallarmé’s writings on *Hamlet*, the role that atmosphere plays in his understanding of the protagonist. In a discussion of the atmospheric effects of breath and speech in Mallarmé’s “Crise de vers,” I focus on the poet’s notion of a “supreme language.” I argue that the recent criticisms of this text by Jean-Claude Milner and Liesl Yamaguchi (respectively) don’t adequately consider the text’s philosophy of a language of perception (seen in the visual descriptions especially). I argue that the “supreme language” overlaps with this philosophy of perception. The “supreme language” involves an attempt to grasp a deeper logic within the perceptive experience of the external world. I also refer to this as the experience’s virtuality.

Mallarméan virtuality is a referential tendency, creating what I call the representational effect of an object’s natural fullness. For Mallarmé, virtuality emerges through a dialectic between sound and visuality. Virtuality’s aim, I argue, is to unveil a naturalist geometry within reality. This reality is not always visible: words (for example, the word, “flower” in “Crise de vers”) function as indices of a profundity which Mallarmé calls *the line*. The latter is not a line of verse, but a type of perceptual composite at the outer reaches of sensation.

The naturalism of the line will also bear upon the issue of readerly experience in Mallarmé’s experimental essays like “Mimique.” Within Mallarmé’s aesthetic program, his famous notion of impersonality will be a stage within a process. In the letter to Lefèbure of May 1867, Mallarmé’s aim is to fashion a more abstract sense of the self—a whole, capable of repetition, upon which nature leaves its impressions. I conclude the chapter with a brief discussion of Mallarmé’s *Igitur* in which I show how time becomes a sensible presence; this temporality, in *Igitur*, does not pass.

The novelistic objects of perceptive ontology in Woolfian impressionism enact a temporal rupture from realism’s more conventional referential representation. In Chapter 2, entitled “The
Mimesis of Sensation: Sensing a Time Beyond Eternity in Woolf’s Moments,” I demonstrate how Woolf creates another kind of realism through time. Importantly, I break from the work of 20th-century continental theorists of radical time influenced by Bergson (like Deleuze) in which the image plays a central, functional role. Woolf’s moments challenge the idea of a Bergsonian image-form not subject to doubt in order to open the imaginative field of literature to a logic of impressions. In Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway and “Anon,” sound impressions serve to develop the theme of impersonal temporality, and in Woolf’s The Waves, character becomes an infinite container of perceptions. In The Waves, Woolf uses gesture to weave together the emergent totality of moments of being. The Waves as a whole becomes an undulating embroidery of gestures, shocks, movements, modalities, cycles, and interruptions that cohere in a pattern beyond conventional narrative. As a critical supplement to Russell’s idea that time does not pass within sensory experience, I argue that time becomes sensible in Woolf’s novels—but only for the reader.

This sensible time is not a form of eternity. I focus instead on Woolf’s “obsession” with “living in time.”70 Following Banfield, I examine how Woolf creates a post-impressionist abstract continuity out of discontinuous experience. I then show that there is a more diffuse form of continuity. I argue that Woolf’s literary post-impressionism has strange remainders. An undetermined temporal form, a blank time separate from eternity is not necessarily geometrical (in a post-impressionist way) for Woolf. Time is an irregular drop of water in Mrs. Dalloway, a “damp stain.” A sense of reality lies in the atmospheric diffusion of these unfinished marks of time, such as the floating “airs” in To The Lighthouse.71

In literary modernism, Joyce’s version of naturalism then significantly magnifies represented perceptions through close-ups and distortions. What is the relationship between Joyce’s naturalism and time? Chapter 3, “Beyond Anthropocentric Time: Joyce’s Tragic Philosophy of Sound,” begins with a look at Joyce’s notions of the “ineluctable modality of the visible” and the "ineluctable modality of the audible" from Chapter 3 (Proteus) of Ulysses.72 I show that in Joyce’s A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man and Ulysses, while visual modalities are richly varied, they do not necessarily encapsulate the ineluctable or fate—defined here as that which cannot be struggled against. The visual field in Joyce’s novels does not appear to overwhelm the cognitive work performed by his characters. In contrast, figures of sound actually do appear ineluctable within Joyce’s novels in that these sounds display a certain tragic character which is moreover, non-anthropocentric—sound thus seems to exceed the human point of view. In this sense, Joycean sound surpasses narratological elements which take affect and the human lifespan as points of departure. I employ Lukács’s pre-Marxist essay on tragic form, “The Metaphysics of Tragedy” (1910), as a philosophical entry to better theorize Joyce’s philosophy of sound. Through a comparison with the relationship between the visual and sound in Nietzsche’s The Birth of Tragedy, I then examine the presence in Joyce’s work of a more dialectical relationship between sound and visual phenomena. Throughout the chapter, I analyze numerous sound techniques in Joyce’s work like disembodied voices and echoes of the dead, interference, the noise of technology, phonic neologisms, linguistic errata, the micro-gesture, a Joycean narrator whose principle task appears to be the narration of sounds—all of these figures culminate in this study with the static repetitions of Sirens (Chapter 11 of Ulysses). Sound’s assured cessation through the passage of time is a perennial component of an anthropocentric literary humanism. In Sirens, sound defies passage; its techniques present anti-teleological approaches to death. In this ontological atmosphere, the uncanny laughter of Sirens dismantles omniscience and anthropomorphic tragic surveillance (the assumption that the story world can be viewed by the all-seeing gaze of divine figuration). Assimilated into Joyce’s infinitely repeatable phenomenal appearances and buttressed by sound’s multiplicity, the fate of objects is one of vibratory suspension for the eyes of the reader.
In “Kafka’s Moment: Spectatorship, Perception, and the Dawning of the Object,” the fourth and final chapter of the dissertation, epistemological operations bring about the gradual dawning of objects. I refer to the object as “dawning” because its state of emergence seems posited for a reader. Adding to Judith Ryan’s work on Kafka and empiricism, I show that the novelist’s objects in *The Trial* are more than phenomena which privilege the relation between object and perceiver over the object perceived (as in William James’ work). Objects are actually built into a system of readerly reception. In contrast to critics like Adorno, Lukács, and more recently J. Hillis Miller, who see Kafka’s work as impenetrable to the spectator’s view of phenomena, I argue that Kafka’s representational effects reside in the protagonist’s sensory apprehension. The reader then aligns with this characterological experience in a subtle way. I compare and contrast what I call Kafka’s spectatorial “time of inquiry” with the interruptive “shock” of Brecht’s estrangement effect, with Benjamin’s dialectical image and with Ruth Ronen’s work on the perceptual principles of fictional time. Kafka’s readerly system is ultimately anti-Brechtian in that the reader does not experience estrangement. That said, in my reading of Kafka, the sensory mimesis presented for the reader is also not a form of Aristotelian empathy—here a mimesis of sensation takes place through a certain gap within reading. The alignment between text and reader does not concern plot or catharsis. In the cathedral scene of Kafka’s *The Trial* for example, the reader is meant to sense a certain shadowiness alongside Joseph K. The act of reading is fundamental to the creation of this “deep darkness” (“das tiefe Dunkel”).
Chapter 1

Mallarmé’s Literary Aesthetics of Atmosphere

This chapter examines the role of what I will call *impersonal atmospheric modalities* within Mallarmé’s literary aesthetics. I focus in particular on the following modalities: air, breath or respiration, speech, the sounds of words, or aspects of nature like weather. I start with Mallarmé’s critical writings on Impressionism. I will show how his reading of the *plein-air* aesthetic entails a particular notion of atmosphere: air is an abstract and diffuse presence within Mallarmé’s writings. The poet emphasizes both the fullness and neutrality of this presence. In a brief reading of Mallarmé’s poem “The Afternoon of the Faun,” I discuss how Mallarmé’s reflections on air also involve temporality. In the essay “Hamlet,” Mallarmé presents a Shakespearean protagonist who radiates a gestural atmosphere which the poet links explicitly to perceptive experiences of nature.

This chapter shows how breath and speech illuminate and shift our understanding of Mallarmé’s theory of language, including his idea of a “*supreme*” language, which he discusses in the essay “Crise de vers.” I link this supreme language to the idea of the *emergence of an object* (like the word “flower” in “Crise de vers”), showing the relationship between the perceptive ontology of such an object and what Mallarmé calls “virtuality.” In other words, I am interested in how perceptive experiences condition the emergence of objects (as well as the words for these objects). Thus, this “supreme” language is not only a question of language itself— I argue that for Mallarmé it concerns an attempt to grasp a deeper temporal pattern within the perceptive experience of the external world.

Readers of Mallarmé like the linguist and philosopher Jean-Claude Milner prioritize within Mallarméan sound, the sound of language; this sound’s destiny is to be a signifier which creates chromatic effects. Here poetic words first create a phonic atmospheric effect for the reader. This audible sound of a word as a sound (the signifier) then resembles the visual sense of either lightness or darkness (the sound’s signified). For example, in “Crise de vers,” Mallarmé states that the French word for day, “jour,” actually creates a sense of darkness.77 Mallarmé then wishes to rectify this problem with his poetry. For Liesl Yamaguchi, Mallarmé’s chromatic effects compensate for the absence of a supreme language, while in “Crise de vers” for Milner they are a mere precursor to a “[p]oetry” that “can and must think.”78 While I argue that Mallarméan “virtuality” (a deeper aesthetic, perceptive drama) is more pressing than sound or the visual in “Crise de vers,” only through the dialectics of sound and visuality can one begin to understand it. These dialectics create virtuality, a form of abstract continuity tied to the human experience of the natural world. This sense of essence relies on something which Mallarmé addresses in essays like “Bucolique” and “La Musique et les lettres,” which he also calls “the omnipresent Line”—an ordering logic within a kind of naturalism.

My viewpoint also shifts our perspective on Mallarmé from that of the *Tel Quel* literary critic Philippe Sollers who locates Mallarméan totality within writing. Sollers states: “we fail to realize that to think is to write, that to read is to read what we are—and thus the play of language escapes us.”80 Sollers describes Mallarmé’s project this way: “[t]he totality of these operations, unveiling and echoing one another even at the level of the *letter* that rules them all, is referred to as *fiction*, and the book—interpreted, completed, put into practice—is what gives this fiction *meaning*, in other words, *reality*.”81 Discussing the multiplicity of formalist meaning in Mallarmé’s “Mimique,” Derrida writes that “the blank or the whiteness (is) the totality, however infinite, of the polysemic series, *plus* the carefully spaced-out splitting of the whole, the fanlike form of the text . . . . the blank is the
polysemic totality of everything white or blank plus the writing site (hyman, spacing, etc.).”82 This totality is a gap in the text where formalist undecidability can be stretched to infinity. Yet I focus on how the Mallarméan idea of totality has a key relation to perceptive experiences of the external world. Then later in the chapter, I discuss how in “Mimique,” Mallarmé turns this referential creation of representational effects into a question of reading. I am not seeking out particular references made within Mallarmé’s work, but rather, to understand how a more abstract referential disposition works within his system.

Finally I discuss how Mallarmé’s impersonality is a stage within a process; here I focus on Mallarmé’s letter to Lefébure of May 1867. Here breath, through a dynamic relation to nature, creates a temporality: the time of the presence of atmosphere. The influence of nature makes the life of the poet into a kind of whole, but also, into an abstraction: an abstract time where nature makes the self into a temporal form. This happens through the impersonal perception of nature. This is different than the formalism of linguistic impersonality because the poet’s organs of perception play a central role. In the conclusion, I show how in Mallarmé’s Igitur, atmosphere becomes an absolute reality by way of a form of time which does not pass.

Air is a form of presence

Mallarmé’s essay “The Impressionists and Édouard Manet” was first printed in The Art Monthly Review on Sept. 30, 1876 in London. The essay was translated into English by George T. Robinson. Mallarmé’s original French version of this essay has been lost. Mallarmé’s primary interest is the Impressionists’ technique of plein air. The latter translates as open air. Open air conveys the idea of painting outdoors, it also expresses a certain expansiveness. The French word plein also translates as full. Mallarmé is possibly more invested in the latter meaning—that of a positive presence. In Manet’s Le Linge (1875), there is a garden scene of laundry drying on a clothesline. Air, along with sunshine, is performing the work of drying the garments. The meaning of this quotidian phenomenon has completely changed in the 20th and 21st centuries. Mallarmé writes:

Some fresh but even-coloured foliage—that of a town garden—holds imprisoned a flood of summer morning air. Here a young woman, dressed in blue, washes some linen, several pieces of which are already drying . . . . It is deluged with air. Air reigns supreme and real, as if it held an enchanted life conferred by the witchery of art; a life neither personal nor sentient, but itself subjected to the phenomena thus called up by science and shown to our astonished eye . . . . And how? By this fusion or by this struggle ever continued between surface and space, between colour and air. Open air:—that is the beginning and end of the question we are now studying.83

Within the painting, air’s presence is absolute; it is a living substance, one more prominent than the objects represented (“such air! Air which despotically dominates over all else”).84 Air is an omnipresent modality with “its perpetual metamorphosis and its invisible action rendered visible.”85 Air’s role in representation is revealed through particular techniques. Mallarmé writes: “as no artist has on his palette a transparent and neutral color answering to open air, the desired effect can only be obtained by lightness or heaviness of touch, or by the regulation of tone.”86 This technique imbues the visible with a particular effect.
Air expresses a more profound sense of reality, beyond that of the objects themselves:

Everywhere the luminous and transparent atmosphere struggles with the figures, the dresses, and the foliage and seems to take to itself some of their substance and solidity; whilst their contours, consumed by the hidden sun and wasted by space, tremble, melt, and evaporate into the surrounding atmosphere, which plunders reality from the figures, yet seems to do so in order to preserve their truthful aspect.87

For Mallarmé, the open-air technique expresses a truth about how to distill the nature of reality. This distillation corresponds to a historical moment. There are several ways that Impressionism purifies the eyes of the artist (“the eye should forget all else it has seen”).88 Unlike “Romanticism,” but like “Realism,” the Impressionists “vigorously exclude[e] all [meddlesome] imagination.”89 For Mallarmé, Zola and naturalism are intimately related to the Impressionist aesthetic. Naturalism conveys that “absolute sentiment which Nature herself impresses on those who have voluntarily abandoned conventionalism.”90 This atmosphere forms a constellation with the work of “Velazquez” (arguably through the latter’s approach to non-figural space) or the “brilliant tones” of the Flemish School. “It is precisely these very aspects which reveal the truth,” Mallarmé writes, “and give the paintings based upon them living reality instead of rendering them the baseless fabric of abstracted and obscure dreams.”91 The dreams belong to Romanticism. In this essay, Mallarméan impersonality’s function seems to be to make way for the most unmediated form of nature’s own expression. Elsewhere on Morisot, Mallarmé writes that the force of her “pictorial language” derives from the absence of the artist’s “intervention.” The effect is produced “by the atmosphere awakening in the surfaces their luminous secret—or the rich analysis of life, chastely restored by means of an alchemy—mobility and illusion.”92 Air and light create the object for the impersonal artist.

An Aesthetic Philosophy of Neutral Light

When one renders a “fist” indoors, Mallarmé writes, “the reflected lights are mixed and broken and too often discolour the flesh tints.”93 Artificial light draws undue attention to the figure itself:

[T]he artist would be in the wrong to represent [the female image] among the artificial glories of candle-light or gas, as at that time the only object of art would be the woman herself, set off by the immediate atmosphere, theatrical and active, beautiful, but utterly inartistic. Those persons much accustomed, [whether] from the habit of their calling or purely from taste, to fix on a mental canvass the beautiful remembrance of [a] woman, even when thus seen amid the glare of night in the world or at the theatre, must have remarked that some mysterious process despoils the noble phantom of the artificial prestige cast by candelabra or footlights, before she is admitted fresh and simple to the number of everyday haunters of the imagination.94

Artificial light creates limitations within perspective. In Mallarmé’s view, memory has the capacity to overcome the effects of artificial illumination. Reflection over time has an effect on the perspectival aspects of a painting’s structure. This “mental operation” appears linked to air’s abstract, natural simplicity, “[it] demands daylight . . . in space with the transparence of air alone.”95 In contrast, synthetic light encourages the use of superannuated techniques: “in the real or artificial half-light in
use in the schools, it is this feature on which the light strikes and forces into undue relief, affording an easy means for a painter to dispose a face to suit his own fancy and return to bygone styles.\textsuperscript{96}

The \textit{plein-air} technique creates a remarkable evenness of flesh tints. The advantages of natural light, Mallarmé writes, is that “it accurately renders [the] complexion, the special beauty which springs from the very source of life,” and this “changes with artificial lights.” Mallarmé clarifies that natural light is inseparable from the air in which it appears: “painting . . . concerns itself more about this flesh-pollen than any other human attraction . . . [it] demands daylight—that in space with the transparence of air alone.”\textsuperscript{97} The metaphor Mallarmé uses for skin suggests a powdery and generative substance. Skin, when represented in this way, becomes like a denizen of the wind; it grows suggestive of trace elements within plant and insect biology. In this metaphor, skin exceeds the human body. This is because “[a]esthetically,” Mallarmé writes, “it [the question of plein-air] is answered by the simple fact that there in [the] open air alone can the flesh tints of a model keep their true qualities.” This apparent fact of nature is decided by light “being nearly equally lighted on all sides.”\textsuperscript{98} Later he writes of “the light touch and fresh tones uniform and equal, or variously trembling with shifting lights.”\textsuperscript{99} The object should appear as if uncolored by any particular point of view. In an essay on Morisot, a “satin infused with life by contact with skin,” an “atmosphere” where “[the intention behind adornment] bursts forth, expressing its relation to the garden and the seashore, a greenhouse, the gallery.”\textsuperscript{100} Impressionist skin conveys a neutral appearance which is capable of suggesting a larger sense of space.

Homologies between human complexion and weather interested Mallarmé. In his fashion gazette \textit{La Dernière Mode}, under the pseudonym Marguerite de Ponty, he discusses facial creams. In one case, he extols the benefits of a facial lotion (a product named \textit{Snow Cream}) which, although harsh, offers the skin “an alert and enviable freshness.” His narrator delights in the idea that the moisturizer would create a skin surface where “two contrary whitenesses [could] mingle.”\textsuperscript{101} With the help of this hydration, skin becomes like snow. In a sense, it is no longer skin. It indicates the natural world in a more pervasive sense. Atmosphere and skin incorporate each other.

Over and above the neutrality of the perceived object, the fullness of air structures the painting itself; it creates a neutral space beyond the harmonizing effect which outdoor light has on the complexion:

\begin{quote}
But will not this atmosphere—which an artifice of the painter extends over the whole of the object painted—vanish when the picture is completely finished? If we could find no other way to indicate the presence of air than the partial or repeated application of colour as usually employed, doubtless the representation would be as fleeting as the effect represented, but from the first conception of the work, the space intended to contain the atmosphere has been indicated, so that when this is filled by the represented air, it is as unchangeable as the other parts of the picture.\textsuperscript{102}
\end{quote}

This sense of a space outside of objects might relate to Mallarmé’s project as a whole. Air is a subtly referential phenomenon in Impressionism; it also \textit{exists before everything else in the painting}. How might \textit{plein-air} help to explain other figures in Mallarmé’s work (foam [“Rien, cette écume, vierge vers”], breath, sound, fans, candles, light, shadow, vibration, et al.)?\textsuperscript{103} Does an atmosphere exist within Mallarmé’s work? For Mallarmé, air, the space outside of, \textit{and, in a way, prior to} represented objects, is a positive space imbued with meanings separate from any single represented object.

\textit{Air is a Temporal Gesture}

Air suggests another sense of reality. In Mallarmé’s poem, “The Afternoon of the Faun,” the
faun does not know if his rape of the nymphs was a dream or not: “Did I love a dream?/ “Aimai-je
un rêve?”

His confusion seeks external form. The faun’s breath figures into this: “[t]hus, when I’ve
sucked the brightness out of grapes, / To chase regret deflected by my feint, / I lift the empty
cluster to the sky, / Laughing, and wild to be drunk, inflate / The shining skins and look through
them till night. O nymphs, let us inflate our MEMORIES.”

The faun uses the hyaline skins to push air into what were formerly grapes, a gesture or action which is an antidote to the time of
regret for him. He is trying to repeat something through this use of air. He does not know if what he
is repeating ever happened in the first place. The grape skins, however, are real. He is performing a
strange temporal operation upon a naturalist surface. The faun exploits the naturalistic detail of the
skins to generate additional fantasy. If he could fabricate recollection, this would give the time of his
dream an external form in the way that the grape skins create an emblem for the time of passing day.
The faun’s gestural breath expresses non-lexical meanings which derive from the body’s movements.

The figure of the potentially unreal grape is overdetermined. Dennis J. Schmidt informs us
that “Pliny tells the story of a contest between Zeuxis and Parrhasius to see which one of them was
the greater artist.” When Zeuxis unveiled his paintings of grapes, they looked so real that birds came
and pecked at them.” Parrhasius then “draw[s] back the curtain on his painting,” only to show that
the curtain itself is the painting. In Schmidt’s view, Lacan uses this painting to demonstrate “how
animals are attracted to surfaces while humans are drawn to the hidden.”

In Mallarmé’s poem, the surface of the grape, inflated by a gesture, challenges a binary between visibility and invisibility.

Lukács: Gesture and Absence

“What is the life-value of a gesture?” Lukács asks at the beginning of his early, pre-Marxist
eyon on Kierkegaard. For Lukács, the gesture is a “movement which clearly expresses something
unambiguous.” There are forms of secret clarity to gestures. “The gesture alone expresses life,”
Lukács goes on to say, “but is it possible to express life? Is not this the tragedy of any living art, that
it seeks to build a crystal palace out of air, to forge realities from the insubstantial possibilities of the soul,
through the meetings and partings of souls.”

Judith Butler reads this essay as a meditation on
removal. She writes:

That Kierkegaard sacrifices his fiancée, Regine Olsen is interpreted by Lukács as a
necessary sacrifice, one that underwrites his entire aesthetic practice, a withdrawal
that conditions form-making itself . . . literary forms must ‘sacrifice’ the personal in
order to work. The task of making a form gets underway once a limitation is set, an
exclusion of life that marks and inaugurates the process of form-making itself.

Things in the world press upon form by way of their absence; the referential tendency is general
here; it is indirect. This presence of absence resembles what Blanchot calls “an activity of absence,”
within Mallarmé’s work. An inverted sense of reality is still “present” as “the dissimulated presence
of being.” In this context of exclusion, form, Butler writes, “holds out the possibility for a
mediation and even indissolubility of the subjective and objective realms.”

This form takes place in a moment of sacrifice.
Hamlet and Atmosphere

In Mallarmé’s essay of the same name, Hamlet is conceived of as the radiation of an atmosphere, as well as a metaphor for Mallarmé’s reaction to the changing seasons. Hamlet, in Mallarmé’s eyes, is an indirect distillation, a representation within a very abstract referential tendency. He is not a symbol; he represents elements of nature in a strange way. The first theater which Mallarmé mentions in the essay is not Shakespearean, but that of “autumnal Nature,” which “prepares Her Theater sublime and pure. She will not, in Her solitude, shed light upon essential miracles until the Poet, whose lucid eye alone can penetrate their meaning (and that meaning is the destiny of man), has been called back to ordinary cares and pleasures.” The visual richness of Fall—and its relation to fate—are on Mallarmé’s mind when he discusses Hamlet:

L’adolescent évanoui de nous aux commencements de la vie et qui hantera les esprits hauts ou pensifs par le deuil qu’il se plaît à porter, je le reconnais, qui se débat sous le mal d’apparaître . . . . Je sais gré aux hasards qui, contemplateur dérangé de la vision imaginative du théâtre de nuées et de la vérité pour en revenir à quelque scène humaine, me présentent, comme thème initial de causerie, la pièce que je crois celle d’année pourpre, violet, rose et toujours or. Le commerce de cieux où je m’identifiai cesse, sans qu’une incarnation brutale contemporaine occupe, sur leur paravent de gloire, ma place tôt renoncée (adieu les splendeurs d’un holocauste d’année élargi à tous les temps pour que ne s’en juxtapose à personne le sacre vain); mais avance le seigneur latent qui ne peut devenir, juvénile ombre de tous, ainsi tenant du mythe.

Mallarmé frames his discussion of Hamlet with rhetorical digressions about the sky and the movement of seasons. Atmosphere determines the emergence of Hamlet as a form. Mallarmé posits a continuity between Hamlet and these contemplations about the natural environment, ritual, and sacrifice. “[L]e seigneur latent qui ne peut devenir, juvénile ombre de tous” (“[T]he prince of promise unfulfillable, young shade of all of us”), Mallarmé writes, as if the Prince of Denmark were a silhouette for the stand of humanity.

Hamlet radiates presence:

Les plus belles qualités (au complet), qu’importe dans une histoire éteignant tout ce qui n’est un imaginaire héros, à demi mêlé à de l’abstraction; et c’est trouver de sa réalité, ainsi qu’une vaporeuse toile, l’ambiance, que dégage l’emblématique Hamlet . . . . Hamlet, étranger à tous lieux où il poind, le leur impose à ces vivants trop en relief, par l’inquiétant ou funèbre envahissement de sa présence. l’acteur, sur quoi se taille un peu exclusive à souhait la version française, remet tout en place seul par l’exorcisme d’un geste annulant l’influence pernicieuse de la Maison en même temps qu’il épand l’atmosphère du génie, avec un tact dominateur et du fait de s’être miré naïvement dans le séculaire texte.

Hamlet’s presence must be undiminished by outside development. His gestures, when they resonate in the right way by a skilled actor, will transcend the vagaries of style. Hamlet’s existence is presence. The end of our study shows how this tendency (where atmosphere is absolute) takes shape through the time of Mallarmé’s Igitur.
“Crise de vers” or Breath Across Vision and Sound

A relationship in Mallarmé’s work between his Impressionist-influenced idea of plein-air and language revolves intimately around the action of breathing. For Mallarmé, words introduce different kinds of exhalations. In “Crise de vers,” he writes:

L’oeuvre pure implique la disparition élocutoire du poète, qui cède l’initiative aux mots, par le heurt de leur inégalité mobilisés; ils s’allument de reflets réciproque comme une virtuelle traînée de feux sur des pierreries, remplaçant la respiration perceptible en l’ancien souffle lyrique ou la direction personelle enthousiaste de la phrase.

The pure work implies the elocutionary disappearance of the poet who cedes the initiative to words, by the shock of their mobilized inequality; they illuminate one another through reciprocal reflections like a virtual trail of fire upon gemstones, replacing the perceptible respiration found in the ancient lyric breath or a sentence marked with an enthusiastic personal direction.¹¹⁴

The literary voice in which impersonal words appear must be as imperceptible as an air which feeds the illumination of precious stones. Impersonality suggests that the words on the page exist apart from the person who writes. Different types of exhalations articulate the problem impersonality. In her translation, Barbara Johnson calls “the ancient lyric breath” something more: “the primacy of the perceptible rhythm of respiration,” although the words primacy and rhythm are not in the original text, her interpretation suggests that the ancient breath carries a gross regularity.¹¹⁵ Mallarmé is seeking another kind of breath than this. His formulation of the ideal breath is even more complex though: it relies not just on the perceptible sounds of speech, but also on visual metaphors. One must consider this ideal breath across two general spheres in fact: how we hear, and how we see. The two are interrelated in Mallarmé’s work. The metaphor of words knocking against one another is borrowed from Baudelaire’s “Le Soleil”: “trébuchant sur les mots comme sur les pavés” (“stumbling upon words like upon paving stones”).¹¹⁶ There is also an implicit metaphor for fire, which needs air or breath in order to persist.

Milner’s Reading of “Crise de Vers”

In “Mallarmé Perchance,” Jean-Claude Milner focuses attention on a particular idea in Mallarmé’s “Crise de vers.” This notion of Mallarmé’s concerns how in certain poetic verses, sounds resemble the natural thing referred to, unlike a discordant relation to natural things—as in ordinary prose. Milner’s interpretation of Mallarmé’s idea is persuasive: sound or the “sonorous vibration” of language, he contends, represents Mallarmé’s principle means to formulate a non-Saussurian system of the signifier. This is if the sound of the word (the signifier) resembles the visual qualities of the thing which it designates. For Saussure, the relation between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary—it bears no relation to things in the world. For Mallarmé, in contrast, the signifier is a word’s sound “and the thing signified” is “the sense,” Milner states.¹¹⁷ In other words, for Saussure, “the sound and the thing [are] mutually independent . . . . [and] [a]s for the signifier and the signified, they are compared to the recto and verso of a sheet of paper; they know nothing of one another.” In contrast, “Mallarmé assumes that the sonority of the term retains some property of the thing.”¹¹⁸ The thing which the sound refers to is a reference.
The quality of a word’s sound (again, *the signifier*) is measured by a chromatic scale. In “Crise de vers,” Mallarmé calls the chromatic shades a system of “touches,” very much like in painting, “corresponding to [objects] in shading or bearing.” If the visual atmosphere created by the sound correlates with the object, the listener experiences a consistency between words and the world.

Generally, the sounds of words disappoint Mallarmé. The phonic vibration of words only satisfies him when poetry performs something different with sound. In *Crise de vers*, Mallarmé writes:

À côté d’ombre, opaque, ténèbres se fonce peu; quelle déception, devant la perversité conférant à jour comme à nuit, contradictoirement, des timbres obscur ici, là clair. Le souhait d’un terme de splendeur brillant, ou qu’il s’éteigne, inverse; quant à des alternatives lumineuses simples—Seulement, sachons n’existerait pas le vers lui, philosophiquement rémunère le défaut des langues, complément supérieur.

“Beside *ombre* [shade], which is opaque, *(ténèbres)* [shadows] is not very dark; what a disappointment, in front of the perversity that makes *jour* [day] and *nuit* [night], contradictorily, sound dark in the former and light in the latter. Hope for a resplendent word glowing, or being snuffed out, inversely, so far as simple light-dark alternatives are concerned. —*Only*, be aware that verse *would not exist* if, philosophically, makes up for [*rémunérer*] language’s deficiencies, as a superior supplement.”

Liesl Yamaguchi has analyzed the French verb *rémunérer* in the previous passage; she states that “Mallarmé’s verb enacts a very simple equation that takes place entirely within language: verse compensates for the absence of the supreme language.” Both Milner and Yamaguchi focus part of their respective readings of “Crise de vers” on how the sound of verse makes up for the absence of the definitive language. Mallarmé states this clearly in the above passage; it would be hard to disagree.

Yet in “Crise de vers,” a clear dividing line does not exist between this ideal language and Mallarmé’s broader concept of representation, I wish to argue. For Milner, the need to progress beyond a poetry which sounds like a chromatic supplement for phenomena results in a “Mallarméan doctrine,” of which Milner sees *Un Coup de dès* to be the “final expression.” Milner’s idea of a doctrine does not concern sound and visuality but rather how Mallarmé’s poetry frees itself from phonic perfection and joins with thought. I think Mallarmé’s goal in “Crise de vers” is to discuss literature in light of the mystery of natural appearances. I wish to posit the idea of subtle, diffuse, naturalistic representational effects in place of what Milner calls the *weak meaning* of the mimesis of thought.

My reading of “Crise de vers” focuses on the strange atmosphere which Mallarmé discusses; this is *a theoretical literary technique* through which Mallarmé reveals something about “supreme” language. At the close of “Crise de vers,” Mallarmé discusses “a brand new atmosphere” for words. Arguably, this is not just an attempt to mimic sound, nor does it consist of naturalistic color effects created by them. True, Mallarmé mentions the “repeated reformulations between sound and sense,” but the emphasis here is on *astonishment* (“a total word, entirely new . . . . the surprise of never having heard that fragment of ordinary eloquence before”), an astonishment which would rest on a type of effect—*virtuality*. 
“Crise de vers” Presents a Subtle Reality of the “In Effect,” which is a Meditation upon the Visual

Deeper forms of visuality exist in “Crise de vers.” The essay’s initial paragraph is explicit about this: “a string of multicolored pearls left by the rain, reflected in the glass of a case full of books. Many a work, under the beaded curtain, will align its own illumination; I enjoy following their light, as under a saturated cloud, against the window, one follows storm lights across the sky.”

Mallarmé distinguishes the radiance streaming from texts in his bookcase from the pattern of raindrops. The rain pattern on the glass of the bookcase is a reflection, but the glowing presence of the books seems even more virtual. The visual elements are interwoven in subtle ways which I will explain.

Illumination is the word Mallarmé uses to distinguish the visual trace of the books from reflections; it is compared to “storm lights” or lightning. Before this word appears, the visual surface has four layers: sky, window, bookcase glass, and books. This strange radiance is separate from all of this, perhaps it is the “[a]something else,” which Mallarmé describes in “La Musique et les lettres.”

An illumination is a byproduct of a subtle aspect of reality like the “virtual train of fire across gemstones.”

He makes other statements like this: “[t]o institute an exact relation between images, and let detach there a third, blendable, clear aspect, presented for divination.” This “third” type of thing, a near transparency, corresponds less to the real effects of light and dark, but rather, to delicate atmospheric elements, where an appearance like reflected raindrops would initiate an inquiry into the nature of the visible. By “divination,” Mallarmé is perhaps not referring to a prediction about the future, but to a mode of perception at the outer limits of sensation.

Mallarmé does not wish to invoke an object directly, but rather, the effect of its appearance. Virtuality is that which is in effect the case. The effect of a sheer appearance has significance for him; it seems to be mean something over and above the object itself. This “third, blendable, clear aspect,” from the last paragraph is, again, “detach[able].” By virtuality, I think that Mallarmé also means something more essential than the material object itself (“an undeniable desire of my time is to distinguish two kinds of language according to their different attributes: taking the double state of speech—brute and immediate here, there essential”). His virtuality borrows natural effects: the abstract phenomenal effect of the fullness of objects, reflective effects, or the transparent aspect of something like glass. A deeper, neutral state of appearances is more pressing in “Crise de vers” than the visual or sound alone. Virtuality is a mimesis of perceptive experience. For Mallarmé, a philosophy of literature is inextricable from this mimesis. But this philosophy is not limited to the idea of textual play: the aesthetic effects derive from the representation of very acute experiences of seeing and hearing. Virtuality seeks to isolate an effect which takes place within seeing and hearing.

The Dialectic of Sound and Visuality

In “Crise de vers,” sound is equally complex. Mallarmé writes:

[N]ous en sommes là, précisément, à rechercher . . . un art d’achever la transposition, au Livre, de la symphonie ou uniment de reprendre notre bien: car, ce n’est pas de sonorités élémentaires par les cuivres, les cordes, les bois, indéniablement mais de l’intellectuelle parole à son apogée que doit avec plénitude et évidence, résulter, en tant que l’ensemble des rapports existant dans tout, la Musique.

Mallarmé re-fashions the representational effects of sound in order to add something different from
what hearing is like in reality. In the passage above, Mallarmé already separates his own notions of “la symphonie” and “la Musique” from the sounds of actual instruments. The symphony is a question of relations between movements, relations which sets of words might also achieve through constellations amongst themselves. These relations between words relate to Mallarmé’s metaphor of the visual reflection—word patterns, like reflections, echo one another across different levels. Such considerations are helpful when considering a poem such as Mallarmé’s Un Coup de dès.

In Mallarmé’s system, sound and visuality pass through unique dialectics, similar to what Robert Greer Cohn calls, in his study of Mallarmé’s Igitur; “tetrapolarity.” Here is an example, not from Igitur, but from “Bucolique”:

Telle page rurale, accompagnement à l’autre, oiseux, jamais disparate—ce site, habituel, sous un reflet de nuage classique et lieu commun: arrivait-elle, l’écriture, raréfiée naguères par la symphonie, à se limiter dans plusieurs signes d’abréviation mentale, d’autant eux monteront vers l’irréductibilité ou impossibilité au delà—sur le sol où je mets le pied, plus évidemment leur mirage, ordinaire, demeure. Rien ne transgresse les figures du val, du pré, de l’arbre.

Such a rural page (as accompaniment to the other, pointless, never disparate—this site, familiar, beneath the reflection of a classical cloud, a common place): could writing, formerly rarefied by symphonies, condense itself into several abbreviated mental signs? Especially as they will tend towards irreducibility and the impossibility of going beyond this minimalism—on the ground where I tread, more obviously their mirage, ordinary, [remains]. Nothing is able to transgress the figures of the valley, the field, the tree.

A polar set consists of writing and nature (or of nature as something already fundamentally literary), another consists of sound and visuality, still another exists between “abbreviated [cognitive] mental signs” and figures in the external world. The dialectics are irregular; sometimes they overlap. A word like “symphony” has its own meaning for Mallarmé—it exists independently of a dialectical movement to the visual only briefly, as the “abbreviated mental signs” are symbolic in a way which would seem available to visual apprehension. Yet “abbreviated mental signs” are not just symbols for thoughts, they are also “condens[ations]” of music and are thus notational. Everything happens alongside the movement of Mallarmé’s two feet (both visual and phonic) on the actual “ground” (the walking creates a sound again, a murmur of footsteps). There is a relationship between past “symphonies,” “mental signs,” and the sound of locomotion. Perhaps as sensations occur within the experience of walking in nature, thoughts transition swiftly between types of sensations. The “irreducibility” of units of thought are not just mental, music-like notes, or what some call symbols, but this time, natural landscape images like “the tree.” This “tree” is a “figure,” but also, what I wish to call, an object. For Mallarmé, it is already symbolic. There is a homology within the object between the effects created by the natural world (when we perceive it) and literary effects.

How does one render the effects of natural objects (like seeing “the tree” as an appearance for example) through the use of symbols like language? I think the tree is a point in a passage. The passage presents objects as constellations, not just with each other, but within layered understandings of perceptive experience and symbolic representation. Heterogeneous perceptive experiences also present ways to think about thought. Again, here music and language (“the symphony”) implies the movement to visuality and language (“the tree”). Sound and visuality index an aesthetic philosophy which
concerns the rendering of objects of perception. The only consistency is the “common place,”
where nature is conflated with the idea of a symphony.

Mallarmé’s metaphor of the symphony deserves further elaboration. Within the nature of
perception, he sees the possibility of a dynamic set of perceptual worlds overlapping. No single act
of perception (whether it is aesthetic in nature, or more quotidian) can posit the existence of a single,
orderly world. The symphonic harmony which is created is not between different instruments of
sound, but between a host of different representational effects. The symphony he describes would
not be limited to art (or any single art form) and would include the perceptive effects of the natural
world. Seeing a tree for example, links with the effects of reading literature (the “rural page”). In
attempting to harmonize diverse perceptual experiences in this way, Mallarmé’s metaphor of the
symphony might be considered in light of Giorgio Agamben’s writings on the 20th-century zoologist
Jakob von Uexküll. In The Open, Agamben uses a similar metaphor to describe Uexküll’s notion of
scientific environments:

Where classical science saw a single world that comprised within it all living species
hierarchically ordered from the most elementary forms up to higher organisms,
Uexküll instead supposes an infinite variety of perceptual worlds that though they are
uncommunicating and reciprocally exclusive, are all perfect and linked together as if
in a gigantic musical score, at the center of which lie familiar and, at the same time,
remote little beings called Echinus esculentus, Amoeba terricola, Rhizostoma pulmo,
Sipunculus, Anemonia sulcata, Ixodes ricinus, and so on.

The idea that a single real world exists is anthropocentric. Uexküll wishes to call attention to the
remoteness of an organism like the jellyfish (Echinus esculentus), to show that there are many possible
worlds of perception. Acts of perception are diverse. For Mallarmé, the acts of listening to music,
reading literature, or observing nature present different types of perceptive experiences. Yet these
experiences can be thought of as a collection of little instruments within one echoing score.

Like Air, Visuality and Sound create Natural Fullness

Objects have traits. In “Crise de Vers,” the appearance of a natural object (in a simple, full
state, prior to the attempt to make sense of it with a description linguistically) actually contains
particular representational effects: “Monuments, the sea, the human face, in their natural fullness,
conserve a property differently attractive than the veiling any description can offer; say evocation, or, I
know, allusion or suggestion.” The wholeness implicit within the experience of a natural object posits
other totalities. When taken up as a form of “literary charm,” these natural objects reflect the
“volatile dispersal of the spirit.” This is not the same thing as a “description.” The technique
which Mallarmé formulates involves the evocation of something within the nature of appearances. It is the
appearance’s “natural fullness.” The natural object (“[m]onuments, the sea, the human face”), “has
to do with nothing but the musicality of everything.” The object’s vibrancy is linked to a diffuse
and relational model: it resonates, it echoes. Similarly, Mallarmé lauds some contemporary poetry
which “seems to be thundering and harmonious with plenitude.” The effect of fullness within a
natural thing is a kind of music. This also resembles a landscape’s distribution over a wide area
(“dispersal”). Sound’s lack of a boundary is conflated with the spatial effects of landscape (but not as
an account of an object, rather it is the vibrational, diffuse effect of the object’s sheer appearance
which would invoke landscape). A composite exists for the spread of sound and the abstract imprint
which accompanies an appearance (“the sea, the human face, in their natural fullness”). This idea
seems proximate to that of air. It also suggests a referential tendency. The object of the reference is a
diffuse and relational element within the nature of appearances.

The Isolation of Speech

Spoken words are coterminous with a certain notion of atmosphere. I would like to discuss the former in the context of “Crise de vers.” In the same passage where he discusses “a brand new atmosphere” at the end of “Crise de vers,” Mallarmé describes a “[v]erse, which, out of several vocables, makes a total word, entirely new, foreign to the language, and almost incantatory, which achieves that [ideal] isolation of speech” (“[l]e vers qui de plusieurs vocables refait un mot total, neuf, étranger à la langue et comme incantatoire, achève cet isolement de la parole”). Why does Mallarmé use the word parole (speech) here? In French, the word parole can carry a different set of meanings than the word “speech” does in English. He appears to be invoking the word in order to refer to a particular instance of speech (as in Saussure’s distinction between parole and langue). In the same sentence, he writes, “[v]erse . . . negating . . . despite their repeated reformulations between sound and sense, the arbitrariness that remains in the terms,” that is to say, Mallarmé is mentioning verse as that which negates chance. Yamaguchi helpfully informs us that in such an instance, verse is not poetry, but a more comprehensive category:

Within the vast realm of prose, there exists a sub-category that partakes of poetry and even of verse; it plays with cadence, timbre, and rhyme; it is distinguished from the versified poetry that preceded it by a singular absence: the metrical line. The separation does not divide verse from prose, nor verse from poetry; verse, stretched to the point of breaking, falls on both sides of the divide.

