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Late Modernist Obsolescence: Isherwood and Adorno in Mid-Twentieth Century Los Angeles

Will Norman

Christopher Isherwood's *A Single Man* (1964) and Theodor W. Adorno's *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life* (1951) represent two of the paradigmatic literary works of intellectual alienation in the U.S. post-war period. Their surface similarities are striking: both texts address themselves explicitly to the situation of the white male émigré in Los Angeles, marooned in a sea of mass culture. Both are shot through with gestures of aggressive defamiliarization and hostility to their environment. Read together in dialogue, and loosened from their conventional frames of reference, they offer us an opportunity to revise some of the dominant arguments about the literary-historical categories of late modernism, such as its alignment with ideologies of aesthetic autonomy, and to propose instead a more relational orientation to its meaning.¹ Out of this comparative encounter emerges a distinctive set of concerns for expatriate modernists of Adorno and Isherwood's generation, which centre on the intersection of several temporalities: of biological time, literary history, and capitalist development. In this case, these temporalities meet one another on the terrain of everyday bourgeois existence in mid-century Los Angeles, in a blending of variant rhythms with social space which creates some distinctive aesthetic and philosophical effects.² These effects will lead us ultimately to a consideration of late modernism's narrative articulations of death and obsolescence.

Isherwood's short novel narrates a day in the life of George, an Englishman and a middle-aged literature professor, in the wake of the death of Jim, his partner. We follow George in his daily routine and his movements around the city, including his teaching at San Tomas College (based on Cal State Los Angeles, where Isherwood taught for several years), his dinner with a female friend, and his late-night encounter with a male student in a bar. The narrative concludes with George's peaceful and unexpected death by heart attack as he drunkenly sleeps that night. Narrated in the present tense using a development of the "I am a camera" style that he made famous in his 1939

novel *Goodbye to Berlin, A Single Man's* narrating consciousness records George in all his intimacy – from his thoughts and memories to his bowel movements and death – with a scrupulous equanimity.³ George himself, however, is possessed by intense feelings and affects: of grief and melancholia for his lost partner, anger and disgust at the debased culture of post-war Los Angeles, and erotic desire for young men.

Adorno's *Minima Moralia*, on the other hand, is a collection of fragmentary and occasionally aphoristic reflections on a variety of themes held in common with *A Single Man*, including intellectual labor, expatriation, the culture industry, gender and sexual relations, fascism, aesthetics and the passing of bourgeois culture. While *A Single Man* holds these diverse themes together formally by virtue of its one-day structure, the unity, such as it is, of *Minima Moralia* is the characteristically Hegelian-dialectical style of thought employed by Adorno, which relentlessly reverses and negates each and every claim he makes as soon as the reader has grasped it. The factors that draw the work into conversation with *A Single Man* are not limited to the shared interests held by the figure of the European highbrow exile in Los Angeles. At a more structural level, it is rather the provocation to understand the social through the personal and the everyday that make the two works such productive interlocutors. As Adorno comments in his "Dedication": "in an individualistic society, the general not only realizes itself through the interplay of particulars, but society is essentially the substance of the individual."⁴ Though *Minima Moralia* is conventionally read as a key text in the tradition of Frankfurt School critical theory, what Adorno calls its "renunciation of explicit theoretical cohesion" directs us to understand it through its attention to the contingent, the evanescent and the ephemeral, and therefore in the context of the same set of concerns as that evoked by *A Single Man*.⁵ In this sense, *Minima Moralia's* provisional and deeply personal meditations on loss, alienation and social discomfort could just as appropriately make it a classic text of non-Anglophone American literature, and a modernist one at that.⁶ In addition to reading Adorno as one of the great critics of literary modernism, we should also remember he was one of its great exemplars.

