

Introduction

The essays in this volume cover the period from about 1880 to 1930, during which modernity as a form of social and cultural life feeds into the beginnings of modernism as a cultural form. What has been called ‘the new modernist studies’ has essentially been concerned with locating modernism, now defined more broadly than in the past, in relation to other aspects of the culture of modernity. The journal *Modernism/Modernity*, established in 1994 and now the official journal of the Modernist Studies Association, originally announced its aim as being to ‘convey some sense of the grand ambition and scope of artists and intellectuals of the first half of this century’.¹ It currently describes itself as ‘Concentrating on the period extending roughly from 1860 to the present’, and the journal covers a very wide range of themes in the literary and cultural spheres.

In their recent discussions of ‘the new modernist studies’, Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz have emphasized the ‘expansion’ of the field.² While they stress the global dimension of expansion, there are also other dimensions which should be considered. One is temporal, in that ‘the new modernist studies’ is more open to the prehistory of modernism in the late nineteenth century. More importantly, perhaps, there is also an intrinsic dimension which recognizes something like the same duality which Baudelaire had identified in modernity: the combination of solidity and fragmentation which enables us to use the term ‘modernist’ both for a high-rise building and for Joyce’s prose. Some of the essays in this volume are explicitly concerned with the modernist writing and culture of the early twentieth century; others with longer-term affinities and continuities. As Michael Levenson has suggested, ‘The agon of modernism was not a collision between novelty and tradition but a *contest of novelties*, a struggle to define the trajectory of the new.’³

The questions raised by what has rather misleadingly been called ‘the modernity thesis’ in relation to early cinema have a more general application.⁴ There is a perceived tension in contemporary modernist studies

between approaches which stress the context of social and cultural modernity, opening up questions of gender and globality, and those which focus on the specifically aesthetic dimension of modernism.⁵ I would suggest, by contrast, that we need to transcend the sharp opposition that is sometimes presented between a culturalist and a more formalist approach to modernism. An instance of their connectedness is indicated by Hugh Kenner, in *The Mechanic Muse*: ‘In the twentieth century, said T.S. Eliot, the internal combustion engine altered people’s perception of rhythm: little had been pervasively rhythmic save one’s own heart, one’s lungs, the waves, and horses’ hooves.’⁶ Rhythm is both a formal dimension of poetics and is shaped by cultural circumstances and change. Language, experience, culture and technology are not independent of each other, but are profoundly interrelated.

Railways, cinema, psychoanalysis and the literature of detection – four of the key themes of the essays in this volume – lead us from the nineteenth into the early twentieth century. Railways and other modern forms of transport are not intrinsically modernist, but they have been an important inspiration for modernist cultural forms and movements, and there are continuities to be traced between the early responses to rail travel and the automobile and later modernist celebrations of them. Mark Seltzer, in his *Bodies and Machines*, examined, through American naturalist fiction, ‘the radical entanglement of relations of meanings and relations of force . . . and the radical entanglement of writing, bodies and mechanics’. He referred not only to the more generalized model of thermodynamics but specifically to the railway itself, as ‘the centering nineteenth-century model . . . of the principle of locomotion’, and of the mechanisms of relays, exchanges, couplings and cross-points between, for example, the natural and the technological, ‘passion and mechanism’, bodies and machines.⁷ In such accounts, the railway train becomes an icon of mobility. It is, as Nicholas Daly has shown, a central element in sensation fiction, and it continues to be so in the detective fiction that followed.⁸ The railway acts as an embodiment of both the progressive and the destructive aspects of industrialism, and as a powerful motor by means of which the nineteenth century is driven into the twentieth. There has been something of a shift of emphasis from the economic and social history of the train to its phenomenology – from the fact of rapid motion to the ways in which it is experienced – but there is also a growing interest in the forms of connectivity, across nations and empires, tracked by the railways.

In 1858 Marx wrote in the *Grundrisse* that ‘the means of communication and transport [enable] the annihilation of space by time’,⁹ and their

interrelations have rightly been seen as a central aspect of culture at the turn of the century, notably by Stephen Kern.¹⁰ Discussion of a number of phenomena in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – dreaming, early cinema, transport, telepathy, telegraphy – define their significance as an annihilation of space *and* time. In the first decades of the twentieth century, the distortion of space–time relations was given an aesthetic twist by futurists and others. Léger, for example, pointed to the impact of the visual experience of rapid motion on ‘the condensation of the modern picture, its variety, its breaking up of forms . . . It is certain that the evolution of means of locomotion, and their speed, have something to do with the new way of seeing.’¹¹ Aldous Huxley famously claimed that speed, and in particular fast driving, was the only new pleasure invented by modernity.¹² The impact was not just visual: Freud suggested a link ‘between railway-travel and sexuality . . . clearly derived from the pleasurable character of the sensations of movement’,¹³ and more recently (and as I discuss in Chapter 2), Sylvie Nysembaum has suggested that this rhythmic motion blurs the boundaries between human and machine.¹⁴