What happens to this line? What orders Mallarmé’s thinking? Is order now related to speech, which seems to be performing something profound in “Crise de vers?”

When Milner discusses the words “isolation of speech,” in “Mallarmé Perchance,” this speech has a more complex relation to verse. For Milner, conventional speech creates something arbitrary: chance. He writes: “[h]uman beings speak; they speak in languages; thus, they engage with the chance that governs their own encounters . . . . [v]erse abolishes chance at the core of language.” Milner’s explanation of “that isolation of speech” (Mallarmé’s words) is that of an “analogue to a revolutionary party,” one separate from the crowd. Their speech is unique, they are also the “participants” who “enable the functioning of [Mallarme’s project of] the Book.” Milner states: “a group of speaking beings who are devoted to realizing it in spoken form isolates itself in the midst of the crowd.” It is not clear whether or not the Book is supposed to be in verse or not. Here Milner’s language is lifted directly from “Crise de vers,” but he assumes a direct relation between these different types of speakers and speech.

Beneath The Flower of Speech

I think “isolated speech” for Mallarmé is more literal; he means that speech itself is far away—and perhaps especially distant from speaking beings—even if they speak. This outlying speech bears a close resemblance to another passage from “Crise de vers”:

Je dis: une fleur! et, hors de l’oubli où ma voix relègue aucun contour, en tant que quelque chose d’autre que les calices sus, musicalement se lève, idée même et suave, l’absente de tous bouquets.
I say: a flower! and, far from the oblivion where my voice relegates any contour, as something other than known calices, musically there rises, the idea itself and fine, the one absent from all bouquets.

Mallarmé takes a visual object (which no one has ever seen) for his point of departure. But speech ("je dis" / "I say") creates this flower through sound. One has never seen the flower which Mallarmé speaks of. Mallarmé speaks just one word; he creates a vibratory thing with a breath of virtuality. There is also a first person speaking subject, but here I think the point is to create a gap between speech and the "I." The flower, a single, isolated word, presents a discontinuous moment. This moment is also one of speech. The flower invokes a dialectic between a nominative, now surpassed visuality ("calices," "bouquets," ) and sound (speech, music). This is not a line of spoken poetry but another kind of enunciation. For Milner, sound in poetry could make pour sound bright rather than dark. Mallarmé is using speech differently here, but is it for the sake of eventually formulating a poetry for thought alone, as Milner contends? Has Mallarmé’s formulation (in prose) left the naturalist representational effects of the flower behind? He seems, in contrast, to be advancing a more subtle form of reference. In "La Musique et les lettres,” Mallarmé defines speech as something unreal: “[a]s opposed to a denominative and representative function, as the crowd first treats it, speech, which is primarily dream and song, recovers, in the Poet’s hands, of necessity in an art devoted to fictions, its virtuality.”

Mallarmé now adds another difficulty, he calls natural speech dream—but he also states that dreams present a reality in-effect. The spoken flower is a form of “isolation,” its reality is in the back of beyond.

The Line is a Form of Abstract Continuity, Another Whole

My argument is that speaking the word flower is what in "La Musique et les lettres,” Mallarmé calls “the act of creation,” which is “the notion of an object, escaping.” Elsewhere in this essay, he describes the escaping object as one piece within a network:

Tying the ephemeral objects together is the idea of an absolute presence. The bloom is a joint within the strange “logic” of reality, a clue to a lot of activity. How does this flower represent? What does it refer to? How does the flower make reference? A flower pins a dialectical perceptual composite, the composite, on another level of abstraction which is, in the quote above, a pervasive “Line.” The lost line of meter is based largely upon speech rhythms; the “omnipresent Line” is based upon a deeper logic within perception.

A word like flower is fastened to a larger structure of impressions which it indicates:
À ce tracé, il y a une minute, des sinuuses et mobiles variations de l’Idée, que l’écrit revendique de fixer, y eut-il, peut-être, chez quelques-uns de vous, lieu de confronter à telles phrases une réminiscence de l’orchestre; où succède à des rentrées en l’ombre, après un remous soucieux, tout à coup l’éruptif multiple sursautement de la clarté, comme les proches irradiations d’un lever de jour: vain, si le langage, par la retrempe et l’essor purifiants du chant, n’y confère un sens.

When I mentioned a minute ago that tracery of sinuous and mobile variations on the idea that the written word claims to fix, some of you may have had reason to compare such lines with a memory of the orchestra, where returns to the shadow are followed, after a worrying whirlpool, by a sudden multiple eruptive leap of brilliance, like those gleams of light that occur near daybreak: but all this is in vain, if language, through the reforging and the purifying flight of song, does not confer a meaning on it.¹⁵⁵

Mallarmé describes the lines as if they were weather patterns; he develops extra-linguistic contexts for the emergence of a word. The word punctures this atmospheric shape and conveys a sense of meaning. Ambiguous perceptible lines may resemble remembrance, like interior memories of music. This places an accent on the external matter of the line though, and less emphasis on thought. The line is a form of deeper abstraction and continuity between interior thought and external things.¹⁵⁶ It is a topography: “I demand that everything, the whole system, shocks, slides, across limitless and accurate trajectories—a certain opulent state which immediately becomes ambiguous from a delicious failure to conclude this short cut, this line.”¹⁵⁷ The line provides the “evolving context of the Idea.”¹⁵⁸ This is a deep aesthetic system beyond any single art medium. “Music and Literature are the twin faces” of it, Mallarmé states. “Music” or sound, conveys the far away quality which “stretch[es] out towards the unfamiliar.” Literature, words, secure a clarity, a code for the diffuse system which “glitter[s] with certainty.” He calls the whole system “the Idea.”¹⁵⁹ The latter must be as thin as the horizon; like in other writings of Mallarmé on fashion, it evokes the way in which Parisians escape summer tourism: “we simply go to the very edge of the Ocean, where only a pale and blurred line can be seen, to behold what is beyond our usual dwelling place: the infinite and nothing.”¹⁶⁰

Eyes Reading Appearances: “La Musique et les lettres” vs. “Mimique”

In “La Musique et les lettres,” literature consists of a mimesis of the outer reaches of sensation. Reading (and thought) are forms of entanglement with this underlying mimesis: “let’s abandon the old distinction between Music and Literature, for that was merely a separation sought in order to bring them together again: the latter provoking prestige and situated at the limit of the sense of hearing and of abstract vision.” Literature “becom[es]” what the poet calls “a spacious understanding.”¹⁶¹ Literature (“the printed sheet”) can thereby have “an equal impact” to the outer aspects of sensation.

So Mallarmé’s work posits a relation between diffuse, musical abstraction and the clarity of a material page. Like words in “La Musique et les lettres,” the mime’s body in “Mimique,” a metaphor for the act of reading, performs (what is described as) a distillation. But all of this happens in silence:

Composé et rédigé par lui-même, soliloque muet que, tout du long à son âme tient et du visage et des gestes le fantôme blanc comme une page pas encore écrite . . . . l’esthétique du genre situé plus près de
principes qu’aucun! rien en cette région du caprice ne contrariant l’instinct simplificateur direct.

[C]omposed and set down by himself, a mute soliloquy that the phantom, white as a yet unwritten page, holds in both face and gesture at full length to his soul . . . . the esthetics of the genre situated closer to principles than any! nothing in this region of caprice foiling the direct simplifying instinct . . . [l]

A page, the white costume, and the mime’s face seek to measure something—a “soul”—which cannot be measured. The mime must be complete, he must present a precious gift, this “full length,” a blank page, to his own intangible essence. He must create a tangible offering to his own immeasurability. He must be a body which is almost simultaneously fuller and more abstract than a body. His body must tremble on the borders of the soul’s impossible geometry.

Words present a clearer distillation of the geometrical perceptive mass (the line in “La Musique et les lettres,” perhaps the soul in “Mimique”). Simplification has to do with the time of reading. This is accurate because in “Mimique,” Mallarmé still distills this aesthetic down to “the idea”:

La scène n’illustre que l’idée, pas une action effective, dans un hymen (d’où procède le Rêve), viceux mais sacré, entre le désir et l’accomplissement, la perpétuation et son souvenir: ici devançant, là remémorant, au futur, au passé, sous une apparence fausse de présent. Tel opère le Mime, dont le jeu se borne à une allusion perpétuelle sans briser la glace: il installe, ainsi, un milieu, pur, de fiction.

The scene illustrates but the idea, not any actual action, in a hymen (out of which flows Dream), tainted with vice yet sacred, between desire and fulfillment, perpetration and remembrance: here anticipating, there recalling, in the future, in the past, under the false appearance of a present. That is how the Mime operates, whose act is confined to a perpetual allusion without breaking the ice or the mirror: he thus sets up a medium, a pure medium, of fiction.

Time is occasioned by the mime’s virtual appearances. His act is an emblem for the page of the text. Words must be like appearances. The mime’s performance, an emblem for “[s]ilence, sole luxury after rhymes,” is a metaphor for the corporeal gestures of reading: “perhaps, with authenticity, between the sheets and the eye there reigns a silence still, the condition and delight of reading.” Even though a word might secure the abstract structure beyond it, the word in the act of reading, upon the “sheets” now, functions like an appearance for “the eye.” Reading, if it is like a mime’s performance, seems to bring the aesthetic full circle, almost back to the fleeting line. By focusing on the materiality of the act of reading, Mallarmé appears to make it more like an act of perceptive experience, a thing which involves the eye more than something which does not participate directly in external form (like thought).

The Body, Impersonality, Air, Long Time in “Bucolique”

The body of the poet anchors this perceptive system. The poet transforms the experience of
writing into something more abstract—into a kind of story—through a force within breath. Although Mallarmé did not see impersonality as a simple thing, certain passages make it sound this way:

Impersonifié, le volume, autant qu'on s’en sépare comme auteur, ne réclame approche de lecteur. Tel, sache, entre les accessoires humains, il a lieu tout seul: fait, étant. Le sens enseveli se muet et dispose, en choeur, des feuillets.

Not personalized, the volume, from which one is separated as the author, does not demand that any reader approach it. You should know that as such, without any human accessories, it happens all alone; made, being. The hidden meaning stirs, and lays out a choir of pages.

The ideal literary work takes place as if the author is not there. But if one looks further into Mallarméan impersonality, beyond such majestic pronouncements, one sees that what happens to the author is complex.

The book may lay out a type of autonomous song, but the poet himself, at other points in Mallarmé’s work, has become, as in the following poem’s title (“Autre Éventail”), another kind of object:

Ô rêveuse, pour que je plonge
Au pur délice sans chemin,
Sache, par un subtil mensonge,
Garder mon aile dans ta main.

Une fraîcheur de crépuscule
Te vient à chaque battement
Dont le coup prisonnier recule
L'horizon délicatement.

Vertige! voici que frissonne
L'espace comme un grand baiser
Qui, fou de naître pour personne,
Ne peut jaillir ni s'apaiser.

Sens-tu le paradis farouche
Ainsi qu’un rire enseveli
Se couler du coin de ta bouche
Au fond de l’unanime pli!

This poem externalizes the living heart. But the fan, a dynamic instrument which wades in air, gathers up something more central than the absence of the poet from the side of the beloved. The fan creates an external relation between itself, the beating heart of the dreaming beloved, and the horizon. What is the time of the fan’s gestures, as it pushes air to the edges of visible space? This poem, dedicated to “Mademoiselle Mallarmé,” is proximate. How has the poet’s life flitted back before the eyes of the reader in a way such that we can say, it is as if the poet is not there, even though something related to Mallarmé could not be more present within this poem?
The strength of Manet’s painting, in Mallarmé’s view, was its impersonality, but then Mallarmé writes an obituary for his friend Manet which points to a more complex technique: “A lesson to me—that daily witness who never forgot—teaching me that you play the whole of yourself, over again, every time, staying like everyone else without remaining different—by an act of will. I remember he used to say, in those days, and so well: ‘The eye, a hand . . . ’ Ah, let me think of it again.”169

Manet, he also states, “rejuvenated the great pictorial tradition by drawing on his instincts.”170 The author must make his life abstract, must enter into a place, where one’s entire lifespan, one’s destiny grows instrument-like. This recalls a key phrase from “Mimique”: “a mute soliloquy that the phantom, white as a yet unwritten page, holds in both face and gesture at full length to his soul.”171

To paraphrase Mallarmé, one performs the self abstractly, one transforms oneself into a repetition (a repetition which is a totality). This repetition is the aesthetic existence of the artist (Manet) who knows, in Mallarmé’s opinion (as expressed in the essay “The Impressionists and Édouard Manet”) how to distill a greater reality from nature. The time involved here is not eternity, nor is it death, it is somewhere between the two. In Igitur, a different text, Mallarmé may refer to this as: “the narcotic calm of the pure self long-dreamed of.”172

Impersonality almost precedes this self; it is a stage within a process. In the letter to Lefébure of May 1867 (interestingly, the essay “The Impressionists and Édouard Manet” appears in London six months after this letter), Mallarmé already formulated what he will say about Manet in the obituary of 1883. Writing about composition in the letter, Mallarmé criticizes the technique of self-negation: “I have not made these discoveries through the normal development of my faculties, but through the easy way of self-destruction which, in turn, produced not strength but the sensitiveness that was destined to lead me to this extreme.” Aesthetic self-annihilation is the product of impatience, because in becoming impersonal, one separates oneself from nature: “it is the fear of remorse (because, impatiently, I disobeyed the natural law) that makes me take refuge in the impersonal, as though indulging in a kind of self-vindications.”173 Impersonality alone creates fragments: “thoughts [which] come from the brain alone . . . they are like tunes played on the squeaky part of the first string [of a violin] . . . they come and go without ever being created, without leaving any trace . . . I can’t recall a single one of those sudden ideas I had last year.”174

These impersonal ideas do not create a sense of continuity, which for Mallarmé comes from impressions left by external reality. Mallarmé describes this in “Bucolique”: “[t]he dual catalysts to Literature, both its exteriority and means, have, in the absolute order of things, exerted their influence on a particular individual. Nature—Music—Terms used in their current meaning, of foliage and sounds.” This entails “a matter of drawing inspiration again, quite simply, from fate.”175 Mallarmé’s life must be situated within nature and music, but this involves experiences of each (which were arranged by chance). Nature is “a tangible idea conveying a measure of reality to the blunted senses and, by compensation, direct; it communicated to my youthful person a fervor which I call passion.”176 The latter emotion is homologous with a sacrificial temporality. Nature is impenetrable but it presents a lucidity which exceeds quotidian things: “once the days have dematerialized in majestic suspense, the funeral pyre is lit, in the virginal hope of forbidding interpretation by the decipherer of horizons. While by this suicide, the secret does not remain incompatible with man, and lucidity dispels the mists of obsolescence, existence, street.”177 Nature, with its “measure of reality,” grants the poet the abstract clarity of a longer time that can never be extinguished (unlike human existence or public fashions [“street”]).178 The poet must “perceive[e] himself as ingenuous, in infinite union with the earth.”179

So nature creates a mysterious sacredness and a lucidity. In “Bucolique,” Mallarmé’s protagonist “smiles at the thought that this adventure should paradoxically prove useful: because
such an accumulation of vagueness in this place will, in such people, stimulate an outburst at once appalling and furiously intelligent.”

A gathering of the ineffable occurs elsewhere: “A feeling of security—called the rustic peace of the fields—confronted with dissipation or verbiage, amasses enough silence to allow the grandeur of what must not be uttered to emerge.”

As in “La Musique et les lettres,” invisible lines express a deeper aesthetic logic inherent within the perception of nature. These lines are also continuous with the incendiary sacrifice mentioned earlier:

Esthétiquement la succession de deux états sacrés, ainsi m’invitèrent-ils—primitif, l’un ou foncier, dense des matériaux encore (nul scandale que l’industrie, l’en émonde ou le purifie): l’autre, ardent, volatile dépouillement en traits qui se correspondent, maintenant proches la pensée, en plus que l’abolition de texte, lui soustrayant l’image.

Aesthetically—the succession of two sacred states [nature and music]—thus did they invite me—the first, primitive or intrinsic, still unseen because of its material state (thus there was no scandal in the fact that industry pruned or purified it): the other, a blazing, volatile distillation in lines meeting each other—now close to thought—in more than the abolition of text and the image extracted from it.

When Mallarmé discusses nature, he does not mean a material thing. He means an effect. In “La Musique et les lettres” he describes music in the same way, as something other than the obvious, not as sounds, but as lines or effects. Nature and music meet within this realm of virtuality. It is literature’s task to create a perceptive, experiential harmonization of these effects, perhaps within the very silence of words in which these non-material virtualities can take place (as seen in “Mimique”). Multiple layers of correspondence exist between these forms of efficacy: “[t]he miracle consists in having noted, according to temporal succession, the different levels of the resemblance.” Music completes an education which the perception of external reality initiated. “Hence, in the evening of my years,” Mallarmé writes, “irresistibly drawn towards the source of music by an indefinable instinct, I recognized, without a doubt, the waning but rekindled flame wherein the groves and heavens sacrificed themselves; there, open to the public gaze, [the vision now] fanned by the lack of the dream consumed, spreading shadows like the vault of a temple.”

Perceptive experience creates a diffuse sense of space (“the illusion of space comes into its own”).

Mallarmé captures an experience of modernity; he juxtaposes urban space with nature. The latter is a “central void.” He mentions “[m]onotonous railways” which lead to the forest; the latter benefits from a dialectical relation to the city. Nature (“extraordinary, divine”) can “suddenly spring forth from the artificial ground in exchange for miles of asphalt which, in order to flee, [he] must tread anew.” In the city, Mallarmé writes of the secret sound he wishes to render: “how little does the sound emanate in the fortress deliberately constructed by people as a barrier against nature’s magnificence, unless one has recourse to music whose high, transmutative furnace is extinguished during these months.”

The influence of the modern city (when not placed within a dialectic with nature) compromises literary sound’s power of resonance: “how little, on the ramparts, does the cannon of our contemporary period thunder forth: the noise ceasing at such a distance for the person who, in his imagination, cuts a flute for himself out of a reed, with which to consummate his bliss.”

The poet’s body is a container for the flow of air. In the same letter to Lefébure (1867), Mallarmé writes that “I think that the healthy thing for man—for reflective nature—is to think with his whole body; then you get a full harmonious thought, like violin strings vibrating in unison with the hollow wooden box.” This is how he overcomes the limitations of impersonality:
I tried to stop thinking that way, and with a tremendous effort I braced the nerves in my chest so as to produce a vibration—still holding on to the thought I was then working on, which became the subject of the vibration, that is, an impression; and so that is the way I am beginning a poem I have been dreaming about for a long time. Ever since then, whenever the crucial hour of synthesis approaches, I say to myself: “I am going to work with my heart”; and then I feel my heart (at those times my whole life is undoubtedly centered in it), and the rest of my body is forgotten, except for the hand that is writing and the living heart, and my poem is begun—begins itself.

Mallarmé appears to be forcefully holding his breath. This body holds within it an impression—a natural tremor capable of containing the energy for a poem. He focuses on his heart, but it is as if the heart is registering a rhythm from outside of the body. This technique represents in the moment a depository for Mallarmé’s entire life. The ideal linguistic expression begins from this sense of a suspended body made more essential than itself. This may be the time of the presence of atmosphere, the way in which, as Mallarmé says of Manet, one transforms oneself into a totality and a form of repetition. Mallarmé posits this vibratory corporeality as an instrument of nature.

**In Mallarmé’s Igitur, Time is Sensible; It is a Function of a Presence which is Metaphysical**

In *Igitur*, the poet’s respiration is an important figure (“when the breath of his ancestors wants to blow out the candle . . . he says ‘Not yet!’ . . . he himself . . . will forecast something great (no stars? chance annulled?) from this simple fact that he can bring about shadow by blowing on the light.” Whether or not the candle will be blown out is central to the drama of *Igitur*. Mallarmé’s *Igitur* revolves around a series of actions (casting dice, making a recitation, entering a tomb, et al.), to be performed at (or around) midnight. Midnight in *Igitur* is introduced phonically, it “sounds.” In the original French, the word for midnight, *minuit* appears to modify phonetically the luminosity of the word *nuit* (night): “Minuit sonne.” One could argue that these words emit a darker chromatic effect. In *Igitur*, this midnight does not pass. Here atmosphere is not linked to the body of the poet, or even to nature necessarily; it is metaphysical. In the first section of *Igitur*, presence is the primary thing—an absolute reality in itself.

The hour acquires sensible characteristics: “[c]ertainly a presence of Midnight persists. The hour did not disappear through a mirror, did not bury itself in curtains, evoking a furnishing by its vacant sonority.” Almost visible in the looking glass, time is present. The opposite of time passing is a time which conveys this state of being. This stilled time creates a totality: “the absolute presence of things.” Here we are no longer in the open air of daylight; instead, the reader is situated within the confines of *Igitur*’s room, a room which assumes the proportions of “the human mind,” and *Igitur* “descends the stairs” of it. It is a metaphysical location: “[t]ombs—ashes (not feeling, nor mind) dead center.” Mallarmé uses the French word “neutralité” to describe this nucleus. The room represents a state of being between the subjective and the objective.

The *fullness* of Mallarmé’s impressionist theory of atmosphere resonates with this midnight which does not pass. The interior of *Igitur* stills time; its presence is not diffuse in this case. Mallarmé emphasizes a stifling sense of place: “And the presence of Midnight remains in the vision of a room of time.” In “Mimique,” the silent orchestra with its brushstrokes of visuality and sound caught pieces of “thought and dusk.” In *Igitur*, intellection is like a vacant beat of the heart within the room: “the mysterious furnishing arrests a vague quiver of thought.”
Time is broken both within its progress and at its initial moment of generation: “a luminous break of the return of its waves and their first expansion while (within a moving limit) the former place of the hour’s fall is immobilized in a narcotic calm of the pure self long dreamed-of.” Within this “metaphysical story or play,” Igitur is, in Mallarmé’s words, a form of “projected absolute.” Igitur’s body seems to be abstractly synonymous with both the room and (like Hamlet) with the text itself.

The sensibility of time’s arrest is expanded upon. Mallarmé writes: [midnight’s] . . . time is resolved in draperies upon which is arrested the quivering [of intelllection] now subsided, adding its splendor to those draperies in a forgetfulness, like hair languishing about the host’s face, lit with mystery.” The curtains are ornaments for windows in a world which is hard to fathom. Igitur states: “I have tried for the time it [the clock] sounded to remain present in the room . . . I made the curtains thicker, and as I was obliged to be seated across from this mirror, in order not to doubt myself, I gathered up preciously the least atoms of time in cloths ceaselessly made thicker.” And so there is a relationship between presence and time, but also signification. For in the state of arrest we see: “eyes null like the mirror, stripped of any meaning other than presence.” The presence here is that of the slightest traces of being within dramatic negativity, the evacuation of the fullness of being, and yet, still, persisting, a vague life of absence.
Chapter 2

The Mimesis of Sensation: Sensing a Time Beyond Eternity in Woolf’s Moments

Woolf’s Anti-Realism, The Mimesis of Sensation as a Representational Effect, Eternity

The Woolfian perceptive experience I wish to discuss in this chapter is anti-realist. The novelist’s treatment of time is central to this shift in representation. Ann Banfield notes that Woolf “finds the ‘appalling business of the [literary] realist . . . false, unreal, merely conventional.’” The terms are clear, Banfield states, citing Woolf, “[c]onventional narrative—‘stories of childhood, stories of school, love, marriage, death and so on’—are ‘none of them . . . true.’” They fail to convey the real, including the reality of time’s passing.”

207 Woolf wishes to create another kind of realism. Modernist impressionism’s representational effects reject literary realism, prompting the reader’s ongoing engagement with textual phenomena in a different way.

To this purpose, Woolf creates a mimesis of sensation in which time becomes sensible for readers in subtle ways. This mimesis consists of the characterological sensory universe within her novels, which extends to the outer reaches of sensation. This mimesis is not representational in the way that realism is. Realism aims to represent an idealization. In Objectivity, Daston and Gallison suggest that the scientific atlas images which predominated from “the seventeenth through the mid-nineteenth centuries,” created idealizations synonymous with a kind of realism. “The words typical, ideal, characteristic, and average are not synonymous,” Daston and Gallison write, “even though they all fulfilled the same standardizing purpose. These alternative ways of being true to nature suffice to show that concern for accuracy does not necessarily imply concern for objectivity.”

208 The authors also note that “extracting nature’s essences almost always required scientific atlas makers to mold their images in ways that their successors would reject as dangerously ‘subjective.’”

209 For example, the illustration of an insect presents an idealization when it represents a perfect specimen of the species (without torn wings or an antenna that was missing). If the illustration showed the antenna missing because it was on the specimen the artist was copying, then the species would be mistakenly identified as having just one antenna. Or, as Daston and Galison write: “[w]hy would anyone choose as the bottom line image of the human thorax one including a broken rib . . . or a clover with an insect-torn leaf?”

210 This representational idealization is similar to what realist painters aimed to present—how the subject would look under ideal conditions (including those of light, etc.). Objects of momentary perception seen at a particular moment at a particular place are less important than the presentation of a standard image. An idealization is in one sense timeless because it doesn’t present an object as it might appear under certain less perfect conditions.

Impressionism’s version of mimesis, in contrast, hinges on momentary sensation and perception. I approach the concept of mimesis from the perspective of the organs of perception which perceive time through sound and visuality. Here a sensory engagement with time on the part of the reader is possible. This sensory engagement takes place despite the fact that, as Banfield asserts (largely through Russell) that time’s passage cannot be experienced in a sensory way. It also takes place even if the novel’s characters are not acknowledging time directly as they perceive things. In other words, the (characterological) outer reaches of sensation (or, what I call, the mimesis of sensation) which engages with time largely consists of representational effects for the reader. This
representational effect is not just formalist, but also naturalistic—it advances an indefinite sense of reference.

My argument also involves the concept of eternity. Unlike the respective ways in which modernist thinkers as diverse as Russell (although he does not apply his philosophy to literature), Benjamin, and Baudelaire privilege eternity in their approaches to the time of modernism, I do not think that Woolf’s temporal aesthetics engages with eternity in a way that can be fully aligned with these above-mentioned modernists, but rather through a concept of deep time distinct from eternity. For example, this notion of time might relate to Baudelaire’s dualist idea of seizing a timeless image within the transitory, but for Woolf, I will argue that the relationship between visual things and time is more complex. However, it would be difficult to understand the forms of temporal abstraction in Woolf’s work without an extensive consideration of Banfield’s authoritative work on this subject in particular. This time debate occurs initially through the formation, in Woolf’s literary impressionism, of a radical temporality: “moments” not subordinate to chronology, in which self-conscious perceptive processes foreclose a realist fixed nature within objects. For Woolf, this entails a way of “living in time” in which perceptive experience is neither wholly subjective nor wholly objective.211

I also wish to argue that Woolf posits diffuse forms of abstract continuity in her work which are not reducible to post-impressionist design. These are things like “the airs” in Mrs. Dalloway—time itself as a diffuse, barely perceptible form of relation to exteriority.212 What I wish to gather from Banfield’s reading, in particular, is this: Woolf felt that discontinuous experience was crucial in rendering a more abstract continuity beyond traditional novelistic form. I think that this abstract continuity has some kind of remainder—strange forms of being like air, or the “damp stain” left by the beggar woman’s song in Mrs. Dalloway.213 An abstract kind of atmospheric naturalism exists in Woolf’s work. Eternity is now a kind of irregular water drop in Woolf’s text. The text gestures to eternity but it is also suffused with a strange new idea of the real as atmospheric diffusion, such that the stain of eternity is caught within a unique notion of atmosphere.214

I ask a series of questions. More may be said about the Woolfian figures which buttress abstract continuity—figures which fill the moment. Who senses obscure forms of ontology like air or odd forms of light or sound in Woolf’s novels? How are these sensed? How is it even possible to sense time in this way, despite the fact that the characters are often oblivious to this atmosphere? What are the terms of this temporal possibility? What does this have to do with the terms of meaning within modernist fictional representation? What does it mean to have an atmosphere in the text which operates temporally in a way that the characters may not be capable of understanding? What is the relationship between a discontinuous moment and remainders of time? Are there other kinds of continuity, or deep time, to be found in Woolf’s novels (in particular, The Waves) which are not the same thing as post-impressionist strokes of geometrical design?

A term which I would like to define early in this study is visuality. In my view, four visual scenarios are at stake in this study: images, impressions, post-impressionism, and then something more obscure which I term visuality, and which in my formulation is related to ontology. In Woolf’s short work “The Moment: Summer’s Night,” she describes collisions between the perceiving body and immediate constituents of visual experience. The visual experience cedes to mere color, and the narrator emphasizes, not concrete, undistorted objects, but photoreception at the level of the eye:

*Visuality*

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To begin with: it [the moment] is largely composed of visual and of sense impressions. . . . the sense of the light sinking back into darkness seems to be putting out with a damp sponge the colour in one’s own eyes.\textsuperscript{215}

This scene, in which a “sponge” of coloration directly confronts the spectator’s retina, is not comparable to a picture on a wall, which an embodied spectator could choose to see or to turn away from. This scene takes place at the level of embodiment, as the eye becomes implicated as a still witness to this sheer visual appearance. It is perhaps this immovability which imbues Woolf’s moment with a unique, discrete temporality. Experience does not unfold distantly, for the consumption of a spectator through sequentially observable phenomena. Rather, for the perceptive faculty that receives impressions, experience presents itself in the now. The sponge represents a notion of perceptive experience situated outside of the self. This experience is presented as if it were occurring in a laboratory. The reality of external objects emerges here on the basis of appearances rather than on concrete things. In Woolf’s impressionism, the concern is with the nature of appearance. In this passage, time is very much embedded within perceptive experience. In fact, time cannot escape perception, even though within this notion of perception the accent does not fall on the human. This perception is created through visuality. Visuality is the visibility which takes place at the outer reaches of sensation not locatable within subjectivity, objectivity, or the image.

Impressionism works with visuality as its source, although visuality is not reducible to impressionism. Visuality is what occurs when Woolf’s impressionist fiction seems to be doing something more. Visuality in my definition is closer to the living presence of the sponge, a neutral anchor for representational effects situated at the crossroads of perceptive experience and representation. Visuality is not a complete, undistorted form, but, again, I do not think that it can be subsumed under the general terms of eternity. Woolfian visuality is also like the “prickly light” which accompanies Percival’s absence at the restaurant in \textit{The Waves}. Within the arena of literary sound, for the sake of an analogy, this type of impersonal sensory surface is like the “frail quivering sound” of the beggar woman’s singing in \textit{Mrs. Dalloway} (a sound which is accompanied by a strange flood of temporal ideas).

\textit{A Time Distinct from the Image}

Woolf’s approach to impressionist time distinguishes itself from other modernist philosophies of time based upon the image. Here the word image deserves further definition. 20\textsuperscript{th}-century continental theories of temporality often conflate radical time with imagistic constructs: immediately available visual forms of experience in which the coherence of the image-form is not subject to doubt. In other words, these images are complete in themselves, they are thought of as being truly there. In \textit{Matter and Memory}, Bergson writes that “[e]very movement, inasmuch as it is a passage from rest to rest, is absolutely indivisible.”\textsuperscript{216} This indivisible movement is composed of images: “[t]he afferent nerves are images, the brain is an image, the disturbance traveling through the sensory nerves and propagated in the brain is an image too.”\textsuperscript{217} This philosophy permits for voluntary elaborations of sensation that bring the past into the present moment, constituting time as indivisible: “[t]his special image,” writes Bergson, “which I call my body, constitutes at every moment, as we have said, a section of the universal becoming. It is then the place of passage of the movements received and thrown back[.]”\textsuperscript{218} Images (the body included) are continuous. Banfield cites the philosopher John Passmore’s remarks on Bergson: the latter “‘contrasts time as we think about it and time as we experience it.’ The dualities represent for Bergson ‘two realities’ but not two temporal realities. Only experienced time—\textit{la durée}—is real time.”\textsuperscript{219}
Post-modern theories of time influenced by Bergson also deal with time in the vocabulary of the experience of complete images. In Deleuze’s writings on cinema, past and present are in constant tension by means of the “crystal-image,” a pure image of time in crystal form. In Cinema 2: The Time Image, Deleuze writes:

These [images] are direct presentations of time. We no longer have an indirect image of time which derives from movement, but a direct time-image from which movement derives. We no longer have a chronological time which can be overturned by movements which are contingently abnormal; we have a chronic non-chronological time[.]220

Deleuze is writing about images in film. He tries to combine Bergson’s idea of continuous images with the cinematograph. In Bergson, these two things are incompatible. The cinematograph only creates the illusion of movement on the basis of still frames whereas experienced time, for Bergson, is actually continuous. Deleuze is aware of this. He is combining Bergson’s ideas with that of cinema. In either case, the image reigns supreme. Deleuze attaches the static image to the idea of movement. The problem lies within the nature of visuality which Deleuze proposes. I don’t think that a spectator engages in a sensory fashion with time through the intellectual absorption of images. My reasons for this disagreement are (at least in part, but not fully) consistent with Russell’s idea (see the notes to my introduction) that time takes place in more abstract ways. My reading (as I will explain below) is also consistent in part with Banfield’s reading of post-impressionist time.

Woolf’s moment, in which doubt fuels impersonal modalities of perception, breaks with the centrality of images in the theories of philosophers like Bergson and Deleuze in order to open the imaginative field of the novel, firstly, to the still logic of impressions. The image, in contrast, presents itself as an ontological map, gratifying rather than challenging the spectator's analytic mechanisms. The impression, conversely, finds ground somewhere between idea and sensation, prompting associations with intellection as much as with the passive reception of phenomena. In Literary Impressionism and Modernist Aesthetics, Jesse Matz writes: “the Impressionist enjoys integration of intellect and sense without giving up intellect's independence, and gains the validity of contingency and experience without losing the ‘higher’ powers of perception, essence, and freedom.”221 In place of images, objects in literary impressionism present blank spaces: occasions for immanent perceptive processes which endlessly precede the fixed substance of reality.

The modes of reading which a text like The Waves creates take their point of departure from Russellian epistemology and modern logic. In Our Knowledge of the External World, Russell writes:

But even when the desire to know exists in the requisite strength, the mental vision by which abstract truth is recognized is hard to distinguish from vivid imaginability and consonance with mental habits. It is necessary to practice methodological doubt, like Descartes, in order to loosen the hold of mental habits; and it is necessary to cultivate logical imagination, in order to have a number of hypotheses at command, and not to be the slave of the one which common sense has rendered easy to imagine. These two processes, of doubting the familiar and imagining the unfamiliar, are correlative, and form the chief part of the mental training required for a philosopher.222

Russell’s approach allows for perception to see the object in ways that it has never been seen. This dismantling of habitual knowledge and cultivation of the unusual are approaches, inspired by Banfield’s The Phantom Table, that permeate this study. They attempt to make sense of Woolf’s
novelistic time through aspects of analytic philosophy. Russellian doubt isolates the space of the object and frees visuality from the fixity of the image and Bergson’s interpenetrated moments.

Like Russell, Woolf aims to create a more philosophically rigorous vision of reality. A quarter of the way into *The Waves*, the gesture of a flower’s reflection in a mirror performs the interruptive, delimitative emergence of a visual object. “The looking-glass whitened its pool upon the wall,” Woolf writes, “[t]he real flower on the window-sill was attended by a phantom flower. Yet the phantom was part of the flower for when a bud broke free, the paler flower in the glass opened a bud too.”

The flower’s reflection in the mirror as a form of still, impressionist representation serves the same function as does Woolf’s representation of objects through writing. She emphasizes that the “phantom flower” is an appearance of an object; it points to its own image upon the mediating surface of the mirror. The narrator’s perception of the flower, before its representation or mediation through writing, is already mediated by the flower’s representational reflection in the mirror. The act of representation (by Woolf) of an already-mediated object seems to acknowledge in advance the idea that the real lies within a more arduous process of mediation intrinsic to perceptual experience. Here what is real is closer to a kind of exquisite phantom. This is an example of what I wish to call the perceptive ontology of the object. The object is not real in a conventional sense—it emerges, it posits a plasticity within perception which extends to the experience of reading. I also think that this sense of time has plasticity: it is a representational effect.

My understanding of linguisticality does not abandon reference however. The emphasis on mediation in Woolf’s work is not out of keeping with post-structuralism’s critique of phenomenological presence. Indeed the moment in Woolf is a simulated temporality that acknowledges its own mediation (perceptual and often linguistic) while retaining the notion of a whole. In “Signature, Event, Context,” Derrida writes that: “the unity of the signifying form is constituted only by its iterability, by the possibility of being repeated in the absence not only of its referent, which goes without saying, but of a determined signified or current intention of signification, as of every present intention of communication.” In my study of Woolf’s impressionism, I assent to Derrida’s claim that “there is no experience of pure presence, but only chains of differential marks.”

Derrida’s focus on repetition is interesting. I think that repetition occurs within Woolf’s work together with a more obscure sense of reference. In my reading of literary modernism, repetition occurs because there is a referent; however, this referent is still not fixed. I approach what Derrida calls the “unity” or the totality of the textual object independently of the materiality of the signifier. Woolf is gesturing to an indefinite reference. Gestures of perception in Woolf’s work imbue the text with a textual infinity other than that of Derrida’s signifier: the perceptive modality of the act of apprehension within the moment. In order to conceive of the relationship between representation and repetition, there must be a time in which the sense of repetition can occur. The modernists repeat what exists in appearance, which creates a non-essential notion of reference. In my view, modernism does not do away with the referent. Reading words in this context becomes intimately tied to modernist ways of seeing appearances, conditioned by an epistemological shift explicitly expressed within the aesthetics of impressionism and post-impressionism. The appearances are the referents, and not the actual objects.

*Banfield’s Theory of Woolf’s Post-Impressionist Time, Eternity, “The Airs” Distinct from Designs*

The way in which time passes in Woolf’s work is addressed by Banfield in her essay, “Time Passes: Virginia Woolf, Post-Impressionism, and Cambridge Time.” For Banfield, Woolf’s moment involves a way to see reality tragically, from the point of view of eternity: “[f]or the impressions that make up the moment and the random configuration they assume can only be seized with the clarity required from a position outside experienced time.” Banfield cites Russell: “A truer image of the
world, I think, is obtained by picturing things as entering into the stream of time from an eternal world outside.” Of these Russellian aspects in Woolf’s work, Banfield comments, “enduring forms enter time from a timeless sea of universals, thereby transforming the present into a ‘moment of being.”

A particular viewpoint or perspective is posited in this instance. Time is approached through this more abstract point-of-view. The point is to remove the concept of time from any embeddedness within the human perceptive experience of change as conceived by Bergson, but also, within any sensory experience. This modernist aspiration for an indifference (like that of eternity) to the human perceptive experience of time (or the possibility of that experience) is an important theoretical marker. From here one can eventually see how Woolf’s fictional goals complicate the concept of eternity. Eternity is a very important—although I feel unstable—resting point for understanding the different ways in which time might work within Woolf’s fiction.

In addition to Cambridge time-thinking, Banfield defines Woolfian temporality through a focus on the intellectual history of impressionism. For Banfield, the novelistic solution for Woolf is to combine “[i]mpressionist ‘vision’” with “Post-Impressionist ‘design,’ Paul Cézanne’s geometry.” Roger Fry critiques the way in which Impressionism renders objects. Within Impressionism, there is no attempt to create a clear object, only “‘a flat mosaic of coloured blobs’” in which “[t]he object [is] reduced to its constituent sensations” (Fry’s words). Already in Impressionism, there is a break with the type of interpenetration of instants seen in Bergson’s thinking. “Continuity here,” Banfield states, “is not a flux but a series of discrete elements, the atoms of visual experience analyzed, for which Post-Impressionism must contribute the design. It is not the elements of sensation but the ‘separate forms’ of objects [Fry’s words]—for example, of chairs, tables, human faces and bodies—which ‘are lost in the whole continuum of sensation.’” A discrete object emerges within Post-Impressionism. This object has a “necessary relation to its surroundings” as ‘an inseparable part of them.” This object thus only emerges on a higher level of abstraction.

This visual abstraction also has a corollary in a theory of time through a conversion of “Fry’s spatial categories into temporal versions of his dualism of ‘vision and design.’” The temporal counterpart to Fry’s theory of space is, in Banfield’s words, the Russellian “Dualism of Experienced Discontinuity and Abstract Continuity.” In this case “[t]ime really passes, but abstractly and objectively,” which is a “conception of real time as physical time.” Physical time is a form of invisible continuity not revealed by sensation but added upon it through an abstraction akin to that of mathematics. “Paradoxically” only through analysis can we reach an understanding of “direct and thus unanalyzed knowledge.” Here “[d]iscontinuity is the ‘raw material’ out of which continuity is built, to paraphrase Fry on Georges Seurat.” For Russell, the reality of time is abstract and can only emerge from analysis, and for Fry, the emergence of a spatial object in Post-Impressionism (from the scattered colored pieces of Impressionism) is similarly abstract.

How is time’s passing incorporated into fiction? In To the Lighthouse, Banfield notes, Woolf conceptualizes Russellian abstract time through the use of an interlude or blank space between “The Window” and “The Lighthouse.” She notes that “Russell’s “logical bridge” from “[sense] data to the abstract and imperceptible objects of mathematical formulae,” from experienced time, discontinuous and full of jumps, to mathematicized time and motion, can be spanned by a logical relation. The time interval’s placement falls in-between two markers. “Two blocks joined by a corridor” is how Woolf describes “Time Passes” in the manuscript notes to the novel []. Here time’s passing is not perceived in the perception of objects. It is only a logical relation.