Adorno and Isherwood were born into the generation that came to adulthood in the interwar period in Europe. Both lived in Weimar Germany for a time and studied in Britain – Isherwood at Cambridge and Adorno at Oxford – before emigrating to the United States in response to Fascism and the start of World War Two. They lived close to one another in the suburbs of Los Angeles during the 1940s: Isherwood in Rustic Canyon, just outside Santa Monica (where George also lives in *A Single Man*), and Adorno in Brentwood, around four miles north-east down Sunset Boulevard. In reading them together, their shared historical experience of witnessing the rise of Fascism in Europe, followed by their inhabitation of mid-century Los Angeles, provides one important context for understanding their respective responses to what I will call modernism's first death, which was paradoxically also its birth. Both *A Single Man* and *Minima Moralia* are saturated with implicit and explicit allusions to the canon of European modernism, many of them to the same writers, such as Franz Kafka and Marcel Proust, who had died in 1924 and 1922 respectively. The first words of *Minima Moralia*, for example, are "for Marcel Proust," a name which receives eight entries in the index, while Kafka receives seven.⁷ Both writers are implicit points of reference for Isherwood. James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, whose *Ulysses* and *Mrs Dalloway* provide the clearest models for Isherwood's decision to structure *A Single Man* around a day in the life of an urban bourgeois, had died more recently, both in 1941.⁸ Isherwood had known Woolf in London in the 1930s, and wrote an elegy on her passing. "This world was no place for her," he wrote. "I am happy to think that she is free from it, before everything she loved has been quite smashed."⁹ It is left to the reader to speculate on precisely what Woolf had loved that was in the process of being smashed in 1941, but we might provisionally place it under the sign of a certain British, bohemian, bourgeois culture often loosely gathered together by literary scholars under the heading "the Bloomsbury Group," and placed under the sign of modernism. It was a culture committed to ideals of taste and refinement, to the exploration of private subjectivities and to aesthetic experimentalism; a culture threatened not only by shifting class relations in Britain, but also by the onset of a world war, which, at the moment of Woolf's death in March 1941, threatened to obliterate Britain too.

Both *Minima Moralia* and *A Single Man*, though written more than ten years apart, register that sense in which the passing of what we now call modernism was also its birth. To put this another way, Isherwood and Adorno experienced modernism twice, as living tragedy in the interwar period of crisis in Europe, and as commodified farce in midcentury America, when the canon of high modernism was first called into being and codified as a cultural monolith. Adorno wrote with melancholy and disgust about the integration of the monuments of twentieth-century European high literature into the large-scale culture industry he witnessed in the United States, and the transformation of its writers into celebrities. He reserved particular scorn for the creation of the Random house edition of Moncrieff's translation of *A la recherche du temps perdu*, "cut-price exclusivity even in its appearance, a mockery of the author whose every sentence put out of action a received opinion, while now as a prize-winning homosexual he fills a similar need for youth as do the books about forest animals and the North Pole exhibition in the German home."¹⁰ Kafka, he noted "is becoming a fixture in the sub-let studio. The intellectuals themselves are already so heavily committed to what is endorsed in their isolated sphere, that they no longer desire anything that does not carry the highbrow tag."¹¹ Adorno was doubtless thinking in part about the influence of the highbrow periodical culture in the United States during this period, for example in publications such as *Partisan Review*, where critics such as Clement Greenberg and Lionel Trilling set out influential and self-conscious programs of modernist canon-formation. (Isherwood reviewed Berthold Brecht's *Poems in Exile* there in 1942, and in the same issue Lionel Abel reviewed Harry Levin's seminal *James Joyce: A Critical Introduction*, which helped define Joyce's posthumous legacy).¹²

In the case of *A Single Man*, George's professional status as a professor of English literature within the newly expanding state university system provides the novel's entry route into the issues surrounding the transformation of modernism from living culture to reified object of study. George teaches a class on the 1939 novel *After Many a Summer Dies the Swan*, by Isherwood's friend and fellow émigré in Southern California, Aldous Huxley. *After Many a Summer* remains now, as then, a peripheral part of the British modernist canon, in part because of its American themes and setting.¹³

