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*The Temporality of Rhetoric:
the Spatialization of Time
in Modern Criticism*

Thesis submitted for the degree of Ph.D. in English

Brian Dillon

University of Kent at Canterbury

1999

In memory of my parents

'Le moment où je parle est déjà loin de moi.'
(Boileau, Épîtres, III)

*'The passage of time
Is flicking dimly upon the screen;
I can't see the lines
I used to think I could read between.'*
(Brian Eno, 'Golden Hours')

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A b s t r a c t

Every conception of criticism conceals a notion of time which informs the manner in which the critic conceives of history, representation and criticism itself. This thesis reveals the philosophies of time inherent in certain key modern critical concepts: allegory, irony and the sublime. Each concept opens a breach in time, a disruption of chronology. In each case this gap or aporia is emphatically closed, elided or denied. Taking the philosophy of time elaborated by Giorgio Agamben as an introductory proposition, my argument turns in Chapter One to the allegorical temporality which Walter Benjamin sees as the time of photography. The second chapter examines the aesthetics of the sublime as a melancholic or mournful untimeliness. In Chapter Three, Paul de Man's conception of irony provides an exemplary instance of the denial of this troubling temporal predicament.

In opposition to the foreclosure of the disturbing temporalities of criticism, history and representation, the thesis proposes a fundamental rethinking of the philosophy of time as it relates to these categories of reflection. In a reading of an inaugural meditation on the nature of time, and in examining certain key contemporary philosophical and critical texts, I argue for a critical attendance to that which eludes those modes of thought which attempt to map time as a recognizable and essentially spatial field. The *Confessions* of Augustine provide, in the fourth chapter, a model for thinking through the problems set up earlier: Augustine affords us, precisely, a means of conceiving of the gap or the interim. In the final chapter, this concept is developed with reference to the criticism of Arnold and Eliot, the fiction of Virginia Woolf and a philosophy of cinema derived from Deleuze and Lyotard. In conclusion, the philosophical implications of the thesis are placed in relation to a conception of the untimeliness of *death*.

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Introduction

Criticism finds itself in a temporal predicament. Always belated, the work of criticism is the ghost or spectre of the object — the work or text — to which it orients its gaze. The critical text which would attempt to direct itself to the past, to a literary or artistic history, thus constitutes the ghostly condensation, on the plane of the present, of a multitude of prior events. The critic is one who places these events — which occur in *time* — within a *space* conceived as the homogenization of those disparate events. The critic charts or maps the past. At the same time, criticism orients itself toward a future: the fulfilment of the work in its projected reading or interpretation. All criticism (be it a ‘historical’ criticism) is in this sense also a ‘criticism of the future’, the projection or annunciation of a coming time, a future moment, the coming to term of a work pregnant with meaning. Between the moments of past and future, criticism situates itself within a certain understanding of the present or of the contemporary. Criticism occurs *on time*; it proposes itself as a *timely* happening, even (or perhaps especially) when it offers itself as innovation or as return (that is, when it claims to be *untimely*). In a certain sense, this paradoxical temporality of criticism has been the more or less unacknowledged referent of the disparate modes of thinking which for modern criticism have been grouped together under the name of *theory*. This thesis will examine the structures and slippages of time in modern criticism. In announcing this project, in introducing the temporal territory traversed in what follows, the argument is first of all exercised by the question of the preface, of the annunciation, projected above. Accordingly, the argument will orient itself first, at the outset, with reference to a text which is concerned with the complex temporality of the preface:

‘Every written work can be regarded as the prologue (or rather, the broken cast) of a work never penned, and destined to remain so, because later works, which in turn will be the prologues or the moulds for other absent works, represent only sketches or death masks.’¹