The period 1880–1930 has been described by Hugh Kenner, glossing Richard Cork’s book on Vorticism (and in the process transforming what Cork called the first into the second), as ‘the second machine age’, and it is true that this was the time when, for example, machine transport became for the first time a central feature of the modern city.¹⁵ The year 1895 has particular significance, marking both one starting point for the history of cinema (if this to be dated from the occasion of the first public exhibition of the Lumière brothers’ film) and a spectacular railway accident at the Gare Montparnasse in Paris. The story of early cinema-goers becoming terrified by a film of the arrival of a train at the station at La Ciotat, though it may be exaggerated, links the two forms through affect as well as temporal coincidence.¹⁶ The year 1895 is also of key importance in the early history of psychoanalysis, with (as I discuss in Chapter 9) Freud dating his discovery of the unconscious to that year.

Freud’s analysis of dreams, published at the end of 1899, was, he thought, ‘the most valuable of all the discoveries it has been my good fortune to make’¹⁷ and ‘the royal road to a knowledge of the unconscious activities of the mind’.¹⁸ For Walter Benjamin, dreams are intimately linked to history and utopia: ‘the history of the dream remains to be written . . . Dreaming has a share in history.’¹⁹ In his *Arcades* project he repeatedly quoted Michelet’s remark in an essay of 1839 that ‘Each epoch dreams the one to follow, creates it in dreaming.’²⁰ The arcades are a kind of dreamscape, and historiography as he practised it is a form of dream interpretation and one

oriented to the future: 'Every epoch, in fact, not only dreams the one to follow but, in thus dreaming, precipitates its awakening.'²¹

Early reflection on cinema focused substantially on the parallels between dreams and films, even if the Freudian 'screen memory' was a sometimes misunderstood translation of Freud's motif of concealment (*Deckerinnerung*). The interiority of dreams has found conceptual and experiential parallels in the often private character of cinema spectatorship and in railway travel, in which the scenery passes by as if projected onto the train window.²² Both in the cinema and from the train, there is an element of voyeurism – even perhaps *in* the train, as when Freud speculates that as a two-year-old he saw his mother naked on a night train: the founding moment of his discovery of the Oedipus complex, as he would later theorize it. The interrelation between railways and detective fiction concerns not just plots shaped by new possibilities of mobility but also, as Walter Benjamin noted, by the particular suitability of this form of fiction as reading matter on a train journey. For Benjamin, even in 1930, a railway journey was capable of reawakening the fear experienced by nineteenth-century travellers: an anxiety which could be countered by reading literature which aroused another form of fear.²³

The literary detective was, Ronald Thomas has suggested, 'arguably the most significant and enduring contribution to the history of English literature made during the Victorian era', but the theme of unmasking and detection, as the Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch noted, has a much wider prominence, for example in Ibsen's dramas or the work of Poe.²⁴ It is also central to Freud, whose 'analytical research . . . is no longer informed by cool dissection but by a vigilance typical of the detective. The conviction that, the more neatly the mask conceals, the less salutary that which goes on behind it, gives rise to a deep suspicion of draperies and facades.'²⁵ Siegfried Kracauer, too, analysed detective fiction at length in 1925, against the background of what in 1963 he called 'the ornament of the mass'.²⁶ The analysis and decipherment of hieroglyphics was also a recurrent motif in early cinema criticism and in analyses of modern forms of advertising, where it becomes closely linked to both the spectacle and the visual sign-systems of modern urban culture.²⁷

Recent cultural theorists have pursued the connections between detection and psychoanalysis – twin sciences of evidence-gathering and of the reconstruction or deduction of the whole from the part. Both, as Carlo Ginzburg argued in his essay 'Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm', are semiotic sciences, methods of reading and interpreting signs.²⁸ Ginzburg turns to a passage in Freud's 'The Moses of Michelangelo', the essay in

which Freud reconstructs a history from a detail and a gesture, deciphers the enigmatic knot in Moses' beard and the position of his index finger, and attempts to transmute the frozen moment of statuary into motion, narrative and temporality. In the essay Freud compared the technique of psychoanalysis with the methods of Giovanni Morelli, an art connoisseur who attributed authorship and detected fakes by diverting attention:

from the general impression and main features of a picture, and by laying stress on the significance of minor details, of things like the drawing of a fingernail, of the lobe of an ear, of halos and such unconsidered trifles which the copyist neglects to imitate and yet which every artist executes in his own characteristic way . . . It seems to me that his method of inquiry is closely related to the technique of psychoanalysis. It, too, is accustomed to divine secret and concealed things from despised or unnoticed features, from the rubbish-heap, as it were, of our observations.²⁹