However, it is more the style than the content of the pedagogy we see George practicing that speaks to the status of modernism in the early 1960s. George asks his class, “in an almost bullying tone” to “make up your minds what this novel actually *is* about.”¹⁴ The response of his class demonstrates the way in which the stakes of engagement with modernists texts have been reduced to mechanical problem-solving: “For nearly all of them, for all their academic training, deep, deep down regard this *about* business as a tiresomely sophisticated game.”¹⁵ Even the best students, who have “cultivated the *about* approach until it has become second nature, who dream of writing an *about* book one day, on Faulkner, James or Conrad,” are merely “waiting for the right moment when they can come forward like star detectives with the solution to Huxley’s crime.”¹⁶ To be a reader of modernism, then, in Isherwood’s imagined university classroom in the early 1960s, is to grasp the act of reading as a competitive and individualist game to be played, won and consigned to the casebooks. To follow the allegory Isherwood offers us, moreover, the modernist writer becomes an outlaw guilty of a crime for which he must be identified and presumably punished.

This episode represents Isherwood’s parody of New Critical methodology as it filtered into the mainstream of literary studies in the early 1960s, but it articulates a perspective comparable to Adorno’s critique of modernist culture as commodity, and of its authorization by highbrow mandarins. In both cases, the process describes a minority opposition culture being assimilated, mastered and reified as it enters into the cultural mainstream, even if only as the privileged portion of a stratified hierarchy. With these considerations, we are now in the historical and theoretical territory that has been explored in debates in literary scholarship over the last twenty years about the definition and application of the term *late modernism*. In his 2002 study, *A Singular Modernity: Essays on the Ontology of the Present*, Fredric Jameson identified late modernism with the elaboration of an “ideology of modernism full-blown” in the mid-century United States, articulated by such cultural formations as the *Partisan Review* circle and the New Critics.¹⁷ In Jameson’s account, the commitments to aesthetic and stylistic autonomy that make up this ideology were not present during the interwar era of “modernism proper,” but were rather invented *post-facto* in the United

States and retroactively mobilized by the nation's new intelligentsia. In the case of *A Single Man* and *Minima Moralia*, however, there is a strong sense that any heroic gestures of withdrawal and autonomy that might be made in the face of the culture of US liberalism are nevertheless assimilated into the very mechanics of late capitalism that they pretend to oppose. Adorno, Isherwood and George are examples of what C. Wright Mills would in 1944 give the name "intellectual workers," reflexively aware of their own entanglement in the commodification of thought.¹⁸ As Adorno puts it in *Minima Moralia*, "the detached observer is as much entangled as the active participant . . . the very movement of withdrawal bears features of what it negates."¹⁹

Rather than pursue, then, those impulses towards aesthetic autonomy and formal mandarinism with which Jameson identified late modernism, I am interested in the intersection of biological time, literary history, and capitalist development that these texts represent. At this intersection, their authors and the subjectivities they explore are both actively creative subjects and prematurely historical objects, watching their own lives in the process of entering obsolescence. In *A Single Man*, this structure is expressed by the situation George finds himself in as a professor, teaching his own living culture *as if it were already dead*. Isherwood's diaries from the period of *A Single Man's* composition are very clear: this was to be a novel about middle-age, that juncture in the biological cycle at which one is aware of one's difference both from the generation preceding, which is dying or dead, and that which is beginning to displace yours in its claims to adulthood.²⁰ Adorno began the composition of *Minima Moralia* in the year he turned forty, though the affective register of the book suggests the experience of an older man. Its temporal orientation, not only in its mourning of European modernism but also in its historicizing of subjectivity, resembles in several respects that of *A Single Man*, in which the remnants of the old world persist beyond the conclusion of their own narrative:

For since the overwhelming objectivity of historical movement in its present phase consists so far in the dissolution of the subject, without yet giving rise to a new one, individual

experience necessarily bases itself on the old subject, now historically condemned, which is still for-itself but no longer in-itself.²¹

We are beginning to discern, then, the mutual interest these texts hold in both seeing and inhabiting that moment of temporal lag when abrupt social-historical shifts – what in historiographical discourse attracts terms such as *watershed* or *fault line* – interrupt the duration of a lifespan, leaving consciousness intact but nevertheless hollowing out the individual's ontological core. Such is the import of *A Single Man's* extraordinary first lines, which rewrite the famous opening of Kafka's *die Verwandlung* to transform Gregor's awakening into George's: "Waking up begins with saying *am* and *now*. That which has awoken then lies for a while looking up at the ceiling and down into itself until it has recognized *I*, and therefrom deduced *I am, I am now*."²² Isherwood allows his narrative voice unmediated access to the mechanics of consciousness in the absence of any classically high-modernist gestures towards fluid and ineffable interiority. This decision, along with his steadfast refusal to prioritize the mechanics of consciousness over that of the aging body, is the novelistic correlative to Adorno's zombie subjecthood, blithely stumbling on after its extinction.