With these words, Giorgio Agamben opens the preface to the English edition of his book *Infanzia e storia*, thus introducing a temporal paradox which, he claims, ensures that the written work can never coincide with itself in time.² The text is at one and the same time the announcement and the remnant of another text that can never be read because it will never be written. In this way, the actual, ‘real’, text becomes merely the ghostly prefiguration or reminder of a work that cannot manifest itself. The text is subject, then, to a double temporality: on the one hand, it exists as a kind of ‘prologue’, the preface or introduction to the coming work, of which — like all prefaces — it both is and is not a part. In other words, the written text comes before the unwritten. On the other hand, though, the written work can be said to come *after* the unwritten: it constitutes the material remains of a prior text. The ambiguous metaphor around which Agamben formulates his opening remarks is instructive in this regard: the written text is first of all the ‘broken cast’ of an unwritten one. It is unclear whether the ‘cast’ is to be taken as the mould which shapes or forms the subsequent work, or as that which preserves its prior form (a cast *taken from* the work). In both cases, the cast is broken: either it will now never form the work of which it is the prior model, or it no longer represents the work of which it is a subsequent representation. In fact, as even this introductory sentence reveals, the cast of which Agamben writes must be understood in both of these senses: it is, it transpires, both the *mould* which forms the work and the *death mask* which is formed from the departed work. The text is thus both inauguration and memorial, both the instituting of a new time and the definitive representation of the end of a duration or a life, both beginning and end. In

this respect, the text which Agamben describes should be read in the light of Walter Benjamin's comments in his essay 'On the Image of Proust':

It has rightly been said that all great works of literature found a genre or dissolve one — that they are, in other words, special cases.³

For Agamben, the written work, paradoxically both prior and anterior to the unwritten, fulfils both of Benjamin's criteria: it both founds and dissolves a genre (the unwritten work itself). The unwritten work, in its constitution in and through its 'preface' (which is also its epitaph) thus produces an interruption of the continuum of linear time:

The absent work, although it is unplaceable in any precise chronology, thereby constitutes the written work as *prolegomena* or *paralipomena* of a non-existent text; or, in a more general sense, as *parerga* which find their true meaning only in the context of an intelligible *ergon*. To take Montaigne's fine image, these are the frieze of grotesques around an unpainted portrait, or, in the spirit of the pseudo-Platonic letter, the counterfeit of a book which cannot be written.⁴

The painterly metaphor is important in this passage; the written text is the draft, sketch or cartoon for a projected image, but also, at the same time, the most definitive of visual representations: the death mask as evidence of the ultimate, final expression (the dead work in repose).

Agamben's text, then, proposes a vision of two moments in time, two instants conceived in terms of *before* and *after*. Something occurs between these two moments, or rather does not occur: that is, does not happen for the time of the framing instants. The unwritten text exists only in relation to a past and a future out of which it is made and through which its (non)existence can be posited; it is never seen 'as in itself it

really is', but as its (non-)manifestation in past and future. Something is both said and unsaid. It is precisely this notion of the 'unsaid' that concerns Agamben both in his preface to *Infancy and History* and in the book's title essay. The book forms, he says, the prologue to an unwritten work on the voice and language (entitled *The Human Voice* or *Ethics, an essay on the voice*). The concept of infancy denotes for Agamben an experience which, once more, as in the case of the unwritten text itself, is conceived in terms of an interim, of an 'in-between':

In my unwritten work on the voice, the site of this transcendental experience was sought instead in the difference between voice and language, between *phone* and *logos*, inasmuch as this difference opens the very space of ethics.⁵

While I do not have the space or the resources here to do justice to the complexities of Agamben's writings on infancy and on the voice, I wish to draw attention at this point to the importance of the gap or the interim in this text.⁶ As I shall argue in Chapter Four (in relation to Agamben's reading of Book XI of Augustine's *Confessions*), the notion of an interruption, of an 'in-between-ness' is crucial to his thought.