In To the Lighthouse, Woolf represents time’s passing in the interlude, as Banfield suggests, through “the airs”:  

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The airs are not 'disembodied selves'; they are personifications of the physical forces of nature, indeed of time itself: let in through 'the rusty hinges and swollen sea-moistened woodwork,' they raise the question of the 'hanging wall-paper,' the flowers, the books, 'How long would they endure?' (Woolf [1927] 1955: 190-91). It is the night air that leads Mrs. Ramsay to take her shawl—for 'it might be cold' (ibid.: 123)—as it is the airs which loosen the shawl to reveal the skull beneath (ibid.: 196, 200), which itself had "gone moldy too"(ibid.: 206), as they had "furried, tarnished, cracked" the other objects in the house (ibid.: 194). The characters remain ignorant of time's passing—that is the point. They are within the moment, where all is still; time's movement is imperceptible.\textsuperscript{235}

If, in Banfield's reading of Woolf, air is time, it is interesting how air presents itself as a thing within the interlude. Like in Mallarmé's conception of it, air represents here an abstract and diffuse presence. For Banfield, to indicate the passage of time, there must be a cleaner "post-impressionist" stroke. The post-impressionist novelist, like Cézanne, molds novelistic structure under the clearest southern light of day. For Banfield, the markers of abstract continuity are like the columns of Greek architecture—the tripartite structure of To the Lighthouse, or 'the three strokes of the lighthouse's beam.' She writes, "[t]ime does pass, even if through seemingly static moments."\textsuperscript{236} I do not disagree. What interests me is that these static, logical markers are not the same thing as "the airs" which she discusses earlier. "The airs" are more diffuse and abstract.

\textit{The Nature of the Discontinuous Moment, The Problem with Conventional Narrative, Faces, Mysticism}

My reading of Woolf starts with discontinuity; such irregularity is a better reflection of the nature of impressions. Following Banfield’s argument, by showing experience as discontinuous, the novelist makes the first step towards a broader, abstract continuity. In Woolf's The Waves, the dissolution of character is particularly important as a site for the modality of the discontinuous moment. Many Woolfian characters hover in gaps and resist the flow of conventional, realist narrative. In The Waves, Rhoda is such a character. Rhoda does not only embody the novel's post-realist aims, but even indirectly expresses them at the farewell dinner for Percival when she states: "One moment does not lead to another. The door opens and the tiger leaps . . . I am afraid of the shock of sensation that leaps upon me, because I cannot deal with it as you do—I cannot make one moment merge in the next. To me they are all violent, all separate[.]" Constant motion that disavows the possibility of stillness through a rapid succession of time units, the following of indices into the future, and the moratorium placed on discrete instants ("[R]un[ning] minute to minute and hour to hour," “days and hours pass like the boughs of forest trees . . . to a hound running on the scent,” “the general blaze of you who live wholly, indivisibly and without caring in the moment”) are all characteristics of conventional narration. Rhoda’s despair reveals the harsh mechanisms of narration.\textsuperscript{237} She cannot reconcile herself with moments arranged in progressive narration. “One moment does not lead to another,” she states. She is unable to consider life as a “whole and indivisible mass” of moments stacked upon one another. Rhoda feels separate “shock[s] of sensation.”\textsuperscript{238} For Rhoda, “there is no single scent, no single body . . . to follow.”\textsuperscript{239}

There is excessive haste in what Rhoda describes, as if nothing can be truly read. When she describes herself as an impression (“And I have no face. I am like the foam that races over the beach or the moonlight that falls arrowlike here on a tin can”) she presents something for the reader to linger over.\textsuperscript{240} The meaningful details of a person’s face would characterize a realist description. In lieu of this, Rhoda presents not so much two images but the qualities which foam and moonlight
share: diffusion, presence, and sublimity. Moreover, these are diaphanous objects which draw the eye to them. Rhoda foregrounds the possibility of the reader’s perception upon surfaces. The impressionist surface which Rhoda’s characterological visual extension represents could almost reflect the reader’s anonymous inquiry into the moment—figuratively contained within the nature of diffuse surfaces.

The whole must be seen in a single moment, it must be more dynamic than the haste and agitation of progress. In Woolf’s “A Sketch of the Past.” A moment of being is an expansive moment, not one that can be stacked upon the next. The goal is to render the way in which a certain reality appears—not to reach an emotional zenith. Like Rhoda, Woolf describes her initial shock experiences as ones marked by a sense of despair. However, there is a decisive turn. Woolf states: When I said about the flower “That is the whole,” I felt that I had made a discovery. I felt that I had put away in my mind something that I should go back [to], to turn over and explore.” This is a flower, we saw in the introduction, that she has held in her mind for her entire life. The flower’s emergence, this sensation is concomitant with a certain understanding of sensation: “in the case of the flower I found a reason; and was thus able to deal with the sensation. I was not powerless. I was conscious—if only at a distance—that I should in time explain it.” Analysis enters into sensation and this is what makes the flower into a whole. The object must be “discovered.”

This whole is not intuited instantly. Its relation to what Russell sees as the unity of mysticism is complex. He defines the latter as “the belief in insight as against discursive analytic knowledge,” an insight which is “sudden, penetrating, coercive” and “contrasted with the slow and fallible study of outward appearance by a science relying wholly upon the senses.” For mysticism, “sense, reason, and analysis” are “blind guides leading to the morass of illusion.” In mysticism, absolutely everything is one, mysticism “refuses to admit opposition or division anywhere,” and so Russell asks the question, “[i]s all plurality and division illusory? Russell’s alternative is a “scientific philosophy” which is “more humble, more piecemeal, more arduous . . . more indifferent to fate, and more capable of accepting the world without the tyrannous imposition of our human and temporary demands.”

While “fully developed mysticism” is for Russell “mistaken,” he still thinks it contains “an element of wisdom,” and should be “commended as an attitude towards life, not as a creed about the world.” Russell wishes to retain mysticism’s “spirit of reverence.” Mysticism also denies “the reality of time” which Russell objects to, but he wishes to maintain mysticism’s indifference to it: “though time be real, to realize the unimportance of time is the gate of wisdom.” The point is to use mysticism’s indifference to time as an alternative to “Evolutionism, [which] in basing itself upon the notion of progress, which is change from the worse to the better, allows the notion of time . . . to become its tyrant rather than its servant, and thereby loses that impartiality of contemplation which is the source of all that is best in philosophic thought and feeling.” Mysticism posits a useful sense of totality, but this totality is posited too quickly. What is needed is a totality which emerges from a slower sense of wholeness, based on distinct moments akin to those found within scientific observation.

The Flower

We should now return to Woolf’s flower. In Woolf, the sense of the whole emerges from a form of contemplation closer to Russell’s scientific outlook. The flower is a natural object. A referential world holds a considerable bearing upon the technique of reading the flower. The flower references Woolf’s own biography as a perceiving subject; it references her life in an abstract way. Woolf’s flower buttresses a structure of abstract continuity—the reference point is the natural world, understood as an exquisite intervention of human experience. This experience is sharpened into an abstract whole—it is not a form of irrecuperable discontinuity—it is discontinuity made into something.
Here interruption and structure coincide through a more general notion of the body as a form of abstract continuity since the body can both receive an impression and analyze it. The body’s organs of perception, when grasped in a more impersonal fashion, imply a continuity. Woolf states that this special flower creates a “shock.” This shock extends to the reader. Another kind of literary structure develops from this (ideally) shared perceptive scenario. The shock may be sudden, but the explanation and the process which follow it are more gradual.

In contrast, Rhoda is unable to make sense of her sensations or weave the shock into a greater totality. Rhoda’s despair outlines a crucial impasse in the modern human experience of time: how to make sense of a moment with potential meanings that cannot be fulfilled through conventional forms of time. Conventional stories about things like marriage or death submit instances in time to an a priori narrative structure, passing over them like “a hound running on the scent.” Although this progression fashions itself as a “natural force,” it is utilitarian and mechanistic. It is also a form of teleology. The present moment collapses under forward motion. Here few sensations can be rendered within an analytic form. The movement between the world and fiction is not dynamic enough. Everything seems to move within the fictional time of narrative urgency.

In The Waves, Rhoda is stranded within such forms of time. She is also stranded on the outskirts of narrative. Rhoda is terrified because she can only live in the moment, but, for her, a moment which can’t be made into anything larger. It seems to her as if the structure of modern life has no alternatives to conventional narrative structure. Woolf defamiliarizes progressive narration by making it appear strange and remarkable from the point of view of Rhoda (“the general blaze of you who live wholly, indivisibly and without caring in the moment”). Here an instance in time can only acquire value through its relation to the illusion that there will always be a very next moment (as if the totality of narrative illusion were ineluctable).

The jagged senses of alternative continuity found throughout The Waves correspond to Rhoda’s observation that there are worlds in which “[a]ne moment does not lead to another. The door opens and the tiger leaps.” An emergent order does not abandon the moment for having “an end in view.” The Waves aspires to expand the edges of moments. Here the moment acquires a life of its own. Woolf arranges moments that appear “all violent, all separate” in new ways.

The Door is an Ontological Blank or Another Kind of Order

Woolf also explores the moment through forms with distinct contours, like a mirror, a window or a door. In “The Moment: Summer’s Night,” she writes: “[a]nd then one shape heaves and surges and rises, and we pass . . . down the path towards the lighted windows, the dim glow behind the branches, and so enter the door, and the square draws its lines round us, and here is a chair, a table, glasses, knives, and thus we are boxed and housed[.]” Woolf’s impressionist moment is a container for objects and perceptions, as well as a frame. There are already forms which mark human experience, tremendously unsettling forms of which we remain practically unconscious.

In The Waves, when “the door opens,” Jinny states, “the door keeps on opening.” At the French restaurant during Percival’s farewell dinner, the opening of the door is a continuous interruption, a continuous opening. It is a gap which marks something deeper within time like the lighthouse’s flashes of post-impressionist time (as Banfield’s abstract continuity), but yet the forms are characterized by the presence of a radically negative thing (Percival’s absence, which is also a kind of death). His absent presence is not seen outside of the objects which mark his absence in a very peculiar way. Woolf writes:

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“[I]t is now five minutes to eight,” said Neville. “I have come early. I have taken my place at the table ten minutes before the time in order to taste every moment of
anticipation; to see the door open and to say, ‘Is it Percival? No; it is not Percival.’ I have seen the door open and shut twenty times already; each time the suspense sharpens. This is the place to which he is coming. This is the table at which he will sit. Here, incredible as it seems, will be his actual body. *This table, these chairs, this metal vase with its three red flowers are about to undergo an extraordinary transformation. Already the room, with its swing-doors, its tables heaped with fruit, with cold joints, wears the wavering, unreal appearance of a place where one waits expecting something to happen. Things quiver as if not yet in being. The blankness of the white table-cloth glares...* If he should not come I could not bear it. I should go. Yet somebody must be seeing him now. He must be in some cab; he must be passing some shop. And *every moment he seems to pump into this room this prickly light, this intensity of being so that things have lost their normal uses—this knife-blade is only a flash of light, not a thing to cut with. The normal is abolished. The door opens, but he does not come...* “The door opens, the door goes on opening,” said Neville, “yet he does not come.” ... “He has not come,” said Neville. “The door opens and he does not come.”

Meaning is generated through a negative process. Elsewhere Rhoda states: “the swing-door goes on opening.” The novel repeats the opening and closing of the doors while the friends await the arrival of Percival to such excess as to render the repetition of the door’s movement a haunting, abstract rhythm. The door opening is even like a figurative reference to death and mortality as Woolf often ties it to (the lack of) Percival’s appearance. Unlike the movement of the sun and the waves at interludes in the novel, doors are embedded within the manmade spaces and containers that characters inhabit.

The gesture of the opening and closing door provides an emergent order within this sequence of *The Waves*; human experience hinges on its repetitive movement. The opening door indicates change and incipience as it frames characters’ experiences. “The door opens,” Jinny continues, “[t]he door goes on opening. Now I think, next time it opens the whole of my life will be changed. Who comes? ... The door opens. Oh, come, I say to this one, rippling gold from head to heels. ‘Come’ and he comes towards me.” Jinny states earlier: “Now the car slides to a stop. A strip of pavement is lighted. The door is opening and shutting. People are arriving; they do not speak; they hasten in. There is the swishing sound of cloaks falling in the hall. This is the prelude, this is the beginning.”

The opening door can be a figure of terror, a form of interruption; it reflects confinement, but also something kinetic. The opening door does not contain being, it registers and marks it, it intensifies sensation, or causes the mind to stand still. Rhoda says:

“The door opens; the tiger leaps. The door opens; terror rushes in; terror upon terror, pursuing me. Let me visit furtively the treasures I have laid apart. Pools lie on the other side of the world reflecting marble columns. The swallow dips her wing in dark pools. But here the door opens and people come; they come towards me... Each time the door opens I am interrupted... Like a ribbon of weed I am flung far every time the door opens. The wave breaks. I am the foam that sweeps and fills the uttermost rims of the rocks with whiteness; I am also a girl, here in this room.”

The gesture of the door exists within the larger architecture of the novel. What is the significance of suggesting that “every time the door opens,” there is a reverberation that corresponds to the moment when “the wave breaks”? This synchrony of interruptions corresponds to the formation of character in the novel. In the above passage, Woolf repeats the words “I am”
four times in the space of a few lines. The opening door’s interruption transfigures being. Being itself seems interrupted and magnified. In *The Waves*, gestures of perception accumulate into stringed masses of aesthetic being, and if their expansion in the text modulates, it does so around the quasi-alternity of character, drifting locus points of perceptive ontology. The voices of characters when they make such statements as these are not merely the voices of beings but constellations of aesthetic being, constellations of gesture. A constellation of aesthetic being is an order of experience in which the subjective comes to resemble the objective, but it does so according to a free arrangement which is so diffuse that it might only be called *aesthetic*. It is only possible within fiction.

Analytic philosophy helps to provide general categories for what aesthetic being is. In *The Waves* the human element loses its separateness from architectural and organic rhythms (doors opening, waves breaking). Here character is modeled after the object, becoming a reflective pool of being. The subjective comes to resemble the objective. Banfield writes that “[f]or Moore and Russell, a patch of yellow or grey, like ‘les taches grises et blanches que font les maisons sur le ciel clair’ that Zola claims Monet loves, is neither physical nor mental but has what Russell called ‘physical subjectivity.’ Russell’s physical subjectivity is a version of Ernst Mach’s neutral monism.” Here Banfield quotes Ulrich Weisstein, who writes that “‘Mach’s contention, which provides the basic impulse for his *Analyse der Empfindungen*, that the only reality worth considering is that of the surface, [is] precisely what Impressionism (which deserves the label ‘Sensationism’) is all about.” Banfield’s argument is that naturalism is largely consistent with Impressionism. What this perhaps explains less is how much Woolf dramatizes objects and gestures in *The Waves*. Woolf holds fast to a kind of despair. Modernism’s aesthetic tradition of appearances allows her to see objects, but I do not think it fully accounts for the metaphysical drama of the object. I do not know if Monet’s cathedrals, for example (despite the fact that we might never understand Woolf’s decision to include the appearance of doors without an Impressionism like Monet’s), contain the same unsettling drama as Woolf’s opening and shutting doors. If the ultimate reality is that of surfaces in modernism, if the ultimate reality is visibility, then I think, for Woolf, this state of affairs is a problem for her characters—it is a troubling fact.

By eroding the boundary between the human character and organic life at the level of the impressionist surface, Woolf experiments with an emergent, rhythmic totality. Elsewhere, Bernard states: “I am filled with the delight of youth, with potency, with the sense of what is to come. Blundering, but fervid, I see myself buzzing round flowers, humming down scarlet cups, making blue funnels resound with my prodigious booming. . . . I have gone buzzing like a swarm of bees, endlessly vagrant.” Similarly, in the scene where Louis visits the eating house, he states, “[m]y roots go down through veins of lead and silver, through damp, marshy places that exhale odours to a knot made of oak roots bound together in the centre.” Susan states a few pages later: “At this hour, this still early hour, I think I am the field, I am the barn, I am the trees; mine are the flocks of birds . . . and the cow that creaks as it pushes one foot before another . . . and the faint red in the sky, and the green when the red fades; the silence and the bell; the call of the man fetching cart-horses from the fields—all are mine.” Here being becomes hyperbolic and immeasurable, and character is an infinite container of perceptions.

“Prickly Light” is a figure of Deep Abstraction

Woolf’s characterization of Percival is not a function of action. Characterization is an actual light source: “[a]nd every moment he seems to pump into this room this prickly light, this intensity of being so that things have lost their normal uses—this knife blade is only a flash of light, not a thing to cut with. The normal is abolished.” Percival arrives late to the dinner but his absence at the table and his death structure large sections of the novel. At the table, Percival’s absence
intensifies Neville’s perception of objects. Percival’s absence at the table, a kind of gap in being, turns a “knife blade” into “a flash of light,” while “prickly light,” pulses or “pump[s] into th[e] room.”262 However, if character is a light source, this light source (Percival) is unequivocally absent. Percival is a gap beneath the flood of visual appearances.

I think that Woolf’s The Waves also presents forms of deep abstraction. Through the (visual) appearances conditioned by absence, Woolf posits something more than the idea that character (or subjectivity) grows objective (Mach’s “Sensationism”). Something else streams into the scene. It is a negative possibility. Surfaces deliver something which is not conditioned by them, but by an invisible presence (Percival). Percival’s absence speaks through appearances. Negative meanings emerge from the fragments of Percival’s inverted essence (Percival’s abstract presence is not normal, he is not there, he is not essential, the light is an inversion of him). A virtual essence blossoms visually within the space of his abstracted essence. The impressions, the flashes, the “prickly light[s]” seem to be molding terms of meaning beyond their status as appearances; they seem to be forms of visuality, anchorage points for a stranger commerce between experience and representation. The essence of character becomes an ongoing epistemological problem. But this ambiguity of essence is perceptible through the arrangement of appearances. In the words of Catherine Malabou, one might ask, “is there a mode of possibility attached exclusively to [such] negation?”263

Objects also shift in appearance beneath flickering, uncertain light frequencies. “Things quiver as if not yet in being,” Woolf writes in the passage about Percival’s farewell dinner.264 The perceptive ontologies of objects are unfixed, fluctuating beneath modernism’s experimental lamp of perception. Being becomes a question of what is or is not perceivable, of what it is possible to perceive at any given moment. “The blankness of the white table-cloth glares,” Neville states.265 The narrator perhaps chooses the noun “blankness” to describe the table-cloth in order to render the ontological complexity that empty spaces convey. The blankness of the color white is a sign of Percival’s absence at the table, connoting a void. However, the table-cloth is not invisible. Rather, the table-cloth becomes a charged, visual force. Here a gap in the visual frame “glares,” or looks back upon the viewer, deflecting the spectator’s gaze while violently demanding consideration of its ontological possibilities.

Through death, perhaps something about this ontological plasticity is revealed. Death does not reveal it, but something, some act of forming around the absence of Percival, is heightened around the space of his implicit death. Something is clarified, something can be seen.266 Moreover, this deathly visual force is posited as a representational effect for the reader’s own sensory affiliation with the text. The blankness of the tablecloth can only be perceived at the outer reaches of sensation.

The opening and closing of the door in the above passage is a blank space, a sight of almost sheer potential and possibility, even sheer nothingness: “he does not come. . . . he does not come. . . . he does not come.”267 The gesture of the door opening is modal; it swings above an abyss, a gap, like Percival’s absence, which structures and conditions forms of emergence. Character is incomplete, emergent, and virtual, and ontology is modal. Here meaning does not require realism’s fullness of being; instead, meaning derives from a virtual play of meaning. “Realism aimed to paint things in themselves,” Banfield writes. “The atelier guaranteed it the ideal conditions that allowed realism to paint a hypothetical thing beneath its appearances. Impressionism painted the surface of things, their appearances, prior to any interpretation.”268 These appearances have an unsettling effect on ontology.
Gesture

If ontology is modal, sense perception is the medium through which this modality takes place. A chain of being manifests through visual and aural impressions which characters indicate through gesture. Being takes place within a certain atmosphere:

“Look,” said Rhoda; “listen. Look how the light becomes richer, second by second, and bloom and ripeness lie everywhere; and our eyes, as they range round this room with all its tables, seem to push through curtains of colour, red, orange, umber and queer ambiguous tints, which yield like veils and close behind them, and one thing melts into another.”

In *The Waves*, there often is profound doubt as to the existence of external objects of perception, yet a foregrounding of the very idea of the visible and of appearance accompanies this doubt. Objects fluctuate in *The Waves*. They do not represent objects in the world, but modal fluctuations within the visual realm of objectivity. Woolfian modernism’s modal objects point to their own appearance. Objects are held under the light and “the light becomes richer, second by second.” The impression develops within the novel like a photographic image. Visuality is a membrane that registers an object within an undefined field of colour: “red, orange, umber and queer ambiguous tints.” Tables evaporate into “curtains of colour” and “veils” that open and “close behind” the movements of the eye. Within these impressionist events, sheer fields of an embodied novelistic perception composed of sound and visuality constitute a moment which enacts a split from the mimetic surface of novelistic form.

“[O]ne thing melts into another,” Woolf writes. The quivering of objects is also a blurring of their boundaries. The framework for what can be seen or heard expands. “Our senses have widened,” Jinny states. *The Waves* expands the notion of content, altering novelistic form and expanding the novel’s epistemological function. *The Waves* structures itself around our perception of possible worlds.

In Woolf’s “A Sketch of the Past,” one of the effects of the shock experiences of perception is to create an epistemological frame. Here interruptive perception surrounds the object with a bounding geometry. In *The Waves*, literary techniques compose similar epistemological frames. *The Waves* allots extraordinary proportion to sense impressions and gestures. In Jinny’s speech above, the senses are membranes which register the most distant sounds, while perception is the lens that delimits objects. The framing of the object and the form of this frame create a new novelistic epistemology.

Sounds

Elsewhere in *The Waves*, Woolf writes: “Yes, said Jinny, “our senses have widened. Membranes, webs of nerve that lay white and limp, have filled and spread themselves and float round us like filaments, making the air tangible and catching in them far-away sounds unheard before.” In the case of Jinny’s dynamic sound, which involves hyperbolic nerve membranes, perception is a diaphanous surface of reception for the most subtle fluctuations in the atmosphere. Jinny conceives of perception as a medium filled with air. This surface is able to receive an emergent sound. Here the “filaments” are a texture, a body of strands within the air that capture sensation. Jinny identifies a means by which the senses perceive an order of phenomena within the medium of atmosphere. The senses are interwoven with the atmosphere in an aesthetic ontology.
“[F]ar-away sounds,” sounds “unheard before,” are perceived. In *The Waves*, a sense of aesthetic being anchors this emergent modality of “sounds unheard.” Expanding senses create textured webs that grasp sound within their filaments. Sense “[m]embranes” create order with “webs of nerve that lay white and limp.” The senses are like containers in that they “have filled and spread themselves.” These containers are mobile, “float[ing] round us like filaments, making the air tangible.” Furthermore, the sounds are diffuse. The reader does not know the source of these sounds. The audible is foregrounded, and without any clearly stated object or referent, an expanded notion of the body, with its dynamic membranes and webs of nerves, stands in to anchor it. These representational effects appeal to the outer reaches of sensation. They create a mimesis of these subtle sensory surfaces for the reader.

This sound takes place within an emergent dimension of the novel; it is held within a flow of sensation that does not fit into a logic of interpenetrated moments, or “one moment merg[ing] in[to] the next.” It is rather a moment of sound arising on a highly sensible surface. This is an emergent novelistic surface, a web that challenges the idea of the body’s coherence or fixity. The sound also indexes a substantial degree of materiality. In *The Waves*, the sound traces a web of phenomena and anchors these phenomena in an emergent image of corporeality. In moments when the frame is stretched beyond the limits of narrative, a certain image of the bodily senses persists.

Through different statements, characters in *The Waves* relay the idea that they represent unstable constellations of being. Bernard expresses self-conscious awareness of this. He states: “I am made and remade continually. Different people draw different words from me.” Elsewhere, *The Waves* expresses the falsity of language which posits fictional subjectivities easily accessible to linguistic modes of expression:

> “Yet these roaring waters,” said Neville, “upon which we build our crazy platforms are more stable than the wild, the weak and inconsequent cries that we utter when, trying to speak, we rise; when we reason and jerk out these false sayings, ‘I am this; I am that!’ Speech is false.”

By critiquing the referential function of pronoun-demonstrative pairings, Neville problematizes grammatically conventional approaches to characterization. Conventional narrative employs referential, demonstrative representations of subjectivity and identity. In *The Waves*, these types of representation are not aesthetically adequate to capture Neville’s fictional being.

In contrast, other uses of language ignite aesthetic being in *The Waves*. In a context in which demonstrative linguistic identity becomes a source of anxiety, what linguistic orientation can subject or character-driven being take? Bernard says:

> “A phrase. An imperfect phrase. And what are phrases? They have left me very little to lay on the table, beside Susan’s hand; to take from my pocket, with Neville’s credentials. I am not an authority on law, or medicine, or finance. I am wrapped round with phrases, like damp straw; I glow, phosphorescent. And each of you feels when I speak, ‘I am lit up. I am glowing.’ The little boys used to feel, ‘That’s a good one, that’s a good one,’ as the phrases bubbled up from my lips under the elm trees in the playing-fields. They too bubbled up; they also escaped with my phrases. But I pine in solitude. Solitude is my undoing.”

Such statements highlight the major role language plays in moments of being. Bernard starts with a question: “[a] phrase. An imperfect phrase. And what are phrases?” Here language stands in isolation. By the middle of the passage, however, language and human existence have become
inseparable: “I am wrapped round with phrases, like damp straw; I glow, phosphorescent.” This inseparability suggests a relationship in *The Waves* between character and the contingent dynamics of language use.

For Woolf, being is modal, it arises as an emergent effect of perception. We can think of the waves themselves as a modality, an emergent aesthetic order. The work of the novel resembles the action of waves. There is an underlying gestic rhythm for the novel as a whole that smooths away moments of unconscious experience and brings to the forefront phosphorescent moments of heightened perception, like a multitude of gemstones washed up on the shore.

Waves also separate. Refined, glowing fragments of being fill *The Waves*, but the novel's attempt to hold these moments together is a struggle. Louis asks: “How can I reduce these dazzling, these dancing apparitions to one line capable of linking all in one?” It is clear that this “line” is not fixed, but dotted with ruptures and uncertainties as much as with easily assimilable material. Rhoda calls this line “the emerging monster,” stating: “[w]ith intermittent shocks, sudden as the springs of a tiger, life emerges heaving its dark crest from the sea. It is to this we are attached; it is to this we are bound, as bodies to wild horses. And yet we have invented devices for filling up the crevices and disguising these fissures. . . . This is part of the emerging monster to whom we are attached.”

Through the use of gesture as a tapestry to weave together the emergent totality of moments of being, *The Waves* as a whole becomes an undulating embroidery of shocks, movements, modalities, cycles, and interruptions that cohere in a pattern beyond narrative. A logic of embroidering sensations into a whole through the membrane of the visible is revealed early in the novel. *The Waves* opens with an elaborately staged sunrise:

Gradually the dark bar on the horizon become clear as if the sediment in an old wine-bottle had sunk and left the glass green. Behind it, too the sky cleared as if the white sediment there had sunk, or as if the arm of a woman couched beneath the horizon had raised a lamp and flat bars of white, green and yellow, spread across the sky like the blades of a fan. Then she raised her lamp higher and the air seemed to become fibrous and to tear away from the green surface flickering and flaming in red and yellow fibres like the smoky fire that roars from a bonfire. Gradually the fibres of the burning bonfire were fused into one haze, one incandescence which lifted the weight of the woolen grey sky on top of it and turned it to a million atoms of soft blue. The surface of the sea slowly became transparent and lay rippling and sparkling until the dark stripes were almost rubbed out. Slowly the arm that held the lamp raised higher and then higher until a broad flame became visible; an arc of fire burnt on the rim of the horizon, and all round it the sea blazed gold.

This passage utilizes a mode of novelistic visual perception which acknowledges its own mediation: “the air seemed to become fibrous,” metaphor—“as if the sediment in an old wine-bottle had sunk and left the glass green”—imbuing the reception of the sunset with impressionistic qualities. Woolf aestheticizes the very act of perceiving shifting colors at sunrise.

In a kind of figurative materialization of perception, Woolf also magnifies and aestheticizes air in this passage. When she writes that “the air seemed to become fibrous,” she takes up her reception of the air as specifically perceptive—“seem[ing] to become”—yet she externalizes the texture of this reception. Woolf renders these apparent fibers manifest in the air and places them in sensuous consultation with the perceiving voice. The movement of the sinking sediment which leaves the wine bottle green is assonant with the painterliness of this description, the clarification of color intensifying the impression and presenting a lingering visual surface. Woolf retains these reverberative interactions between perception and air throughout the novel.

Woolf modifies the atomism of Impressionism by centralizing the emergence of the landscape in a human gesture, resonating with the textual production of a fictional corporeality.
Woolf ascribes pronounced artifice to the dawning of perception. The overarching gesture of a 
woman raising a lamp above the landscape, an image that resembles a human-like authorial presence, 
imbues the passage with a sense of omniscience.

"The surface of the sea slowly became transparent," Woolf writes. After the sun has risen, the 
narrator writes "[t]he light struck upon the trees in the garden, making one leaf transparent and then 
another." It is as if the landscape is melting under the light. The reader sees this transparency on a 
broad canvas, a copious landscape of colors.

Transparent, evanescent parts, like Woolf’s flashing leaves, cohere. “Gradually the fibres of the 
burning bonfire were fused into one haze,” Woolf writes, “one incandescence which lifted the weight of the woolen 
grey sky on top of it and turned it to a million atoms of soft blue.” The narrator of this passage seems 
reluctant to use the word “sun”; instead light is referred to through metaphors that capture how it 
appears to the eye. “One haze, one incandescence,” Woolf writes emphatically. The sunrise, “a 
million atoms of soft blue,” emblemizes an emergent totality. The totalizing unity of the sunrise 
indicates and accounts for elements of a shifting atmosphere analogous to perception. Woolf’s 
sunrise rattles the fibers of the air. It also creates these fibers. Filaments turn the sky into “a million 
atoms of soft blue” and capture modalities of perception like Rhoda’s discovery of “far-away sounds 
unheard before.”

The jagged geometry of this emergent totality fashions a logic of gesture throughout the 
novel. The sweeping light effects that Woolf announces in this opening passage infuse the novel’s 
more quotidian gestures with the qualities of dancing light beneath the lamp of perception. Within a 
tension between light and dark, the gesture of the raising of the lamp allows color to come into 
being. The modulation of color over the surface of the waves, the gradual ascent of the sun as a 
structural interlude within the novel, and its ascent and descent into darkness suggest that the flux of 
light is crucial within this novel, a modality on par with that of the waves themselves. The Waves 
comes into being through these light effects, and the sun’s movement forms a part of the novel’s 
very substance. The two organic rhythms of the sun and the waves are like one deep and 
fundamental gesture that echoes throughout other gestural textures in the novel.

A fractal logic of gestures that compound and expand into an emergent totality guides a 
novel which harnesses materiality within structure in a radically different way than do the properties 
of narrative exploited by the traditional novel. Louis says:

“Flowers toss their heads outside the window. I see wild birds, and impulses wilder 
than the wildest birds strike from my wild heart. My eyes are wild; my lips tight 
pressed. The bird flies; the flower dances; but I hear always the sullen thud of the 
waves; and the chained beast stamps on the beach. It stamps and stamps.”

The Waves is a woven fabric of such echoing movements as “the chained beast [that] stamps on the 
beach. It stamps and stamps.” It consists not in the telling a story, but in the weaving together of 
gestures and impressions.

The gestures of characters and organic life within The Wave acquire a rhythmic continuity. 
The strands of certain rhythms like the waves and sunlight are relatively more prominent in the 
novel than the gestures of tossing flowers or bees buzzing. These flashes of action do not cohere 
within a plot (“my lips tight pressed. The bird flies; the flower dances; but I hear always the sullen 
thud of the waves”). They cohere instead into an emergent totality of gesture in line with a 
contingent fictional logic. Each gesture is dynamic in itself. It stands out from any prolonged line or 
sequence of action and is, in a sense, complete. Many gestures reference other rhythms through an 
alternative sense of continuity and coherence. Behind a gesture like “the bird flies,” the waves are 
“thud[ding]” or “stamp[ing].” Despite the logic of their organization the waves appear woven into
the action as an organic material. Unlike narrative time, they organize action from within, not from without. A gesture is a movement, but it also brackets the idea of movement. In the passage above, the waves are an ever-present backdrop of sound, prompting Louis to say, “I hear always the sullen thud of the waves.” This sullen thud is likened to a “chained beast stamp[ing] on the beach.” This noise that “stamps and stamps” has an equalizing effect on a multitude of gestures and actions as it rhythmically mediates a large proportion of the novel. As a result, distinguishing between major action and minor action becomes difficult. The technique of gesture produces intertwined, overlapping rhythms.

Gestures harness action from the background and bring it closer to the foreground (“things we have only dimly perceived draw near”). A statement from Rhoda concerning a seemingly insignificant action, “[n]ow I dry my hands vigorously,” joins in the novel’s ensuing pages with a series of repeated lyric gestures related to gathering and presenting blossoms: “I will wander down it and pick flowers, green cowbind and the moonlight-coloured May, wild roses and ivy serpentine. . . . I will bind my flowers in one garland and advancing with my hand outstretched will present them—Oh! to whom?” While in The Waves characters become constellations of gestures, foregrounded gestures also interweave characters. A page later Louis notices: “[f]lowers toss their heads outside the window.”

Micro-Gesture

“We are about to part, said Neville,” but gestures of parting and leaving do not guide the novel like turns in a plot. There are many layers of gesture in The Waves. The body of the novel is one of constant, ongoing movements. The Waves is kinetic. Hundreds of micro-gestures enact spirals of being. One genre of this is the movement of animals and insects. In The Waves, Woolf includes hundreds of these micro-gestures:

“With intermittent shocks, sudden as the springs of a tiger” (64), “[t]he birds’ eyes are bright in the tunnels between the leaves” (9), “[a] caterpillar is curled in a green ring” (9), “[t]he grey-shelled snail draws across the path and flattens the blades behind him” (10), “[t]he bee now hums round the head of the great Doctor” (59), “[t]he fire roars; the flies buzz in a circle” (100), “[f]or soon in the hot midday when the bees hum round the hollyhocks my lover will come” (98).

The technique of gesture shatters the boundaries between these threads of being, showing human movement alongside the movement of other life forms. Elsewhere Louis mentions “hats bobbing up and down in perpetual disorder.” The gesture is a mark of chaos, but also of a strange, layered harmony. Each gesture, no matter how mundane, can point to something more enigmatic, more material, and then, almost immaterial: “now the cock crows like a spurt of hard, red water in the white tide.” The bees which constantly buzz in the atmosphere, a caterpillar, a snail, create organic depth in The Waves (“The skin of rotten fruit broke, and matter oozed too thick to run”).

Roots penetrate the firmament to form deeper gestures of order. Beneath the criss-crossing actions of everyday life, in the dance-like, syncopated rhythm of the eating-house, Louis seeks out “the break” in “continuity”: an interruptive order beneath realist, mimetic harmony, or a dynamic order to splinter the fixed movements of the everyday:

“Yet I feel, too, the rhythm of the eating-house. It is like a waltz tune, eddying in and out, round and round. The waitresses, balancing trays, swing in and out, round and
round, dealing plates of greens, of apricot and custard, dealing them at the right time, to the right customers. . . . Where then is the break in this continuity? What is the fissure through which one sees disaster? The circle is unbroken; the harmony complete. Here is the central rhythm; here the common mainspring. I watch it expand, contract; and then expand again. . . . I, who desire above all things to be taken to the arms with love, am alien, external. I, who would wish to feel close over me the protective waves of the ordinary, catch with the tail of my eye some far horizon; am aware of hats bobbing up and down in perpetual disorder. . . . Yes; I will reduce you to order. . . . And the grinding and the steam that runs in unequal drops down the window pane; and the stopping and the starting with a jerk of motor-omnibuses; and the hesitations at counters; and the words that trail drearily without human meaning; I will reduce you to order.

“My roots go down through veins of lead and silver, through damp, marshy places that exude odours to a knot made of oak roots bound together in the centre. Sealed and blind, with each stopping my ears, I have yet heard rumours of wars; and the nightingale; have felt the burying of many troops of men flocking hither and thither in quest of civilization like flocks of birds migrating seeking the summer; I have seen women carrying red pitchers to the banks of the Nile. I woke in a garden, with a blow on the nape of my neck, a hot kiss, Jinny’s; remembering all this as one remembers confused cries and toppling pillars and shafts of red and black in some nocturnal conflagration. I am forever sleeping and waking. Now I sleep; now I wake.”

Louis finds a tune in the contingent disorder of the everyday, but he finds that “the rhythm is cheap and worthless.” He seeks to “oppose to what is passing” a “ramrod of beaten steel.” This solid materiality invokes a deeper order than the patent, narrative rhythms of the everyday. A subterranean, leaden moment penetrates the textual sphere of Louis’s body (“my roots go down”). The geological impersonality of the moment is filled by “lead and silver,” a fictional time densely laced by “oak roots.”

It is as if, across Louis’s body, ages of civilization pass. The scale of being is radically displaced. Lodged in aspects of geological time, the space of novelistic character spreads across continents. Deep in this “marshy plac[e],” where Louis is “forever sleeping and waking,” the modernist figure of novelistic characterization spreads out with a universalizing materiality. Character becomes subterranean, mineral, ancient. Modernist characterization does not correspond to a single mind, but to an impersonal epistemological movement across time. The moment melds itself into layers of rock, solidifies into materiality, and courses through roots and marshy fibers.

In Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* the geological is melded with the thrum of the old beggar woman’s impolential bard song. Sound functions as a template for notions of an impersonal temporality radically distinct from the present. This impersonality appears in the form of anonymity in Woolf’s essay “Anon.” There sound suggests a linguistic time before the printed word and the proper name of the author, that of “the simple singer,” during “the silent centuries before the book was presented”: a rural, anonymous village singer “before Chaucer’s time.” In “Anon,” Woolf imagines sound and the birth of song in the English language as an attempt to mimic birdsong. Sound is linked with the neutral anonymity of language before the printing press. In “Anon,” Woolf writes:

Anonymity was a great possession. It gave the early writing an impersonality, a generality. It gave us the ballads; it gave us the songs. It allowed us to know nothing of the writer: and so to concentrate upon his song. Anon had great privileges. He was not responsible. He was not self-conscious. He is not self-conscious. He can
borrow. He can repeat. He can say what everyone feels. No one tries to stamp his own name, to discover his own experience, in his work. He keeps at a distance from the present moment.  

There are two crucial characteristics to this passage from “Anon” relevant to Woolf’s treatment of sound in *Mrs. Dalloway*: the impersonality of the song and the idea that the singer occupies the space of a moment which is “at a distance from the present.” The anonymity of the sound impression is important to the construction of a temporality outside of a written record with distinct proper names and a specific chronology.

*A Sound Beyond Eternity*

Similarly, the “damp, marshy places that exhale odours to a knot made of oak roots” that cocoon Louis’s geological fibers in *The Waves* might accompany a sound that, eighty pages into *Mrs. Dalloway*, catches Peter Walsh’s ear outside Regent Park Tube station. *Mrs. Dalloway*’s old beggar woman’s impersonality breaks with the social semiotics of the proper name, and the universal, eternal quality of the murmur within her ballad dislocates time from the sign system of realist narrative. Woolf writes:

*A sound interrupted him; a frail quivering sound, a voice bubbling up without direction, vigour, beginning or end, running weakly and shrilly and with an absence of all human meaning into

\[ ee\ um\ fab\ um\ so \]
\[ foo\ swee\ too\ eem\ oo—\]

the voice of no age or sex, the voice of an ancient spring sprouting from the earth; which issued, just opposite Regent’s Park Tube station from a tall quivering shape, like a funnel, like a rusty pump, like a wind-beaten tree for ever barren of leaves which lets the wind run up and down its branches singing

\[ ee\ um\ fab\ um\ so \]
\[ foo\ swee\ too\ eem\ oo \]

and rocks and creaks and moans in the eternal breeze.

*Through all ages*—when the pavement was grass, when it was swamp, through the age of tusk and mammoth, through the age of silent sunrise, the battered woman—for she wore a skirt—with her right hand exposed, her left clutching at her side, stood singing of love—love which had lasted a million years, love which prevails, and millions of years ago, her lover, who had been dead these centuries, had walked, she crooned, with her in May . . . .

As the ancient song bubbled up opposite Regent’s Park Tube station still the earth seemed green and flowery; still, though it issued from so rude a mouth, a mere hole in the earth, muddy too, matted with root fibres and tangled grasses, still the old bubbling bubbling song, soaking through the knotted roots of infinite ages, and skeletons and treasure, streamed away in rivulets over the pavement and all along the Marylebone Road, and down towards Euston, fertilizing, leaving a damp stain.
The sound in this passage (“a frail quivering sound, a voice bubbling up without direction, vigour, beginning or end”) interrupts the hourly toll of Big Ben, creating a fissure in the novel. The unconventional meanings of this sound (“[running] with an absence of all human meaning into ee um fab um so / foo swee too eem oo”) introduces into the novel a vast abyss of time.

This singular sound interrupts discrete, plot-driven narrative units at the same time as the text repeatedly and non-referentially points to fluctuating abstractions such as “infinite ages,” “all ages,” and a very exaggerated amount of time: “ten million years” in the future. The sound is linked to a love that “had lasted a millions years.” It has passed hyperbolically “[t]hrough all ages,” and it will still surface “ten million years in the future.” Through this impressionist temporality, Woolf makes eternity overlap with the finite linear time of a single day, creating a gap within conventional narrative time.