What does it mean for this interference of biological rhythms of life and sleep cycles with the historical temporality of socially determined subject formation to be staged in mid-twentieth century Los Angeles? We should recognize at the outset that Los Angeles is not generally understood by literary scholars to possess a homegrown modernism of its own, comparable to that of the other two great U.S. cities of the twentieth century, New York and Chicago. Morrow Mayo tactlessly pronounced in 1933: "In the field of beautiful letters Los Angeles is virtually barren. A city one hundred and fifty-two years old, it has no more literary tradition or background or consciousness than Scranton, Pennsylvania . . . It is not conducive, it appears from the results, to the creation of worth-while literature."²³ There is also a danger, however, that the notion of a debased Los Angeles unable to sustain a literary culture becomes a mythology in its own right, no less ideological or indeed myopic than any of the other stories it tells of itself. For Julian Murphet, Los Angeles was

always-already postmodern, molding itself to fit its own exuberant mythologies of boosterism and Hollywood, in thrall from the beginning to simulacra and simulation.²⁴ From this perspective, as Murphet argues, Los Angeles is a test-case for the future of literature itself under conditions of a totalizing global capitalism.

The effect of such a critical narrative, in its race to the present, is retroactively to grant contemporary capitalism domain over the past as well as the present, erasing the drama of its temporality, its acceleration and concrete development – the very conditions we understand to underpin the aesthetic production of modernism. However, between the 1910s and the 1950s, as the historiography consistently reminds us, Los Angeles underwent a process of expansion and modernization unparalleled in the United States, transforming a small town into the third-largest city in the nation, fueled principally by oil, Hollywood, and the aeronautical industry.²⁵ Mid-century Los Angeles writing is full of recognition of this process and its cultural effects. Morrow Mayo wrote in 1933 that, despite the influx of Midwesterners over the preceding years “the place has retained the manners, culture and general outlook of a huge country village.”²⁶ By the end of World War Two, however, during which Adorno and Isherwood both lived in the city, Carey McWilliams was able to claim that the war years “telescope[d] a quarter century of development into the space of a few years,” leading to new suburbs and a freeway system to connect them.²⁷

In Raymond Chandler’s 1949 novel *The Little Sister*, Philip Marlowe reminisces as he drives those freeways, about a recent past when “there were trees along Wilshire Boulevard. Beverly Hills was just a country town. Westwood was bare hills and lots offering at eleven hundred dollars and no takers. Hollywood was a bunch of frame houses on the interurban line . . . People used to sleep out on porches.”²⁸ In contrast, Marlowe bitterly claims, postwar LA is a “neon-lit slum,” but then he jolts himself out of his bitter reverie: “you’re not human tonight, Marlowe.”²⁹ In his seminal sociological work from this period, *The Great Transformation* (1944), Karl Polanyi had argued that such shocks in capitalist development from the turn of the nineteenth century to the present, unmitigated by social

protections designed to ensure continuity and incrementalism, created cultural dislocations that rent the fabric of society, “disembedding” it in such a way that threatened the very category of the human as he conceived it.³⁰ There was nothing natural or inevitable about such processes, he insisted. Rather, they should be grasped as historically contingent. *The Great Transformation* offers an instructive correlative to mid-century literary attempts to reckon with the accelerating pace of urban development in the city, and a reminder of the need to pay attention to ways in which temporal dislocations are simultaneously social and spatial ones felt in the realm of shared cultural experience.