The written work that would attempt to speak about experience, then, according to Agamben's preface, can only ever be a prologue or preface to that experience. This observation does not exclude the perspective from which the text comes *after* the experience, forming its epilogue; rather, the work constitutes the *before* and *after* of a work (that is, of an experience) with which it can never coincide. The text presages (and produces) the nonexistent text, and constitutes at the same time a leftover, an excess, the ruined crucible in which the unformed work is created. Another text of Agamben's — 'Project for a Review', the last essay in *Infancy and History* — describes again a text which is subject to a paradoxical temporality: the 'timeliness' of the projected review (for which the essay provides a polemical preface or manifesto)

resides in its ability to stand outside of the chronological instant which it inhabits. This essay proposes once more a text which is, in an important regard, 'out of time' and which, again, is conceived as simultaneously premature and belated, as both ancient and modern, as both prologue and epilogue. Agamben begins:

The review whose project is presented here makes its claim to authority in precise proportion to its awareness of its own situation. Only in so far as it attains such awareness [...] can it aspire without arrogance to find within itself the criterion of its own timeliness. The point of view which it intends to adopt is in fact so radically and originally historical that it can easily renounce any chronological perspective, instead including among its tasks a 'destruction' of literary historiography. The site it chooses to inhabit is neither a continuity nor a new beginning, but an interruption and a margin, and it is the experience of this margin as founding historical event which constitutes the very basis of its timeliness.⁷

As in the case of the 'unwritten work', the review referred to here is both situated in time (in relation to the categories of before and after) and at the same time outside of that time. The text in which these statements are to be found — the 'project', the *projection*, of the review — thus announces another text, which, on the one hand, ought to share the same time as the essay (as its temporal fulfilment) but which also, on the other hand, must inhabit a different chronology. The review is, after all, the institution of a *new* temporality (and the 'destruction' of an older historical narrative) of which the essay or project cannot itself partake. The review of which the essay forms the annunciation inhabits a gap or margin: 'the one produced early in modern Western culture between cultural patrimony and its transmission, between truth and its modes of transmission, between writing and authority.'⁸ The time which the review inhabits (and

out of which it must therefore move if it is to institute a revolutionary untimeliness) is a time which is unable, says Agamben, to formulate a vital or authentic relationship with its own past. The modes of artistic and critical thought which are normally understood as orienting themselves toward the future — that is, the avant-gardes in their concern with citations, appropriation and the ready-made — reveal themselves to Agamben's reflection as in fact directing their gaze toward the past. That this relationship with the past is no longer available is, claims Agamben, the result of the waning of the influence of the avant-gardes:

Their decline marks the start of a time in which the present, petrified in an archaic *facies*, remains always a wasteland, while the past, in its estranged mask of modernity, can be only a monument to the present.⁹

While the review itself will be able to open a revolutionary breach in time, that is, to inaugurate a future, the prefatory text or essay remains trapped in this frozen present, bounded by a past of which it is *no longer* a part and a future of which it cannot yet partake. The present, in fact, is evacuated of all meaning, particularly at those moments when it ought most accurately to coincide with itself, when it ought to be most 'timely': the essay is written 'at a time that has lost sight of any other criterion for events than "what the newspapers say," just when "what the newspapers say" no longer has a jot to do with reality.'¹⁰ In opposition to this abstract, empty time, Agamben sets — as he does in the preface — a concept of the duration of human experience:

Against the empty, continuous, quantified time of vulgar historicism must be set the full, broken, indivisible and perfect time of concrete human experience; instead of the chronological time of pseudo-history, the cairiological time of

authentic history; in place of the total social process of a dialectic lost in time, the interruption and immediacy of dialectic at a standstill.¹¹

The reference to Walter Benjamin's 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' in this passage is crucial: there is an analogy to be drawn here between the advent of the review — a text which will institute a new relationship with the past — and the Messiah in Benjamin's text, who comes, as it were, as a materialist historian to freeze the present, the better to explode the calcified history that has been made of the past:

Thinking involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock, by which it crystallizes into a monad. A historical materialist approaches a historical subject only where he encounters it as a monad. In this structure he recognizes the sign of a Messianic cessation of happening, or, put differently, a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past. He takes cognizance of it in order to blast a specific era out of the homogeneous course of history — blasting a specific life out of the era or a specific work out of the lifework.¹²