“[E]e um fab um so / foo swee too eem oo,” Woolf writes. No particular language corresponds to this rhythmic murmur. In Mrs. Dalloway, Woolf presents a ballad song which evokes universality. The perennial thrumming of the murmur is removed from referential time, the novel’s socio-historical grounding, and teleology. As the sound impression constructs a space free from conventional narrative time, words for time (“ancient,” “eternity,” “through all ages,” “millions of years ago”) scatter in multiples across the text’s surface. This abundance of exaggerated temporal references renders the possibility of a single representation of time in the passage dubious. Sheer, repetitive linguistic hyperbole proliferates around the idea of eternity. The passage’s hyperbolic language of time folds into a non-referential, prolix language, rendering the temporal vocabulary opaque. Here time entails novel forms of meaning which appear separate, in a subtle way, from words like “eternity.”

This passage also offers something in the place of conventional narrative: an audible modality or representational effect, around which the temporal lexicon grows frayed and tattered. The sound impression (“ee um fab um so / foo swee too eem oo”) actualizes itself, making itself literary as a repeatable, spoken utterance. That is to say, although this sound appears like a mere inarticulate sound, in Mrs. Dalloway, Woolf maintains aesthetic qualities in the sound by transforming it into a lyrical murmur. The long vowel sounds constitute a faintly discernible linguistic value. Although this assemblage of letters is nonsensical, a kind of non-specific utterance, it also creates a linguistic spiral of eternity within the interlude. In addition to the gaps, a negative activity exists within them.

Hyperbolic materiality accompanies moments of impressionist temporality in Mrs. Dalloway and The Waves. In The Waves, Louis describes the event of women carrying pitchers, an image distant in both time and place, as if it were happening in the present. About thirty pages earlier in the novel, Louis mentions this same image during the train ride sequence: “[I] force myself to state, if only in one line of unwritten poetry, this moment; to mark this inch in the long, long history that began in Egypt, in the time of the Pharaohs, when women carried red pitchers to the Nile. I seem already to have lived many thousand years.”

Louis is adopting a different scale of time that seems to fit within the container of Woolf’s impersonal moment, if not within chronological history. Like the ancient song that emerges, bubbling from the knotted roots of the text’s deep artifice of impressionist time in Mrs. Dalloway, Louis, like some ruin on the banks of the Nile, “seem[s] already to have lived many thousand years.”

*Augustine’s Sound*

The sound impression helps foreground the interruptive aspects of literary impressionism, calling forth a universal unboundedness. Sound also interrupts novelistic aesthetics, while the visual
impression, as it departs from the image in a moment distinct from the present, produces perceptive ontologies of objects.

Perceptive ontology is a modernist phenomenon, but the quandary of an immediate, perceptive time outside the present is perennial. The flux of perceptive gestures (in terms of both sound and visuality) in the moment finds theoretical analogues in traditions prior to modernism. The uncertainty of the impression and the doubt that ensues can be found in Augustine’s writings. He reaches an aporia in chapter eleven of *Confessions*:

Concentrate on the point where truth is beginning to dawn. For example, a physical voice begins to sound. It sounds. It continues to sound, and then ceases. Silence has now come, and the voice is past. There is now no sound. Before it sounded it lay in the future. It could not be measured because it did not exist; and now it cannot be measured because it has ceased to be. At the time when it was sounding, it was possible because at that time it existed to be measured. Yet even then it had no permanence. It came and went. Did this make it more possible to measure?302

The objective is to call attention to sound’s relationship with temporality, and the way in which the continuous passing of sound creates peculiarities for narration. Augustine writes: “it sounds. It continues to sound, and then ceases.” In *Time and Narrative*, Ricoeur explains in regard to Augustine’s speculations that “[t]he key is indeed to be sought in what passes [when a voice sounds] as this is distinct from the pointlike present.”303 Ricoeur places the emphasis not on the sound but on the perceptive phenomenon of its passing. “[W]hat passes” is a metaphorical form of time, like Woolf’s moment, which is distinct from the present. Woolf’s moment does not involve to the same degree the subjective memory of sound (as Augustine’s words imply). The representational effects of sound are in fact a form of presence in Woolf’s fiction. The appearance and disappearance of sound marks a form of abstract continuity. Augustine seems to have difficulty truly sensing sound, which is to say that its actual perceptive presence is not a form of time, but perhaps the logical relation between appearance and disappearance is what creates a form of time.

Woolf’s moment is also suggestive of what Augustine calls the moment of “dawning,” a moment when something is clarified. The moment Augustine describes is an invitation to contemplate the unfamiliar, in the context of the movement of doubt. The immeasurability of Augustine’s sound is by no means identical to the perceptive ontology of the object in Woolf’s fiction, but it shows, in a different context, epistemological doubt apprehending the blank space of an unclear phenomenon.

*Woolf’s Distinctness from Other Modernist Eternities*

In conclusion, crucial to how we define stages in literary modernism are subtle shifts in representation. Some of the most important aspects of these shifts involve the authorial treatment of temporal signs. Modernity as a theory of time found one early definition in Baudelaire’s *Le Peintre de la vie moderne* (1863). According to Baudelaire in this essay, the modern artist must extract a sense of eternity from fugitive impressions of the present.304 As such, Baudelaire constitutes modernity within a temporality that, like Augustine’s sound, passes by—with the artist as witness to an ongoing temporal motion which does not find pause or fixity. Immanently peripheral to the kind of absolute permanence which the notion of eternity represents—both beyond and behind eternity in self-conscious witness to the transitory—the modern aesthetic subject encounters the infinite within the representational effects of perceptive experience. This is a mimesis of the outer reaches of sensation, to the degree that a novel can attempt to render such things for its readers.
Woolf’s impressionist temporality of the moment emerges from these pre-existing notions of time within modernism. The position of the modern aesthetic subject in relation to the eternal in Woolf is similar to Baudelaire’s conception: ineluctably outside of eternity, Woolf’s modernity only conceives of permanence as a logical possibility. In Woolf’s work, however, a radicalism of technique extends and deepens a modernist theory of time beyond the scope of Baudelaire’s conception. Whereas Baudelaire seems almost to retain and instrumentalize an archaic and mythological eternity, Woolf exports eternity to the domain of an impersonal impressionist mediation in which both language and perception are at stake. The exteriority of eternity in Woolf emerges not through dynamic operations within a temporal situation, as it does in Baudelaire, but from a critical approach to the specific linguistic conventions which attempt to invoke any sense of time at all. Woolf’s writing removes time from familiar semantic locations. Here time is a representational effect of the mimesis of sensation.

In Mrs. Dalloway, a perceptive funnel of sound (“ee um fab um so / foo swee too eem oo”) introduces a time with “an absence of all human meaning.” Words for eternity become superfluous in this moment (“infinite ages,” “millions of years ago,” and “in ten million years”). Woolf reproduces and ironizes the very conventions of eternity. What these words mean in the dictionary are illusory markers. The passage aims instead, not for a semantic sense of time, but a more blank time which does not mean eternity. This introduces in a subtle way the chance for another mode of meaning. The sound exists, like “the airs” in To the Lighthouse beyond the semantic markers for eternity, as if by positing this sound, another way to think about time (or continuity) might emerge.

This indecipherable murmur in Mrs. Dalloway which catalyzes perceptive doubt separates itself from a self-reflexive, prolix use of words for eternity. This formalism includes within it naturalism. The sound of the singing beggar seeks out something different than eternity. This sound “leav[es]” a “damp stain.” It is something permanent, yes, but it is not a pure mark of eternity. The stain still contains moisture, the adjective (“damp”) modifies the permanence of the stain. It also suggests that the character of the stain is still an unsettled question. This implies an atmospheric naturalism. Eternity is now a kind of irregular product of atmospheric presence within the work. There is a corporeality of the text which gestures outward to contain the sound.

I think this is different than previous kinds of modernist fusions of the transitory with the eternal. When Baudelaire discusses the extraction of the eternal from the transitory, or when Benjamin mobilizes the past as it flashes in upon the present in “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” they construct different aesthetic spaces within the vocabulary of these temporal categories: blending temporal terms rhetorically but still retaining an operable semantic apparatus for these terms. Additionally, Woolf’s moment of time radically disrupts even the non-linear modernist trope of simultaneity between the fugitive moment and another clearly defined temporal category (eternity in Baudelaire, or the historical past within Benjamin’s non-teleological jetzt-zeit, “the presence of the now,” both of which actively perform non-linear operations upon linear chronologies).

Conversely, in the passage from Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway, language eschews a conventionally semantic or even easily perceptible eternity. The text mimics the very representation of eternity, and then, in this formal display it presents us with an unfinished stain. The difference between these approaches to time (one which retains the semantic outlines of time, another which creates a perceptive surface) marks a distinction between the early literary modernism of Baudelaire and this enhanced fixation upon the transitory, atmospheric surface seen more in high modernism. Baudelaire’s modernist collects transitory images. Woolf instead pulls the eye into a stain of sound which is ironically ornamented by the idea that eternity is not necessarily the final answer to this, albeit fleeting sound.

Although Woolf forecloses the possibility of a semantic eternity in Mrs. Dalloway, her work seizes upon something like a mimicry of the rhythm of the eternal through the repetition of words
for eternity within the funnel of the moment. Even though time persists only as a remainder of reference, language in her work still tries to catch up with the eternal that it has lost. The infinite is in Woolf posited as the occasion for the proliferation of doubt around a strange, paradoxical object like the “frail quivering sound.” This is a radical aesthetic move in that the attempt of Woolf’s language to stage a kind of freedom from time acknowledges in advance its failure to fully sever itself from the shadow of time or from epistemological attachments to the unfamiliar.

Interruption in Woolf is another aspect of her aesthetic radicalism. The interruptive space which the sound (in the passage from Mrs. Dalloway) indicates, disrupts narrative. Woolf’s moments create characters, like the beggar woman from Mrs. Dalloway and Rhoda from The Waves, that exist not only on the outskirts of temporal semantics, but also on the outskirts of narrative. Impressionist temporality occurs on the margins of narrative, and then it posits other kinds of deep, unfinished time.

In addition to shifts in the representation of temporal signs, modernism’s representational innovations involve re-configurations of the nature of perception. The emphasis on perception in Woolf’s interruptive techniques, especially within the incidence of emergent totalities, is a significant aspect of her aesthetic innovation. In Woolf’s novels, emergent totalities also take shape through things like the hyperbolic materiality which Louis describes or the fractal gestures of perception which circulate around doors and a tablecloth, as well as other modal, perceptive ontologies like the phantom flower Woolf describes. In Woolf, one does not apprehend aesthetic totalities through convention, trope, or heritable form. Instead, it is necessary to apprehend the emergent totality through a mimesis of sensation which analogizes the human organs of perception like the eye and the ear, and to grasp this totality through the perceptive ontology which the Woolfian novel creates within the characterological sensory universe.

The infinite recession of the object in Woolf’s perceptive ontology transcends the limitations of single signifiers, narratives, works, and genres. As a result of the way in which they transcend certain narrative and linguistic limitations, as well as the materiality of the signifier, the totalities so powerfully suggested by Woolf’s infinite containers of perception broaden the scope of aesthetic reception. Although all of their constituent parts and characteristics might not be immediately available to apprehension, Woolf’s capacity to create these totalities imagines and implies even grander unities.

In Woolf’s The Waves, the discontinuous gestures of the natural world (the roots which form a more dynamic order which Louis discusses or the micro-gestures of a tiger’s sudden movements or the sounds of bees) and the everyday world (the haunting repetition of a door opening and closing) point to forms of abstract continuity. At the same time, the negative activity within these interludes, the “prickly light” generated by Percival’s absence, or “the airs” in To the Lighthouse seem different than post-impressionist markers of design. They are strange kinds of ontological agitation, like a kind of static within the imperfect nature of reality—and the virtuality of mimesis which attempts to seize it. “Prickly” is a sensory word which makes the light seem less visual; now light is an uncomfortable sensation on the skin. The body, struck by a very strange light, trembles on the verge of something which can’t be seen.

Literary impressionism privileges composite surfaces of language and perception, but these surfaces point infinitely beyond language to indicated structures (like the time of a “frail quivering sound” not fulfilled by eternity’s semantic meanings in Mrs. Dalloway). These structures seek possibilities of meaning that words like “all ages,” “eternity,” or “ten million years” don’t quite adequately seize. Such words do not start with the trembling nature of the impression. The trembling (or prickly) impression testifies to the broader arrival of abstraction, but what is sensed is invisible. This creates unlimited gaps and fractures in the illusory, continuous body of conventional stories. Even though Woolf tells stories in a novel like Mrs. Dalloway, the largest drama is perhaps
within the novel's air-like interstices. This is significant to a radical modernist project seeking to overcome the limitations of the conventionally mimetic, referential, and social surfaces of realist literary representation. In addition, it has profound implications for aesthetic experience in general. Woolf’s novels also imply a readership capable of imagining these unities and abstractions, a readership that transcends certain narrative and linguistic expectations. It is the ongoing event of the object’s ontological emergence which constructs an aesthetic totality. Woolf fashions impersonal 

surfaces of perception which lie beyond and beside the perceptive limitations of the embodied aesthetic subject. Woolf posits a corporeality immediately embedded within the text. Her texts construct impressions as well as a body capable of apprehending them. The Waves gestures outward and invokes the body in relation to impersonal modalities of space, sound, light, gesture, and interruption, and the novel forms of temporal meaning implied by these modalities.
Chapter 3

Beyond Anthropocentric Time: Joyce’s Tragic Philosophy of Sound

This chapter addresses the dialectical relationship between sound and visuality in Joyce’s work. Its point of departure is Joyce’s famous passage at the opening of Chapter 3 (Proteus) of *Ulysses* concerning the “ineluctable modality of the visible” and the “ineluctable modality of the audible.” This passage from Proteus makes explicit reference to George Berkeley and Aristotle, as well as others. I will argue that a truly ineluctable modality is one which the perceiver is constantly coming up against; the modality thus posits a certain opacity which human cognition struggles against. The ineluctable nature of events characterizes a distinct literary genre: tragedy. In Joyce's work visual modalities, for the most part, *do not correspond* to ineluctable modalities. That is to say, the ability of human cognition to grapple with an object is not overwhelmed by most Joycean visible modalities. In contrast, figures of sound demonstrate a closer link to the ineluctable. Thus, Joycean sound also posits a non-anthropocentric, tragic temporality. Later in the chapter, I examine the complexity of the relations between sound and visual phenomena in Joyce’s work.

Linguistic Naturalism and Another Time

Hugh Kenner writes in *A Homemade World* that “‘Joyce began *Ulysses* in naturalism’ (1974, 155) but in *Joyce’s Voices* [he] asserts that ‘with the eleventh episode, called ‘Sirens,’ something changed.’” What is the relationship between Joyce’s naturalism and time? Another pre-Sirens passage from Proteus concerns the sensory experience of sound and time. Joyce writes:

No, they will pass on, passing, chafing against the low rocks, swirling, passing. . . . Listen: a fourworded wavespeech: seesoo, hrss, rsseeiss, ooos. Vehement breath of waters amid seasnakes, rearing horses, rocks. In cups of rocks it slops: flop, slop, slap: bounded in barrels. And, spent, its speech ceases. It flows purling, widely flowing, floating foampool, flower unfurling.

Under the upswelling tide he saw the writhing weeds lift languidly and sway reluctant arms, hising up their petticoats, in whispering water swaying and upturning coy silver fronds. Day by day: night by night: lifted, flooded, and let fall. Lord, they are weary; and, whispered to, they sigh.

How do wave sounds pass in the passage above? They seem to pass repeatedly, even hyperbolically, *but only in phenomenal movement*. But then, later in this description, such movement will become a static lull. Does the non-lexical onomatopoeia (Derek Attridge’s term) of wave sounds (“hrss, rsseeiss”) by virtue of the magnified referentiality of these sounds, create the conditions for a static instant? For Russell, time does not pass within sensory experience, it only passes through abstract continuity. For Russell, the movements of waves would not be forms of real time.

Would Joyce agree that phenomenal waves don’t contain time? Again, Joyce’s naturalism *magnifies sensory phenomena*. By magnifies, I mean that his naturalism enhances the sound without making it ideal. But his sounds then indicate a time on the other side of sound’s naturalist linguistic
surface. This time would function almost like a response to these sorrowful impressions: “Saint Ambrose heard it, sigh of leaves and waves, waiting, awaiting the fullness of their times.” Joyce’s sounds stay put for a plenary narrative which is more real than realism. The temporality of Joycean sound, this chapter argues, presents a tragic philosophy of sensory perception which exceeds anthropocentric epistemologies. This might be called a more naturalistic approach to time. The naturalist linguistic surface transforms nature into precise units (“ooos”).

Tragic temporality is probably inaccessible to characters directly through their experiences. However, this time may have existed in tragedy’s origins; it was possibly indicated through unnamed rhythmic movements. “Tragedy begins with a dance of Anons,” writes F.L. Lucas. He states that in the earliest poetry “the people speak,” while in tragedy, they “dance.”[311] “[W]hatever the origin of the chorus,” Lucas writes, “the individual first made his dramatic appearance in the midst of this anonymous ritual.” The choral sound origins of tragedy are homologous with the multiple, anonymous gestures of dance. What is the relation between a human/anonymous multitude and the way in which tragedy exceeds anthropocentrism? An anonymous literary multiplicity appears in Joyce’s work as early as the summer of 1900. An admirer of Ibsen, the eighteen-year-old embarked on a dramatic play, A Brilliant Career, which he later destroyed. In a letter dated September 15th 1900, his friend William Archer offers a critique: “you . . . crow[d] your stage with such a multitude of figures that Shakespeare himself could scarcely individualize them.”[313] This anonymous multiplicity would appear to replicate a more abstract and impersonal sense of movement within the tragic. In 1903, at the Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève in Paris, Joyce reads Aristotle’s works including The Poetics. He develops an interest in tragedy patent in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man: “the tragic emotion is static,” Stephen states.[315]

Joyce’s tragic philosophy of sound (“the ineluctable modality of the audible”) evolves in relation to visual modalities (“the ineluctable modality of the visible”). In Proteus, he mentions the visible first. Similarly, in The Birth of Tragedy, Nietzsche asks: “what aesthetic effect is created when the inherently separate artistic powers of the Apolline and the Dionysiac become active alongside one another? Or, more briefly, how does music relate to image and concept?”[316] For Joyce, sound constructs a universality which challenges Nietzsche’s epistemological binary of a “gaping gulf” between sound and phenomenal images. In Joyce’s work, sound techniques are homologous with his naturalism’s phenomenal reality. Sound’s tragic philosophy embodies phenomenal multiplicity, not a mythic, phonic apotheosis. That is to say, sound exists in a dialectical relationship with visible things. These techniques are consonant with Lukács’s pre-Marxist essay on tragic form, “The Metaphysics of Tragedy” (1910), a theory of tragic temporality which challenges duration (the sensory passage of time through interpenetrated moments).

I examine time in Joyce by looking at a number of sound techniques in his work: disembodied voices and echoes of the dead, interference, the noise of technology, phonic neologisms, errata, forms of synchronic substitution, the micro-gesture, affinities between perception and language as figures of opacity, the novelistic figure of the narrator of sounds—these figures culminate in this study with the static repetitions of Sirens. Sound’s assured cessation through the passage of time is a perennial literary humanism. In Sirens, sound defies passage, its techniques present anti-teleological approaches to death. That is to say, a phonic atmosphere is created within the text, constructed for the reader’s experience of a more abstract time—Joyce’s characters touch the borders of this time at the outer reaches of sensation.

In this atmosphere of sound, the uncanny laughter of Sirens dismantles an implicit assumption that the story-world’s existence correlates necessarily with an omniscience in which divine figuration watches over tragedy (I also call this anthropomorphic tragic surveillance). Assimilated into the linguistic character of Joyce’s infinitely repeatable phenomenal appearances and buttressed by sound’s multiplicity, the fate of objects is one of freedom from prosaic time. In Ulysses,
“the ineluctable modality” involves fate and necessity, but this problem is articulated in terms of form, in terms of how words contain the natural world, or how linguistic enclosures or borders bind their referents, the enclosures that carry this natural life with its objects across the aesthetic rhythms of fate.\textsuperscript{318} Joyce’s form of what I am calling ‘naturalism,’ and which Banfield has argued has more affinities with the naturalist movement than is usually recognized, is not ‘a mirror held up to nature,’ It is a naturalism that is linguistic, that has deeply to do with language, and in that sense is compulsively imbricated with narrative form.

**The Visible is Multifaceted in Joyce’s Work**

The opening passage of Proteus presents different forms of epistemology where Stephen’s considerations circulate around the differences between visibility and sound, and what kinds of knowledge they can produce. First, a logic of the sign and human cognition encapsulate the visible, statements which seem to necessitate his later inquiry into sound: “[i]neluctable modality of the visible: at least that if no more, thought through my eyes.”\textsuperscript{319} To characterize this epistemology, Stephen pushes the affinity between the mediated cognitive effects of sensory perception and written symbols: “[s]ignatures of all things I am here to read, seaspawn and seawrack, the nearing tide, that rusty boot. Snotgreen, bluesilver, rust: coloured signs.”\textsuperscript{320} An identity is created between cognition, written symbol, and color.\textsuperscript{321}

The above passage from Proteus involves an important reference to Berkeley. Don Gifford summarizes Berkeley’s idea of “colored signs”: “[here] we do not ‘see’ objects as such; rather, we see only colored signs and then take these to be objects.”\textsuperscript{322} Colors are thus absolutely symbolic. For Berkeley in *An Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision* the respective senses create their own different effects. These visual and auditory ideas do not overlap:

Sitting in my study I hear a coach drive along the street; I look through the casement and see it; I walk out and enter it. Thus, common speech would incline one to think I heard, saw, and touched the same thing, to wit, the coach. It is nevertheless certain the ideas intromitted by each sense are widely different, and distinct from each other; but, having been observed constantly to go together, they are spoken of as one and the same thing.\textsuperscript{323}

The word “coach” insists on one object, but for Berkeley’s nominalism, this singular word obfuscates what is actually a scene composed of divergent sensory experiences. Berkeley’s ideas stress airtight sensory mediations. Yet Joyce’s “ineluctable” implies colors outside the mind’s theater and exceeds these idealist meditations.

Aristotle’s philosophy of vision is less averse to the idea of an external object existing in the world. In the same opening passage from Proteus in which Berkeley is mentioned, Stephen then muses in Aristotelian fashion: “[l]imits of the diaphane. But he adds: in bodies. Then he was aware of them bodies before of them coloured. How? By knocking his sconce against them, sure. Go easy. Bald he was and a millionaire, maestro di color che sanno. Limit of the diaphane in. Why in? Diaphane, adiaphane.”\textsuperscript{324} In Aristotle’s *De Sensu et Sensibili*, the “diaphane” or translucence is a bounding “extremity,” it is “a common ‘nature’ and power” within the object which testifies to “something real,” where “colour is just this ‘something’ we are plainly taught by facts—colour being actually either at the external limit, or being itself that limit, in bodies [.].”\textsuperscript{325} Instead of idealist colors, Aristotle brings in the idea of the natural world. Translucence, something neutral and diffuse, is the object’s thin crust of visibility. This discrete spatial parameter is a universal quality of external objects.\textsuperscript{326}
Yet in this same sequence from Proteus, Stephen hastens to perceive the world without these visual transparencies. The ineluctable, given outline of visual reality grows more elusive. In *Ulysses*, the ineluctable (fate) is the condition of possibility for the proliferation of modalities. And they proliferate. Haptic, exteroceptive hand movements seek out firmer, invisible boundaries. He imagines his world without the use of vision: “[i]f you can put your five fingers through it it is a gate, if not a door. Shut your eyes and see.” Visibility is a precursor to the mimesis of a tactile, sensory gesture. This gesture seems less about touching an object than attempting to sense a type of *perceptual boundary*, as that of which Aristotle speaks. Stephen wishes to grasp the outer reaches of sensation. His hand presents a blind movement toward another scene of perceptual experience. He momentarily closes the book upon the visual, *as a character he cannot see* whatever it is that he wishes to invoke (which in this passage also seems to entail a shift to audible things).

In this famous opening passage of Proteus, the epistemological shift from visual things to this suspended hand gesture shouldn’t be overlooked. Visual objects have a considerable history in Joyce’s work, for example, in *A Portrait of the Artist as A Young Man*, in the epiphany, a bounding geometry encircles the object through a highly determined analytic, visual practice. Here “the esthetic image in the dramatic form is life purified in and re-projected from the human imagination.” Stephen’s epiphany is deified and impersonal (“like the God of creation, [the artist] remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails”), yet the image relies on sequential analysis and the cognitive displacement of the object into an aesthetic thing. In *Portrait*, the narrator writes:

—In order to see that basket, said Stephen, your mind first of all separates the basket from the rest of the visible universe which is not the basket. The first phase of apprehension is a bounding line drawn about the object to be apprehended. An esthetic image is presented to us either in space or in time. What is audible is presented in time, what is visible is presented in space. But temporal or spatial, the esthetic image is first luminously apprehended as selfbounded and selfcontained upon the immeasurable background of space or time which is not it. You apprehend it as one thing. You see it as one whole. You apprehend its wholeness. That is *integritas*.

—Bull’s eye! said Lynch, laughing. Go on.

—Then, said Stephen, you pass from point to point, led by its formal lines; you apprehend it as balanced part against part within its limits; you feel the rhythm of its structure. In other words, the synthesis of immediate perception is followed by the analysis of apprehension. Having first felt that it is one thing you feel now that it is a thing. You apprehend it as complex, multiple, divisible, separable, made up of its parts, the result of its parts and their sum, harmonious. That is *consonantia*.

The practice is acute. The eyes contain the object (the verb form “to apprehend” is repeated eight times). The character’s visual analysis transforms the object into an aesthetic thing: “[t]he mystery of esthetic like that of material creation is accomplished.” The artist lays hold of the basket. The young artist *practises* impersonality. The singularity of this image in *Portrait* differs from how the third-person narrator in *Ulysses* registers patterns of multiplicity which engulf the visual field almost despite the presence of characters.

Visual grammars are diverse in *Ulysses*. In the opening of Telemachus, referents take the form of distortion. Stephen arguably can’t contain the images. Visual form takes place. The atmosphere exhibits an overwhelmingness which exceeds Stephen’s perspectival situation. In *Joycean Frames*, Thomas L. Burkdall argues for affinities between Joyce’s images and Eisensteinian montage,
according to a history of the image which includes the eighteenth-century Japanese print maker Sharaku and the Noh drama masks of the 14th and 15th centuries. Burkdall calls attention to Julius Kurth’s study of Sharaku’s visual techniques:

[The] repudiation of normalcy and the subordination of naturalism—meaning realism in literary critical terms—to intellectual considerations and psychic expression, so common in the cinema, is directly linked by Eisenstein to Joyce in a note . . . [Eisenstein writes] “it has been left to James Joyce to develop in literature the depictive line of the Japanese hieroglyph. Every word of Kurth’s analysis of Sharaku may be applied, neatly and easily, to Joyce.”

In Film Form, Eisenstein mentions the “monstrous incongruities” and “the expressiveness of archaic disproportion” in Sharaku’s portraits of Kabuki actors, while asserting that “[a]bsolute realism is by no means the correct form of perception.” Burkdall explains that “[b]y archaic, Eisenstein means both the art of prehistory and the art of children, in which the proportions of images indicate their significance.” Burkdall is conflating realism with naturalism, whereas I think that naturalism is different than realism’s “normalcy”—naturalism can still contain distortions if this distortion is premised on the idea that the nature of reality is irregular.

Sharaku’s exaggerated physiognomies (like elongated, frowning lips) and hand gestures find a counterpart in Buck Mulligan’s fragmentary body in the opening lines of Telemachus (Chapter 1 of Joyce’s Ulysses). After he “frown[s] at the lather on his razorblade,” “a pleasant smile broke quietly over his lips,” “a tolerant smile curled his lips,” “his curling shaven lips laughed,” “[a] flush . . . rose to Buck Mulligan’s cheek.” Early on we see Mulligan “gurgling in his throat and shaking his head,” “the shaking gurgling face . . . equine in its length.” One also notes the “edges of his white glittering teeth,” “his even white teeth glistening here and there with gold points,” as well as his “grey searching eyes,” his “smokeblue mobile eyes,” the “stirring silver points of anxiety in his eyes.” There are his pantomimic hand gestures which “blessed gravely thrice the tower . . .” “made rapid crosses in the air,” “covered the bowl smartly”: here Buck Mulligan “pointed his finger in friendly gest,” “he held his razor neatly and with stroking palps of fingers felt the smooth skin,” “he swept the mirror a half-circle in the air.” This surge of obdurate close-ups distinguishes itself from an analytic, epiphanic visual scenario. The body’s opacity discourages a harmonizing cognitive envelope from forming around the micro-gestures. That is to say, the narrator is offering multiple impressions, multiple appearances. In response, Stephen then “bent forward and peered at the mirror held out to him, cleft by a crooked crack. Hair on end. As he and others see me. Who chose this face for me? This dogsbody to rid of vermin. It asks me too.”

In Telemachus, Stephen questions his own image.

The Abstract Continuity of the Bowl (As a Container)

Visual plasticity, in the form of abstract continuity, overdetermines this scene from Telemachus. The reader sees more than Stephen can see, but this enhanced visibilty also makes the scene less clear for the sake of an alternate and more abstract sense of visibility—largely for the sake of the reader. Phenomenal containers (a shaving bowl and a bowl holding bile) and a bowl-like “ring of bay and skyline” (the landscape itself) structure the novel’s opening parapet vignette. The bowl performs more for the reader than it does for the characters, but I think this is more than a motif. Bowls appear continuously. They signal visual memories. The landscape is like an amphora for Stephen’s past, a macabre, almost postmodern pottery. The painted images are grotesque and overwhelming:
The ring of bay and skyline held a dull green mass of liquid. A bowl of white china had stood beside her deathbed holding the green sluggish bile which she had torn up from her rotting liver by fits of loud groaning vomiting.

Buck Mulligan wiped again his razorblade.

Stephen can’t cognitively enclose the “green mass of liquid” or the “bile” as “coloured signs,” which are only “thought through [his] eyes” (the visual epiphany in Portrait also seems mediated on this cognitive scale). In Telemachus, Mulligan’s “razorblade” reminds us that the bowls are there from line one, one-hundred and seven lines earlier: “[s]tately, plump Buck Mulligan came from the stairhead, bearing a bowl of lather on which a mirror and a razor lay crossed.” In Burkdall’s view, “[t]he ring of bay and skyline” blends with Stephen’s memory of the “bowl of white china.” He states: “Stephen [metaphorically] transmutes the bay into the bedside bowl with its bilious discharge. This change presents an incongruity, one determined by the psyche of the perceiver, as well as monstrous disproportion—the bowl looms as large as the bay.” Burkdall sees the containers as if they existed within Stephen’s represented speech and thought as a continuous psychological duration. Yet these sentences occur in third-person narration—they are merely inflected by Stephen’s visual memories. The bowl technique is not based on psychological metaphors but a modality of repetition which accentuates its own punctuation and grammar. The first sentence (“ring of bay and skyline”) is severed from the second by the period and a different tense, the past-perfect: “[a] bowl of white china had stood,” “bile which she had torn.” In Telemachus, this grammar mediates and separates the images, with little direct relationship between thoughts and signs.

**The Color Green**

Parallel repetitions include variations on the color green. Mulligan calls Stephen’s “snotgreen” handkerchief a symbol for “Irish poets,” and mentions the “snotgreen sea,” which leads to the narrator’s description of the sea as a “dull green mass of liquid” and the past scene of “green sluggish bile.” Containers exist on multiple levels. There are containers like “bowls,” but there are also containers which take the form of colors. The repetition of the color green brackets traumatic content, yet the green modality’s parameters are ambiguous. The general container form, which manifests as things or shapes which contain, is likewise an amorphous, reappearing phenomenal gesture as subtle as a mere color. In this opening vignette from the Telemachus chapter of Ulysses (Chapter 1), the mind is not instrumental to the formal act of containing the world—another textual dimension needs to be posited. The repetition of the container form creates a sense of abstract continuity. These containers accompany scattered referents and they give them order—enclosing the referential world of naturalism within the effect of parallel moments. Burkdall compares Joyce’s visual techniques to those of Eisenstein, who, he states, “regarded montage fundamentally as a collision—with a ‘view that from the collision of two given factors arises a concept.’” But Joyce’s parallel repetitions create effects that are more indecipherable and unsettling than concepts. This effect has to do with the nature of referents in a more neutral state—indeed independent of any mind which apprehends them. The point is to intervene in a naturalistic perspective through techniques which order phenomenal appearances. A form of repetition needs to be introduced which takes place outside the human mind, but also, beyond anthropocentric narrative perspectives.
In Joyce’s Proteus, Audible Sensations Appear More Neutral

In the Joycean visual scenario referred to above, this surge of images in Telemachus brings to mind, not the visual, but “the ineluctable modality of the audible.” In Proteus, literary writing assimilates into its form external sound repetitions more extensively. Through sound, novelistic form occupies on an epistemological scale another genre than the cognitive. The relation between the perceiving body and the audible is mediated by the material of an external world and a unique understanding of sequence. This mode of sensory experience takes place at the outer reaches of sensation and Joyce creates a characterological mimesis of this. I now wish to return again to the opening passage of Proteus:

Stephen closed his eyes to hear his boots crush crackling wrack and shells. You are walking through it howsoever. I am, a stride at a time. A very short space of time through very short times of space. Five, six: the Nacheinander. Exactly: and that is the ineluctable modality of the audible. Open your eyes. No. Jesus! If I fell over a cliff that beetles o’er his base, fell through the Nebeneinander ineluctably! I am getting on nicely in the dark. My ash sword hangs at my side. Tap with it: they do. My two feet in his boots are at the ends of his legs, nebeneinander. Sounds solid: made by the mallet of Los demiurgos. Am I walking into eternity along Sandymount strand? Crush, crack, crick, crick. Wild sea money. Dominie Deasy kens them a’.

Won’t you come to Sandymount’
Madeline the mare?

Rhythm begins, you see. I hear. Acatalectic tetrameter of iambics marching. No, agallop: deline the mare.

Open your eyes now. I will. One moment. Has all vanished since? If I open and am for ever in the black adiaphane. Basta! I will see if I can see.

See now. There all the time without you: and ever shall be, world without end.342

Stephen relinquishes the more cognitive and perceptual epistemology of the visible expressed earlier in Proteus to more numerical and rhythmic frequencies. His existential state is suddenly dependent on the processes of movement and embodiment that he associates with sound. The audible reconfigures his relationship to the visible. He renounces eyesight and this opens him up to eternity. For example, “[c]rush” moves to “crackling”: suddenly we have a participle in process. This subverts the instrumentality of the sentence, it problematizes the relationship between subject and object. This sound is located in a more neutral position. The line “[a]catalectic tetrameter of iambics marching” might then be read as a process of assimilating into an auditory rhythm the conventions of writing.

In Portrait, during childhood Stephen forms different attachments to the rhythm of sound’s disappearance and emergence:

He leaned his elbows on the table and shut and opened the flaps of his ears. Then he heard the noise of the refectory every time he opened the flaps of his ears. It made a roar like a train at night. And when he closed the flaps the roar was shut off like a train going into a tunnel. That night at Dalkey the train had roared like that and then, when it went into the tunnel, the roar stopped. He closed his eyes and the train went on, roaring and then stopping; roaring again, stopping. It was nice to hear it roar and stop and then roar out of the tunnel again and then stop.343
The deliberate distortion of sound modifies the everyday clamor at Clongowes. A phonic image (the train) emerges in the repetition of micro-gestures which produce expirations. The aleatory temporality of this daydream exhibits discrete, parallel moments. Elsewhere Stephen responds to sound with fascination and repulsion. Rudimentary aesthetic judgments proliferate in contexts where words correspond to sound and other sensations:

Suck was a queer word. . . . But the sound was ugly. Once he had washed his hands in the lavatory of the Wicklow Hotel and his father pulled the stopper up by the chain after and the dirty water went down through the hole in the basin. And when it had all gone down slowly the hole in the basin had made a sound like that: suck. Only louder.

To remember that and the white look of the lavatory made him feel cold and then hot. There were two cocks that you turned and water came out: cold and hot. He felt cold and then a little hot: and he could see the names printed on the cocks. That was a very queer thing.

And the air in the corridor chilled him too. It was queer and wetish. But soon the gas would be lit and in burning it made a light noise like a little song. Always the same: and when the fellows stopped talking in the playroom you could hear it.344

When substances or sensations disappear they stand out in memory. The moments of loss are identical (“always the same”). The generality of this temporality intimates infinity. Loss becomes a predictable rhythm, a disappearance which is sought and which creates, by a kind of artifice of remembrance, the substance of this life lived. The moments do not represent either single or singular points in time.

*Lukács’s Early Tragic Moments are Anti-Realist*

In his essay “The Metaphysics of Tragedy” (1910), Lukács discusses a theory of emergent temporality which is consonant with the philosophical trajectory of sound experiences in Joyce’s work. His pre-Marxist essay addresses fate, form, temporality, and ontology—more so than genre criticism. Tragic form is a form of “[r]eal life” which is “always unreal, always impossible, in the midst of empirical life.” In Lukács’s aesthetic philosophy, which resembles that of Virginia Woolf, tragic form is a moment. He writes: “[s]uddenly there is a gleam, a lightning that illumines the banal paths of empirical life: something disturbing and seductive, dangerous and surprising; the accident, the great moment, the miracle; an enrichment and a confusion.” There is an overwhelming aspect to this fateful moment which must be kept at bay. “[N]o one would be able to bear it,” Lukács writes, “no one could live at such heights—at the height of their own life and their own ultimate possibilities.”345 Non-chronological pieces of time constitute these experiences: “every moment is a symbol, a reduced-scale image of the whole, distinguishable from it only by its size. To fit these moments together must therefore be a matter of fitting them into one another, not after one another.”346 Joycean sound’s static, discrete repetitions are an apt sensible model for this. And in general, an echo in the ear arguably contains the next one, but is not an extension of it. The moments are parallel. Lukács distances such moments from Bergson’s duration. The flashes are both generative and destructive:

Such a moment is a beginning and an end. Nothing can succeed it or follow upon it. . . . This is the metaphysical reason for the concentration of drama in time, of the condition of unity of time. It is born of the desire to come as close as possible
to the timelessness of this moment which yet is the whole of life. (Unity of place is
the natural symbol of such sudden standing still in the midst of the continual change
of ordinary life, and is therefore a technically necessary condition of dramatic form-
giving.) Tragedy is only a moment: that is the meaning of the unity of time; and the
technical paradox contained in trying to give temporal duration to a moment which,
by its very nature, is without such duration, springs from the inadequacy of
expressing a mystical experience in terms of human language. “How can one give
form to what is without image, or prove what is without evidence?” asks Suso.
Tragic drama has to express the becoming-timeless of time. . . . In terms of time,
such drama is completely and rigidly static. Its moments exist in parallel rather than
in series; it no longer lies within the plane of temporal experience.347

Here “human language” is “inadequate” to describe the timelessness of parallelism. In duration,
moments interpenetrate continuously. In duration,
moments interpenetrate continuously. The rejection of duration goes hand in hand with a rejection of realism, thus issues of
time are woven in closely with issues of formal representation. Lukács’s stance hinges not on
formalism however, but on a different understanding of life itself: “nothing can connect [the
moment] with ordinary life. It is a moment; it does not signify life, it is life—a different life opposed
to and exclusive of ordinary life.”348 Form must actually be closer to life, but not the life which
realism shows. When Lukács states “[t]he reality of such a world can have nothing in common
with that of temporal existence,” chronological time is eschewed because it does not match the
notion of life which he seeks to develop. In an even more explicit attack on realism, he states
“[r]ealism is bound to destroy all the form-creating and life-maintaining values of tragic drama.”
Realist forms of mimesis aim to resemble life as it is, but tragic form is “bound to become trivial if
its lifelikeness conceals that which is dramatically real. And lifelikeness fitted into a genuinely dramatic
structure becomes superfluous and is ignored by the senses. The inner style of drama is realistic
within the medieval, scholastic meaning of the word, but this excludes all modern realism.”349

Characters reside, not within a historical conception of reality, but continuously within a
sensible envelope of fate. This robs death of its teleological horizon, but also the authority of its
metaphysical finality. The concept of death alone doesn’t suffice here; a new idea is needed. The
temporal modality of this concept truly departs from a single end-point: “[e]veryone at such a
moment is newly born, yet has been dead for a long time; and everyone’s life stands before the Last
Judgment. . . . [t]he dying heroes of tragedy—as a young dramatist once put it—are dead a long time
before they actually die.”350 Mortality creates edges around the characters of modern realism. The
“cornerstones” of life contain these characters—death is banished to the outside.351 Yet for Lukács,
death is not a boundary. Instead it suffuses the life of the character: “[b]ut for tragedy, death—the
frontier as such—is an always immanent reality, inseparably connected with every tragic event.” In
this concept, death only multiplies in time: “the psychology of tragedy is a science of death-
moments.” Death grows synonymous with a vitality that generates aesthetic form: “death is also—in
a purely positive and life-affirming sense—the immanent reality of tragedy,” a reality which is also an
enhanced mode of being (“for this new way of being is being”).352 Lukács’s task isn’t to demonstrate
how the sensible ontology of a literary work manifests his concept of death. Instead, he affirms that
this tragic form is grounded in new perceptive experiences: “[m]any things disappear which before
appeared to be the very cornerstones of life, while small, barely perceptible things become the new
supports of life.” By life, Lukács means an emergent moment. He describes a person that “can no
longer walk along the paths where he used to walk, nor can his eyes find any direction in them,” but
through a sort of perception of necessity, out of this blindness to what had been the everyday, a
more acute sense of passage arises which allows him to “strid[e] confidently over bottomless
marshes.” He calls this “b[е]ing-necessary” where “the memory retains only this one necessary thing and simply forgets the rest.” The concept also involves a type of felt “judgment,” indeed “a cruelly harsh one, without mercy or reprieve,” but this is not the judgment of one’s own person. In a sense, Lukács’s concept of death is closer to a form of impersonality, here “[t]he final tension of selfhood overleaps everything that is merely individual.”