If Polanyi settled on “great transformation” as his term for the effects of accelerated socio-historical change, Isherwood’s term in *A Single Man* is “the Great Change.” This phrase is used to describe the demographic shift in George’s neighborhood of Rustic Canyon, and its increased development. Originally settled as “a last-ditch stand against the twentieth century,” by bohemians imagining “a subtropical village with Montmartre manners,” the canyon “used to reek of bathtub gin and reverberate with the poetry of Hart Crane,” a sure sign of its association not only with interwar modernism, but also with the queer culture George and his partner embraced in their lives together.³¹ “The Great Change,” capitalized for ironic awareness of its universalizing hubris, begins in the late forties “when the world-war-two vets came swarming out of the East with their just-married wives, in search of new and better breeding grounds in the sunny Southland.”³² Here Isherwood delineates an opposition between a minority queer culture that defines itself by a refusal of twentieth-century modernity, and an invading army of breeders looking to colonize the future through personal investment in finance capitalism: “For breeding you need a steady job, you need a mortgage, you need credit, you need insurance. And don’t you dare die, either, until your family’s future is provided for.”³³ This scenario and the “Great Change” that accompanies it, though rarely discussed in the scholarship on *A Single Man*, opens up a crucial set of symbolic relations in the novel, whereby queerness becomes aligned with finitude and death, set in refusal of a feminized

breeding culture that instrumentalizes life as a means to perpetuate the relations of capitalist production, while simultaneously swarming the city and appropriating its space.

The temporal orientation of George's remarks about his neighborhood and the "breeders" that are taking it over is to be read, then, in the context of his life as a gay man. Work in twenty-first century queer studies helps us to grasp George's seemingly idiosyncratic disposition as part of a longer history of queerness. George's angry rejection of the middle-class families moving into the canyon, and especially of the children who trespass on his property, is closely aligned to what Lee Edelman describes as the queer refusal of "reproductive futurism," and its chosen symbolic figure, "the Child," upon which the logic of politics stakes its claims to legitimacy.³⁴ In Edelman's account, the structural positioning of queerness within the social order makes the figure of the queer uniquely equipped to undo that order's fraudulent claims on the future, and to counter it with an act of absolute negation. As one reads Edelman's eloquent polemic, *A Single Man's* relentless concern not only with the rejection of biological reproduction and its associated futurity, but also with its barely concealed and erotic mobilization of the death drive, demand ever greater attention.³⁵ "Every *now* is labelled with its date," we read on the novel's first page, "rendering all past *nows* obsolete, until – later or sooner – perhaps – no, not perhaps – quite certainly: It will come."³⁶ These lines prepare us in advance for the novel's conclusion, when George's final waking act before death is to "come" in a drunken solo masturbatory climax. Just as Isherwood claimed comfort at the thought of Woolf's death before everything she loved was smashed, so most of the canyon's queer bohemians were "lucky enough to have died off before The Great Change."³⁷ George's unfortunate fate, it seems, is by contrast to survive social transformation, and to persist even if only as a mere functioning organism. Rather than the fear of death, then, "we have with us a far more terrible fear, the fear of survival."³⁸ Appropriately enough, then, Isherwood at one point considered calling his novel *The Survivor*.³⁹

What Edelman's work cannot provide a reading of *A Single Man*, however, is a means of grasping the relationship between George's queer refusal of reproductive futurism and the very particular historical circumstance of economic growth in the post-war United States. This economy made possible the creation of an expanded middle class, and a dramatic increase in the population, real-estate development and infrastructure of Los Angeles. But it also led to the introduction of new technologies for the facilitation of consumer debt, such as the credit card, which was first introduced in 1959 by American Express and would then be expanded to a modern national credit card system in 1968 with the advent of Visa and Mastercard.⁴⁰ These were technologies which would effectively demand affective as well as financial investment in the fantasy of a never-ending future growth that would outlive a single human lifespan. The meaning of the future, of course, is always historically determined in the most intensive ways, and George's turn away from it – in fact his refusal of it as a category *tout court* – is the refusal not of some generalizable temporality of the modern, such as Walter Benjamin's "empty homogenous time," but rather the seemingly deathless acceleration of the post-war U.S. boom.⁴¹ My intention here is not to place psychoanalytic and Marxist-historicist modes of criticism in competition. Instead, I want to suggest what can be gained from attending to the intersection of biological rhythms of human ageing and reproduction with the temporalities of finance, investment and urban development on the one hand, and cultural change on the other. This intersection is what places *A Single Man* within the ambit of modernity, but also provides its unmodern other. If its lateness is in part determined more or less straightforwardly by the novel's densely patterned rewriting of Woolf, Joyce and Kafka after the world of the European modernists had been smashed, it is also by virtue of these awkward syncopations that the late mode of *A Single Man* is made possible in the subject's recognition of its own growing obsolescence.