The motif of detection and unmasking was also crucial to the 'new biography' of the early twentieth century, whose novelty has not been sufficiently recognized in discussions of literary modernism. This reworking of the biographical form – pursued more or less independently by Lytton Strachey in Britain, André Maurois in France, Emil Ludwig in Germany and Gamaliel Bradford in North America – was accompanied by a mass of commentary on the genre, written by both its practitioners and its critics. The new biography combined a debunking approach, particularly strong in Strachey, and a 'scientific' emphasis with a painterly focus on revelatory or exemplary detail rather than chronological narrative: the biographer, in Ludwig's understanding, as a portraitist. Moreover, 'Pictures', Ludwig asserts, 'those silent betrayals, provide the biographer with material as valuable as letters, memoirs, speeches, conversations . . . or as handwriting. For this reason, a biography without a picture of its subject is impossible'.³⁰

In the words of the early twentieth-century American biographer (or, in his phrase, 'psychographer') Gamaliel Bradford: 'If you know what to look for, minor, insignificant actions tell you much, perhaps more than greater, more deliberate deeds, because there is less thought or care for concealment.'³¹ Biographical discourse, then, would seem to share a focus on detail and a model of decipherment with the sciences of detection and psychoanalysis. This connection was noted by Freud himself when he wrote to Ernest Jones about the 'slippery ground' of psychobiography: 'It is the danger inherent in our method of concluding from faint traces, exploiting trifling signs. The same as in criminal cases, where the murderer has forgotten to relinquish his *carte de visite* and full address on the *Tatort*.'³²

A number of critics in the early to mid-twentieth century set up a stark contrast between modernism and detective fiction, but Ginzburg has pointed to the emergence of an ‘epistemological paradigm’ in the late nineteenth century, tracing links between Galton, Giovanni Morelli, and Freud, and there is certainly an affinity between certain modes of modernist literature and the detective genre. This connection has recently been explored in suggestive ways by Vicki Mahaffey, who links the focus on ‘interpretative authority’ (that of the detective and the reader) in the Sherlock Holmes stories with the modernist difficulty of Joyce’s *Dubliners*, arguing that in both sets of narrative there is a strategy of ‘analysing “backwards” from what is observed’.³³ *Dubliners*, she argues, ‘is a series of detective stories, but they significantly lack a detective . . . It is up to the reader to detect, by “reasoning backwards” from each collection of facts and observations, what must have happened.’

‘The original social content of the detective story was the obliteration of the individual’s traces in the big-city crowd’, Walter Benjamin wrote in his study of Charles Baudelaire, *The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire*.³⁴ He explored the centrality of this motif in Edgar Allan Poe’s ‘The Mystery of Marie Roget’ and in ‘The Man of the Crowd’, which, in his account of the significance of photography both for criminology and for the emergence of detective fiction, Benjamin describes as ‘something like the X-ray picture of a detective story’.³⁵ The city was one of the crucial links, and most often the site, in which modernist culture emerged out of turn-of-the-century modernity. There are significant connections between urban experience and narrative and poetic forms, including the ways in which features associated with literary modernism – the use of stream-of-consciousness techniques, fluid characterizations, explorations of mobility and experiments with temporality – are linked to urban consciousness. Virginia Woolf wrote in a diary entry in 1924:

One of these days I will write about London & how it takes up the private life & carries it on, without any effort. Faces passing lift up my mind; prevent it from settling, as it does in the stillness at Rodmell. . . . But my mind is full of The Hours [the work which became *Mrs Dalloway*] . . . And I like London for writing it, partly because, as I say, life upholds one . . . to see human beings freely and quickly is an infinite gain to me.³⁶

The links between cinema and city as dimensions of modernity are also of central importance to an understanding of modernist culture, with its tropes of movement and dynamism: the connections are explored in my chapter in this volume on the films of the 1920s known as ‘city symphonies’ (Chapter 5).