**Sound and Death, The Sounds of Technology**

In Joyce’s “The Dead,” sound’s fateful accents emerge gradually from “distant music.” At Miss Morkan’s annual dance, characters first anticipate the sounds of arriving guests and “listen” outside the drawing-room door until the waltz . . . finish[es], listening to the skirts that swept against it and to the shuffling of feet. The listening is intentional. Guests extol mellifluous singing voices. Gabriel listens for signals of social hierarchy: “[t]he indelicate clacking of the men’s heels and the shuffling of their soles reminded him that their grade of culture differed from his.” Sound’s realism is a limited epistemology. An effort to decode social meaning just scratches one audible surface. Unsettling forces beyond the immediate perception of meaning later penetrate audible life. “The Dead” is an elegy. Bartell D’Arcy sings the last song of the night, “The Lass of Aughrim.” As Gretta Conroy listens, Gabriel misrecognizes his wife’s response. He aestheticizes her image: “[h]e asked himself what is a woman standing on the stairs in the shadow, listening to distant music, a symbol of . . . [he] saw that there was colour on her cheeks and that her eyes were shining. A sudden tide of joy went leaping out of his heart.” But Gretta’s complexion registers trauma: Bartell D’Arcy’s hoarsely sung lyrics are the ones sung by her first love, Michael Furey. Gretta recounts Furey’s untimely death at the hotel and dampens Gabriel’s histrionic desire. He loses his bearings: “[h]is own identity was fading out into a grey impalpable world: the solid world itself which these dead had one time reared and lived in was dissolving and dwindling.”

Yes, the newspapers were right: snow was general all over Ireland. It was falling on every part of the dark central plain, on the treeless hills, falling softly upon the Bog of Allen and, farther westward, softly falling into the dark mutinous Shannon waves. It was falling, too, upon every part of the lonely churchyard on the hill where Michael Furey lay buried. It lay thickly drifted on the crooked crosses and headstones, on the spears of the little gate, on the barren thorns. His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead.
Besides how could you remember everybody? Eyes, walk, voice. Well, the voice, yes: gramophone. Have a gramophone in every grave or keep it in the house. After dinner on a Sunday. Put on poor old great-grandfather. Krahraark! Hellohellohello amawfullyglad kraark awfullygladaseagain hellohello amawf krpthsth. Remind you of the voice like the photograph reminds you of the face. Otherwise you couldn’t remember the face after fifteen years, say. For instance who? For instance some fellow that died when I was in Wisdom Hely's.

Rtsstr! A rattle of pebbles. Wait. Stop!

He looked down intently into a stone crypt. Some animal. Wait. There he goes. An obese grey rat toddled along the side of the crypt, moving the pebbles. 363

Crackling static ("Krahraark!") crosses the threshold of Bloom’s imagination when he hears it re-echo ("Rtsstr!") before he sees the rodent waddle. This lends the gramophone verisimilitude. Reproduction involves decay. The sound of static proliferates around the voice of the dead. Vinyl’s imperfect, contingent depth of sound overshadows realism, its material conditions ("krpthsth") supersedes the voice and diminishes its singularity. As a type of interference, static registers an atmospheric-like puff in the voice, a staccato version of the sound interference that steamrolls through Molly Bloom’s thoughts in Penelope, this travelling sound of singing which seems to place special emphasis on the word “dead”: “Frseeeeeeeeeeeeeeeefrong that train again weeping tone once in the dear deaead days.” 364

Discussing Joyce’s Finnegan’s Wake, Maud Ellmann tells us:

Joyce . . . fractures speech from speaker, song from singer, by drawing our attention to the noises in the voice, the parasitic interference in the utterance. As we have seen, the voice that erupts out of the body cannot be identified with any of its organs—tongue, teeth, mouth, lungs, vocal cords—although these organs taint the voice with burps and slurs and other viscous intimations of mortality. Nor can the body protect the voice from the incursions of ventriloquism, or from the strays and atmospheres of the modern soundscape. In the schizophonic racket of the Wake, the voice functions as a radio-receiver, transmitting ticks from all the imagined corners of the globe. 365

The form, integrity, and fate of the human voice are at stake: the voice is “ventriloqui[zed]” by frequencies outside of its power. Not grounded in a body, non-agential, the voice transmits “strays,” it joins with a hazardous global skein—a larger, emergent sound structure. There are ontological implications. Bloom’s gramophone seance extends the phonic intrusion (“Krahraark!”) beyond death; sound haunts the record’s botched realism, the imperfections and interferences of representation and technology create zombie-like tics of noise, multiple acoustical wavelengths: things in the air. Static extends the voice ("hellohello amawf krpthsth"); it strikes the reader with uncanny liveliness, an unsettled mortality or crushed effervescence. The non-semantic technological extensions of mortal voices don’t threaten life with its own materiality—static speaks anonymously beyond the lifespan. With sound, the novel clarifies something which anthropocentric epistemology is perhaps unable to.

Sound accentuates the opacity of objects and signals a depth within them. Aeolus introduces a sound: “[g]rossbooted draymen rolled barrels dullthudding out of Prince’s stores and bumped them up on the brewery float. On the brewery float bumped dullthudding barrels rolled by grossbooted draymen out of Prince’s stores . . . Dullthudding Guinness’s barrels.” 366 Amanda Sigler informs us that when Aeolus first appeared in the Little Review the sentence, “[g]rossbooted draymen . . . [i]” headlined the chapter but was later moved. 367 In the context of Finnegan’s Wake,
John Bishop performs an etymological reading which informs us that in Joyce's linguistic world a container form like the “barrel” is unique and encompasses more than one might think:

The notoriously strange “barrel” in which Shaun appears (“I am as plain as portable enveloped” “care of one of Mooseyeare Goonness’s registered andouterthus barrels” [414.10-12]) is therefore simply a cipher for the imperceived and “unknown body” of HCE (96.29), within which the “fumiform[ed]” Shaun and all kinds of letters are in fact “enveloped”: etymologically, the English word “body” derives from the Old English bodig (“a cask” or barrel) and is cognate with the Middle Low German boddig (“a tub for brewing”) because then as now the body was perceived as a container of better things (“spirits”). While Shaun's barrel seems to be one of “Msr. Guinness’s,” then, the spelling “Moosyeare Goonness’s” also suggests that beneath all appearances, Shaun is simply a diffuse aggregate of “spirits,” a being with all the palpability of a fairy tale figure (hence “Mother Goose”), who appears inside of HCE. 368

With this reading in mind, the echo of barrels in Ulysses after the funeral in Hades suggests an etymologically encrypted commerce of phantoms outside the gates of Dublin’s Glasnevin Cemetery. If sound registers an aesthetic metaphysics of perception with these “dullthudding” neologisms, then a vibratory, ineluctable sound atmosphere envelops Bloom as he heads for the printing press. The “dullthudding” is oddly echoed in Aeolus by the printing machines. Here Bloom mentions Patty Dignam’s service explicitly: “Hynes here too: account of the funeral probably. Thumping. Thump.” After the headline (“WITH UNFEIGNED REGRET IT IS WE ANNOUNCE THE DISSOLUTION OF A MOST RESPECTED DUBLIN BURGESS”), Bloom likens the action of the printing keys to decomposition: “[t]his morning the remains of the late Mr. Patrick Dignam. Machines. Smash a man to atoms if they got him caught. Rule the world today. His machineries are pegging away too. Like these, got out of hand: fermenting. Working away, tearing away. And that old grey rat tearing to get in.” The lacerating keys make Bloom think about the body’s involuntary dissolution in the coffin. The objects almost interweave through sound’s constellation of dissolution: the coffin-esque “dullthudding” barrels contain fermenting liquid, the keys thump away—the body dissolves. Objects and sounds perform a secret danse macabre in the worlds of absence that echo within Joyce’s words. Sound, death, diction, corporeality, and containers (both as barrels and words) fashion an immanent logic. Sound patterns testify to a metaphysics of perception where literary language represents the intersection between human life and that which lies beyond it. The death principle is sensible.

Technology (and its errata) manifest tragic rhythms. “No writer was ever so observant” Hugh Kenner writes in The Mechanic Muse, “of the way our lives have come to be governed by marks on paper.” The marks can be intended errata, and the second-degree errata of Joyce’s editors correcting his intentional misspellings. Kenner cites Hans Walter Gabler’s 1984 edition of Ulysses: “[o]f Gabler’s 5,000 odd corrections, the vast majority entail, as here, a single character only. It is difficult to dismiss any as unimportant, so closely is Joyce’s work bound to print-shop technology.” Kenner notes that “[e]lsewhere [16.1260] Bloom’s name appears in a newspaper list of those present at a funeral, but misprinted: ‘L. Boom’ . . . Boom means that an imaginary typesetter was dozing.” “Boom” also reduces Bloom to a sound which registers an error. Kenner writes that the high modernists (specifically, Eliot, Joyce, Pound, and Beckett) desired “to sketch what they drew from the world around them.” This world’s “most salient feature” was an “intelligence questing after what can be achieved by a patterned moving of elements in space: the mats of linotype, the words of a poem.” 371
Yet in Aeolus, Bloom is more interested in how the machines are at odds with their own instrumentality. A single oversight by the linotype operator threatens to unleash ineluctable repetitions: “[t]he machines clanked in three four time. Thump, thump, thump. Now if he got paralysed there and no one knew how to stop them they’d clank on and on the same, print it over and over and up and back. Monkeydoodle the whole thing. Want a cool head.” Instruments easily exceed human intentions. Technology and print media’s modalities of excess appear also in the sub-forms of speech and the details of writing. Expressive noise animates objects: “[s]llt. The nethermost deck of the first machine jogged forward its flyboard with sllt the first batch of quirefolded papers. Sllt. Almost human the way it sllt to call attention. Doing its level best to speak. That door too sllt creaking, asking to be shut.” The noises are non-semantic. They form a contingent, universal modality: “[e]verything speaks in its own way. Sllt.” Objects emit sounds like laments: “[t]he door of Ruttledge’s office whispered: ee: cree. They always build one door opposite another for the wind to. Way in. Way out.” Assimilated into the materiality of writing, Bloom invokes the double “e” figure in Sirens when signing the letter to his mistress. The figure cross-references languages: “[r]emember write Greek ees. . . . No, change that ee.” He invokes the “εε”s of the Greek alphabet but this is invisible to the reader. The ee figures cannot be fully exhausted by the senses, they vanish and reappear within alphabetical intricacies.

Sirens then severs sound from anthropocentric structures which privilege the passage of time. Sound’s source is more ambiguous than the human or narrative point-of-view of it. This presents a literary philosophical leap. In Aeolus, for example, a befuddled foreman calls out, “[w]here’s what’s his name?” He seeks a coworker, Monks, regarding the “archbishop’s letter” omitted from a “galleypage.” The cacophony of technology’s speechless mechanisms immobilizes him, but this immobilization still matters to the narrator. The foreman “look[s] about him,” the narrator states, “round his loud unanswering machines.” The noise doesn’t dismantle the conditions for his subjective point-of-view, in fact the noise’s placement underlines dehumanization, while the machines which generate the noise are something that the flip of a switch might turn off. Silence is the reassurance which noise offers to those who contemplate its unsettling presence. Despite the moment’s standstill in Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway, the beggar woman’s ballad song appears capable of an intermission. As we argued, theoretical traditions prior to modernism place value on the idea that sounds pass in time. Augustine writes of a voice, “it sounds. It continues to sound, and then ceases.”

Likewise, in Sirens, Bloom muses wistfully about how the passage of sound in duration has a strong effect upon human emotions:

Numbers it is. All music when you come to think. Two multiplied by two divided by half is twice one. Vibrations: chords those are. One plus two plus six is seven. Do anything you like with figures juggling. Always find out this equal to that. Symmetry under a cemetery wall. He doesn’t see my mourning. Callous: all for his own gut. Musemathematics. And you think you’re listening to the ethereal. But suppose you said it like: Martha, seven times nine minus x is thirtyfive thousand. Fall quite flat. It’s on account of the sounds it is. . . . Time makes the tune. Question of mood you’re in. . . . Playing it slow, a girl, night I came home, the girl.
For Bloom, symbols only intersect with human feeling within duration ("[t]ime makes the tune," "playing it slow") where they create emotional shifts. Thus, "[t]he difference between a song's mathematical representation," the Joyce critic David Sherman writes, "and its rendition in sound over time is like the difference between a polite conversation with Martha and one with an erotic charge." For Sherman, duration's drama of an eroticized time passing derives much of its emotional effect through analogy to teleological narratives of the human lifespan: "[j]ust as the difference between a song and its math involve the vitality of pleasure and desire," Sherman writes, "so the difference between a corpse reduced to an indifferent repetition and one accompanied through its plot involves the vitality, if not of pleasure, then of the recognition of life's singular value and meaning."380 For Sherman, the tune's affective duration draws additional meaning from the endpoint of human death. He draws from Peter Brooks, who writes: "[p]lot is the internal logic of the discourse of mortality."381 This is how Brooks interprets Walter Benjamin's line from the essay "The Storyteller": "[d]eath is the sanction of everything that the storyteller can tell. He has borrowed his authority from death."382

However, Benjamin's statement applies to "storytelling" specifically, a form that he links to oral tradition and human presence: "[e]xperience which is passed from mouth to mouth is the source from which all storytellers have drawn." Storytelling involves "[a]n orientation toward practical interests. . . . [i]t contains, openly or covertly something useful. . . . the storyteller is a man who has counsel for his readers." The story is instrumental and offers guidance: "[c]ounsel woven into the fabric of real life is wisdom."383 For a reader of Joyce like Sherman to rely on this linguistic usefulness equates with reliance upon the myth of human presence in the novel, it is to ascribe to novelistic form the durational presence of a human other (a counselor) who is in fact not there, at least in Benjamin's view. This is because the novel form does not derive from human presence, "its essential dependence," Benjamin writes, is "on the book," or infinitely reproducible materiality. For Benjamin, the "isolated" novelist marks "the decline of storytelling." Since it has little practical use, the scope of the novel widens to include the depth, complexity, and vibrancy of human experience. In contrast to the storyteller's transparent representation of human interests, "[t]o write a novel," Benjamin writes, "means to carry the incommensurable to the extremes in the representation . . . of life's fullness." Here the novel "gives evidence of the profound perplexity of the living." This is also a product of how the "secular productive forces of history," Benjamin states, have "quite gradually removed narrative from the realm of living speech," part of which stems from "[t]he dissemination of the novel . . . with the invention of printing."384 For Benjamin, technological reproduction thus places the vastness of the novel form in an antithetical relationship to anthropocentric time.

In the passage cited above, before Bloom theorizes about musical duration's effect upon human emotion, he actually finds that the bare, symbolic elements of music ("numbers," "figures juggling") are static and don't stir emotions. Sound symbols participate in a formal aesthetics of adequation ("this equal to that") analogous to language. Bloom considers the phrase "[s]ymmetry under a cemetery wall," a reference to "Martin Cunningham'[s]' . . . spelling bee conundrum" in Aeolus, where "[c]emetery [is] put in of course on account of the symmetry," on account of the small orthographical substitutions between the two words in a synchronic system.385 Bloom likens music's unfelt synchronic structures to the static conventions of written symbols, a recognition of mediation closer to how a less human music is set in play in Sirens more generally.

The chapter opens with the sound of the viceregal cavalcade. In the previous chapter (Wandering Rocks), this is a visual spectacle: "Dilly Dedalus . . . saw sunshades spanned and wheelspokes spinning in the glare."386 The opening sequence of Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway mirrors Joyce's spectacle with the regal motor car: "[e]verything had come to a standstill. The throb of the motor engines sounded like a pulse irregularly drumming through an entire body." At other moments it "[p]ass[es] invisibly, inaudibly, like a cloud, swift, veil-like upon hills." On Bond Street it
causes interruptions: “oh! a pistol shot in the street outside!” Yet in Sirens, the sound coagulates. At line sixty-four: “[b]ronze by gold, miss Douce’s head by miss Kennedy’s head, over the crossblind of the Ormond bar heard the viceregal hoofs go by, ringing steel.” A range of words for metals appear, both visual and phonic. The hair colors (“bronze” and “gold”) are metonyms for Douce and Kennedy, respectively. This metallic visual atmosphere registers the sound of another metal, steel. Sixty-seven lines after the sound begins, it ceases to pass: “[y]es, bronze from anear, by gold from afar, heard steel from anear, hoofs ring from afar,” the sound of steel has phonic permanence. Heavy, explicit substitutions and combinations of parts of speech within the neologisms assimilate this phonic permanence into writing: the barmaids now “he[a][r] steelhoofs ringhoof ringsteel.” These neologistic words dismantle the syntactic duration of the previous iteration: “heard steel . . . hoofs ring.” Again, the humanist epistemology of listening found in narrative arguably depends upon a sound that is capable of passing in time: the human subject’s mind is at the center, while sense-data is transitory. Joyce’s linguistic sound experiment challenges this epistemological construct. Here literary sound is syntactically disruptive, constant, and synchronic—an experiment which is not realistic. There is also a widespread consonance between things visual and things heard, as if things are encrypted as composite phenomena in the neologisms (“ringhoof ringsteel”) before they appear, as if fixed in advance within the discrete, infinite universe of Joyce’s literary sound. While the neologistic sounds are indistinguishable from writing, Joyce also maintains a compulsive attachment to the phenomenal idea—the compounding of the viceregal cavalcade’s equine hooves are a prominent example of this.

_Schopenhauer and Nietzsche_

The strange homology between sound, language, and phenomenal form in Sirens differs from Schopenhauer’s thoughts on music from _The World as Will and Representation_ as well as Nietzsche’s use of these ideas in his early work _The Birth of Tragedy_. For Nietzsche, tragic form creates a tension between a visual paradigm (the plastic arts, the art of dream and appearances, or the Apollonian) and a phonic one (Dionysian music, the chorus). Music actualizes universality through a “thorough and unmistakable distinctness,” Schopenhauer writes, similar to “geometrical figures and numbers, which are the universal forms of all possible objects of experience . . . [they] are not abstract but perceptible and thoroughly definite.” This challenges Bloom’s idea that music’s numerical aspect lacks perceptual vitality. Nietzsche quotes Schopenhauer’s work extensively in _The Birth of Tragedy_. Schopenhauer writes that music is “in the highest degree a universal language.” Nietzsche clarifies that for Schopenhauer, music is “a direct copy of the will itself.” Schopenhauer’s anthropomorphic “will” is not what Joyce seeks in the impersonal sounds of Sirens, but both ascribe to music universal qualities by way of a relation between sound and visual form. However, these composites between sound and visual matter in Sirens stray from formal musical purity, stressing the heterogeneity of phonic gestures: “[s]ea, wind, leaves, thunder, waters, cows lowing, the cattlemarket, cocks, hens don’t crow, snakes hissss. There’s music everywhere. Ruttledge’s door: ee creaking. No, that’s noise. Minuet of _Don Giovanni_ he’s playing now.” The accent falls on the discreteness of phenomenal activity. Joyce’s near conflation of “music” and “noise” dismantles a phonic aesthetic hierarchy. Non-semantic words from outside the dictionary are similarly not excluded from the literary work (again, Attridge calls this non-lexical onomatopoeia).

For Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, music expresses a form of universality. Their ideas are relevant to the current discussion of Joyce in that visual phenomena in reality seem unable, in the respective views of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, to disclose what is closest to the essential nature of things in the world. In particular, visual phenomenal things lack the distinct formal qualities
which music has. The tragic turn to music gives form to what is absent, offering a gloss on the true nature of the thing:

All possible efforts, stirrings, and manifestations of the will, all the events that occur within man himself and are included by the reasoning faculty in the wide, negative concept of feeling, can be expressed by the infinite number of possible melodies, but always in the universality of mere form without the material, always only according to the in-itself, not to the phenomenon, as it were the innermost soul of the phenomenon without the body. This close relation that music has to the true nature of all things can also explain the fact that, when music suitable to any scene, action, event, or environment is played, it seems to disclose to us its most secret meaning, and appears to be the most accurate and distinct commentary on it.393

For Schopenhauer, sound’s form reveals that which is beyond the corporeality of phenomenal form. Music’s universality before the fact (“universalia ante rem”) is a condition of possibility for bodily appearances. This universality is a purely phonic, purely formal dimension more profound than “the material” of “the [embodied] phenomenon.” His “mere form” of sound presents “the phenomenon without the body.” Although he eschews corporeality, Schopenhauer still underlines the sensible quality of music. The sounds are opposed to “concepts” which “contain only the forms, first of all abstracted from perception, so to speak the stripped-off outer shell of things; hence they are quite properly abstracta. Music, on the other hand, gives the innermost kernel preceding all form, or the heart of things.” This essence is not an idea in the mind but the sudden, immanent, perceptive form of music itself: “[the composer’s] immediate knowledge of the inner nature of the world,” is “unknown to his faculty of reason,” and arises without “conscious intention.”394 Music is an external, involuntary revelation of non-phenomenological truth. The “most secret meaning” which music reveals about any “scene, action, [or] event” is distinct from mimesis (“it cannot be an imitation”). An image, notably for Schopenhauer, still projects a formal universality through participation in music’s moment of insight: “[s]uch individual pictures of human life, set to the universal language of music, are never bound to it or correspond to it with absolute necessity, but stand to it only in the relation of an example, chosen at random, to a universal concept. They express in the distinctness of reality what music asserts in the universality of mere form.”395 In the moment of musical clarity, the image’s form still glimmers with a universality that does not seem entirely limited to the musical sounds which condition this moment.

In a moment, I will be comparing music’s universality to that of language in the context of Joyce’s imitation of sound. Before I do so, it is worth taking a moment to elucidate Nietzsche’s perspective on the relation between visuality and music because of its contrast to Joyce’s vision of that relation. Nietzsche suggests an epistemological binary or “gaping gulph BETWEEN the visual and music.”396 He calls for a more violent interpretation of the image. Music transports it to a separate, higher hermeneutic sphere. Sound ushers in a new epistemology:

[I]mage and concept acquire a heightened significance under the influence of the kind of music which truly corresponds to them. Thus the art of Dionysos customarily exerts two kinds of influence on the Apolline capacity for art; music stimulates us to contemplate symbolically Dionysiac universality, and it causes the symbolic image to emerge with the highest degree of significance. From these facts, which are inherently intelligible and not inaccessible to deeper examination, I conclude that music is able to give birth to myth, i.e. to the most significant example,
and in particular to tragic myth, myth which speaks of Dionysiac knowledge in symbols.397

The visual’s “spell of individuation” is broken by the “mystical jubilant shout of Dionysos.” The image is now a unit within an expository mythic narrative. No longer individuated, the image is “significant,” “universal,” a form of “knowledge in symbols.” With sound, “the path to the Mothers of Being . . . is laid open,” Nietzsche writes. Music thus leads to a more profound ontology. 398 This is the highly symbolic ontology of myth. Sound thus makes the image available to another narrative, it is no longer a discrete phenomena but a symbol which can participate more elaborately in human discourse.

Joycean Sound Creates A Dialectic with Phenomenal Appearances and A Static Temporality

Unlike Nietzsche, in Sirens, Joycean sound doesn’t symbolically obliterate the discrete image; his noisy objects don’t transcend their phenomenal appearances, nor do they discard the body of the phenomenon as in Schopenhauer. Joyce accentuates the depth of fiction’s phenomenal illusion. Corporeal illusion is a point of departure for sound:

Ah, now he heard, she holding it to his ear. Hear! He heard. Wonderful. She held it to her own. And through the sifted light pale gold in contrast glided. To hear.

Tap.

Bloom through the bardoor saw a shell held at their ears. He heard more faintly that that they heard, each for herself alone, then each for other, hearing the plash of waves, loudly, a silent roar.

Bronze by a weary gold, anear, afar, they listened.

Her ear too is a shell, the peeping lobe there. Been to the seaside. Lovely seaside girls. . . . Fever near her mouth. Your head it simply. Hair braided over: shell with seaweed. Why do they hide their ears with seaweed hair? . . .

The sea they think they hear. Singing. A roar. The blood it is. Souse in the ear sometimes. Well, it’s a sea. Corpuscle islands. . . .

—What are the wild waves saying?399

The chapter, Sirens, is not unlike this seashell. The shell, a resonant cavity, filters and accentuates the distortion of mediums: sound, air, and plasma. The novelist embraces the ear, a phenomenal form—it anchors the sound illusion of a “roar[ing]” sea. The sea’s unintelligible, ongoing speech is a hyperbolic fantasy.

In the exaggerated materiality of this chapter, tragic music changes. Instead of Schopenhauer’s “pictures set to music,” Joyce musicalizes the visual, the phenomenal, and the corporeal through repetition. Gestures of vision fashion rhythms: “Look: look, look, look, look, look: you look at us.”400 Obdurate to the ideologies of temporal flow, this staunch visibility begins a mobile freeze: “[s]he [miss Kennedy] poured in a teacup tea, then back in the teapot tea. . . . waiting on footstools, crates upturned, waiting for their teas to draw. They pawed their blouses, both of black satin, two and nine a yard, waiting for their teas to draw, and two and seven.”401 Actions resound with variations:
Miss Kennedy sauntered sadly from bright light, twining a loose hair behind an ear. Sauntering sadly, gold no more, she twisted twined a hair. Sadly she twined in sauntering gold hair behind a curving ear.\textsuperscript{402}

Micro-gestures shift positions, but they are not vulnerable to change. This creates the “immobilization of all movement,” André Topia, states, and “the transformation of all the dynamic pulse of the sentence into a static, emblematic tableau.”\textsuperscript{403} Deliberate alterations of verb forms forestall progression and diminish the notion of a primary plot. Topia writes:

A subtle counterpoint seems to take place between the main action and the accompanying action, which becomes interchangeable and whose hierarchy is neutralized. First we find ‘sauntered . . . twining,’ then ‘sauntering . . . she . . . twined,’ then ‘she twined in sauntering.’ The finite form becomes present participle and the present participle becomes finite form. The chronological relationship supposedly linking the two actions is disrupted and becomes totally ambiguous. What was originally a punctual action suddenly freezes, seems to be unable to come to an end, and lingers indefinitely.\textsuperscript{404}

The micro-gesture abides, the hair is reshuffled as a different kind of object, one of perceptive ontology. In this static infinity, the strand of hair must be perceived outside of anthropocentric time.

The static temporality of Sirens has distinct characteristics. Repeated gestures tarry in linguistic envelopes which repel change. A gesture is a movement which highlights the non-instrumental autonomy of an action. These gestures tessellate. Topia states:

We find further evidence of this blurring process with the various places of the word “sadly,” first in fourth position, then in second position, then in first position. The linguistic chain becomes totally fluid. The words are used like counters whose spatial position indicates subtle shifts of meaning. The same kind of undecided ambiguity is to be found with “twisted twined,” which should be read not as succession but as juxtaposition. The two actions must be coagulated into one global entity, a kind of imagistic tableau including successive actions in its simultaneous stasis.\textsuperscript{405}

The passage from Sirens recalls the movement of snowfall in Joyce’s “The Dead” (“falling softly . . . softly falling . . . . falling faintly . . . faintly falling”).\textsuperscript{406} Rotational spirals of micro-gestures (“twining a loose hair,” “twisted twined a hair”) enact a gauzy and redundant ontology. Corporeality is essentialized into a figure like “hair.” These repeated gestural condensations of the corporeal accentuate the idea of some kind of continuity which is more than natural movement, but which still does not rescind natural movement. This naturalism is opaque in that like the waves from Proteus discussed earlier, which “await[ ] the fullness of their times,” another time seems to be posited as a result of the movement.\textsuperscript{407}

Opaque because they are sheer instantiation, the objects occupy a different strata of universality: that of suspended, incomplete negations and cycles of emergence. The piano tuner who generates many repetitions is likewise blind: “[t]ap blind walked tapping by the tap the curbstone tapping, tap by tap.”\textsuperscript{408} Blindness extends to the reader. This is the gestural lucidity of instantiation without phenomenal transparency. Joyce actualizes in fiction the persistent emergence of a phenomenon. Repetition captures the opacity of emergence, the dark remainders within the moment of clarification.
The point is to achieve stasis. The phenomenal world must register a static time beyond it. Even when clock time is indicated, a hubbub of gestures precedes it:

—Here’s fortune, Blazes said.
He pitched a broad coin down. Coin rang . . . Clock whirred . . . Clock clacked. . . . Miss Douce took Boylan’s coin, struck boldly the cashregister. It clanged. Clock clacked. Fair one of Egypt teased and sorted in the till and hummed and handed coins in change. Look to the west. A clack. For me.
—What time is that? asked Blazes Boylan. Four?
O’clock.
—Let’s hear the time, he said. . . .
Wait, wait. Pat, waiter, waited.

The objects reveal a compulsion to appear. Their racket is indecisive. The phonic attributes of words and a pun upon waiting help to achieve this stasis. Topia writes of the previously mentioned “sauntering sadly” passage:

We must also notice, at the end of each of the three sentences, the presence of successively “ear,” then “hair,” then again “ear.” Because of the phonic proximity of these two words a kind of hesitation occurs: the two phonic patterns seem to overlap somehow, which corresponds to a kind of blurring of the differences between the various parts of the bodies. The fluidity of the sentence connotes the same fluidity in the bodies. All the parts of the characters’ bodies keep vibrating and migrating. The physical proximity of ear and hair becomes in the sentence much more than mere spatial contiguity: the two elements of the body seem to become part of an intricate game, of a kind of dance in which their places can vary though their relation remains the same. A kind of inner tension, of paradoxically static movement, seems to animate the bodies.

The narrator is not writing bodies but overwriting them. This creates folds in the surface of the fiction such that the structural anatomy of the human body cedes to sound gestures. Sound penetrates visuality as the breath which animates the gestures, not unlike Schopenhauer’s idea in which music presents a universality before the fact (“universalia ante rem”) to reveal conditions of possibility for phenomenal appearances. The difference is that Joyce does not assign sound to a separate hierarchical level of pure form, instead sound is embedded in the gestures. Like Lukács’s tragic moments, the gestures don’t interpenetrate: “[tragic drama’s] moments exist in parallel rather than in series; it no longer lies within the plane of temporal experience.”

The suspension of an object in a state of appearing creates a sense of persistence. This persistence cancels narrative’s ability to evoke irrevocable finality:

The droning hair gesture loiters about in opposition to the temporal diction of irrevocable punctums: “lost,” “[d]eath,” “[g]one,” “[f]orgotten.” This gesture, juxtaposed with “nothing,” recalls Mallarmé’s *Igitur*, where a static visual moment persists beyond “the single shock of the tomb doors,” a moment in Mallarmé’s text which undermines the identity between death and a progressive time that would relegate this “single shock” to the past. In *Igitur*, it is a motion “prolonged by the reminiscence of the sepulchral emptiness of the blow in which clarity is confused,” and from it “comes a vision of the interrupted fall of the panels, as if it were one who, endowed with the suspended motion, turned it back on itself in the resulting dizzying spiral.” In *Igitur*, death presents a complex temporal problem, yet the abiding nature of phenomena like the droning hair gesture resemble the vision of an “interrupted fall,” a static moment enlarged by phonic excess within experimental time. The function of this motionless time is not so much to freeze phenomena in place, but to fashion atmospheres in which they abide.

Another function of still time is to ensure that opacity extends to the basic units of grammar. Divergent speech functions overlap through vibratory orthographical conundrums. The addition of an “e” to the word “he,” fashions a simultaneous interjectional expression which complicates the impersonal pronoun’s universality. The third-person pronoun suffers a radical defamiliarization:

Bald Pat who is bothered mitred the napkins. Pat is a waiter hard of his hearing. Pat is a waiter who waits while you wait. Hee hee hee hee. He waits while you wait. Hee hee. A waiter is he. Hee hee hee hee. He waits while you wait. While you wait if you wait he will wait while you wait. Hee hee hee hee. Hoh. Wait while you wait. The tautology is materializing. The laughter is homologous with the “he.” The verbal expression of laughter is synonymous with the object of humor. Here sound is not language’s other, as it is conditioned by what could also be interpreted as deliberate linguistic errata. The sound obstructs the clear subject-positions that novels strive for. From the point-of-view of narration, action might seem delayed, but action is in fact pulled into the difficult, shifting functions of identical letters, and into the core gesture which is laughter. “Pat” spelled backwards is “tap,” which also leads to inverted sound constellations of the proper name. The blind piano tuner returns to the Ormond bar for his tuning fork, his cane and the fork tap inordinately. Just on one page we read: “Tap. Tap. Tap. Tap . . . Tap. Tap. Tap. Tap. Tap . . . Tap. Tap. Tap. Tap. Tap. Tap. Tap. Tap . . . Tap. Tap.”

Background noise is foregrounded. The character, “Pat,” is a suggested linguistic remainder of a noise. Moreover, what type of third-person narrates the successive “hee[‘s]?” The represented laughter simultaneously swallows the nominal pieces (“he”) of the third-person’s novelistic illusion. The reader sees “Bald Pat” from an unreliable point-of-view. The rhythmic instability of nominal appearances displays a fateful logic of emergence and disappearance. Should the ambiguous narrator of sounds still be called a third-person? This unsound voice deliberately invokes tragic elements when comparing the Ormond bar’s piano to a coffin. Simon Dedalus opens it: “[u]pholding the lid he (who?) gazed in the coffin (coffin?) at the oblique triple (piano!) wires. He pressed (the same who pressed indulgently her hand), soft pedalling, a triple of keys to see the thickness of felt advancing, to hear the muffled hammerfall in action.” As when Bloom imagines a “gramophone in every grave” in Hades, the Sirens narrator imagines deathly chambers for the dissemination of sound. Daniel Ferrer writes: “Music being the center of this episode, we discover death hidden at the core of music. . . From this core death radiates through the text in all directions.” The auditory is homologous with a logic of fate, yet how does fate relate to the narrator of sounds?

Some keys can be found through a closer look at laughter. When the barmaids accuse the menial hotel employee, Boots, of “impertinent insolence,” he responds with a percussion of
stuttering consonants: “Imperthnthn thnthn, bootssnout sniffed rudely, as he retreated as she threatened as he had come.” The barmaids re-echo: “here he was, miss Douce said, cocking her bronze head three quarters, ruffling her nosewings. Hufa! Hufa! Shrilp shriek of laughter sprang from miss Kennedy’s throat. Miss Douce huffed and snorted down her nostrils that quivered imperthnthn like a snout in quest,” Laughter neutralizes speech. The diction is equine and dehumanizing. Interestingly, the words “Hufa! Hufa!” are orthographically close to the German word for hoof, Huf (the Old English root is hōf). This recalls the sounds of the cavalcade and the neologisms, “steelhoofs, ringhoof.” Also, a hoof, like a fingernail, this equine envelope or covering is anatomically horn-like, which is perhaps related in some way to Simon Dedalus’ digital gestures in Sirens: “[c]hips, picking chips off one of his rocky thumbnails. Chips. He strolled. . . . Yes. He fingered shreds of hair, her maidenhair, her mermaid’s, into the bowl. Chips. Shreds. Musing. Mute.” Simon Dedalus’ silent fingernail clippings, in which figurative mermaid hair is caught, are arguably a subtle allusion to Homer’s mythic rocks or the dangerous, mellifluous shores of the Sirens’ island. The authority of allusion is ground down into phenomenal coverings, phonic hooves—little mythic facts of a suddenly keratin-esque variety. And then lexically excessive, the laughter itself sounds for about 30 lines, filled with “giggling peal[s]” in which “young goldbronze voices blended.” Here laughter doesn’t resonate outward, instead it thickens within the repetition. There is a pressure within the style which it can’t escape:

Shrill, with deep laughter, after, gold after bronze, they urged each other to peal after peal, ringing in changes, bronze-gold, gold-bronze, shrill deep, to laughter after laughter. And then laughed more. Greasy I knows. Exhausted, breathless, their shaken heads they laid, braided and pinnacled by glossycombed, against the counterledge. All flushed (O!), panting, sweating (O!), all breathless.

More globally, sound’s dense, sensible proliferation evades the sense of closure and transparency vouchsafed by an omniscient gaze. The two parenthetical “(O!)?” might correspond to climaxes by Douce and Kennedy, but they are also the narrator’s own interjections. These interjections also appear in the piano as coffin sequence just mentioned: “(who?),” “(coffin?),” “(piano!).” Here the parentheticals are both interrogative and exclamatory. The perspective is contingent. The parenthetical voice isn’t at any remove from the immediate revelation of the action. The voice is in delay. Sound marks this vexed third-person voice but is also marked by it. After Boylan leaves the bar:

Miss Douce’s brave eyes, unregarded, turned from the crossblind, smitten by sunlight. Gone. Pensive (who knows?), smitten (the smiting light), she lowered the dropblind with a sliding cord. She drew down pensive (why did he go so quick when I?) about her bronze, over the bar where bald stood by sister gold, inexquisite contrast, contrast inexquisite nonexquisite, slow cool dim seagreen sliding depth of shadow, eau de Nil.

The last parenthetical may be Douce’s thought merging with Bloom’s. The others testify to epistemological uncertainty [“(who knows?)”]. This atmosphere radically resists the penetration of perception. The “inexquisite nonexquisite” presents an obdurate visuality. The exquisite is visible, the words derive from the Latin exquaerere, meaning to seek out, to ascertain. In Wandering Rocks, Gerty MacDowell has a partial view of the cavalcade, she “knew by the style it was the lord and lady lieutenant but she couldn’t see what Her Excellency had on because the tram and Spring’s big yellow furniture van had to stop in front of her on account of its being the lord lieutenant.”
colloquial turns of phrase suggests its Gerty’s represented thought. In Sirens, Miss Douce sees the colors of lady Dudley’s dress and the lieutenant’s pale green uniform: “yes, sitting with his ex, pearl grey and eau de Nil. —Exquisite contrast, miss Kennedy said.”

Shadowy neologisms (“inexquisite nonexquisite”) coalesce with the parenthetical narrator’s unclear perspective. The pale green color of the lieutenant’s clothing ebbs into a “slow cool dim seagreen sliding depth of shadow, eau de Nil.” Joyce might have gotten the term eau de Nil from his reading of fashion newspapers or magazines. The first example of it (in English) appears in the Young Ladies’ Journal of 1870: “a pretty toilette of eau-du-Nil.” Language is a container for the color’s artificial leap beyond twilight. The visual opacity opened up by the absence of omniscience doesn’t highlight some sort of outside beyond the grasp of linguistic art. Rather, it highlights the way in which language travels beyond the gaze. Assimilated into the neologisms, the pale green darkens, the unknown color removes itself from anthropomorphic gazes, and settles into the cavernous prefixes of lack: “in” and “non.” “([W]ho knows?),” could perhaps be interpreted as asking: who sees? And, who hears? The Nile of language captures the movement of vision into blindness. Its parallel currents include the “snotgreen sea” of Dublin Bay in Telemachus, or even the “green sluggish bile.” Joyce’s murky perceptive ontology is homologous with the still abyss of symbols.

Laughter and Anthropocentric Omniscience, Life and Death

In conclusion, in Baudelaire’s “The Essence of Laughter,” the early literary modernist finds that laughter enacts a split in the one who performs it, capturing a tension between the finite and the infinite at stake within human experience. Laughter results from an epistemological shock: that of the limitlessness of human consciousness and its superiority to the predicament of sheer animals, but at the same time, an acute awareness of one’s distance from absolute knowledge: an infinite misery, in Baudelaire’s eyes. Here laughter is anthropocentrically tragic, bound to the pangs of mortality. In laughter, for the poet, the contorted body expresses itself through a physically demanding series of gestures, a non-instrumental labor—and arguably a momentarily liberated materiality. The sense of pride (“orgueil”) and superiority (“supériorité”) implied by this consciousness and its detachment from physical existence, is satanic (“satanique”) Baudelaire argues. Grounded in a laughing body that momentarily exceeds itself, the one who laughs is also momentarily omniscient, detached and self-consciously aware of his/her existence.

The laughter of the Sirens chapter does not stem from human consciousness. Its locus and functions are uncertain. In one case, the laughter creates an interruption at the level of reading, in a pronoun (“he”) where the sounds “hee hee” perform a deliberate malfunction in the act of narrating. The extra e’s trip about in an unclaimed novelistic space, a stylistic malfunction in the synchronic language system at the same time as the “hee’s” point to the ideas of structure and system which they play upon. The “hee’s” recall the relationship between sound and the errata of technology in Aeolus, Maud Ellmann’s notion of a “schizophrenic racket” of phonic remainders, and Bloom’s obsession with the two Greek ee’s. Fate’s rhythmic melody occupies the minutiae of letters in words and sounds, or in Aeolus, the speech of doors (“ee: cree,” “asking to be shut”).

In “The Metaphysics of Tragedy,” Lukács writes: “[a] drama is a play about man and his fate—a play in which God is the spectator. He is a spectator and no more; his words and gestures never mingle with the words and gestures of the players. His eyes rest upon them: that is all. ‘Whoever sees God, dies,’ Ibsen wrote once; ‘but can he who has been seen by God continue to live?’” For Lukács, in tragedy a transparent spectacle appears to a supreme, anthropomorphic gaze. Divine authority derives from the gaze. This omniscient perspective determines the life or death of the characters. In Nestor, the perspective is different: “Stephen jerked his thumb towards the window, saying: —That is God. Hooray! Ay! Whrrwhee! —What? Mr. Deasy asked. —A shout
in the street, Stephen answered, shrugging his shoulders." The aleatory cries of the schoolboys suggest another metaphysics, one free of surveillance. The sound of fate is still sensible, or again, "for tragedy," Lukács states, "death . . . is an always imminent reality." But for Lukács, God ensures death's presence. For Joyce, rhythms create many ideas about death, they are even embedded within brief songs in Sirens: "Ruin them. Wreck their lives. Then build them cubicles to end their days in. Hushaby. Lullaby. Die, dog. Little dog, die." This is a children's song. Iona Opie states that it resembles "the end part of a song used to finish a child's turn on a swing." She mentions a song from "Cheshire, c.1900," which reads: "'An apple for the King, / And a pear for the Queen, / And a good toss over the bowling green. / Die, die, little dog, die, / Die for the sake of your mother's black eye. / Die, die away.'" In the child's game, the repetition of this imperative to cease life marks the gradual cessation of the swing's pendulum where this rhythm of mortality takes a physical shape. The song can be repeated, and this slackening of the swings' ropes, a gesture, the practice of a rhythm, this is not wholly unlike when Stephen folds and "open[s] the flaps of his ears" to mimic the train's passage through tunnels, or the swing-door of The Waves, all are different kinds of "static movement."