The arrhythmia of this blending of temporalities demands that we focus now on the question of scale in *A Single Man*, where the cyclical dailiness of bowel movements, eating and sleeping are juxtaposed not only with the capitalist temporality of reproductive futurism and urban growth, but also with the macro-rhythms of civilizational rise and fall. Up in the Hollywood Hills,

George reflects that “even up here, they are building dozens of new houses; the area is getting suburban,” and feels oppressed by the city’s inexorable growth, but reminds himself “and yet it will die . . . it will die because its tap-roots have dried up; the brashness and greed that have been its only strength. And the desert, which is the natural condition of the country, will return.”⁴² This passage is adapted from an entry in Isherwood’s own diary from February 1961, where he is similarly oppressed by the city “spawning itself to destruction” and fantasizes about it finally “sliding into the sea,” adding “and the quickie promoters and real estate agents hustling to make their dollars before it happens.”⁴³

Isherwood’s fascination with life cycles holds not only at the scale of the human, since cities too are subject to the rhythms of growth and decline. His macro-temporal imagination stands in contrast to that of Adorno in *Minima Moralia*. There, the horror of history “consists in its always remaining the same” even if it “is realized as constantly different, unforeseen, exceeding all expectations, the faithful shadow of developing productive forces.”⁴⁴ For Adorno, the constant variable in historical time was the relentless growth in its destructive tendencies – one for which he could imagine no conclusion but only “terror without end.”⁴⁵ Both of these works, then, focus on the ways in which the everyday itself, as a form of attention to the mundane and trivial, can only be maintained in view of the vast shadows thrown in the post-1945 period by macrocosmic conceptions of historical time, even if Adorno’s vision differs in its insistence on a pure linearity while Isherwood’s is resolutely cyclical.⁴⁶ What the contrast reveals, however, is the possibility of another understanding of Isherwood’s recurrent theme of death.

On the face of it, both Isherwood and Adorno are invested in emptying human death in its contemporary context of all its metaphysical import. Adorno, with knowledge of the Nazi extermination camps only recently registered, sees humanity as indifferent to human death, having already died itself: “Rilke’s ‘prayer for one’s own death’ is a piteous attempt to conceal the fact that nowadays people merely snuff out.”⁴⁷ In the extravagantly defamiliarized final pages of *A Single*

Man, meanwhile, George's death, described in terms of a mechanical systems malfunction, turns his corpse into a "non-entity . . . cousin to the garbage on the back porch. Both will have to be carted away and disposed of."⁴⁸ The difference lies in the sense that, for all its shockingly alienating narrative perspective, the ending of *A Single Man* can be understood, however perversely, as a *happy* one. While, as Bryony Randall has observed, the conventions of the single-day novel typically reserve the occasion of the unforeseen event for a possibility left open outside the bounds of the day itself, in *A Single Man*, the sudden death of George by natural causes is itself the end of the day.⁴⁹ These two cycles, cosmic and biological, are reconciled and fall into a eurhythmic harmony that wrests George away from the dominant reproductive futurism of mid-century Los Angeles and offers him instead precisely that which Adorno ridiculed in Rilke: "one's own death."