Elsewhere, as I shall demonstrate in detail in Chapter Four, Agamben has identified in Benjamin's writings a conception of revolution as the messianic 'now-time' that constitutes a decisive break with the chronological continuum.¹³

The comparison with Benjamin allows a clear formulation of the temporality at work in the 'Project for a Review': the essay, coming at the end of the book and reformulating as it does some of the key concepts with which Agamben has been concerned (experience, fable, infancy, cairology), is also a preface which situates the text it announces (the projected, though clearly *impossible*, review) both in the future

and as the interruption of all systems of thought that would orient themselves toward future fulfilment. The timeliness of the review, as a publication which attempts to treat the present as historical, consists precisely in its situating itself outside of the time in which it finds itself (the time in which 'what the papers say' has no meaning: 'timely' discourse has nothing to say, while tradition cannot be spoken, cannot be transmitted): a time which cannot relate to the past.¹⁴

The temporalities of these two texts suggest a theory of the preface, the introduction, the annunciation. The prefatory text inhabits a different time from the text into which it invites the reader. The anachrony of the preface is only partly the result of the fact that it precedes the main text while having been written afterwards (the preface presumes, in other words, what has yet to be said). To return to Agamben's opening sentence: the written work takes the form of a preface to a work which does not exist. It posits that work as both past and future; it is bordered by anachrony.

The anachrony of the work, conceived in terms of the relationship between the written work and its preface, or between text and *pretext*, is familiar to readers of Romantic poetry. The poetic and critical works of Coleridge provide the most pertinent examples here. In his preface to the 'fragment' of 'Kubla Khan', Coleridge proposes his poem as a kind of introduction or prologue to a work that remains unwritten. The 'two or three hundred lines' which he claims to have composed during his drug-induced sleep appear to the poet simultaneously as word and image:

On awakening he appeared to himself to have a distinct recollection of the whole, and taking his pen, ink, and paper, instantly and eagerly wrote down the lines that are preserved. At this moment he was unfortunately called out by a person on business from Porlock, and detained by him above an hour, and on his return to his room, found, to his no small surprise and mortification, that

though he still retained some vague and dim recollection of the general purport of the vision, yet, with the exception of some eight or ten scattered lines and images, all the rest had passed away like the images on the surface of a stream into which a stone has been cast, but alas! without the after restoration of the latter.¹⁵

In part, then, Coleridge is prefacing an unfinished poem — ‘Kubla Khan’ is presented not as a complete poem, but as a ‘fragment’ and a ‘psychological curiosity’ — while the poem itself is the preface to an unwritten work which the poet has at various times planned to finish:

Yet from the still surviving recollections in his mind, the Author has frequently purposed to finish for himself what had been originally, as it were, given to him [...]: but the to-morrow is yet to come.¹⁶

The unfinished work, however, is also the ruin or remnant of the work imagined by Coleridge, a ghostly memory of an earlier poem. This spectral remanence contains its own ‘epilogue’ in the final eight lines of the poem. The admission of the failure to adequately represent the vision of the first part of the poem is prefaced by a change in temporal perspective: ‘A damsel with a dulcimer / In a vision once I saw.’ This combination of vision and time (the indeterminate ‘once’) marks an abrupt shift to a perspective from which the first thirty-six lines of ‘Kubla Khan’ are revealed as an inadequate poetic rendering of an earlier poetic vision, and of a voice which the poet can no longer hear:

Could I revive within me
Her symphony and song,

To such delight 'twould win me,
That with music loud and long,
I would build that dome in air,
That sunny dome! Those caves of ice! (ll. 42-47)