In Joyce's Ulysses, the novel tears open the concept of death such that it forges a dialectical relationship with life. Tragic airs fashion melodies from expirations:

—All is lost now. . . . Is lost. Rich sound. Two notes in one there. Blackbird I heard in the hawthorn valley. Taking my motives he twined and tuned them. All most too new call is lost in all. Echo. How sweet the answer. How is that done? All lost now. Mournful he whistled. Fall, surrender, lost.

Sirens includes the lyrics of a folk tune, "The Croppy Boy," about the Irish Rebellion of 1798. In it a young man meets death on his way to battle when, after encountering a priest for the sacrament of confession, the priest turns out to be a British soldier in disguise. But the story's accent on the singularity of death changes in Sirens. The cycles of atmospheric being are incorporated back into the generation of a form that defies human time. The text reads:

Low sank the music, air and words. Then hastened. The false priest rustling soldier from his cassock. A yeoman captain. They know it all by heart. The thrill they itch for. Yeoman cap.
Tap. Tap. . . .
With hoarse rude fury the yeoman cursed. . . .
A good thought, boy, to come. One hour's your time to live, your last.
Tap. Tap.
Thrill now. Pity they feel. To wipe away a tear for martyrs that want to, dying to, die.
For all things dying, for all things born.
Chapter 4

Kafka's Moment: Spectatorship, Perception, and the Dawning of the Object

The Dawning Object: Empiricism and Spectatorship

The modernist processes that this study examines take place on the edges of narrative, in contexts apart and distinct from progressive narration, linear chronology, and the present. This chapter demonstrates how Kafka's version of the modernist moment (one distinct from the present) gives rise to the phenomenon of the dawning of the object, in which mimetic fictional objects emerge gradually from spectatorial epistemological encounters. I look at how this moment occurs through and within the representational effects of Kafka's *The Trial*. This final chapter also examines how techniques of interruption in *The Trial* fashion immanent instances of suspended or forestalled time.

The flux of the fictional object within literary modernism is influenced by empiricism. At the level of empiricism's influence on modernism, the theorist of literary modernism Judith Ryan singles out among other things “directness,” in the philosopher William James’ empiricism, where the relation between the object and the perceiver is more important than the content or object perceived. This distinguishes the work of someone like Kafka from the aims of realist narrative. Empiricism, Ryan writes, “unmask[s]” the notion of the [realist] self and hence characterization as “a knowable, definable entity.” Thus “action cannot be said to stem from character, nor can character ‘develop’ in the customary sense.” But there could be another kind of realism in Kafka which would not be identical to the creation of stable, knowable characters and plot dimensions.

In literary terms, Jamesian relationality (the privileging of the act of perception over content) would seem compatible with a privileging of spectatorial dynamics. I refer to the object as “dawning” because its state of emergence seems posited for a reader. The object is more than an empiricism-influenced phenomenon; it is built into the system of modernist readerly reception. In contrast to critics like Adorno, Lukács, and more recently J. Hillis Miller, who see Kafka’s work as impenetrable to spectatorial reception, I argue that Kafka’s representational effects reside in the protagonist’s sensory apprehension and the reader’s subtle alignment with this. In my reading of Kafka, the sensory mimesis presented for the reader is not a form of empathy—here a mimesis of sensation takes place through a certain gap within reading.

With regard to spectatorship, Brecht’s work on drama is a clear example of a spectator-oriented tendency within modernist aesthetic effects (although Brecht's effects are different than Kafka's). The study looks first at Benjamin’s reading of Brecht, where interruptive techniques elicit exercises in critical spectatorship. The aspects of Benjamin’s project which Benjamin highlights also illuminate important aspects of Kafka’s work (both authors were subjects of Benjamin’s critical writings). Objects in Brecht’s scenes are suddenly defamiliarized, while the experience of the audience member aligns with a critical position.

Modernism’s spectatorship is often one which the work implies within itself. In Kafka’s *The Trial*, K. gradually becomes a spectator to his own situation, and techniques of interruption give rise to forms of literary spectatorship which create the conditions for a critical perceptual epistemology of the object. In *The Trial*, an object presents a perceptive experience in the story world of the protagonist. By an object, I also mean something which exists in a state of epistemological
suspension. More specifically, an object does not resonate like a lived experience (Erlebnis), nor an element of general, shared knowledge (Erfahrung). 446 447 An object is not objective, but conditioned by the representational effects of both the protagonist’s perceptive experience, and the reader’s presence.

Modernist representational effects are forms of value. This value is different from the word’s lexical sense, or in Frege’s terminology, its sinn. In other words, the value of language in this case is brought about through the light meanings that take place when K. inquires, not into his impenetrable legal case, but into something more vague at the outer reaches of sensation (largely within gesture and the visual). In this sense, representational effects are referential (but the referent is not a thing definitively known). The referential surface is a mode of experience (in a sense, the experience is also the referential value). Light meaning is a reference to things out there in the external world inasmuch as a thing or an experience can be figured within a novel by the representational effects of sensation.

There are conditions required for this value to emerge in a modernist text, as the value is not emerging at every moment in the story. Interruptive moments in The Trial disrupt narrative progression in the form of gaps, uncertainty, and self-reflexive intervals. After our initial discussion of spectatorship in this chapter, we will discuss how sound contributes to these moments. Sound in The Trial is an arresting figure which opposes a critical dialectic at the same time as it mimics linguistic transmission. At times, volume overwhelms intellection in The Trial; it highlights the law’s indifference to discursive exchange and communication.

The chapter then discusses how in The Trial, Kafka positions objects such that the spectator’s epistemological encounter with the object creates temporal abstraction and uncertainty. Kafka and many other modernists construct temporalities which take place on the basis of a dynamic relationship between spectator and object. The space of forestalled time exists alongside the dawning of the object, a dawning of perception that rests upon a deferral of clear meaning, and often the deferral of the definite contours of the object itself. Toward the end, this study examines how, in Chapter 9 of The Trial, through the fetishistic foregrounding of objects, the text dons or displays its own epistemological processes.

In my reading, Kafka’s time of perception is different from Brecht’s abolition of sensation. Kafka’s literary aesthetics of interruption does not create critical alienation—it creates a time of shared inquiry between the text and the reader. This is not the same thing as empathy; rather it is a question of the protagonist and reader sharing a similar position. The homologous positions of text and reader are structured by a focus on sensory experience. The reader is placed in a homologous relation to the character’s world, not through empathy, but through the representational effects of sensory perception.

It is important to understand the role of stilled time within Kafka’s work. Readers of Kafka like James Rolleston see interruptive time as a way to argue that Kafka is not a realist, but a Romantic solipsist. 448 Kafka’s focus on external reality is not ‘realist’ in a traditional sense, but it does privilege perceptive experience. To understand the relationship between perceptive experience and modernist literary representation, I turn to Benjamin on Brecht.

Benjamin on Brecht, Anti-Empathy

Brecht’s method helps to outline how forms of heightened attention occur within literary experience. In “What is Epic Theatre?” Benjamin’s reading of Brechtian interruption provides a preliminary model for understanding incidences of non-Aristotelian, interruptive style in Kafka’s The Trial. Benjamin writes:
The task of the epic theatre, according to Brecht, is not so much the development of actions as the representation of conditions. This presentation does not mean reproduction as the theoreticians of Naturalism understood it. Rather, the truly important thing is to discover the conditions of life. (One might say just as well: to alienate [verfremden] them.) This discovery (alienation) of conditions takes place through the interruption of happenings. The most primitive example would be a family scene. Suddenly a stranger enters. The mother was just about to seize a bronze bust and hurl it at her daughter; the father was in the act of opening the window in order to call a policeman. At that moment the stranger appears in the doorway. This means that the stranger is confronted with the situation as with a startling picture: troubled faces, an open window, the furniture in disarray. But there are eyes to which even more ordinary scenes of middle-class life look almost equally startling.

If in Aristotelian tragedy empathy takes place through the progressive recorded action which, in the Poetics, Aristotle describes as producing emotional release through catharsis, the temporality which Benjamin discusses in Brecht’s work is neither progressive nor emotive. Interruption is a form of temporal delimitation. As a literary technique, it can also be a form of representational delimitation. In an interruptive moment, time is frozen and all is still within a frame. The frame creates an open field which permits for the “discovery (alienation) of conditions.” When the stranger in Benjamin’s essay appears, he creates, from what had been continuous and ongoing events, a still picture, separating the current moment from all the moments which preceded or will follow it.

Verfremdung, the estrangement effect, produces an arresting, critical time of intellection, freezing the scene into an image capable of being analyzed. It does not stress the fictive present so much as an immediate image destined for critical reflection: a “startling picture” or temporal supplement beyond the coordinates of plot. The audience is given the opportunity to make a critical evaluation within a distinct, clearly demarcated moment liberated from dramatic progression.

Techniques of interruption demarcate a scene which takes place within a moment, the immediacy of which demands extraordinary perceptive attention. Breaking the flow of dramatic narration, Brechtian interruption introduces into the scene a bounding geometry, giving rise to a “startling picture” or cut-out which not only possesses a temporality distinct from the present, but impels the spectator to an epistemological approach distinct from preconception.

In Kafka, perceptive and epistemological processes concomitant with interruption often take place in a critical moment that resonates with Benjamin’s reading of Brecht. The “stranger [who] enters” in the quote above from Benjamin’s reading of Brecht, is a type of spectator. Brechtian techniques summon a critical spectatorship surrounding the objects of the scene (“troubled faces, an open window, the furniture in disarray”). Objects are no longer taken for granted but defamiliarized.

Spectatorship is also a major theme in Kafka’s The Trial. The text not only stages its themes for a spectatorial (interpretative) readership, but elaborates internally on spectating characters: the neighbors at the window in the first chapter, for example, who witness the scene of K.’s arrest, and even and especially K. himself as he comes into an interpretive encounter with his own context. Spectatorship is thus a kind of framing technique that restructures the novel’s focal point. Spectatorship creates a kind of discrete moment in the novel not unlike the Brechtian still frame. In Brecht’s work, the spectator’s perception of events or objects within the frame is defamiliarized.

In Benjamin’s reading of Brecht, visual objects within the frame are almost static, and the perception of these objects gains precedence. Benjamin writes elsewhere that “the art of epic theatre consists in producing astonishment rather than empathy,” that “instead of identifying with the characters, the audience should be educated to be astonished at the circumstances under which they function.” These “circumstances” are removed from their ordinary context and made strange.
through *Verfremdung*, a theatrical term for the alienation effect. The stranger that appears in the quote above is an analogue for the spectatorial subject whose particular perspectival relationship to the events comes to structure the dramatic work more than plot.\(^{451}\) It is important that this spectator must see the events in the still frame *as if they do not share the position* of many of the actors or objects in this particular scene. The spectator should be in both a critical and *wholly separate position* in relation to what is perceptible.

Elsewhere Benjamin writes that “[t]he didactic play and the epic theatre are attempts to sit down on a dais,” a type of raised platform that in his model would include both the spectators and the performers.\(^{452}\) What Benjamin calls “the discovery of conditions” does not take place through mimesis or “reproduction as the theoreticians of Naturalism understood it.”\(^{453}\) Rather, the focus is on producing a scene of arrest that interrupts the spectator’s steady reception of the scene in order to call attention to the conventions of the work itself. This alienation effect arguably questions the aesthetic division between performers and spectators under which certain theatrical illusions function. Spectatorship creates self-reflexive moments. The Brechtian work thus presents itself as an object of scrutiny: the spectator is meant to penetrate the work in the same way that interruption penetrates and defamiliarizes the scene. *But the critical spectators can only engage with what they see with a spatial sense of remove* (seated “on a dais”).

In Brecht, the spectatorial dynamic is designed to pull the audience away. He even assigns critical attributes to the main characters, but these are type characters with patent functions. Benjamin writes: “Brecht made an attempt to make the thinker, or even the wise man, the hero of the drama. From this very point of view one can define his theater as epic theater.”\(^{454}\) For Benjamin, a model for this is how “[t]he French classical theater made room in the midst of the players for persons of rank, who had their armchairs on the open stage.” Whether a thinker or a noble of some kind, this is an “untragic hero.”\(^{455}\) The point for Brecht is that no merging of emotion or sensory experience between the audience and the actors should be able to take place. It is important to keep in mind that in Kafka’s *The Trial*, the protagonist is a tragic character, which makes the comparison between Kafka’s novel and Brecht’s work complex. Is *The Trial* a tragedy which cancels the existence of readerly sensibility? Is spectatorship within Kafka’s *The Trial* Brechtian?

*Spectatorship in The Trial*

One of the more arresting moments in Kafka’s *The Trial* occurs when K. notices a bystander to his execution in a house near the quarry. K. is being held down by men whom earlier he describes as actors and tenors, calling attention to the theme appearing throughout *The Trial* of the law as a type of fiction. The men pass a knife between each other, waiting for K. to take his own life. The narrator writes:

> With a flicker as of a light going up, the casements of a window there suddenly flew open; a human figure, faint and insubstantial at that distance and at that height, leaned abruptly far forward and stretched both arms still farther. Who was it? A friend? A good man? Someone who sympathized? Someone who wanted help? Was it one person only? Or was it mankind? Was help at hand? Were there arguments in his favor that had been overlooked? Of course there must be. Logic is doubtless unshakeable, but it cannot withstand a man who wants to go on living. Where was the Judge whom he had never seen? Where was the High Court, to which he had never penetrated? He raised his hands and spread out all his fingers.\(^{456}\)

K.’s final gesture in the novel is the act of reaching for the distant bystander. A flickering radiance introduces this emergence as soon as the windows are first opened. K.’s gesture of reaching for the spectator is concomitant with an extended critical moment. K. embodies a spectatorial presence within this moment. After K. suddenly notices the stranger, the novel presents K.’s last questions: eleven of them altogether. The appearance of the spectator seems to condition these questions. Unlike the Brechtian stranger described by Benjamin, this stranger’s entrance doesn’t halt the scene in question, instead it suggests a lingering critical possibility. Here spectatorship implies a generally ongoing critical process aside from the plot. It foregrounds the contingency of the current situation, and indicates alternatives in the abstract.\textsuperscript{458} Through the series of questions after the arrival of the stranger at the window, a critical interval in the sequence reflects upon the startling conditions in which K. finds himself. K. participates in intellection, but is he a thinker in the Brechtian sense? This is a question that will need to be answered later in our essay.

In \textit{The Trial}, the spectatorial presence of K.’s neighbors also implies the possibility of a commentary or an outside perspective on the events of the novel. After they eavesdrop on the proceedings, the young man shields the two elderly viewers and begins speaking. The narrator writes, “to judge from the movement of his lips [the young man] was saying something which, owing to the distance, could not be distinguished” / “nach seinen Mundbewegungen zu schließen, irgend etwas auf die Entfernung hin Unverständliches sagte.”\textsuperscript{459} The neighbor’s gesture involves human speech, but speech that never arrives upon the scene in question. The spectator’s gaze and the possibility of a commentary on the events grow intertwined. The neighbor’s commentary is suspended and held at a distance. Here the spectator’s critical moment is deferred. This is important because Kafka’s novel stages the conditions for a critical inquiry through the representational effects of perception more than it offers an entry into an interpretation of more general aspects of the text.

Kafka’s \textit{The Trial} frequently magnifies such minor, opaque background commentary as this. Minor events rarely take place on a minor scale, and many minor details do not correspond proportionately to meaning. A minor detail is often an event in itself. K.’s neighbors might be mere scenic background material in relation to the main plot, but Kafka’s text foregrounds even the most distant commotion, recognizing the frightening potential of rumor. After the text describes the unclear, distant speech of K’s neighbor, K. makes repeated attempts to shoo his neighbors from their window. From the house opposite, the neighbors proceed to follow K. and his bank employees down to the public street. “Don’t look across,” K. states to his employees as they enter the taxi at the end of this opening sequence.\textsuperscript{460} The background overcomes the foreground in this instance, as distant actions create uncanny forms of narrative simultaneity, disrupting the possibility that the tragic effects of this work are limited to those of the outcome of a core plot.

In Kafka’s \textit{The Trial}, non-interpenetrated moments produce disjointed and inconsistent movement from frame to frame. In his reading of Brechtian theatre, Benjamin writes that “[l]ike the pictures in a film, epic theatre moves in spurts. Its basic form is that of the shock with which the single, well-defined situations of the play collide.”\textsuperscript{461} The Brechtian situations that Benjamin
describes are not interpenetrated. Meaning is deferred. The scene finds function, not through its position in a continuity, but through its singular perception by the defamiliarized spectator. In Benjamin’s reading, the interruptive techniques of epic theatre resemble montage and juxtaposition. Structure develops through the spectator’s critical intervention. In Kafka’s *The Trial*, spectatorship comes in the form of bystanders, but K. himself also becomes a spectator as the novel develops. The gestures of Kafka’s bystanders do not initiate a “didactic” scenario, as in Brecht. The situation is more ambiguous. As Adorno’s reading suggests, something has been isolated through the gesture, some aspect of the conditions of life, but this aspect can perhaps only be revealed non-conceptually (“Kafka invert[s],” Adorno states, the historical relation of concept and gesture”). Kafka’s lesson can’t be taught in a straightforward fashion in that it rests on the complex simplicity of gestures.

*Sound is a Model for a Frozen Moment*

To understand how non-interpenetrated, critical moments alter the representational apparatus of a work like Kafka’s *The Trial*, it is important to further consider Benjamin’s reading of Brecht. His theories of interruptive, momentary gesture imply a post-narrative structure in which single representative units expand outwards through citation. Benjamin’s theory of interruption as a theory of expansive structure helps to clarify how the expansion of the non-interpenetrated, critical moment (and moments) within literary modernism function more generally.

The critical moment of perception is also an interruptive moment. As we have addressed in the chapter on Woolf, Benjamin states that “interruption is one of the fundamental devices of all structuring. It goes far beyond the sphere of art. To give only one example, it is the basis of quotation. To quote a text involves the interruption of its context.” When Benjamin states that interruption is central to “all structuring” he is not referring to narrative structure or dramatic structure, but rather the notion of structure itself understood broadly, arguably beyond the configurations of narrative art. Interruption and citation arguably operate beyond the criteria of literary genre. They give rise to a context beyond progressive narration and interpenetrated actions in which excised pieces and excised gestures circulate. Here Benjamin’s *Arcades Project*, a work composed entirely of quotations, comes to mind.

Interruptive, non-interpenetrated moments in *The Trial* often take the form of sound as disruption of narrative. In *The Trial*, K. quotes the Inspector speaking his name, “Joseph K.[,]” when he puts on a performance of the morning’s legal proceedings for Fräulein Bürstner. K. becomes so engrossed in his theatrical rendition of the arrest that, in exaggerated mimicry of the Inspector, he cries out his own name, in a sense reflexively summoning himself. The narrator writes:

> K. was too absorbed in his role, he gave a long-drawn shout: “Joseph K.,” less loud indeed than he had threatened, but with such explosive force that it hung in the air a moment before gradually spreading through the room.

> K. war zu sehr in der Rolle, er rief langsam: »Josef K.«, übrigens nicht so laut, wie er gedroht hatte, aber doch so, daß sich der Ruf, nachdem er plötzlich ausgestoßen war, erst allmählich im Zimmer zu verbreiten schien.

The priest repeats this mode of quotation and interpellation when he names K. in Chapter 9. In the quote above, K. is in a sense taking the enunciation of his own name out of context. The description seems to focus not on the name’s signifying power, but on the qualities of the spoken word as a sound, and the way it “hung in the air a moment before gradually spreading through the room.”
Kafka stages the fundamental instance of the call of the law, the act of hailing—yet through a body of sound which is not attached to the law either linguistically or instrumentally. Also in Chapter 1 of *The Trial* is an even less determinate sound: the landlady’s nephew knocking on the wall in response to K.’s shout. As it metamorphoses into an ambiguous sound, the speaking of K.’s name seems to call forth as response this absurd and non-articulate knock. The legal summons enters into the neutral realm of evening chatter, or just the bothersome nonsense which disturbs the neighboring tenant’s sleep. There is a neutrality to sound in these cases.

Different forms of sound, tattoos, shrieks, and laughter spread across the text of Kafka’s *The Trial*. One thinks of the repeated knockings on doors, the ringing of doorbells, the shriek that interrupts K’s speech during the first interrogation which is attributed to the law student embracing the washerwoman, the laughter of the little girls outside of Titorrelli’s attic, the guffaws of the warders Franz and Willem and their later sighs and wailing when being punished, and the hysterics of the court officials. These sounds are discontinuous: they create breaks in the narrative. Here forms of sound function beyond clear meaning. Certain events of sheer discordant volume exemplify another aspect of sound in Kafka’s *The Trial*.

Sound can dramatically dampen and distract from intellection, especially when volume overrides concept. For example, during K.’s first interrogation, disrupting K’s fulminatory arguments leveled against the court’s “misguided policy” and “contemptible” procedures, sonic volume arrests the progression of K’s direct speech. The narrator writes:

> Here K. was interrupted by a shriek from the end of the hall; he peered from behind his hand to see what was happening, for the reek of the room and the dim of light together made a whitish dazzle of fog. It was the washerwoman, whom K. had recognized as a potential cause of disturbance from the moment of her entrance. Whether she was at fault now or not, one could not tell. All K. could see was that a man had drawn her into a corner by the door and was clasping her in his arms. Yet it was not she who had uttered the shriek but the man; his mouth was wide open and he was gazing up at the ceiling. A little circle had formed round them, the gallery of spectators near by seemed to be delighted that the seriousness which K. had introduced into the proceedings should be dispelled in this manner.

The shriek is synesthetic and momentarily impossible to locate, mixing with the “whitish dazzle of fog” and swamp-like odors. The sound manifests as disembodied volume before the narrator attributes the shrill voice to the student. This attribution of the noise to the student is delayed, stretching the contours of the sonic figure beyond the limits of the one who is shrieking.

This wanton outburst of background noise is an event that draws the court’s attention away from the speaking subject (K.). K.’s argument is usurped by the effects of a nonsensical, grating
scream. The verb form “kreischen” can also mean to screech or to squawk and here the shrill human voice seems to lose its separateness from the animal realm. The spectators gather around the bawdy spectacle in a frenzy. This crowd is “delighted that the seriousness which K. had introduced into the proceedings should be dispelled in this manner.” The serious character of K.’s speech is “dispelled” by a noise, as if “seriousness” were a mere dimension of sound, a sonic modality which could be actually ejected or dismantled through a louder more violent tone, no matter how absurd. The reactions of the spectators are unthinking, automatic. Sound, while its meaning is not clear, often projects chaotic, unspecified effects.

This suggests something about the relationship between volume and intellection, but also about the law. The law is not impervious to the wanton sound of the shriek; it incorporates it. Whereas K’s reasonable complaints do not find access to the law, its officers absorb and respond enthusiastically to the shriek, receiving it like a welcome comical supplement to the law’s proceedings. The maddening volume of the shriek seems indissociable from the law’s very substance in The Trial. Indeed K. is summoned loudly on the morning of his arrest (“Then a shout came from the next room which made him start so violently that his teeth rattled against the glass. ‘The Inspector wants you,’ was its tenor”).471 Exaggerated volume is an operative realm for the law.

Volume in these instances not only obstructs, through overlay, the human capacity for critical inquiry, but collapses any dialectics of information exchange entirely. Indeed the expression of the young man in the above passage seems to be that of someone registering the sound of his own shriek. The shriek is being almost cited or indexed, acquiring the characteristics of reverberation, echoing, and a faint sense of repetition. But it only repeats synonymously: within itself and upon itself.

The shriek marks the impossibility of K. receiving a response to his critique of the court, and constitutes a general impediment to a call and response discursive structure. The shriek is a rupture in K’s attempt to speak to the law and to fashion a critical response to its call—the law only calls and is deaf to the response. This suggests a kind of barbarity, indeed: “Like a dog!” are K.’s dying words as he is murdered.472 Hovering on the edge of meaning, these sounds are under threat of becoming the property of the law itself. Shortly beforehand, he states about the murderers, “[t]hey’re not prepared to answer questions.”473 Seen from this light, eight chapters earlier, the shriek seems like much more than a moment of indecency and indiscretion. It is not simply a moment of lewd behavior. Rather the shriek cites or invokes something about the law’s barbarous indifference to criticism and to questions.

The law of Kafka’s The Trial fails to answer questions. One could argue that this failure serves as the condition of possibility for its very functioning and the hold over its legal subjects that it maintains. In The Trial, the law binds its subjects through absurd, convoluted rhetoric but it does not answer to its subjects. Sound fashions a critique of the law. I do not think that sound and the visual are interchangeable. In The Trial, it seems like the effects of sound are less tied to the realm of inquiry than the way in which the visual is. Sound participates in the mimesis of sensation, but it is more diffuse.

Citation is a Readerly Gesture

Certain figures in Kafka’s The Trial point to the possibility of more redemptive structures than a law which operates un-dialectically on its subjects. Citation, with its independence from linear chronology, is one such figure. For Benjamin, the act of literary citation is a temporal operation that privileges minor events over major ones and unsettles the distinction between foreground and background. Like the non-interpenetrated critical moment, citation is radically decontextualizing and defamiliarizing.
In his essay “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” Benjamin mentions citation in light of a theory of history:

A chronicler who recites events without distinguishing between major and minor ones acts in accordance with the following truth: nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history. To be sure, only a redeemed mankind receives the fullness of its past—which is to say, only for the redeemed mankind has its past become citable in all its moments. Each moment it has lived becomes a citation à l'ordre du jour—and that day is Judgment Day. 

Benjamin shows how citation creates excisions from a linear framework, and imbues these excisions with a singular and messianic temporality. Benjamin’s methodology in the essay is to perform non-linear operations upon linear chronologies. The non-teleological jetzt-zeit, “the presence of the now,” discussed briefly in the conclusion to the chapter on Woolf, is another example of this.

Citation can have anti-narrative effects because the individual moment of citation takes on tremendous significance, disrupting temporal linearity and teleology. The delimitation, extraction, and foregrounding of the citation is a temporal technique, which creates a moment outside of chronological history.

Citation privileges minor events and unsettles distinctions between foreground and background. It is arguably an act of bringing the background or “minor” event alongside the “major” event. The method of Benjamin’s chronicler “who recites events without distinguishing between major and minor ones,” is non-hierarchical and brings to mind Eisenstein’s method of montage, which brings to the forefront unconscious optics as opposed to coded, dominant clichés. The foregrounding of background figures is very prominent in Kafka’s The Trial. Citations find analogy in The Trial through foregrounded, perspectival segments or images. Here apriori visual hierarchies recede from view.

These foregrounded citational segments tend towards equivalence. Benjamin writes: “only for the redeemed mankind has its past become citable in all its moments.” No matter how minor the excision, from each citation expansively emerges the totality of human history. And, as the quotation from Benjamin demonstrates, excised fragments take position outside of a chronological narrative. Modernism’s foregrounded perspectival segments are segments of a time (what Woolf calls “the moment”) purified and extracted from both chronology and teleology. Benjamin harnesses these segments for purposes other than narrative progression, but before being anti-narrative they are citations available as the building blocks for emergent totalities.

The one who cites is also a reader. This reader seeks a form of clarity within a general field of things. The reader, in citing, creates a position relative to an author. A critical correspondence occurs. The reader locates something as arbitrary as a glance from the neighbor’s window (a “minor” event). With citation, meaning arises relationally from a process between the text and the reader. Citation is also penetrative. The text is not an impenetrable architecture but something which can be cut. And the citation exists within a much different temporality. For Benjamin, this is a “redeemed” time, a time when, in a sense, everything can be seen.

Minor Visual Events

Citation involves readership, acts of perception, and hope of some kind. Citation also stretches the field of perceptual intelligibility in The Trial to domains beyond the limits of narrative. Here citation-like delimitations take place through uncanny visual phenomena. Whereas emergent sound in the text often comes in the form of shocking assaults, the visual realm seems to contain
traces of the possibility of redemption. Such moments of emergent visual radiance appear especially toward the end of the text.

As in Woolf’s *The Waves*, visual cutouts in *The Trial* are frequently characterized by their own ongoing dawning to the perceptive subject. In Kafka’s text, however, this dawning is often foreclosed or forestalled. For example, just prior to the climactic moment in the parable of the law when the doorkeeper shuts the door, the man from the country witnesses a spectacular flow of light. It is worth noting that this parable is a citation *par excellence*. And within the parable, there is a moment of heightened perception that seems to break with the core narrative of the parable and that carries with it a certain sense of ineluctability. The priest states: “he does not know whether the world is really darkening around him or whether his eyes are only deceiving him. But in the darkness he can now perceive a radiance that streams inextinguishably from the door of the Law” / “er weiß nicht, ob es um ihn wirklich dunkler wird oder ob ihn nur die Augen täuschen. Wohl aber erkennt er jetzt im Dunkel einen Glanz, der unverlöschlich aus der Türe des Gesetzes bricht.”

This example is particularly interesting in that it foregrounds the problem of the man’s perception of the light: the witnessing of this radiance hinges upon uncertainty within a moment of perception. Perhaps it is a glimmer of something beyond the law, of another world or epoch. The light has an almost ineluctable temporal character: it “streams inextinguishably.” In Kafka’s parable, the moment of a perceptual dawning is foreclosed. Just as the radiance begins to appear, the door of the law is shut. Perhaps of equal importance to this light, are, as Hélène Cixous notes, “the positions of the bodies” of the doorkeeper and the man from the country. This relation, Cixous notes, is “described in concrete terms” and “is going to last a lifetime.” The positions are central also in attempting to decipher the nature of the light: “he [the man from the country] does not know if darkness is inside or outside. But he recognizes a glorious glimmer . . . that eternally shines forth from the door of the law . . . [t]he man is in eternity.”

The figure of a foreclosed dawning enters into a tension between narrative background and narrative foreground in Kafka’s *The Trial*. This takes place through the visual cutout, such as the strip of light and other fragmentary visual pieces. In *The Trial*, as in Woolf’s “A Sketch of the Past,” the critical moment of perception takes shape through these visual cutouts in the surface of reality. Seemingly minor visual events acquire enormous significance in Kafka’s novel, but they do not signify anything clear. Instead, these moments initiate a process.

At the beginning of Chapter 6 of *The Trial*, K. receives a visit from his uncle at the bank. Having caught word of his nephew’s case, the uncle impatiently enjoins K. to confront the matter. Still in his office, K. responds to the urging of his uncle lackadaisically. Peering out the window, his eyes focus on a geometric, visual fragment that stands out from the urban landscape, “a small triangular section […] a slice of empty house-wall between two shop windows” / “ein kleiner dreieckiger Ausschnitt zu sehen war, ein Stück leerer Häusermauer zwischen zwei Geschäftsauslagen.” In this example, a perspectival escape on the part of K. is also one of those digressions in Kafka’s novel which seem to posit a certain conscious drifting on K.’s part into another point of focus, despite the alleged immediacy of the law’s injunction. K. chooses to exert his focus on minor details of the visual landscape outside his office window. It is as if when looking at the “small triangular section,” this “slice of empty house wall between two shop windows,” K. enters into a different story. This is also the kind of moment when the reader would be able to position their reading in relation to K. independently of this tragic novel’s explicit outcome. The reader simply participates in a visual moment. Importantly, this is not a landscape detail relayed as part of the general scene. This triangle interests K. At the same time, its relation to his subjectivity as a character is unclear. These minor details might suggest the emergence of a broader context. Moments when K. strives to maintain an analytical position in relation to his case seem to open up the novel’s perspectival field, admitting into the frame not only those objects central to the narrative,
but also those minor objects which are immediately at hand. For K., having absented himself psychologically from the definitive structure of his case, the “small triangular section” takes on the characteristics of a minor constituent of a structure in ongoing apprehension, an insignificant detail which Kafka chooses to cite in a kind of vast ledger of an aesthetic totality distinct from the more conventional movements of tragedy. The minor event is a fold in the plot; it does not disrupt it absolutely because it does not exist within the same terms as plot. This event opens up the space of the character to something larger than a verifiable destiny. Thus, I argue, the minor visual event attempts to initiate another kind of relationship with the reader.

The Minor Visual Event is also a Form of Gesture

Often in The Trial the gesture of perception manifests as something minor. Such gestures are staged so prominently in the novel that one wishes to ask what their significance could possibly be. In addition to K’s perception of visual pieces, there are powerfully uncanny bodily gestures like Leni’s webbed fingers or the system of handclasps between Leni and K.. In “Franz Kafka: On the Tenth Anniversary of his Death,” Benjamin contrasts the Brechtian gestus with Kafka’s gesture:

What Kafka could see least of all was the gestus. Each gesture is an event—one might even say, a drama—in itself. The stage on which this drama takes place is the World Theater which opens up toward heaven. On the other hand, this heaven is only background; to explore it according to its own laws would be like framing the painted backdrop of the stage and hanging it in a picture gallery. Like El Greco, Kafka tears open the sky behind every gesture; but as with El Greco—who was the patron saint of the Expressionists—the gesture remains the decisive thing, the center of the event.

In Brecht, the gestus makes visible certain social relations. However, as Benjamin makes clear, Kafka’s gesture creates its own context, its own atmosphere of meaning distinct from the readerly anticipation of plot. Here the minor event is less a minor detail and more of a backdrop which exerts itself substantively without abandoning itself to purposive ends. As Benjamin observes: “But it is always Kafka; he divests the human gesture of its traditional supports and then has a subject for reflection without end.” In Kafka’s gestures, segments of human corporeality transcend the very limits of the human without becoming metaphysical instruments or symbols. Concurrently, Kafka frames the moment of the gesture within a space that troubles the parameters of human time, while grounding it in a perceptual epistemology that does not exclude the body as a point of anchorage.

Benjamin suggests that in Kafka’s work one witnesses rather remarkable reconsiderations of visual perspective: literary objects that present new contexts for reflection. Kafka seldom approaches the mundane in The Trial as such. Rather, mundane visual fragments function like gestures to “tear open the sky,” or create new aesthetic contexts for inquiry.

In Chapter 6 of The Trial, the break caused by one of these visual slivers coincides with a moment of indifference, detachment, and perceptual remove on K.’s part, amidst the scene of his uncle’s exhortations regarding his case. “Your indifference drives me mad,” K.’s uncle states, while he badgers K’s assistants and causes a general disturbance.

Outside the window, K. fixates on a visual segment that has nothing to do with the drama at hand. Visual segments like these indicate a frame of possibility: an alternative to the present which nevertheless rushes conspicuously into the present. Another example takes place in Chapter 7, on the day of the Manufacturer’s visit, when K’s performance at work grows remarkably poor. K. has a line of clients waiting for him outside of his office, but he neglects his work duties. K. goes “over to
the window, perched on the sill, holding onto the latch with one hand, and looking down on the square below. The snow was still falling. The sky had not yet cleared. Later in this chapter, the text reads:

Without any particular motive, merely to put off returning to his desk, he opened the window. It was difficult to open, he had to push the latch with both hands. Then there came in to the room through the great window a blend of fog and smoke, filling it with a faint smell of burning soot. Some snowflakes fluttered in too.

Ohne besonderen Grund, nur um vorläufig noch nicht zum Schreibtisch zurückkehren zu müssen, öffnete er das Fenster. Es ließ sich nur schwer öffnen, er mußte mit beiden Händen die Klinke drehen. Dann zog durch das Fenster in dessen ganzer Breite und Höhe der mit Rauch vermischte Nebel in das Zimmer und füllte es mit einem leichten Brandgeruch. Auch einige Schneeflocken wurden hier eingeweht.

The structure of these sentences appears very deliberate. Great stylistic effort is placed in trying to show K.’s lack of intention, his inability to move continuously from frame to frame. The difficulty and magnitude of K.’s gesture when he opens the window belies his distraction: the action serves no particular intention but comes onto the scene cataclysmically. K. opens the window “merely to put off returning to his desk” (“nur um vorläufig noch nicht zum Schreibtisch zurückkehren zu müssen”). Here the textual description expands in the midst of and despite the absence of intention. It is as if this minimal gesture were actually a very significant event— that the maintenance of a standstill in the text actually requires huge amounts of effort.

Benjamin writes: “The man who whitewashes has epochs to move, even in his most insignificant movement. On many occasions and often for strange reasons Kafka’s figures clasp their hands. Once, the casual remark is made that these hands are ‘really steam hammers.’” Benjamin then states, in reference to “The Judgment”: “As the father throws off the burden of the blanket, he also throws off a cosmic burden.” Perhaps K.’s opening of the window is so strenuous because it is without motive. K. perhaps acts according to one action and one frame at a time.

Looking out at the open air, and the evening weather, K.’s gaze and bodily position suggest an attitude of hope or waiting. The act of opening a window directly entails the possibility of opening onto something else. What is supposed to arrive in this moment? This moment in The Trial seems like much more than opening a window. What arrives is merely the soot from the urban street. But in this moment something else enters as well: the snowflakes, another visual sliver in which the background bursts into the foreground. K. is also having a kind of subtle experience of weather, or external reality.

These gestures on K’s part can also be linked to spectatorship. In Prisms, Adorno states that within the spectatorial gestures of the onlookers at the beginning of The Trial, there is a powerful kind of mimesis linked to “traces of experience.” Adorno chooses this passage from early in The Trial: “Through the open window, he had another glimpse of the old woman who with genuine senile inquisitiveness had moved along to the window exactly opposite, in order to see all that could be seen.” For Adorno, something like experience (flickers of something other than sheer objectification) is to be inferred from these subtle moments of visible gestures. For Adorno, the gesture is a “self-evident” form of certainty, a “literalness” which provides a more direct form of meaning than the confusion which arises from linguistic properties themselves. This suggests that if language is opaque then visual gesture creates a strange form of clarity in its place.
Time and Perspectival Arrangements

Kafka’s visual slivers and segments of perception take place within a spatio-temporality distinct from chronological time as well as the present. They seem impervious to the dramatic flow of narration, at times even capable of overwhelming it. Their overall presence is less than plot, yet more than motif. These geometries of visual perception harness the system of perspectively arranged segments which is inherent within any temporal construction. Kafka’s visual slivers reveal how the moment actualizes itself, how it takes place. The perspectival effects of Kafka’s visual gestures posit a more subtle process of meaning than the tragic narrative about the insurmountable legal case. Within this process of meaning entailed by gesture, things appear in fact less confusing, or rather, they do not overwhelm K. to the point that the law does with its strange discursive complexity.

Time in fiction is arguably little more than the effect of perceptible arrangements. It is through the manipulation of spatial perceptual principles that time effects are produced. Such effects also occur through the positioning of segments. In the chapter entitled “Fictional Time” from Possible Worlds in Literary Theory, Ruth Ronen finds that the fictional present is “a temporal concept” that “works as a metaphorical substitute for a modal concept.” She writes:

This metaphoricity is implied by Reinhart (1984) where the narrative present, as the reference time line, is defined by the foreground sequence of the text. The demarcation of the temporal foregrounded segments is oriented, according to Reinhart, by perceptual principles. The author even concludes that a “narrative organization system is obtained by a metaphorical extension of the spatial perceptual system” (805): that is, temporality is viewed as a metaphorical extension of spatial relations.

For Ronen, “temporality,” or “the narrative present” is created by the tension within a visual plane between foreground (“temporal foregrounded segments”) and background. Time is governed by “perceptual principles” and takes the form of surfaces on a spatial prism. More specifically, Ronen argues that there is an intrinsic relationship between the act of foregrounding segments and fashioning a narrative present. Ronen also writes: “the perception of time movement is triggered by the perspectival arrangement of materials and by the linguistic formulation of sentences.”

In Kafka’s novel, a moment distinct from the present foregrounds perspectival segments and restructures the temporal element of visual perception by cutting through narrative time and space. Kafka’s version of the moment—the foregrounded segment, the auditory citation, or the visual sliver—takes place within its own frame. Actions and gestures have singular, internal propulsion: not a propulsion from frame to frame. By foregrounding insignificant background segments—departing from the substantive sequence of events—Kafkean modernism mimics a temporal present which is nevertheless distinct from a narrative present. In Kafka, this occurs not through a proliferation of the linguistic signs for time as it does in Woolf, but by foregrounding perspectival segments. Kafka presents foregrounded segments and visual slivers apart from his narrative, as if they were outside of the present. Within frames that at times seem to exist outside of the modernist novels in which they appear (Woolf’s beggar woman in Mrs. Dalloway for example), gaps and hovering segments create something in the place of time using a logic that shares much with fictional temporality while still being distinct from the latter.
Objects Generate Time Effects

The positioning of objects creates particular time effects, but we will see how the way in which an object takes position in *The Trial* also carries with it the capacity to create certain temporal effects. Certain objects which appear in the chapel scene in Chapter 9—the candle, the pulpit—give the momentary impression of architectural depth and permanence. Although they enter into the scene suddenly and with centrality, they do so not through any of their own instrumentality or mobility, but because K., at a certain moment, notices them. This is how these objects take position. The epistemological inquiry which K., a mobile perceptive subject, then undertakes into these architectural objects seems to denaturalize time. It as if the sequence here were only the contingent steps K. takes in relation to a sudden, architectural object that takes place within a moment that can’t be limited to sequence. Here the dawning of K.’s perception alongside these objects challenges the notion of a static narrative arrangement.