This intuition of death's rhythmical positivity in relation to other imagined cycles is be found elsewhere in Isherwood's post-war American work. In the essay "The Shore," which he wrote for *Harper's Bazaar* in 1952, he wrote of his affinity for the dilapidated buildings of Venice, the next town along the coast from Santa Monica. Venice, as he explained, was subject to a "real estate boom" in the early twentieth century, "which bust with the loss of millions." Now it was a shabby town where the bridges "were apt to fall down soon." Comparing Venice's ruins favorably to those of Rome and Pompeii, he added, "which of these flimsy structures will be here in a hundred years? Probably not a single one. Well I like that thought. It is bracingly realistic. In such surroundings it is easier to remember and accept the fact that you won't be, either."⁵⁰ The context of Isherwood's well-documented interest in and practice of Vedanta in Los Angeles goes some way to explaining such emphases on impermanence. Nevertheless, the reference here to the early-twentieth century real-estate boom in Venice, as to the real estate boosters trying to make dollars as the city slides into the city, reminds us that his meditations on death and impermanence were at the same time meditations on how the life-cycles of humans measured against an inhuman but nevertheless deeply social temporality generated by capitalism. In *Rhythmanalysis*, Henri Lefebvre wrote that production and destruction were the rhythms "proper to capital," instituted in contempt for "the body, the time

of living.”⁵¹ Instances at which the subject is arrested by recognition of life cycles in process, even as they fall away towards death, might accordingly be for Isherwood moments at which the authority of that contempt for the living can be wrested away, however briefly, and something like a state of happiness be achieved. For Adorno, in one of the most violently negative moments of *Minima Moralia*, “happiness is obsolete: uneconomic,” being immune to the demand for exchange value.⁵² In *A Single Man*, however, this negative valence is reversed, so that ageing, obsolete objects from bodies and buildings through to queer communities and literary traditions begin to function as a positive refuge in which happiness might be sought.

What are the implications of these interpretative moves for our consideration of expatriation and late modernism? Tyrus Miller influentially ascribed to this literary historical category, among other features, “an obsessive depiction of pure corporeal automatism, and subjectivity at play in the face of its own extinction.”⁵³ Certainly, the interest in the automatism and the death of the subjectivity are pungent characteristics of both *A Single Man* and *Minima Moralia*, as we have seen. However, taxonomical approaches have limited conceptual purchase in the study of late modernism, just as they do in the study of modernism.⁵⁴ If the term late modernism is to serve literary historians well, we must find ways to reckon with *lateness* itself as a relational concept, one that registers on multiple scales and levels simultaneously, from the literary-historical to the biological, from economic cycles to life cycles. The element I have been drawing out in particular – the structure of self-conscious obsolescence formed from of the intersection of such rhythms – is determined by a specific set of spatial and historical co-ordinates, that of European expatriate writing in mid-century Los Angeles, and therefore has a particularity that may not be easily translated. The question of when and where late modernism happened seems to me unlikely to be resolved, but the critical method itself and the forms of attention we devote to literary works might be as important as selecting the right objects.

¹ On late modernism and the ideology of aesthetic autonomy, see Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London: Verso, 2002).

² In paying attention to intersecting rhythms on the terrain of the everyday, I am drawing on Henri Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*, trans. Stuart Elden and Gerald Moore (London: Bloomsbury, 2004). The everyday is a significant topic in modernist studies, and a full discussion of work engaging it is beyond the parameters of this essay. Scholarship pertinent to the concerns explored here include Bryony Randall, *Modernism, Daily Time and Everyday Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Michael Sheringham, *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Michael Sayeau, *Against the Event: The Everyday and the Evolution of Modernist Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

³ The second paragraph of *Goodbye to Berlin* begins, "I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking." Christopher Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* in *The Berlin Novels* (London: Vintage, 1999), 243.

⁴ Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Fragments from Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 2005), 17-18.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 19. See also Ehrhard Bahr, *Weimar on the Pacific: German Exile Culture in Los Angeles and the Crisis of Modernism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); David Jenemann, *Adorno in America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007); Nico Israel, *Outlandish: Writing between Exile and Diaspora* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002).

⁶ On non-Anglophone American literature, see Werner Sollors (ed.) *Multilingual America: Transnationalism, Ethnicity and the Languages of American Literature* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

⁷ Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 23.