One of the most fundamental processes involved here is the way in which the visual metaphors which had pervaded modern literature become, in a sense, literalized as visual media become more prominent. Photography and film had a profound impact upon the visual arts, displacing, for example, the value of artistic realism. The technology to which Benjamin pointed most emphatically, in his 1936 essay ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproducibility’, was film. In their power to extend human vision (in what Sigmund Freud understood to be a form of prosthesis) or to penetrate more deeply into reality than could the human eye (as Benjamin has it), the technologies of the visual also exposed the human eye’s frailties, partialities and limitations.

In his introduction to *Signatures of the Visible*, Fredric Jameson wrote that the experiences of cinema and cinema-going might underlie the thought and writing of the twentieth century in ways we have not yet understood. Jameson instanced Jean-Paul Sartre’s claim for his own theory of ‘contingency’, ‘derived from the experience of film, and in particular from the mystery of the difference between the image and the world outside’,³⁷ and asks whether this might not be true even for artists and writers who have less obvious connections to film and to movie-going. ‘Did human nature’, Jameson asks, ‘change on or about December 28, 1895? Or was some cinematographic dimension of human reality always there somewhere in prehistoric life, waiting to find its actualization in a certain high-technical civilization? (and thereby now allowing us to reread and rewrite the past now filmically and as the philosophy of the visual)?’³⁸ The emergence of these issues alongside the new medium is in part because film seemed, to its first viewers, to be a reproduction or doubling of the world itself – ‘a recreation of the world in its own image’, in André Bazin’s words³⁹ – and thus engendered models or ‘film fables’ (to borrow the title of Jacques Rancière’s 2001 book) of origin and evolution. I addressed these issues in detail in my book *The Tenth Muse: Writing about Cinema in the Modernist Period*.⁴⁰

The conscious concern of literary writers and other cultural producers in this period with cinema, psychoanalysis and transport varies in degree, but these and other aspects of this central period of modernity formed a background and sometimes (as in the case of writers whom I have not had sufficient space to discuss in this volume, including Elizabeth Bowen, Jean Rhys and Katherine Mansfield) a foreground to their work.⁴¹ Affinities and cross-currents between the cultural phenomena of the period run through and between the essays in this book. They focus more often on modernity than on modernism, narrowly defined, but they nonetheless address their

complex interrelations, pointing to the emergence of modernism in the crucial decades spanning what remains, a century later, the definitive *fin de siècle*.

The temporal complexities of narrative are a central theme, taking up the ways that forms of ‘reasoning backwards’ (as an aspect of the hermeneutic culture of the turn of the century, evidenced in the interpretative drive of detective fiction, with its intense focus on the legibility of the detail) co-exist with the modes of ‘dreaming forward’ explored by Walter Benjamin. Such temporal reversals and inversions are a significant dimension of the reshaping of time and space, to be found not only in the speed of railway travel but also in the juxtapositions and inversions common to dreams and cinema. A related thread in this volume is the topic of asynchronicity or a doubled time-frame. It connects the novelist Marie Belloc Lowndes’s early twentieth-century reinscriptions of an episode of late nineteenth-century danger; Freud and Breuer’s patient’s ‘*double conscience*’ and Freud’s concept of the way in which the new always leads back to the old; and Benjamin’s account of nineteenth-century fears which are reawakened in the transport of the twentieth century. This strand also emerges in discussions of the temporal preoccupations of women modernist writers, for whom the connections between past, present and future are particularly charged. Dorothy Richardson’s novel sequence *Pilgrimage* is an archive of the self – the writing, begun in 1915, of a young woman’s life in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first years of the twentieth – and a project in which Richardson seeks to recapture past presents. In the work of Virginia Woolf, models of continuity and of the depth and complexity of present time, ‘backed’ as it is by the past, carry as much, or more, weight as those of modernist or avant-garde ‘rupture’. Woolf’s capturing of a Victorian scene ‘through the telescope’ (the topic of my penultimate chapter) becomes emblematic of the relationship between spatial and temporal distance and proximity which has guided many of my readings.

The first chapter in the volume, ‘*The Lodger*’, explores a defining episode in late nineteenth-century British culture: the series of murders of women in London in 1888 held to have been committed by the figure who came to be known as ‘Jack the Ripper’. The chapter starts from the depiction of the murders in the terms of fiction, with associations at the time drawn between Whitechapel’s ‘murder mystery’ and works by Edgar Allan Poe and Robert Louis Stevenson. Both Poe’s detective Dupin and Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes have the power to read bodies like texts, a capacity made very literal in Poe’s ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue’, in which Dupin first reads about the mutilated bodies of the women in the newspaper accounts

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of the murders which detail the physician's official examination of the corpses. The hermeneutic understanding of the performances and representations of murder is clearly central to the nineteenth century and beyond; it has become combined with the perception, deeply influenced by the work of Michel Foucault, of the nineteenth century as a culture of surveillance, and one in which the work of detection is most prevalent where it is most invisible or, perhaps, most dispersed. 'We are all on the private detective lay now', as the journalist George Sims put it in 1888. The chapter traces a number of the journalistic, literary and cinematic/filmic representations of the 'Ripper' crimes, focusing on *The Lodger*, the novel published in 1913 by the Edwardian writer Marie Belloc Lowndes, which was the inspiration for Hitchcock's 1926 film of the same title.