Ronen only goes as far as to say that within a given literary work, a given arrangement of objects creates a given temporal framework. In contrast, Kafka takes advantage of a revelatory theological trope in order to constitute an object such that the spectator’s epistemological encounter with the object allows access to temporal abstraction.

If it is the idea of a modernist moment or perceptual segment distinct from any present which concerns us, then how does Kafka produce this moment perspectivally? What is the nature of the space that the Kafkean perceptual segment occupies? How is the perspectival logic and order of this space (that of the modernist moment) fundamentally different from the kind of perspectival logic that we see within a more conventional fictional present?

Dark spots and flashes create exaggerated literary chiaroscuro in *The Trial*. Plays between light and dark in Kafka’s novel are crucial to the creation of the temporality that we are calling the Kafkean dawning of the object or foregunded segment. These perspectival forms involve the immediate positioning of uncertain, foregrounded, spatial segments.

If the present can be understood as a metaphorical extension of spatial relations, then this space is almost made to collapse in the cathedral scene when K.’s analytic gestures extend beyond the framework of reliable narrative space. When K. examines the dark folds of the pulpit, the narrative present folds into this gesture. The rhythm of this corporeal gesture is not wholly unlike Stephen’s, in Joyce’s Proteus chapter, when he feels impelled to close his eyes in order to hear the sounds on Sandymount Strand. In this example from Joyce, the oscillation between appearance and disappearance creates a very significantly slowed-down instance within the story. In the example from Kafka’s novel, this oscillation gestures toward something else. Modernism suffuses these moments with an unprecedented foregrounding of perception through the dawning of objects—the pace is slowed down to a point where a different readerly sense of engagement appears to be invoked. Such moments evoke a change at the level of modalities of aesthetic reception.

In Kafka’s text, illumination and darkness acquire uncanny textures of emergence, pushing beyond the binaries of light versus dark and visibility versus invisibility. In Chapter 9, K. enters the cathedral and experiences physically impossible light effects. The narrator writes:

Away in the distance a large triangle of candle-flames glittered on the high altar; K. could not have told with any certainty whether he had noticed them before or not. Perhaps they had been newly kindled. Vergers are by profession stealthly-footed, one never notices them. K. happened to turn round and saw not far behind him the gleam of another candle, a tall thick candle fixed to a pillar. It was lovely to look at, but quite inadequate for illuminating the altar-pieces, which mostly hung in the darkness of the side chapels; it actually increased the darkness.494
In der Ferne funkelte auf dem Hauptaltar ein großes Dreieck von Kerzenlichtern, K. hätte nicht mit Bestimmtheit sagen können, ob er sie schon früher gesehen hatte. Vielleicht waren sie erst jetzt angezündet worden. Die Kirchendiener sind berufsmäßige Schleicher, man bemerkt sie nicht. Als sich K. zufällig umdrehte, sah er nicht weit hinter sich eine hohe, starke, an einer Säule befestigte Kerze gleichfalls brennen. So schön das war, zur Beleuchtung der Altarbilder, die meistens in der Finsternis der Seitenaltäre hingen, war das gänzlich unzureichend, es vermehrte vielmehr die Finsternis. 495

In this passage, light effects manifest as chiaroscuro, or a play between light and dark. Yet the description of the interior of the cathedral extends beyond chiaroscuro. As the light cast by the “tall, thick candle fixed to a pillar” actually increases the gloom in the cathedral, the causality of light and dark become unreliable. Perhaps this is because Kafka’s passage foregrounds fields of light and darkness which persist outside the light spectrum entirely. The candle’s material ambivalence—suggesting both dark and light simultaneously—as well as its theological iconography suggest that whatever it illuminates may be extra-visual.

The timing of the candle’s placement in the sequence is also ambiguous: it emerges within the moment, as if intended for this moment and even K. alone. Indeed “K. could not have told with any certainty whether he had noticed them [the candles] before or not.” The candle is thus intensively bound up with K.’s immediate presence within the moment at hand. The reader is meant to experience this candle differently also.

The candle is not one among an array of objects, awaiting apprehension or interpretation. Rather, it seizes a position within the scene and actively posits itself as an object. As such, the candle catalyzes a process of perception. The fetishistic foregrounding of the candle grants it a perceptual value independent of the context within the church. Presented to K., unwilling to subside into configurative equivalence with other constituents of the scene, the candle is an operative and dynamic object of epistemological interpretation, whose possibilities operate beyond the chapel and even beyond the text. This type of possibility, or fluctuation, is part of the nature of the Kafkean moment.

If the candle functions in the scene as a plenipotentiary of the dawning of the object, offering itself to an ongoing epistemological cathexis that extends beyond the current context, human bodily gestures in the scene choreograph and emulate this function. The abstraction of the figure of the candle finds an accompaniment in the verger’s gestures, which strive for a communicative register even as they prove impenetrable to rational comprehension: “But when he saw that K. had become aware of him, the verger started pointing with his right hand, still holding a pinch of snuff in his fingers, in some vaguely indicated direction. His gestures seemed to have little meaning” / “Als sich aber nun der Kirchendiener von K. bemerkt sah, zeigte er mit der Rechten, zwischen zwei Fingern hielt er noch eine Prise Tabak, in irgend einer unbestimmten Richtung. Sein Benehmen war fast unverständlich.” 496 Vague and incomprehensible forms of human gesture, pointing outside the text and any immediacy of meaning, complement the effects of the candlelight.

Human gestures and other visual fragments within the cathedral function like a series of windows, which, though dark, give forth the idea of illumination. The candlelight’s darkness and the verger’s gestures indicate visibilities and legibilities outside the text, terms of meaning to which the reader seems to have been given some access to: gestures and figures which, far from resolving meaning, lie within a time which the story’s end will not resolve. The fact that the verger’s gestures “have little meaning” challenges us to think outside of a definite arrival at signification. These Kafkean signs create a sense of infinite deferral.
Many objects that appear in *The Trial* require unique epistemological modes of apprehension. The epistemological operation which surrounds them is fetishistic, and brings about the gradual dawning of objects. The text also dons perceptual objects in the sense that it positions or foregrounds such objects as central objects of display. *The Trial* dresses itself in its own epistemological accoutrements. Here the dawning/donning of the object in the text and by the text takes place within a state of perceptual emergence.

*The Mimesis of Sensation, The Experience of Reading*

In Chapter 9, the appearance of the pulpit also becomes an occasion for this process of perceptual epistemology:

> K. went up to the pulpit and examined it from all sides, the carving of the stonework was carefully wrought, the deep caverns of darkness among and behind the foliage looked as if caught and imprisoned there; K. put his hand into one of them and cautiously felt the contour of the stone, he had never known that this pulpit existed.\(^{497}\)

> K. trat vor die Kanzel und untersuchte sie von allen Seiten, die Bearbeitung des Steines war überaus sorgfältig, das tiefe Dunkel zwischen dem Laubwerk und hinter ihm schien wie eingefangen und festgehalten, K. legte seine Hand in eine solche Lücke und tastete dann den Stein vorsichtig ab, von dem Dasein dieser Kanzel hatte er bisher gar nicht gewußt.\(^{498}\)

This perceptual epistemology takes place within a specific moment, concurrently with the foregrounding of the pulpit, yet it is also drawn out and exaggerated.

K. approaches the pulpit’s obscure crevices as if this object and its surrounding darkness were evanescent phantasmagoria. The tactile senses spread out upon the surface of the incomplete, emergent objectivity of the pulpit. It is as though the figure of the pulpit were only a reflection in a mirror, on the other side of which a real pulpit might emerge. K. grasps a momentary architectural object within the liminal space of perceptual epistemology.

Visual darkness corresponds with tactility within this moment of perception. The visual logic of this sequence is unique. In Chapter 9, forms of candlelight that increase darkness give way to the strange appearances of objects like the pulpit. The pulpit carries with it a deep architecture of darkness ("das tiefe Dunkel"). This darkness seems permanent, deep, and ulterior, arguably subsisting in another dimension. The moment of the dawning of perception expands in relation to this permanence. With his hands K. explores the intricately designed or “carefully wrought” stonework. Darkness of this magnitude might be employed normally as a type of visual backdrop. Here this backdrop is given immediate importance. It is the event context for K’s tactile gestures.

According to Ronen, perspectival arrangements create aspects of fictional temporality. The uncanny, staged darkness of the pulpit calls the perspectival architecture of fictional time into question. If, according to Ronen, narrative presence can be understood as a metaphorical extension of a visual play between foreground and background, then perhaps time itself folds into K.’s gesture of placing his hands upon the darkness because here the difference between foreground and background has become unreliable. The visual gap which the darkness represents is thrust upon the spectator. When K’s hand disappears into immediately foregrounded darkness, this hand also disappears into the Kafkean moment.
Throughout this study, we have shown how, within certain modernist works, a frame of time or moment is cut out from the remainder of the work. Within these frames or gaps arise objects of epistemology. This gap is usually characterized by a certain still or arrested quality. Even though they are arrested, however, images and objects are active in that they are thrown into the perceptual process. They become epistemological images; objects that exist within the process of perception, and in an aesthetic mode apart from representation.

The candle in Chapter 9, the darkness, the pulpit—all are arguably epistemological images within a perceptual epistemology. In this perceptual epistemology an organ of perception takes precedence, anchoring the indefinite image in the tactile moment. The epistemological image of the pulpit takes shape through tactile apprehension. The pulpit and its dark stonework are therefore images that exist within the process of being learned or examined by a subject, K. The literary technique of perceptual epistemology is a snapshot of the experiment of knowing within the moment of the dawning of perception.

In *The Trial*, the moment of the dawning of perception is developed, drawn out, and exaggerated. It exists within an enhanced and foregrounded magnitude within the text. Furthermore, K. critically examines the pulpit’s stonework. It is not just the evanescent nature of the dawning of perception at stake in the epistemological image. K.’s examination scene perhaps also conducts an inquiry into the nature of the dawning of perception.

The text foregrounds perception to make way for a critical epistemology, but also for a new mode of time. The text emphasizes the very process and medium of apprehension so much as to overwhelm the object in question. In Chapter 9 of *The Trial*, the pulpit is such an object. It almost seems to take place for the sake of inquiry alone: an inquiry into the fact of its own appearance in a moment outside the general drama.

As an object of inquiry, the pulpit is a prime example of modernism’s dawning of the object. It catalyzes a process of critical perception. This critical perception takes the form of an examination of both the pulpit as well as the dark the gap in knowledge that it represents. Also similarly to the candle, the darkness here appears to have no contingent relationship to the physical relativity of the current environment’s architecture, as though it subsists in another dimension. It appears to K. as though through revelation: in its architectural solidity it locates itself centrally in his perceptive experience. It takes position in relation to him, and then the reader is arguably offered an extensive gap of time in which to take a position in relation to K.

The pulpit does not rely for its own ontology on the general surrounding context. For K. the inquiry is more than a visual one; he seeks to lay his fingers upon an object, the pulpit. This is an object that he had “never known” to have “existed.” Its existence seems to consist in the event of its taking place as an object of inquiry, within the time of inquiry.

The stonework of the pulpit frames the Kafkan visible within the liminal space of the dawning of perception. The pulpit is another immediate, momentary architecture. It appears to be almost thrust upon K. Its crevices arrest darkness: “the deep caverns of darkness among and behind the foliage looked as if caught and imprisoned there.” Similarly to the candle in the church, there is a depth and a permanence to this darkness.

Darkness has been imprisoned by the pulpit on the edges of perception. A gap in the visual has been isolated within a moment. This capturing, this act of foregrounding the visual moment is further emphasized in the scene through tactile perception. The pulpit registers and captures fields of darkness that exceed the edges of visibility. K feels “the contour[s]” of the stone. This unique darkness is apprehensible, perceivable by the tactile senses.

K. attempts to explore the pulpit with his hands, as if his object were beyond the realm of light and dark altogether, beyond the problem of visibility and invisibility. Kafka expands upon the moment of initial contact with the object. What is at stake here is the momentary existence of a
perceivable phenomenon (darkness, stonework), taking a position, or being staged in the fluctuating advent or dawning of epistemology. The Kafkean moment expands upon a moment of initial perception. It draws out the initial murky contact with the object and turns it into a critical sequence, making the moment of first touch into something much larger.

K., like the man who stands before the law, has an experience. This experience is conditioned by the representational effects of the novel and takes place at the outer reaches of sensation. Unlike in Brecht, the same level of detachment from the literary work’s spectacle of sensation does not exist in Kafka. In Benjamin’s view of Brecht, the dramatist abolishes the sensory. Sensory effects might cause empathy or identification, something which Brecht’s entire system is designed to abolish unequivocally. K. participates in inquiry, but he is not Brecht’s thinker. His thought is impure, highly mediated by the body, which assumes a kind of ambiguous, critical posture in relation to the world. I call this the mimesis of sensation. In fact, I would argue the spectator’s thought-world is actually meant to be consistent with K.’s in this moment. The spectator should sense this darkness. The effect is not Aristotelian, because it does not derive from a narrative outcome or empathy with a character. Rather the effect is a homology between the experiential effects of perception and reading. The experience of the reader changes with these new, dark objects.

As we saw in Woolf’s The Waves, the dawning of perception through the dawning of the object are processes vital to modernism. The moment seizes all of K.’s perceptive attention as it fashions a temporality distinct from the present. This is the time of the examined moment and the dawning of the object. K. reaches out his hand to a darkness that exists beyond the problem of invisibility in the moment of the dawning of perception. Kafka’s darkness is not obscure. It is a time where inquiry takes place.
Notes

Introduction


6 See Banfield, “Between Naturalism and Modernism,” 120-1.


10 Ibid.

In Russell’s theory of dualistic time, time does not pass in sensible experience, it only passes though “an invisible abstract continuity” (see Ann Banfield’s essay, “Time Passes,” 482-86). In her essay, Banfield argues that Woolf, a central modernist in the current study, was deeply influenced by 20th-century Cambridge time-thinking (Banfield’s phrase) largely through its influence on her friend, Roger Fry. Cambridge time-thinking finds formulation between 1903 and 1927, notably by the philosophers G. E. Moore, Russell, F.H. Bradley, and J. McT. E. McTaggart. Although the influences of analytic philosophy cannot be applied wholesale to each modernist I write about (each grapples with time and the terms of literary meaning in their own way), the interdisciplinary perspective of someone like Russell still invites broad applications. For example, later 19th-century mathematicians found that “there is no such thing as the next moment,” as Russell explains. This for him was an important discovery. It is accomplished through “the banishment of the infinitesimal” (the idea of the infinitely small) which had “played formerly a great part in mathematics,” having “been introduced by the Greeks . . . . It gradually grew in importance, until, when Leibniz invented Infinitesimal Calculus, it seemed to become the fundamental notion of all higher mathematics . . . . But at last Weierstrass [1815-1897] discovered that the infinitesimal was not needed at all . . . . Thus if there are to be no infinitesimals, no two moments are quite consecutive, but there are always other moments between any two. Hence there must be an infinite number of moments between any two; because if there were a finite number one would be nearest the first of the two moments, and therefore next to it. This might be thought to be a difficulty; but, as a matter of fact, it is here that the philosophy of the infinite comes in, and makes all straight” (Russell, Mysticism and Logic [New York: W.W. Norton, 1929] 82-3). The point is that, even in space, matter can always “be cut up and made smaller still,” thus it will “always have some finite size” because there are “no finite number of divisions,” which confirms what might be called the separateness of a moment of perceptive experience, and the increased significance of infinity within modernist epistemology (Russell, Mysticism and Logic, 83). For Russell, abstract “mathematical continuity is not visualizable,” Banfield writes, which for him means that we can’t see time pass with our eyes, but can only understand it through the “logical imagination.” In other words, immediate perceptive experience might be timeless. “Time passes invisibly,” Banfield writes, “but it passes nonetheless.” She summarizes Woolf’s time aesthetic: “[t]he characters in To the Lighthouse must close their eyes in sleep for time to pass” (Banfield, “Time Passes,” 485). Banfield cites the phrase “logical imagination” from: Bertrand Russell, Mysticism and Logic (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1957 [1917]) 76-77.


In Necessity and Form, Stanley Corngold discusses what he calls the “literalization of the metaphor” in Kafka’s The Metamorphosis. He writes: “Kafka transforms metaphor back into his fictional reality, and this counter-metamorphosis becomes the starting point of his tale” (51). Corngold wishes to keep this “fictional reality” separate from the idea of a referential tendency in the text. Nabokov, the lepidopterist, found great interest however in the appearance of this insect in Kafka’s text. Kafka’s beetle presents a scientific visual puzzle.

I present “a woman reclines, another combs her hair” as a rhetorical device.
It is in “Mallarmé Perchance” where Milner treats Mallarmé’s aesthetics of poetic thought as a form of weak meaning. Milner writes, of the Mallarméan line “A Throw of the Dice Will Never Abolish Chance” that “Mallarmé isolates the weakest possible thought. Descartes sought the minimal thought in much the same way; he found it in the Cogito, which he himself considered a tired saying: hoc tritum, he says, ‘this worn-out phrase.’ Mallarmé could hardly confer a more favorable judgment upon his own pivot sentence. Like the Cogito, it folds back on itself; in so far as it is a thought, it casts a roll of the dice; saying that a roll of the dice does not abolish chance, it says of itself that it is a roll of the dice and that it does not abolish chance.” The result, for Milner, is a new imperative: “Poetry can and must think. Such is the task of the new genre inaugurated by Mallarmé.”


Jameson, The Antinomies of Realism (London: Verso, 2013) 32, 42. Jameson’s theory appears heavily influenced by the work of Walter Benjamin. Benjamin discusses changes to the temporal structure of perception in his famous essay “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire”: “[t]he invention of the match around the middle of the nineteenth century brought forth a number of innovations which have one thing in common: one abrupt movement of the hand triggers a process of many steps” (174). An instant suddenly has a new significance. It is striking that Woolf uses the match struck Benjamin singles out to invoke the moment. In Mrs. Dalloway, Clarissa for a moment “had seen an illumination; a match burning in a crocus; an inner meaning almost expressed” (Virginia Woolf, Mrs. Dalloway, 32). For Lily Briscoe in To the Lighthouse, the match struck is also a metaphor for a momentary revelation: “[t]he great revelation perhaps never did come. Instead, there were little daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark” (Virginia Woolf, To the Lighthouse [New York: Harcourt, 1927], 161).

For Benjamin, the “snapping’ of the photographer” changes time too, “[a] touch of the finger now sufficed to fix an event for an unlimited period of time. The camera gave the moment a posthumous shock, as it were. Haptic experiences of this kind were joined by optic ones” (175). Exposure to advertising, or moving through an urban center, involves new forms of perceptive experiment, the human subject becomes “a kaleidoscope equipped with consciousness” (Baudelaire’s words). By the time of Baudelaire, “the imprint that history has made upon the conditions of human perception is clear: “technology has subjected the human sensorium to a complex kind of training” (175). The body grows so accustomed to small assaults that “a new and urgent need for stimuli was met by the film. In a film, perception in the form of shocks was established as a formal principle.” For Benjamin, the aesthetic technique of interruption in film is here conditioned by external factors acting upon a now desensitized body. The moment he describes is “the rhythm of production on a conveyer belt” which is also “the basis of the rhythm of reception in film” (175). Walter Benjamin, Illuminations, Trans. Harry Zohn, Ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Shocken Books, 1968) 174-5. In this study, I discuss modernist representational effects which arise from perceptive experience, effects which seem distinct from the sheer alienation of human perception that Benjamin describes.

Jameson, The Antinomies of Realism, 46.

Ibid, 140.

22 Mallarme, from The Latest Fashion, Mallarmé in Prose, 83.


24 Ibid.


26 Joyce, Ulysses, 5, 220.


28 Ibid.

29 Foucault, Ibid.


31 Joyce, Ulysses, 31.

32 Of “consciousness,” James writes, “[t]hat entity is fictitious” (James, p.1158).

33 James, 1145.

34 James, 1142, emphasis mine.

35 The moment consists of the experience of perceptive relations. This is an experience of perception which can’t be attributed to the contingent subject of Erlebnis or the objectivity of Erfahrung (see footnote number 23 below). Similarly, binaries between thought and matter do not exist, James claims. Thus, how does modernism, I’d like to ask, capture the dissolution of these binaries through the aesthetic of perceptive relations which I call objecthood?

36 Jay defines the terms of experience at one point in this way: “Kantian Erfahrung is the empirical evidence of the transcendental, scientific, cognitive, subject; Diltheyan Erlebnis is the inner experience of the contingent subject prior to rational reflection or scientific cognition.” (Jay, “Experience without a Subject: Walter Benjamin and the Novel,” p.148).

37 Jay, 148.

38 Cited in: Jay, “Experience without a Subject: Walter Benjamin and the Novel,” p.152. Banfield’s quote is from: Banfield, “Where Epistemology, Style and Grammar Meet Literary History: The Development of Represented Speech and Thought,” 449. With regard to represented speech and

Banfield writes that although “some commentators assume these ‘represented perceptions’ are cases of represented thought,” the represented perceptions, she asserts, should not be considered as identical to “represented thought,” and that “upon closer inspection, we find differences among the sentences representing consciousness, differences whose distribution follows the intuitive distinction between reflective and non-reflective consciousness.” For Banfield, represented perceptions share with represented thought “the characteristic use of the past tense” and “the use of ‘shifted modals’ could, should, would, and might where discourse would have can, shall, will, and may” (Banfield, “Reflective and Non-Reflective Consciousness in the Language of Fiction,” Poetics Today, Vol. 2, No. 2 [Duke University Press: Winter 1981] 65-7). The different represented perceptions which I discuss don’t seem to follow in each case the presence of what Banfield calls shifted modals.


See: Daston and Galison, Objectivity (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2007) 9-17, 27.

Galison and Daston are clear that objectivity involves a history of looking, of “what is worth looking at, how it looks, and, perhaps most important of all, how it should be looked at”(23). This entails a history of the eye in the late 19th-century. Thus “objectivity is not synonymous with science” in general (28-9).


Rancière, The Aesthetic Unconscious, 83. Rancière reads Freud’s own literary interpretations (of Hoffmann, Ibsen, etc.) as “analyses which were so many ways of resisting the nihilist entropy that Freud detects and rejects in the works of the aesthetic regime of art, but that he will also legitimize in his theorization of the death drive” (Ibid, 83).

Rancière, Ibid, 85-87, his emphasis.

Rancière discusses a “philosophical restaging of the tragic equivalence between knowing and suffering . . . the invention of psychoanalysis occurs at the point where philosophy and medicine put each other into question by making thought a matter of sickness and sickness a matter of thought” (Rancière, 23).

Ibid, 22.


Banfield is citing from: Bertrand Russell, An Outline of Philosophy (Cleveland: The World

52 See: Banfield, Ibid, 96, 98.


56 Banfield, *The Phantom Table*, 401.


58 Ibid.

59 Here is the full quote from Eliot: “Hamlet is up against the difficulty that his disgust is occasioned by his mother, but that his mother is not an adequate equivalent for it; his disgust envelops and exceeds her. It is thus a feeling which he cannot understand; he cannot objectify it, and it therefore remains to poison life and obstruct action” (Eliot, “Hamlet and His Problems”).


63 Ibid.

64 Cited in Banfield, “Time Passes,” 496.


I borrow this particular phrasing from the gender and sexuality theorist of Woolfian aesthetics, Elizabeth Abel. Despite Woolf’s anti-realism, Abel clarifies that “we do Virginia Woolf’s novels a disservice if we accept too readily her protestations about narrative . . . . For much as she disdained and suspended the conventions of plotting observed by her Edwardian precursors, Woolf was obsessed with the experience of living in time.” The nature of Woolf’s literary aesthetic of time is the subject of the current essay. Abel’s point is an important one: another kind of narrative emerges in Woolf’s work. For Abel, this is rooted in psychoanalysis, a point of view that I do not wish to disqualify as a potent resource for understanding Woolf’s project, but which I do not address in the current study. See: Elizabeth Abel, *Virginia Woolf and the Fictions of Psychoanalysis* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), xv (in Abel’s preface).


Franz Kafka, *Der Proceß* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2008) 218.

Chapter 1: *Mallarmé’s Literary Aesthetics of Atmosphere*

Mallarmé writes: “Languages are imperfect in that although there are many, the supreme one is lacking” (Stéphane Mallarmé, “Crise de vers,” from *Selected Poetry and Prose*, trans. Mary Ann Caws (New York: A New Directions Book, 1982) 75.

Stéphane Mallarmé, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, 368, translation mine.


Ibid, 206.


81 Ibid, 57.


84 Ibid, 452.

85 Ibid, 454-5.

86 Ibid, 456.

87 Ibid, 454-5, italics mine.

88 Ibid, 448.

89 Ibid, 444.

90 Ibid, 446. Mallarmé again seems to mark his distance from Romanticism, but also stylistic convention, in a short essay on Morisot. He states, “[n]o intrusive light is shed by dreams . . . professional or common concerns are suppressed.” Stéphane Mallarmé, “Berthe Morisot” from *Mallarmé in Prose*, trans. Jill Anderson, 69.


95 Ibid, 454.

96 Ibid, 455.

97 Ibid, 454.

98 Ibid, 455.

Mallarmé writes, in this essay on Morisot: “satin infused with life by contact with skin, atmosphere of the pearly East revived: or, with ideal nonchalance, setting free by the glimpse of nudity the social grace imprisoned by style, so that the meaning behind the dress bursts forth, expressing its relation to the garden and the seashore, a greenhouse, the gallery. Classical tradition revived with fluidity and the rapture of the naked breast” (Mallarmé, *Mallarmé in Prose*, trans. Jill Anderson, 69). Here is the original French version: “le satin se vivifiant à un contact de peau, l’orient des perles, à l’atmosphère : ou, dévêt, en négligé idéal, la mondanité fermée au style, pour que jaillisse l’intention de la toilette dans un rapport avec les jardins et la plage, une serre, la galerie. Le tour classique renoué à ces fluidité, nitidité” (Mallarmé, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2, 151).

In an article titled, “The Fashion Gazette,” Mallarmé writes: “Snow feels harsh on your face yet offers it an alert and enviable freshness, the cream that roughens its texture, yet repairs and nourishes it; these two contrary whitenesses mingle, I think, their virtues without their dangers, in the deliciously named product *Snow-Cream*, whose double whiteness invades the fragility of the skin, the better to nourish and heal it. You will agree that milk is not the same as cream; the product called *Lait d’Hébé* should really have been called, other than by implication, the ambrosia itself that Hebe served to the gods of Olympus. For the miraculous lotion renews both suppleness and strength—that is, everything the most delicate of complexions, so exposed to the importunities of winter, could desire. A recollection, not vague in the slightest, persists in the *Eau de Toilette au Lait d’Hébé*” (Mallarmé, *Mallarmé in Prose*, 90-1).

Here is a longer version of the same quote: “Now Manet and his school use simple colour, fresh, or lightly laid on, and their results appear to have been obtained at the first stroke, that the ever-present light blends with and vivifies all things. As to the details of the picture, nothing should be fixed in order that we may feel that the bright gleam which lights the picture, or the diaphanous shadow which veils it, are only seen in passing, and just when the spectator beholds the represented subject, which being composed of a harmony of reflected and ever-changing lights, cannot be supposed to look the same, but palpitates with movement, light, and life. But will not this atmosphere—which an artifice of the painter extends over the whole of the object painted—vanish when the picture is completely finished? If we could find no other way to indicate the presence of air than the partial or repeated application of colour as usually employed, doubtless the representation would be as fleeting as the effect represented, but from the first conception of the work, the space intended to contain the atmosphere has been indicated, so that when this is filled by the represented air, it is as unchangeable as the other parts of the picture” (Mallarmé, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2, 456-7, italics mine).

The verse is from the poem “Salut” and translates into English as: “Nothing, this foam, virgin verse.” Mallarmé, *Selected Poetry and Prose*, 2, translation mine.

Ibid, 32.

Ibid, 37.


Here is the full quote from Lukács: “What is the life-value of a gesture? Or . . . what is the value
of form in life, the life-creating, life-enhancing value of form? A gesture is nothing more than a movement which clearly expresses something unambiguous. Form is the only way of expressing the absolute in life; a gesture is the only thing which is perfect within itself, the only reality which is more than mere possibility. The gesture alone expresses life: but is it possible to express life? Is not this the tragedy of any living art, *that it seeks to build a crystal palace out of air*, to forge realities from the insubstantial possibilities of the soul, through the meetings and partings of souls, a bridge of forms between men? Can the gesture exist at all, and has the concept of form any meaning seen from the perspective of life?” György Lukács, *Soul and Form* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 44, italics mine.


109 Blanchot writes: “One can say that Mallarmé saw this nothing in action; he experienced *the activity of absence*. In absence he grasped a presence, a strength still persisting, as if in nothingness there were a strange power of affirmation. All his remarks on language tend to acknowledge the word’s ability to make things absent, to evoke them in this absence, and then to remain faithful to this value of absence, realizing it completely in a supreme and silent disappearance. In fact, the problem for Mallarmé is not to escape from the real in which he feels trapped, according to a still generally accepted interpretation of the sonnet on the swan. *The true search and the drama take place in the other sphere*, the one in which *pure absence affirms itself* and where, in so doing, it eludes itself, causing itself still to be present. It subsists as *the dissimulated presence of being*, and in this dissimulation it persists as chance which cannot be abolished. And yet this is where everything is at stake, for the work is possible only if absence is pure and perfect, only if, in the presence of Midnight, the dice can be thrown. There alone the work’s origin speaks; there it begins, it finds there the force of the beginning.” Maurice Blanchot, “The Igitur Experience,” from *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock (The University of Nebraska Press, 1982). I am citing this essay from: Bloom, 6-7, italics mine.

110 Here is the full quote from Butler: “Indeed, in the early work typified by *Soul and Form*, literary “form” is neither subjectively conjured nor objectively imposed; it holds out the possibility for a mediation and even indissolubility of the subjective and objective realms. Indeed, the early emphasis on form might be said to refute the stark opposition between subjective and objective modes of experience upon which the later criticism relies.” Butler, cited from her introduction to: Lukács, *Soul and Form*, 3.

111 Mallarmé, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2, 166-67. Here is the English translation: “That adolescent who vanished from us at the beginning of his life and who will always haunt lofty, pensive minds with his mourning is very present to me now as I see him struggling against the curse of having to appear . . . . I am thankful that chance has drawn me away from my imaginative and absent-minded vision of the theater of clouds and truth, brought me down to a human stage, and given me, as my first topic of discussion, what I consider to be the play. For had it become too quickly accustomed to the purple, violet, pink, and eternally gold horizon, my vision might easily have been offended. My relationship with the skies, which were my home, now ends; and my place in front of that screen of glory is not taken by any of my indelicately palpable contemporaries. (Farewell to the brilliance of that yearly holocaust which has flamed out to the proportions of all time, so that there may be no witness to its empty rite.) And now here comes *the prince of promise unfulfillable*, young shade of all of
us; and therefore there is myth in him.” Stéphane Mallarmé, “Hamlet,” from Selected Poetry and Prose, trans. Mary Ann Caws, 70.

112 Ibid., 70-71, his italics.

113 Mallarmé, Oeuvres complètes, vol. 2, 166-67, italics mine. Here is the English translation: “Even the finest of qualities must remain relatively unimportant in a story which dwells solely on an imaginary and somewhat abstract hero. Otherwise the reality of the atmosphere created by the symbolic Hamlet will be disintegrated like a curtain of mist . . . . Hamlet (a stranger everywhere) brings that quality to bear upon the hard and overly obtrusive, through the disquieting and funereal invasion of his presence. Whenever the French version of the play becomes a little too exclusively patterned, the actor restores things to their proper places; with a gesture, he exorcises and neutralizes the pernicious influence of the Théâtre-Français; and at the same time, breathes out the atmosphere of genius; all this he does with a masterful touch, because he has looked into this time-honored text with simplicity, as in a mirror.” Stéphane Mallarmé, “Hamlet,” from Selected Poetry and Prose, 73, italics mine.


117 Milner, 87.

118 Milner, 87-8.


122 Mallarmé describes the supreme language through linguistic representational effects. These effects are derived from the sensory experience of sound and visuality as well as the dialectics between them.

123 Milner, 101.

124 Milner writes: “Mallarmé’s fundamental theorem,” is that “[v]erse abolishes chance only when it is disjoined from thought. And hence, a lemma: thought speaks in prose. From which it follows that the prose of thought does not abolish chance” (95). And in Milner’s words, “the Hugolian empire” (102) of verse is important here. “Hugo,” Mallarmé writes, “brought all prose—philosophy, eloquence, history—down to verse, and, since he was verse personified, he confiscated, from whoever tried to think, or discourse, or narrate, almost the right to speak” (Mallarmé, “Crise de
vers’ from *Divagations*, 202). In Milner’s view, the post-Hugolian poetic revolution of mellifluous verse that sounds like what it names, “had to be disconnected from thought [as in Hugo’s mode of verse] and restored exclusively to the play of sonorities.” But starting with *Un Coup de dés*, “the situation is reversed in its entirety. Poetry can and must think” (Milner, 102).

125 Milner writes: “Mallarmé isolates the weakest possible thought” (Milner, 103).


127 Mallarmé, *Divagations*, 211.

128 Ibid, 201, italics mine.


131 Mallarmé, *Divagations*, 207.


133 Mallarmé, “Crise de vers,” *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2, 212.


136 Ibid.


138 Here is the full quote: “Monuments, the sea, the human face, in their natural fullness, conserve a property differently attractive than the veiling any description can offer; say evocation, or, I know, allusion or suggestion; this somewhat haphazard terminology testifies to a tendency, perhaps the most decisive tendency that literary art has undergone; it limits it, but also exempts it. The literary charm, if it’s not to liberate, outside of a fistful of dust or reality without enclosing it, in the book, even as text, the volatile dispersal of the spirit, which has to do with nothing but the musicality of everything” (Ibid, 208, italics mine).

139 Ibid, 208.

140 Ibid, 209.

141 This “fullness” is a special “property differently attractive” than “description.” Does “description” apply to a certain type of thinking as well? One opposed to “natural fullness,” the
“evocation,” or “the volatile dispersal of the spirit,” as well as “the musicality of everything”? (Mallarmé, *Divagations*, 208). In Mallarmé’s idea of plenitude, there is a sense of virtuality’s possession of the essential. How does description compromise this?

142 Mallarmé, *Divagations*, 211, italics mine. The original French text is from: Mallarmé, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2, 213, italics mine. In contrast to Yamaguchi’s argument, which is that the supreme language is understood by Mallarmé to be beyond his grasp, I think the essay “Crise de vers” as a whole oscillates between the idea of the new (post-Hugolian) verse which sounds like the object it names and the supreme language (see the previous footnote on Milner and Hugo). If this atmosphere is radically “new” in 1895, then how could it be meant to describe the effects of the *poetry which sounds like the object it names* following Hugo, a poetry which Milner dates from 1885 to 1895? The distinction between what is possible and impossible in literature (in Mallarmé’s view) does not seem patent in “Crise de vers.”

143 Ibid.

144 Yamaguchi, 115.

145 Milner, 96.

146 Ibid, 97.

147 Ibid.

148 Milner writes: “the Book, in creating an organized coexistence, abolishes the chance of the crowd . . . but no one can determine with certainty whether the book as Mallarmé conceived it was to be in verse or not” (98). In the passage that ends “Crise de vers,” the concepts of “isolated speech” and a certain kind of verse (or a literary sense of language) seem consistent.

149 Mallarmé, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, 368, translation mine.


151 Mallarmé is not *describing a flower*, he renders the impression of a fleeting bloom in “the new atmosphere” (Ibid, 211). Mallarmé’s *spoken flower* is a clue to a system of virtuality, something I will approach in the pages which follow through another concept: *the line*.


153 Mallarmé, “La Musique et les lettres,” *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2, 68, italics mine. Here is the English translation: “Such an occupation is enough, consisting in comparing the aspects and their number as they strike our intelligence; awakening, as décor, the ambiguity of some fine figures, at the intersections. *The entire arabesque* that links them reveals dizzying leaps with a fear that is recognizable; as well as anxious chords. Warning by certain, instead of disconcerting, leaps, or affirming that their similarity removes difference by conflation. *A mute melodic calculation, of those motives (motifs) that combine with our fibers to create a logic*. What agony, then, shakes the chimera, pouring from its wounds of gold the evidence that *the whole creature exists*; no defeated twist either falsifying or transgressing the
omnipresent Line spread out from every point to every other in order to institute the idea—except in the instance of the mysterious human face—just as a Harmony is pure.” Mallarmé, Mallarmé in Prose, trans. Rosemary Lloyd, 37.

154 “[O]mnipresent,” the organizational line is pervasive and diffuse, within both space and time. This presence must be understood in a more geometrical sense; it is a constant, albeit shifting, shape. Words like “fleur” fasten upon aspects of the line like clothespins (they “fix” upon the line’s “variations”). Mallarmé, Ibid, 38.


156 Thinking about the line through an expansive mental act is likened to waiting for dawn. The sound and visuality dialectic is recurrent here: the leap of song in memory (sound) is compared in the same sentence to a pre-sunrise illumination (the visual).

157 Ibid.

158 Ibid, 44.

159 Ibid, 39.

160 Mallarmé, Mallarmé in Prose, 83.

161 Ibid.


164 Ibid. The mime exists within words, and Mallarmé calls attention to the word as something more static now, as “ice” or a “mirror,” as a measured stage for an imperfect idea of time (Ibid). Like Hamlet, the mime’s gestures radiate the presence of this time.

165 Mallarmé, Oeuvres complètes, vol. 1, 372.

166 In Act V, Scene 2 of Hamlet, “[h]ad I but time,” is what the protagonist says near his death (William Shakespeare, Hamlet, [online], http://www.folgerdigitaltexts.org/html/ham.html#line-5.2.0. Accessed: November 12, 2017). I think that Mallarmé may have prolonged a certain kind of interstitial time in a text inspired in many ways by Hamlet, Igitur.

167 Mallarmé, Selected Poetry and Prose, 42. Here is the English translation: “Oh dreamer, that I may plunge / Pathless to pure delight, / Learn by a subtle lie / To keep my wing in your hand. / A twilight coolness comes / Upon you with each beat / Whose caged stroke lightly / Thrusts the horizon back. / Now feel space shivering / Dizzy, some great kiss / Which, wild to be born in vain,
/ Cannot break forth or rest. / Can you feel paradise / Shy as a buried laugh, slip / From the corner of your mouth / Down the concerted fold!” Mallarmé, *Selected Poetry and Prose*, trans. Peter and Mary Ann Caws, 43.

168 Ibid.


170 Ibid.


172 There are many echoes of Igitur in this same letter. In particular with reference to the candle in *Igitur*. This is how Mallarmé describes the emergence of an impression in this letter: “My work was created only by elimination, and each newly acquired truth was born only at the expense of an impression which flamed up and then burned itself out, so that its particular darkness could be isolated and I could venture ever more deeply into the sensation of Darkness Absolute. Destruction was my Beatrice. I can speak of this now because yesterday I completed the first sketch of my work. It is perfectly outlined; it will be imperishable if I don’t perish. I looked upon it without ecstasy or fear; I closed my eyes and saw that it existed” (Mallarmé, *Selected Poetry and Prose*, trans. Bradford Cook, 88).


174 Ibid, 89.


176 Ibid, 139.

177 Ibid.

178 Here is the full quote from Mallarmé’s “Bucolique”: “The first nature: a tangible idea conveying a measure of reality to the blunted senses and, by compensation, direct; it communicated to my youthful person a fervor which I call passion, just as, once the days have dematerialized in majestic suspense, the funeral pyre is lit, in the virginal hope of forbidding interpretation by the decipherer of horizons. While by this suicide, the secret does not remain incompatible with man, and lucidity dispels the mists of obsolescence, existence, street” (Ibid).

179 Ibid, 142.

180 Ibid, 137.

181 Ibid, 140.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid, 140.


Ibid.

Ibid, 141.

Ibid, 141-42.


Ibid, 89.


Ibid, 91.

Mallarmé, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, 434.

Ibid, 92.

Ibid.

Ibid, 91.

Ibid.

Mallarmé, *Igitur*, the French text is cited from Cohn, p.75.


Ibid, 92-3.

Ibid, 93.

Cohn, 1. The second quotation is from: Mallarmé, *Selected Poetry and Prose*, 92.

Ibid, 93.

Ibid, 97.
Chapter 2: The Mimesis of Sensation: Sensing a Time Beyond Eternity in Woolf’s Moments


208 Daston and Gallison, 69-70.

209 Ibid, 69.

210 Ibid, 15.

211 See: Abel, Virginia Woolf and the Fictions of Psychoanalysis, xv in Abel’s preface.


213 Virginia Woolf, Mrs. Dalloway, 80-1, italics mine.

214 My particular phrasing here, “irregular water drops,” might cause confusion. Here eternity is something irregular. To see how a different idea of irregular water splashes relates to objectivity, as it emerges in late-19th-century scientific atlas images, see: Daston and Galison, Objectivity, 9-17, 27.


217 Ibid., 19.

218 Ibid., 151, italics in original.


Jesse Matz has shown that literary impressionism shares certain characteristics with phenomenology, but its focus on mediation distinguishes it from the latter. Matz draws an analogy to Derrida’s critique of Husserl’s phenomenology in 1967. Matz writes: “In *Speech and Phenomena*, Derrida proves there remains in Husserl’s phenomenology a certain metaphysical bias, a metaphysical distinction between subjectivity and world, which enables false notions of “presence.” The belief that experience makes the world present to the subject is, according to Derrida, wrongheaded, because it fails to see that nothing ever comes unmediated; nothing stands outside of the subject-world relation in such a way as to have the immediacy of presence” (Matz, 27-8).


Ibid.