⁸ On the influence of Woolf, see Jamie Carr, "Writing the Unspeakable in *A Single Man* and *Mrs. Dalloway*," in *The American Isherwood*, ed. James J. Berg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 49-62. Ian Scott Todd explores the relation to Joyce in "Christopher Isherwood's Bathroom," *Journal of Modern Literature* 38, no. 4 (2015): 110-125.

⁹ Christopher Isherwood, "Virginia Woolf," in *Exhumations: Stories, Articles, Verses* (London: Penguin, 1969), 156.

¹⁰ Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 220.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 220.

¹² *Partisan Review* 9, no. 3 (1942).

¹³ On the American fiction of both Huxley and Isherwood, including *After Many a Summer* and *A Single Man*, see Paul Giles, *Atlantic Republic: The American Tradition in English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2006), 223-244.

¹⁴ Isherwood, *A Single Man*, 49.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹⁷ Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*, 169.

¹⁸ C. Wright Mills, "The Social Role of the Intellectual," in *Power, Politics and People: The Collected Essays of C. Wright Mills*, ed. Irving Louis Horowitz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), 292-304.

¹⁹ Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 26.

²⁰ Christopher Isherwood, *The Sixties: Diaries, Volume 2: 1960-1969*, ed. Katherine Bucknell (London: Chatto and Windus, 2010), 221.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

²² Isherwood, *A Single Man*, 1.

²³ Morrow Mayo, *Los Angeles* (New York: Knopf, 1933), 326.

²⁴ Julian Murphet, *Literature and Race in Los Angeles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 20.

²⁵ See Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (London: Vintage, 1992); Norman Klein, *The History of Forgetting: Los Angeles and the Erasure of Memory* (London: Verso, 1997); Kevin Starr, *Embattled Dreams: California in War and Peace, 1940-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002)

²⁶ Mayo, *Los Angeles*, 329.

²⁷ Carey McWilliams, *Southern California: An Island on the Land* (Salt Lake City, UT: Gibbs Smith, 1973), 371.

²⁸ Raymond Chandler, *The Little Sister*, in *Later Novels and Other Writings*, ed. Frank MacShane (New York: Library of America, 1995), 357.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 357.

³⁰ Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1944).

³¹ Isherwood, *A Single Man*, 8.

³² *Ibid.*, 8.

³³ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

³⁴ Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 2. On the temporal orientation of queer history and loss in relation to modernism, see Heather Love, *Feeling Backwards: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

³⁵ Edelman identifies the death drive with the *jouissance* beyond pleasure and pain: see Edelman, *No Future*, 25.

³⁶ Isherwood, *A Single Man*, 1.

³⁷ Ibid., 8.

³⁸ Ibid., 67.

³⁹ Isherwood, *The Sixties*, 283.

⁴⁰ David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* (New York: Melville House, 2014), 367.

⁴¹ Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2019), 205.

⁴² Isherwood, *A Single Man*, 88.

⁴³ Isherwood, *The Sixties*, 46.

⁴⁴ Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 234.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 235.

⁴⁶ C. D. Blanton's account of late modernism also emphasizes the interrelation of temporal scales. For him, late modernism emerges as a retraction and unfolding of high modernism's grander historical ambitions, in which genres such as the lyric stand "in metonymic relation to a larger whole, itself impervious to direct presentation." Blanton, *Epic Negation: The Dialectical Poetics of Late Modernism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 16.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 233.

⁴⁸ Isherwood, *A Single Man*, 152.

⁴⁹ Bryony Randall, "A Day's Time: The One-Day Novel and the Temporality of the Everyday," *New Literary History* 47, no. 4 (2016): 609.

⁵⁰ Christopher Isherwood, "The Shore," in *Exhumations: Stories, Verses, Articles* (London: Penguin, 1969), 190.

⁵¹ Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis*, 61-2.

⁵² Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 217.

⁵³ Tyrus Miller, *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and the Arts between the World Wars* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 64.

⁵⁴ On this point, see Ian Afflerbach, "Style, Autonomy, and Ideology: Making Room for Late Modernism in the American Scene," *Literature Compass* 14, no. 10 (2017): 10.1111/lic3.12408. Online.