The railway and train travel is the subject of the next two chapters. Chapter 2, 'Oedipus Express', examines the centrality of the railways to psychoanalytic thought. It explores the ways in which some of Freud's most fundamental concepts were influenced by nineteenth-century accounts of 'railway shock' and 'railway spine', as diseases of modern life, and charts the recurrence of metaphors and dreams of the railway in Freud's writings and in the dreams and symptoms of his patients. The genesis of Chapter 3, 'Railway Reading', is Walter Benjamin's 1930 article, 'Kriminalromane, auf Reisen' ['Detective Novels, on Journeys'] and its claim that 'Travel reading is as closely linked to railway travel as is the time spent in stations.'⁴² Matthew Arnold wrote, in a critical account of railway reading, of 'the tawdry novels which flare in the book-shelves of our railway stations'; the image of a flaring or firing up makes an implicit connection between trains and novels that the chapter pursues through discussion of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century sensation and detective fiction.

The psychology of the turn of the century was strongly focused on concepts of 'attention' and 'distraction', and the models of consciousness which these terms imply became central to modernist literature and thought. In Chapter 4, "From Autumn to Spring, Aesthetics Change": Modernity's Visual Displays', I explore the ways in which models of 'attention', drawn in part from the work of the nineteenth-century psychologist Théodule Ribot, shaped theories of 'attraction', advertising, film spectatorship and the pictorial 'language' of modernity. The work of the German-born philosopher and psychologist Hugo Münsterberg ties these strands together in particularly significant ways. Münsterberg, who left his post at the University of Freiburg in the 1890s in order to take up a position in William James's psychological laboratory at Harvard, where Gertrude Stein became one of his students, was a polymath. His researches,

theoretical and applied, reached into many corners of modern life: crime and detection (he invented the lie-detector test), industrial efficiency, transport (he created a prototype for a simulated driving apparatus), visual psychology and optics, and film (his 1916 study *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study* is a foundational work of film aesthetics). The chapter discusses Münsterberg in tandem with the American poet and early writer on film Vachel Lindsay, showing how the work of these two individuals, with their radically different backgrounds and experiences, came together in their writings on modern visuality and, in particular, on the cinema. Modernism's 'visual turn' is indeed a connecting thread of the essays in this volume, as is the correlation of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literature's models of (in Fredric Jameson's phrase) 'presented vision' with the visual and optical technologies of the same period, in particular the new medium of film.

Chapter 5, "A Hymn to Movement": The "City Symphony" of the 1920s and 1930s', continues the focus on cinema, exploring the cluster of city films made in the US and Europe in the first decades of the twentieth century. It examines the films in relation to the one-day novels of the same period, notably Joyce's *Ulysses* and Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, and discusses the centrality of 'modernist dailiness' in relation to the urbanism which provides the strongest conjunction between cultural modernity and literary modernism. The incidence of literary and filmic 'city symphonies' in this period also points up, in highly significant ways, the connections and contestations between literature and film.

Chapter 6, 'Staging the "Private Theatre": Gender and the Auto-erotics of Reverie', takes the theatrical metaphor of its title from one of psychoanalysis's early patients, 'Anna O', whose case history is included in Freud and Breuer's *Studies in Hysteria*, a key text of 1895. The 'private theatre' is the sphere of fantasy, reverie and 'systematic day-dreaming' which becomes intimately linked to literary fiction-making. The chapter explores the relationship between fantasy and writing, in the stories of Freud's patients and in the work of women writers at the turn of the century, opening up the question of the New Woman as a figure of, and for, modernity. It also addresses the issue of the 'interiority' of the New Woman, and the contrasting images of the auto-eroticism attached to this figure (in the writings of the sexologist and psychologist Havelock Ellis and others) as a question of internal fantasy or external stimulation, 'fiction' or 'friction'; an aspect of the uncertain relationship between the inner and the outer that shaped much turn-of-the-century thought. The drive to inwardness was defined in the 1880s by Max Nordau as 'ego-mania', and the critique of modernist