Banfield writes (citing Russell): “Russell distinguishes the appearance of experienced continuity from the reality of abstract continuity. ‘The continuity which we experience in the world of sense,’ he suggests, is an illusion; just as the appearances of visual sensation must be analyzed by the painter to reveal that experienced continuity is illusory. Again, we are led to conclude that, although Russell’s conception of experience is of a direct and thus unanalyzed knowledge, there is, paradoxically, no access to it without analysis—we cannot experience directly until we have rid
ourselves of common sense. This is like the discontinuity discoverable under the flux of Fry’s Impressionist vision—Fry speaks of ‘appearance as revealed by Impressionist researches.’ Discontinuity is the ‘raw material’ out of which continuity is built, to paraphrase Fry on Georges Seurat. In this sense, Russell implies, mathematical continuity is not visualizable.” The Russell quote Banfield cites is from: Russell, Our Knowledge of the External World, 136. The Fry quote is from: Roger Fry, Transformations: Critical and Speculative Essays on Art (London: Chatto and Windus, 1926), 196. Banfield, “Time Passes,” 484-5.


236 Banfield writes: “Lily’s ‘solution,’ putting the tree in the middle, like Woolf’s placement of ‘Time Passes’ at the novel’s center, transforms Impressionism into Post-Impressionism by an interval both temporal and spatial. ‘Time Passes’ links an earlier moment with a later; it is thus that ‘time passes.’ ‘The effective structure of the novel’ is, indeed, as Fleischman finds it, ‘a static symbolic pattern of three movements—akin to the three strokes of the lighthouse’s beam’ but precisely because Woolf accepts the realist answer to McTaggart’s idealism [the Cambridge Apostle McTaggart thought that time was unreal, see: Banfield, “Time Passes,” 475]. Time does pass, even if through seemingly static moments.” The Woolf citation is from: Virginia Woolf, To The Lighthouse (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich), 154. The Fleischman citation is from: Avrom Fleishman, Fiction and the Ways of Knowing (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1978) 172. Banfield, “Time Passes,” 503, italics mine.

237 Woolf, The Waves, 130-1, italics mine.

238 Elsewhere in The Waves Bernard calls these shocks the “black arrows of shivering sensation” (Woolf, The Waves, 251).

239 Woolf, The Waves, 130-1, italics mine.

240 Ibid.


242 Woolf writes: “When I said about the flower “That is the whole,” I felt that I had made a discovery. I felt that I had put away in my mind something that I should go back [to], to turn over and explore. It strikes me now that this was a profound difference. It was the difference in the first place between despair and satisfaction. This difference [in dealing with shock effects] I think arose from the fact that I was quite unable to deal with the pain of discovering that people hurt each other; that a man I had seen had killed himself. The sense of horror held me powerless. But in the case of the flower I found a reason; and was thus able to deal with the sensation. I was not powerless. I was conscious—if only at a distance—that I should in
time explain it. . . . This suggests that as one gets older one has a greater power through reason to provide an explanation; and that this explanation blunts the sledge-hammer force of the blow. I think this is true, because though I still have the peculiarity that I receive *these sudden shocks*, they are now always welcome.[.] (Woolf, *The Waves*, 130-1, italics mine).


244 Ibid, 32.

245 Ibid, 11, 12, 10, 22.


248 Ibid., italics mine.

249 Ibid.


252 Ibid., 118-121, italics mine. Another important instance of the ontological logic entailed by the gesture of the swinging door in *The Waves* occurs after Percival’s death. Bernard states: “A child playing—a summer evening—*door will open and shut, will keep opening and shutting*, through which I see sights that make me weep. For they cannot be imparted. Hence our loneliness; hence our desolation. I turn to that spot in my mind and find it empty. My own infirmities oppress me. There is no longer him to oppose them” (Woolf, *The Waves*, 156, italics mine).

253 Ibid., 122.

254 Ibid., 104-5.

255 Ibid., 101, italics mine.

256 Ibid., 105-7.

In *The Ontology of the Accident*, Malabou posits a theory of “destructive plasticity,” which she describes as “this power of change without redemption, without teleology, without any meaning other than strangeness.” Malabou also asks: “is there a mode of possibility attached exclusively to negation?” Catherine Malabou, *The Ontology of the Accident*, trans. Carolyn Shread (Polity, 2012) 24, 73.

Here I am relying again on Malabou’s work, *The Ontology of the Accident*. Here she writes: “One does not die as one is; one dies as one suddenly becomes. And what one becomes is always in the order of a desertion, a withdrawal that takes form”(69). Malabou links the ambiguity of essence to a plastic idea of time. One of her examples is Proust. She writes: “Proust highlights this plastic ambiguity of time endlessly. The progression, evolution, inflection, repetition, but also the instantaneous, the infinitely rapid, the bump, the accident, which appears to elude duration, or at least to introduce into the thickness of succession the undateable bifurcation of destruction, sharp as a claw, unpredictable, throbbing, magnificent” (Malabou, 54, italics mine).

Banfield, “Between Naturalism and Modernism,” 118.


In “Anon,” Woolf writes: “For many centuries after Britain became an island, the historian says, ‘the untamed forest was king. Its moist and mossy floor was hidden from Heaven’s eye by a close
drawn curtain of innumerable tree tops.’ On those matted boughs innumerable birds sang; but their song was only heard by a few skin clad hunters in the clearings. Did the desire to sing come to one of those huntsmen because he heard the birds sing, and so rested his axe against the tree for a moment? But the tree had to be felled; and a hut made from its branches before the human voice sang too. . . . The voice that broke the silence of the forest was the voice of Anon” (Woolf, “Anon,” cited in Silver, 382). The quote that Woolf cites in this passage is from George Macaulay Trevelyan, *History of England* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1926), 3.


300 Ibid., 81-2.


305 With regard to the dialectical image, Benjamin writes: “The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again. […] For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably.” Quoted from: Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” from *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 255.

306 “History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogenous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now (*Jetztzeit*)” (Benjamin, “Theses on The Philosophy of History,” from *Illuminations*, 261).

Chapter 3: *Beyond Anthropocentric Time: Joyce’s Tragic Philosophy of Sound*


308 James Joyce, *Ulysses*, 41.

Joyce, Ulysses, 41.

F.L. Lucas, Tragedy: Serious Drama in Relation to Aristotle’s Poetics (New York: The Macmillon Company, 1958), 80. Here Lucas writes: “Das Volk dichtet,” it has been said of [the earliest] poetry; here ‘das Volk tanzt.” The German phrases translate to: “the people speak,” and “the people dance.”

Ibid.


See: Richard Ellmann, 120.


Ibid., 76.

Joyce, Ulysses, 31.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

One might add that a semantic conflation exists in the English lexicon between verbs for semantic clarification and verbs for the intensification of light (illuminate, shed light on, enlighten, elucidate, etc.).


Joyce, Ulysses, 31.

Cited in Gifford, 45. In Ulysses Annotated, Gifford writes: “[i]n De Anima Aristotle argues that color is the “peculiar object” of sight, as sound is that of hearing. In De Sensu he postulates that the ‘Translucent’ (diaphane) is ‘not something peculiar to air or water, or any of the other bodies usually called translucent, but is a common ‘nature’ and power, capable of no separate existence of its own, but residing in them, and subsisting likewise in all other bodies in a greater or less degree. . . . But it is manifest that, when the Translucent is in determinate bodies, its bounding extreme [limit] must be something real; and that colour is just this ‘something’ we are plainly taught by facts—colour being
actually either at the external limit, or being itself that limit, in bodies. . . . It is therefore the Translucent, according to the degree in which it subsists in bodies (and it does so in all more or less), that causes them to partake of colour. But since the colour is at the extremity of the body it must be at the extremity of the Translucent in the body’ (from 439a, b, *The Works of Aristotle*, trans. J.A. Smith, ed. W. D. Ross [Chicago, 1952], vol. 1, p.676).” This long quote is cited from: Gifford, 45.

326 See the long quote above.


329 Joyce, Ibid., 212, Joyce’s italics.

330 Joyce, Ibid., 215.


332 Ibid., 54-5. The Eisenstein quote is from: Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Form* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1977), 35.

333 Eisenstein, 34-5. Some of this text is also cited by: Burkdall, 54.

334 Burkdall, 55.

335 For these visual fragments related to Mulligan, see: Joyce, *Ulysses*, 3-7.

336 Ibid., 6.

337 Ibid., 5.

338 Ibid., 3.

339 Burkdall, 57.

340 Joyce, *Ulysses*, 4-5.

341 Burkdall, 52. Eisenstein’s quote is from: Eisenstein, 37, Eisenstein’s italics.

342 Joyce, *Ulysses*, 31, Joyce’s italics.


344 Ibid., 11, italics mine.
345 Lukács, *Soul and Form*, 176.

346 Ibid., 182.

347 Ibid., 181-2.

348 Ibid., 181.

349 Ibid., 183, italics mine.

350 Ibid., 182-3.

351 Ibid., 181.

352 Ibid., 178, 184, italics in original.

353 Ibid., 181.

354 Ibid., 183.


356 Ibid., 207.

357 Ibid., 203.

358 Ibid.

359 Ibid., 240-2.

360 See: Ibid., 251-4.

361 Ibid., 255.

362 Ibid., 255-6.


364 Ibid., 627.


In contrast, in the essay “To Sing or To Sign,” Maud Ellmann argues that the ees create a supplement which in fact can be exhausted by Bloom’s olfactory sense. She writes of Bloom, “[h]e hears ees creaking, he sees ees Greeking; and while the E enjoys the charms of both modalities, it also opens a defect in both, an unvoiced, unseen residue.” She then asks, “Is it possible that we have missed a third modality? Bloom seems to think so when he muses, ‘Words? Music? No, it’s what’s behind’ (274)” (Maud Ellmann, “To Sing or To Sign,” in Morris Beja et al., eds., James Joyce: The Centennial Symposium [Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986], 68). Ellmann emphasizes scent, or the knowledge of Bloom’s nose, Bloom’s allegedly greasy, or as she points out a “Greece-ee” organ. Ellmann’s version of this remainder is the unctuous, the flatulent: grease “eases entries and odyssean exits,” her argument concerns the epistemology of scent certainty: “[w]hat the ear hears, and the eye sees, give way to what the nose knows” (Maud Ellmann, “To Sing or To Sign,” 68-9). This pursuit of a third modality is promising, but Ellmann’s modality of scent certainty is grounded in subjectivity and intentionality. The creaking ee’s arguably point to the vexed universality of an impersonal, inexorable soundscape in Sirens which overwhelms subjective perspectives. The source of “what’s behind” these sounds is more difficult to discern.

Augustine writes: “[c]oncentrate on the point where truth is beginning to dawn. For example, a physical voice begins to sound. It sounds. It continues to sound, and then ceases. Silence has now come, and the voice is past. There is now no sound. Before it sounded it lay in the future. It could not be measured because it did not exist; and now it cannot be measured because it has ceased to be. At the time when it was sounding, it was possible because at that time it existed to be measured. Yet even then it had no permanence. It came and went. Did this make it more possible to measure?” (Saint Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, Confessions, 240-1)


Ibid., 84-7, italics mine.

Ibid., 87.

Joyce, *Ulysses*, 100.

Ibid., 208.


Nietzsche, 77.

Joyce, *Ulysses*, 231.

See: Attridge, “Joyce’s Noises,” 471-484. In addition, in Sirens, one discovers that sound forms composites with the phenomenality of visual matter. Rather than visuality and sound operating, as Nietzsche states, more or less discretely “alongside one another,” sound and visibility participate in each other’s emergence simultaneously—this blending draws out supplementary atmospheres of impersonal ontological traces (Nietzsche, 77).


Ibid., 78-9.

Ibid.

Nietzsche, 76.

Ibid., 79.

Ibid., 76.

Joyce, *Ulysses*, 231.

Ibid.
To clarify the repetition, here is another version of this previously quoted passage: “It was falling on every part of the dark central plain . . . falling softly . . . softly falling into the dark mutinous Shannon waves . . . he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead” (Joyce, “The Dead,” 255-6).

Joyce, *Ulysses*, 41.

Joyce, *Ulysses*, 236.

Ibid., 218-9.

Topia, 78.

Lukács, *Soul and Form*, 182.

Joyce, *Ulysses*, 228, last italics mine.

Stéphane Mallarmé, *Selected Poetry and Prose*, trans. Robert Greer Cohn, 94.


Ibid., 237.

Ibid., 216.


Ibid., 214-5.

Ibid., 213.
Ibid., 214.

Ibid., 216.

Ibid., 220.

Ibid., 208.

Ibid., 211.


Ibid., 4-5.

Charles Baudelaire, Oeuvres complètes, 694.

Ibid., 693.

Joyce, Ulysses, 97, 100.

Lukács, Soul and Form, 175.

Joyce, Ulysses, 28.

Lukács, Soul and Form, 184.

Joyce, Ulysses, 233.

Cited as “suggested by Iona Opie,” in Gifford, 307.

Ibid.

See: Topia, 78. Also see: Joyce, Portrait, 13, and Woolf, The Waves, 118-121.

Joyce, Ulysses, 224.

Ibid., 234.
Chapter 4: Kafka’s Moment: Spectatorship, Perception, and the Dawning of the Object

Stanley Corngold and Benno Wagner discuss the influence of empiricism on Kafka’s short work, “The Description of a Struggle.” Ernst Mach’s *The Analysis of Sensations* (1885), with its “second printing in 1900,” Corngold and Wagner write, “became a key text of Vienna modernism, acting as a relay between the arts, science, and the humanities. Its anti-metaphysical thesis of the ‘unsalvageability of the self’ became an aesthetic manifesto; but even without its notoriety, Kafka would have become acquainted with Mach’s program upon joining the Prague Brentano circle in 1902” (Stanley Corngold and Benno Wagner, *Franz Kafka: The Ghosts in the Machine* [Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2011], 20).

In *The Vanishing Subject: Empirical Psychology and the Modern Novel*, Judith Ryan charts the influence of empiricism on modernism extensively, as well as in relation to Kafka. For Ryan, William James and Ernst Mach are the influential figures within this trend, which marks “[t]he transition between the late nineteenth century and the twentieth.” For Ryan, this is not a break from realism and naturalism, but “a realization of tendencies already implicit in nineteenth-century literature” (Judith Ryan, “The Vanishing Subject: Empirical Psychology and the Modern Novel,” *PMLA*, Vol. 95, No. 5 [Oct., 1980], 857-869, 857). In the later nineteenth-century, Ryan writes, “new theories were being advanced that cast doubt on the discrete identity of the subject itself . . . . [r]educed to its basic tenet, empiricism states that all we can know are sense impressions, thoughts, and feelings, bundled together as ‘elements’ (Mach’s term) of our total view of things.” Ryan cites Woolf’s phrase, ‘the world seen without a self,’ by eliminating the observing ‘self’ but not the actual act of observing, aptly describes the literary equivalent of this ‘elementaristic’ view . . . . A preoccupation with perception and with the expression of perception in its various modalities characterizes the entire period; perception loosens itself by degrees from its personal anchoring and becomes increasingly disembodied” (858). Novels develop a form of “‘elementaristic’ presentation” (858) where “subjectivity is dissolved and ‘world’ and ‘self’ are reduced to a loosely associated bundle of elements—a style in which things and sensations have equal valency within the entire complex” (858).

Most fitting for the current study on Kafka, would be empiricism’s idea of “directness.” Here Ryan quotes William James: “[t]o be radical, an empiricism must neither admit into its constructions any element that is not directly experienced, nor exclude from them any element that is directly experienced. For such a philosophy, the relations that connect experiences must themselves be experienced relations, and any kind of relation experienced must be accounted as ‘real’ as anything else in the system” (Ryan cites this quote as: William James, *Radical Empiricism*, 42; James’s italics). But importantly, the idea of “relations” extends also to that between the object and the perceiver. James, Ryan notes, “emphasizes less the content of perception than the act itself as a reciprocal relationship between the perceiver and the thing perceived” (861). Noting how novelists like Döblin, Musil, and Broch adopt a Machian-influenced style, Ryan states: “like free-floating particles, the ‘elements’ appear sometimes more, sometimes less related to the perceiving self” (863).

Ryan, 864.
My approach is similar and different from Adorno’s approach to Kafka in *Prisms*. At times, Adorno seems to think that the reader can engage in a critical and productive way with obscure openings within a text like *The Trial*: “[t]he attitude that Kafka assumes towards dreams should be the reader’s towards Kafka. He should dwell on the incommensurable, opaque details, the blind spots. The fact that Leni’s fingers are connected by a web, or that the executioners resemble tenors, is more important than the Excursus on the law. It is true both of the mode of representation and of the language” (Theodor W. Adorno, *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber [Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1967] 248). Here the interpretation of obscure moments in the text (like Kafka’s proliferation of gestures) appear like promising moments for critical analysis in Adorno’s view.

But unlike in my reading of Kafka’s work, Adorno sees the relationship between the text and the reader as a fundamentally hostile one. He thinks that Kafka “collapses [the] aesthetic distance” between them. Kafka “commands interpretation” with every sentence although “none will permit it.” Kafka’s reader is “the allegedly ‘disinterested’ observer of an earlier time.” And Kafka “overwhelms him” since “the contemplative relation between text and reader has been shaken to its very roots.” The act of interpretation resembles an encounter with fate: “far more than [the reader’s] intellectual equilibrium depends on whether he truly understands [Kafka’s text]; life and death are at stake” (246). For Adorno, Kafka’s text creates a tense, although strangely proximate relation to the reader. The text is “designed not to sustain a constant distance between themselves and their victim but rather to agitate his feelings to a point where he fears that the narrative will shoot towards him like a locomotive in a three-dimensional film. Such aggressive physical proximity undermines the reader’s habit of identifying himself with the figures in the novel” (246). For Adorno, Kafka’s reader is in fact so close to the text that they are afraid of it. Such readers do not think; they fear that they are actually identifying with objects (which would include the characters) in an objectified state: “[t]he crucial moment, however, towards which everything in Kafka is directed, is that in which men become aware that they are not themselves—that they themselves are things” (255).

In “The Sense of an Un-Ending,” J. Hillis Miller performs a narratological reading of *The Castle* which shows that the universe of Kafka which Lukács and Adorno describe involves making the text even more obscure than Lukács or Adorno see it: “[t]he narrative is not so much the straightforward telling of a story that might be interpreted narratologically as it is the staging of situations that are permanently inconclusive acts of reading, always in excess of the data they attempt to read. These readings are, perhaps, allegorical representations of the reader’s own acts of interpretation . . . . Readers feel, to boot, as if they are getting farther and farther away from a constantly receding destination . . . . This limitation in human possibilities of knowledge can be defined as the impossibility of verifiable interpretation” (J. Hillis Miller, “The Sense of an Un-Ending: The Resistance to Narrative Closure in Kafka’s Das Schloß,” in *Franz Kafka: Narration, Rhetoric, and Reading*, ed. by Jakob Lothe, Beatrice Sandberg, and Ronald Speirs [The Ohio State University Press, 2011, 108-122], 113-15. Miller thinks that Kafka forms a critique of a general social predicament within a world of signs: “[t]he genius of *Das Schloß* is to have shown that the sad situation of its hero is the result of not having direct access to other people’s minds and feelings. This situation vis-à-vis other people is the confrontation of a proliferating network of signs. The interpretation of those signs, or, more precisely, our reading and exegesis of them, is both urgently necessary and at the same time impossible or, more precisely, our reading and exegesis of them, is both urgently necessary and at the same time impossible or, even more precisely, always possible,
but not ever possible to verify. We can read the signs others emit, but we can never be sure we have read them right” (121).

For Miller, narrative performs a social function. Of the field of narratology, he writes, “technique participates in the production of meaning. Some narratologists, skittish about the word ‘meaning,’ would prefer to say ‘production of effect’ . . . . By ‘performative effect,’ I mean a decision, brought about by the reading, to do something; for example, to teach the novel or to write about it, but also perhaps to change one’s behavior in everyday life” (108). Miller wants the novelist to touch the reader’s life, to teach them something through novelistic effects. For Miller, by making reading difficult, Kafka teaches his readers that people in the world are difficult to read: people’s signs can’t be “verif[ied]” (121).

I think that a lesson of Kafka’s could be that inquiry takes place in a realm of extreme obscurity where the terms of meaning grow complex. “Change . . . in everyday life,” as Miller calls it, is complex. Kafka changes how representation and experience are configured within the act of reading. I would argue that the lesson is more immediate than Miller sees it. The verifiability of a sign lies within the perceptive experience itself. Miller posits an external system of value by means of which literary value can be measured. In a way, his point is to refute the need for external measurement. Kafka shows us, the “impossibility of a verifiably correct reading,” but still this impossibility is valuable only if it helps us to grapple with the complex meanings that other people emit to us (121). For Kafka, I think the value is within reading, which is intertwined with perceptive experience.

In my reading of Kafka, the sensory mimesis presented for the reader is not a form of empathy—here sensory mimesis takes place through a certain gap within reading. In “Tradition and Betrayal in ‘Das Urteil,’” Russell Berman notes that Kafka avoids realistic sensational detail in order to create a more abstract, tragic statement. Berman writes, discussing “Das Urteil,” that “[r]ealistic expectations are being raised and undermined at the same time. As J.P. Stern has noted, ‘In Kafka’s story, the sensational is avoided because the transition from the realistic to the surrealistic or fantastic is gradual.’” The collapse of realistic epistemology, which will be carried out in the father’s judgment and Georg’s death, is in effect already announced between the lines of the superficial order of the placid beginning” (Russell A. Berman, “Tradition and Betrayal in ‘Das Urteil,’” from A Companion to the Works of Franz Kafka, ed. by James Rolleston [Camden House, 2002, 85-99] 89). Berman demonstrates an incisive take on time in his reading: “the narration turns out to be not at all about a reversal of fortune, certainly not an individual’s misfortune, but rather about the nature of judgment in general and its relation to fortune and the way of the world” (91). Berman suggests that the tragic elements are there for Kafka to make a larger statement about life. The tragedy is not specific to the protagonist. Plot is a “veneer” (91), in Berman’s reading. Connecting different parts of Berman’s essay, his take on realism as a sensational form which Kafka avoids suggests that the sensational buttresses the plight of an individual within a tragic realist plot. The idea is that sensory detail helps to bring the reader into a cathartic identification with the tragic character. My reading of The Trial suggests that sensory phenomenia, albeit quiet figures in Kafka’s work, can perform the opposite. Here sensory engagement on the part of the reader takes place in a time which is not that of empathy with the fortunes of an individual. There are other kinds of time which take place within a more static kind of perceptive experience.
Again, here on the question of representational perspective, Adorno has an interesting viewpoint: “the space-time continuum of ‘empirical realism’ is exploded through small acts of sabotage, like perspective in contemporary painting . . . . Under this spell pure subjectivity turns into mythology, and spiritualism, carried to its logical extreme, turns into the cult of nature . . . . Absolute subjectivity is also subjectless . . . . pure subjectivity, being of necessity estranged from itself as well and having become a thing, assumes the dimensions of objectivity which expresses itself through its own estrangement” (Adorno, 262). Kafka’s world is not empirical, but this does not mean, in my view, that a thing-like subjectivity becomes the substitute. In Kafka, I think that experience is located differently—it is unhinged from the subject. In my view, an object does not assume the characteristics of something objective (whether this is scientifically informed or informed by the Marxian idea of social relationships taking on the characteristics of things). Certain objects in \textit{The Trial} for example would not exist in the way that they exist without the representational effects of perception that take place between the protagonist and the fact that there is a reader there too, which I think that Kafka acknowledges in ways which are more engrossed in representational dynamics than Adorno seems to think.

\textit{In Franz Kafka: The Ghosts in the Machine}, Corngold and Wagner argue that objects in Kafka’s work are discursive constructions, or increasingly determined by a will towards statistical, general knowledge. Wagner focuses on the 19th-century discourse of suicide statistics and the discourse of accident insurance which influenced Kafka’s intellectual formation as an insurance expert. A key early influence on modernism’s statistical thinking is The Belgian court astronomer and statistician Adolphe Quetelet’s \textit{Physique Sociale} (1835), which presents the idea that the life and behavior of humankind are quantifiable phenomenon. For Kafka’s modernism, this creates a “statistically reconfigured social order, all-pervasive and inescapable” (Corngold and Wagner, 21). Corngold and Wagner seek “to reconstruct [Kafka’s] writing as the birth of literature from the statistics on suicide” (43). Here, “the quantitative discourse of alienation precedes the immediate experience of alienation” (45). Certain quotes from Kafka would appear to strongly attest to such a fact: “The comet trailing fire through the night sky, with all of Prague’s eyes on it, matters only as it corresponds to a moment of fiery disappearance; the empirical world is interesting for the intensity of its dissolution” (Corngold cites these lines from Kafka directly in his \textit{Lambent Traces: Franz Kafka}, Princeton University Press, 2004, 22 [cited in Corngold and Wagner, 45]). Notice in the passage above how Kafka favors the concept of dissolution over empiricism.

For Corngold and Wagner, not just suicide statistics, but the discourse of accident insurance in general influences Kafka who “for several decades, until shortly before his death in 1924 . . . was one of the leading legal minds of the Workman’s Accident Insurance Institute for the Royal Imperial Kingdom of Austria-Hungary and thereafter for the Czech Lands” (7). Accident insurance is a discursive apparatus that creates objects in the world. For Corngold and Wagner, it even creates light. So in a sense, visuality is rooted in discourse (as statistical data). Corngold and Wagner draw from Deleuze for this idea. Deleuze writes: “Visibility cannot be traced back to a general source of light that could be said to fall upon pre-existing objects: it is made up of lines of light that form variable shapes inseparable from the apparatus in question . . . . Each apparatus has its way of structuring light, the way in which it falls, blurs and disperses, distributing the visible and the invisible, giving birth to objects that are dependent on it for their existence, and causing them to disappear” (Gilles Deleuze, “What is a Dispositif?” in \textit{Michel Foucault: Philosopher}, ed. and trans. Timothy J. Armstrong [New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992], 160 [cited in Corngold and Wagner, 231]).
There is a moment in Kafka’s travel diary, in which he describes the case of a famous Parisian tricycle accident from 1911. Corngold and Wagner describe Kafka’s writing this way: “[i]n this new context, the criterion of the truth of the event no longer lies in the object (the damaged tricycle) but in the judgment of the spectators, who once again declare the peculiar absence of individual fault for the accident” (182). Events are discursive constructions. Spectators are intimately involved. The body becomes an epistemological construct, but of a very specific variety: “Kafka’s protagonists move and have their being almost without exception between the depiction of what one could call their bodily fate and their dissolution into the order of large numbers, of statistical probabilities” (194). The ontology of objects becomes a procedure of risk assessment: “Kafka’s official policy might best be put as redefining the being of things and relations through the risk they constitute” (10). Mankind becomes a product of statistical averages. This radically changes the nature of experience. It changes what life means: “[t]he point is the felt gulf between life as lived experience and life as calculable risk” (203).

The primary argument of Corngold and Wagner may ultimately concern experience. It cannot necessarily be lived, it must evaporate into Erfahrung, in this case, the cultivation of a statistical point of view: “[s]o here is Kafka, producing images resistant to our expectations of what’s on offer in experience, with little interest in providing us with Erlebnis (following Walter Benjamin’s ‘the thrills of the hour’). Indeed he wrote the freedom of writing as ‘the freedom of authentic description that releases one’s foot from lived experience [Erlebenis]’” (100, from The Diaries of Franz Kafka, 1910-1913, New York, Shocken, 1948, cited from Corngold and Wagner, 12-13). The statistical point-of-view is for these critics, Kafka’s “higher kind of observation,” which mattered deeply to [him] as the ‘perhaps saving comfort of writing’(Kafka’s Selected Stories, New York, Norton, 2007, 210, cited from Corngold and Wagner, 193). Experience is located differently in Kafka. Apart from Erlebnis and Erfahrung, I think there must be other kinds of experience, as well as other types of configurations between experience and representation which are more neutral. I would like to ask: how do modernist literature’s representational effects of perceptive experience construct objects?

The question of realism is a major problem in Kafka studies. Time in Kafka has been a way for critics to understand how mimesis works in his texts, and how Kafka’s work can be defined in relation to realism. In “Kafka’s Time Machines” (1986), James Rolleston situates his essay as a response to Charles Bernheimer’s book, Flaubert and Kafka: Studies in Psychopoetic Structure (1982). While Bernheimer felt that there were important continuities between the two writers in terms of the 19th-century realist tradition, Rolleston argues that they are very different. Unlike Flaubert, “Kafka isn’t any kind of realist . . . there is no mimetic impulse whatever in his prose . . . his texts are governed by entirely different imperatives” (James Rolleston, “Kafka’s Time Machines,” from Critical Essays on Franz Kafka, ed. by Ruth V. Gross [G.K. Hall and Co., 1990, 85-104] 85). Rolleston’s argument is that Kafka is anti-realist. Rolleston also argues that Kafka’s version of time is romantic. Here time marks shifts in representation away from mimesis. Using “Schlegel’s terms . . . idealism [must] generate realism out of itself . . . [t]ime, in this perspective, necessarily generates space (hence the realist impulse), but is ontologically prior to it —[or as] in Novalis’ pithy phrase: ‘space as a precipitate of time—as a necessary consequence of time’” (86). Here is the Novalis quote in the original German: “Der Raum, als ein Niederschlag aus der Zeit—als nothwendige Folge der Zeit.” Novalis, Schriften, vol. III, ed. Richard Samuel (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1968), 564 (no. 67), cited from Rolleston, 103. Time in Kafka is prescriptive, for Rolleston, a “prescriptive theatre,” a theater which has no reality other than “the total definition of self and world” (Rolleston, 93).
challenge for the character is to “reintegrate the time of the world” (Rolleston, 93). Kafka’s romantic idealist time is *solipsism*. But for Rolleston there is a goal to this. For example, Gregor’s suicide fashions “The Judgment” with “the only present moment left open by his story, the moment of death...the collapse of prescriptive time opens only into the renewed chaos of anti-space, anti-wisdom, anti-history. But provided the chaos is reached with rigorous logic and temporal truth, it is as stimulating to Kafka as it was to the Romantics. It is where the human imagination starts again” (95-6). Imagination (or the creative act) and death are synonymous.

So, for Rolleston, in specific moments Kafka’s work is realist to the extent that the real world is generalized to the point of a mythic chaos. The only other way to ward off this plunge into the present moment of the actual world is something which Rolleston calls “the logic of ecstasy...[a] ritual time, with its culmination in aggressive banality, in radically useless fulfillment” (99). Rolleston’s essay asks a very interesting question, which concerns the temporality of genesis beyond solipsism: [w]hy does the necessary temporal disruption at the origin of human creativity turn so ineluctably into permanent exile and death?” (92). Rolleston focuses on Kafka’s short stories (“The Judgment,” “Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse Folk,” “The Great Wall of China,” and “Investigations of a Dog”), and this may account for some of the differences in his perspectives on time in Kafka from those advanced in this study. My reading of Kafka’s *The Trial* suggests that Kafka is a mimetic writer of some kind, that K. is not solipsistic. The reader can verge into K.’s experience. Like Rolleston, I think time is central in this shift back to the perceptive experiences of the world. For Rolleston, *interruption* is the interruption of solipsism which leads to an entry into the contingency of the world. In my view, interruption is a form of perceptive experience which seems antithetical to narration, but consistent with a type of mimetic exchange between the text and the reader. I do not see the perceptive moment within the world of Kafka as a form of chaos, but as a form of experience.

449 Benjamin, 150-51.

450 Ibid, 150.

451 In “What is Epic Theater?,” Benjamin writes: “[e]pic theater is in league with the course of time in an entirely different way from that of the tragic theater. Because suspense belongs less to the outcome than to the individual events, this theater can cover the greatest spans of time” (Benjamin, 149, italics mine).

452 Benjamin, 154.

453 Ibid, 150.

454 Ibid, 149.

455 Ibid, 149.


457 Kafka, *Der Prozess*, 241.
This is also possible because K. has remained critical despite the horror that surrounds him. Before arriving at the quarry he tells himself, “the only thing for me to go on doing is to keep my intelligence calm and analytical to the end” (Kafka, *The Trial*, 247).


Benjamin, 153.

Ibid, 152.

See Adorno, *Prisms*, 249.

Benjamin, 151.


Kafka, *Der Proceß*, 29.

In contrast, in Kafka’s *Amerika*, Karl Rossmann experiences a flurry of traffic noise which harmonizes into a clear image: “[i]n the morning and evening, and in his dreams at night, that street was always full of swarming traffic. Seen from above, it appeared to be a swirling kaleidoscope of distorted human figures and the roofs of vehicles of all kinds, from which a new and amplified and wilder mixture of noise, dust and smells arose, and all this was held and penetrated by a mighty light, that was forever being scattered, carried off and eagerly returned by the multitude of objects, and that seemed so palpable to the confused eye that it was like a sheet of glass spread out over the street that was being continually and violently smashed” (Franz Kafka, *Amerika*, trans. Michael Hofmann [London: Penguin, 1996], 29).


Ibid, 50-51.

Kafka, *Der Proceß*, 57.


Ibid, 250.

Ibid, 246.

Benjamin, 254.

In “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” Benjamin writes: “[h]istory is the subject of a structure
whose site is not homogenous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now (Jetztzeit)” (Benjamin, 261).


This ending resembles the end of “The Judgment,” in which K’s death is not stated as a fact. Instead, Russell Berman writes: “it is especially important to note that while we read that Georg lets himself fall from the bridge the text does not in fact report his death. On the contrary, in the place of death, we learn of the infinite traffic, with its multiple connotations, surely quite distinct from a definitive and fully terminal conclusion. Whether Georg’s death is muffled beneath the passage of the bus, or the infinite traffic somehow redeems him, is left undecided by the text itself” (Berman, 91).


The English translation is from: Kafka, *The Trial*, 100. The German text is from: Kafka, *Der Proceß*, 80.

See J. Hillis Miller’s essay “The Sense of an Un-Ending” and the earlier footnote on the notion of “verifiability” in Kafka (Miller, 113-15).

Benjamin, 121.

Ibid, 122.


Ibid, 144.

Ibid, 146.

Kafka, *Der Proceß*, 140.

Benjamin, p.113.

Adorno, 249.

Adorno reads the moment when K’s neighbors watch him at the opening of *The Trial* as a gesture which evokes a subtle dimension of experience. He writes: “[i]s there anyone who has lived in boarding houses and has not felt himself observed by the neighbors in precisely the same manner; together with the repulsive, the familiar, the unintelligible and the inevitable, such a person has seen the image of fate suddenly light up. The reader who succeeds in solving such rebuses will understand more of Kafka than all those who find in him ontology illustrated” (Adorno, 248). Here Adorno refers to fate alongside a difficult moment within Kafka’s text a second time (see the earlier
footnote). Gesture indicates something general within experience: “[t]he experiences sedimented in the gestures will eventually have to be followed by interpretation, one which recognizes in their mimesis a universal which has been repressed by sound common sense” (249). Common sense is general. Gesture implies a seemingly more direct contact with something. For Adorno, the representational effects of Kafka’s gestures (this “mimesis”) illuminate this more immediate surface of experience: “[s]uch gestures are the traces of experience covered over by signification. The most recent state of a language that well’s up in the mouths of those who speak it, the second Babylonian confusion, which Kafka’s sober diction tirelessly opposes, compels him to invert the historical relation of concept and gesture. The gesture is the ‘that’s the way it is’; language, the configuration of which should be truth, is, as a broken one, untruth” (249). Gesture, in its “literalness,” implies a working notion of “self-evident” certainty. Adorno writes: “Gestures often serve as counterpoints to words: the pre-linguistic that eludes all intention upsets the ambiguity which, like a disease, has eaten into all signification in Kafka” (248). Gestures occur without explicit design. In a sense, gesture is able to create meaning here because language has become too ambiguous (and thus incapable of securing a clear meaning).


492 Ibid, italics mine.


494 Kafka, The Trial, 226.

495 Kafka, Der Proceß, 216.

496 The English text in translation is from: Kafka, The Trial, 226. The German text is from: Kafka, Der Proceß, 218.

497 Kafka, The Trial, 226.

498 Kafka, Der Proceß, 218.

499 In the essay “Franz Kafka or Thomas Mann,” Lukács finds Kafka incapable of “critical detachment.” Lukács criticizes “the modernist writer [who, like Kafka] identifies what is necessarily a subjective experience [of time and reality] with reality as such” (Georg Lukács, The Meaning of Contemporary Realism, trans. John and Necke Mander [London: Merlin, 1963], 51). For Lukács, Kafka is not a typical modernist, because his technique itself is actually realist. For Lukács, detail defines realist technique: “an adequate image of objective reality will depend on the writer’s attitude towards reality as a whole. For this attitude determines the function which the individual detail is accorded in the context of the whole” (51). In Lukács’s view, Joyce’s “arbitrary naturalism” suggests that the modernist writer “will not be able to distinguish between significant and irrelevant detail . . . . the essentially naturalistic character of modernism comes to the fore.” However, “[t]he matter becomes more complex with Kafka. Kafka is one of the very few modernist writers whose attitude to detail is selective, not naturalistic. Formally, his treatment of detail is not dissimilar to that of a realist. The difference becomes apparent only when we examine his basic commitment, the principles determining the selection and sequence of detail” (52). What makes Kafka fall victim to
modernism’s subjectivism has to do with “how the individual writer imposes some kind of order on
the profusion of sensuous impression,” which is “chiefly a biographical question.” This is what
Lukács calls “perspective” (53). If perspective can establish an “authentic reflection of reality,” then
“the selection and subtraction [the author] undertakes in response to the teleological pattern of his
own life constitutes the most intimate link between a writer’s subjectivity and the outside world. We
observe here a dialectical leap from the profound inwardness of subjectivity to the objectivity of
social and historical reality” (55). Kafka’s details are not capable of seizing the whole of social reality,
Lukács claims, there is no dialectic within them, as forms of “distortion,” these details are “cryptic
symbols of an unfathomable transcendence. The stronger their evocative power, the deeper is the
abyss, the more evident the allegorical gap between meaning and existence” (78). The argument here
is consistent with that of Adorno, which is that Kafka’s subjectivism creates an allegorical world
impenetrable to the critical faculties. Here meaning does not match up with the actual experience of
life’s conditions. In Lukács reading of Kafka, life is an unexamined phenomenon.

In contrast, for Adorno, it seems like the perceptual gaps which appear in Kafka’s work should be
seen as the more exemplary points of a mythological landscape. Of Kafka’s light effects he states:
“[t]he light-source which shows the world’s crevices to be infernal is the optimal one” (Adorno,
269). From this perspective, all one can say is that the candles and the pulpit must be purely
allegorical.

Benjamin writes: “The epic theater purposes to ‘deprive the stage of its sensation derived from its
subject matter.’ Thus an old story will often do more than a new one . . . . If the theater is to cast
about for familiar events, ‘historical incidents would be the most suitable.’ Their epic extension
through the style of acting, the placards and captions, is intended to purge them of the sensational”
(Benjamin, 148).

Does Kafka’s creation of exemplary forms of visual darkness through linguistic techniques
correspond to a type of thought? Arendt reads one of Kafka’s parables in this way. Her focus is on
how Kafka stages a philosophical problem of experience, time, and thought. Arendt, in her Preface
to The Gap Between Past and Future (1961) discusses a predicament of modern life, now alien to
tradition, where “thought and reality have parted company . . . reality has become opaque for the
light of thought, and that thought, no longer bound to incident . . . is liable either to become
altogether meaningless or to rehash old verities which have lost all concrete relevance” (Hannah
cites Tocqueville: “Since the past has ceased to throw its light upon the future, the mind of man
wanders in obscurity” (6). In Arendt’s view, Kafka arrives at the heart of this issue. He sheds “rays
of light” on it, not to “illuminate its outward appearance,” rather his insights “possess the power of
X rays to lay bare its inner structure that, in our case, consists of the hidden processes of the mind”
(7). Kafka shows us what is happening in the modern mind when it has slipped out of the traditional
brackets.

Arendt discusses a parable of Kafka’s. Here Kafka writes of “two antagonists: the first
presses him from behind, from the origin. The second blocks the road ahead. He gives battle to
both . . . . His dream, though, is that at some time in an unguarded moment—and this would require a night
darker than any night has ever been yet—he will jump out of the fighting line and be promoted, on
account of his experience in fighting, to the position of umpire over his antagonists in their fight
with each other” (cited in Arendt, 7, italics mine). Arendt interprets this parable as a geometrical
shape. The umpire is a diagonal line which escapes a parallelogram of opposing forces: “[t]his diagonal force, whose origin is known, whose direction is determined by past and future, but whose eventual end lies in infinity, is the perfect metaphor for the activity of thought” (12). Kafka’s position as a “he,” matters here: “only insofar as he thinks, and that is insofar as he is ageless—a “he” as Kafka so rightly calls him, and not a “somebody”—does man in the full actuality of his concrete being live in this gap of time between past and future” (14). Arendt is talking about a thinking subject: “what had come in to being only with his own, self-inserting appearance—the enormous, ever-changing time-space which is created and limited by the forces of past and future; [here] he would have found the place in time which is sufficiently removed from past and future to offer “the umpire” a position from which to judge the forces fighting with each other with an impartial eye” (12). As her title suggests, Kafka’s gap between past and future resembles “[t]he contemporary conditions of thought,” which she calls a “mental phenomenon,” something which cannot be “applied to historical or biographical time” (12). Arendt depicts Kafka, not as a biographical person, but as this “he” who both grapples with and transcends a “thought-event” (10).

Arendt calls this a gap—a universal thing radiographed by Kafka’s thinking. “The gap,” she writes, “is not a modern phenomenon, it is perhaps not even a historical datum but is coeval with the existence of man on earth. It may well be the region of the spirit or, rather, the path paved by thinking, this small track of non-time which the activity of thought beats within the time-space of mortal men and into which the trains of thought, of remembrance and anticipation, save whatever they touch from the ruin of historical and biographical time. This small non-time-space in the very heart of time, unlike the world and the culture into which we are born, can only be indicated” (13, italics mine). For Arendt, this thinking arises from *Erlebnis*: “my assumption is that thought itself arises out of incidents of living experience and must remain bound to them as the only guideposts by which to take its bearings” (14).
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