The preface itself names a number of the poem's precursors, thereby identifying the pre-texts of 'Kubla Khan' and at the same time revealing the initial vision as a product not just of opium, but of reading. Before falling into the reverie in which he composed the poem, Coleridge, we are told, had been reading Samuel Purchas's *Purchas his Pilgrimage*, itself one of the sources of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. While the final section of 'Kubla Khan' echoes Prospero's Epilogue to that play, Coleridge quotes in the preface his own poem *The Picture*. This poem recalls *The Tempest* and the speech which the Prospero's Epilogue itself recalls: Puck's final speech in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*:

Then all the charm
Is broken — all that phantom-world so fair
Vanishes, and a thousand circlets spread,
And each misshapes the other.
(Coleridge, *The Picture*, ll. 69-72)

The temporal paradoxes suggested by 'Kubla Khan' and its preface are not unusual in Romanticism: a similar, if more practical, problem attends the unfinished 'Christabel' and Coleridge's prefatory announcement of his intention to complete the poem. As I shall argue in Chapter Three, in the context of a reading of Paul de Man, Wordsworth's 'Essays Upon Epitaphs' address a similar paradox.

Pictorial Time

The preface, then, is subject to a certain anachrony: in an important sense, it can never inhabit the same time as the text it introduces.¹⁷ Following this line of argument, it becomes possible to see the prefatory text as a means of rendering spatial — that is, of *mapping* — the complexities of a text, the temporality of which is problematic or fugitive. The preface makes of the text, in other words, a cartography constructed from certain ‘landmarks’, all that occurs between these landmarks becoming merely a series of pathways or routes between recognizable points. There is a connection to be acknowledged here between perspective and temporality. As Jacques Le Goff has pointed out, linear perspective (that is, a new way of representing *space*) is intimately connected to medieval innovations in the measurement of *time*:

Along with perspective, medieval painting discovered pictorial time[...]. [T]he painter confined his picture or fresco to the temporal unity of an isolated moment and focussed on the instantaneous (which, ultimately, photography would take for its domain), while time, one might say narrative time, was to be found restored in mural cycles.¹⁸

For Le Goff, the origins of perspective are linked to the manner in which, for a nascent capitalism, time and space are inseparable: ‘Another important change was due to the merchant’s discovery of the price of time in the course of his exploration of space.’¹⁹ We shall return below, in more detail, to this link between the time of capital and the mapping of space, but it is enough at this point simply to note that the preface works in the same way. The preface constructs out of the multiplicity of the text a single space which is also a single, unified time: a geography of the work which can then be

surveyed from the aerial vantage-point of the pre-text. The time of the work is thus reduced to the time of the preface: that is to say, it is reduced to a spatial configuration. We will see this impulse toward the reduction of a problematic temporality to a manageable space in Paul de Man's essay 'The Rhetoric of Temporality' (in Chapter Three) and the criticism of Matthew Arnold and T.S. Eliot (in Chapter Five). The task of the critic for these thinkers is essentially to produce out of the temporal flux of textuality or of tradition, a spatial 'picture' that will afford (at least temporarily) a stable critical perspective (even if, as for de Man, that perspective is endlessly refashioned and repositioned in an ironic *dédoublement*).

This spatialization of the temporal in the prefatory text can be construed as a means of reducing all times to one time: in other words, as a means of *saving time*, of telescoping time (the time of reading) into one unified textual perspective, of seeing at a glance the topography of the work. There is an analogy to be drawn here with the work of Paul Virilio, for whom the technologies of visual representation in modern warfare function as tools for the conservation of time: the perspective offered by photography and cinema (and the instantaneity of later technologies of the phenomenon Virilio calls 'telepresence') allows a temporal advantage over one's opponent, a vantage-point of the same order as the perspective afforded by the preface. Virilio outlines a conception of the *theatre* of war, a 'scenario prepared in advance by whichever adversary claims to dominate the other.'²⁰ The construction of an elevated and fortified position from which to survey the surrounding terrain allows the defending party to avoid 'the uncalculated spontaneity of primitive struggle' (that is, of hand-to-hand combat) and to choose, in the temporal interval provided by the vantage-point, an appropriate strategy:

In other words, one must try to preserve, *on that very spot*, one's *head start* over the enemy. Whence the construction, around the hillock, of protected

enclaves, enclosures and fences intended to *slow the aggressor down*. Attack and defense then split on this terrain to form two elements of a single dialectic: the former becomes synonymous with speed, circulation, progression and change; and the latter with opposition to movement, tautological preservation, etc.²¹

The construction of the vantage-point thus allows the unpredictable time of the battle to be construed as a space that can be mapped in advance. This ancient and founding gesture becomes in later technological innovations of the war machine, the ultimate military advantage. The ability, for example, to survey from the air a battlefield whose contours are in continual flux becomes crucial in the First World War:

Indeed the reconnaissance aircraft itself, whose function was to supply ground troops with information, to direct artillery barrages or to take photographs, gained acceptance merely as a 'flying observation post', almost as static as the old balloon with its cartographers, pencils and paper.²²

The logic of technological warfare, then, consists in the opposition of *perspectives* conceived as efforts to spatialize a problematic temporal field: conceived, that is, as methods of *saving time*. A similar conservation of time has been theorized in a number of different contexts by Jean-François Lyotard: in each case what is again in question is the gaining and maintenance of a temporal advantage. For Lyotard, this logic applies equally to capitalist speculation and to the institutional demands of an academy which is in the business of mapping (that is, reducing) thought to a spatial (and saleable) model. As we shall see in Chapter Four (in the context of a discussion of the temporality of capital in the writings of Saint Augustine), Lyotard conceives of the time of capitalist speculation as:

grounded in the principle that money is nothing other than time placed in reserve, available. It matters little whether this be after the event or in advance of what is called 'real time'. 'Real time' is only the moment at which the time conserved in the form of money is realized. What is important for capital is not the time already invested in goods and services, but the time still stored in stocks of 'free' or 'fresh' money, given that this represents the only time which can be used with a view to organizing the future and neutralizing the event.²³

The stockpiling of time, then, is a way of holding something in reserve for an anticipated future; an unpredictable future is controlled by its contraction onto a measurable space. As in Virilio's argument, this is a way of gaining a temporal advantage:

Why do we have to save money and time to the point where this imperative seems like the law of our lives? Because saving (at the level of the system as a whole) allows the system to increase the quantity of money given over to anticipating the future. This is particularly the case with the capital invested in research and development.²⁴

This impulse toward the conservation of time is conceived of in *The Differend* with regard to the place of that text in relation to philosophical, academic and publishing marketplaces. Lyotard prefaces the text with a 'Reading Dossier' which he claims (with some irony) will take the place of reading the book itself for those readers who require a 'map' of the concepts contained in the actual text: for those, that is, who wish to *save time*. Accordingly, the prefatory text describes the desired reader of *The Differend* thus:

A philosophical one, that is, anybody on the condition that he or she agrees not to be done with 'language' and not to 'gain time'. Nevertheless, the present reading dossier will allow the reader, if the fancy grabs him or her, to 'talk about the book' without having read it.²⁵

Lyotard imagines a time (the next century) in which the 'message' of a book (its *information content*) will be separated from the text itself and will circulate in a number of other media more or less geared toward speed of assimilation and the gaining of a real return for the publisher, while the reader acquires a symbolic profit. *The Differend* itself, writes Lyotard, is 'too voluminous, too long, and too difficult;' it is an example of a kind of reflection which demands a considerable expenditure of time and is therefore inimical to the temporal economy within which reflection struggles to survive:

Still there is something new: the relation to time (I am tempted to write the 'use of time') that reigns today in the 'public space'. Reflection is not thrust aside today because it is dangerous or upsetting, but simply because it is a waste of time. It is 'good for nothing', it is not good for gaining time. For success is gaining time.²⁶

It is in the nature of reflection, argues Lyotard, to leave open the question of the *event*: the question to which reflection responds, here as in Lyotard's comments on avant-garde art, is: *is it happening?* Reflection is thus an effort to experience the *now*, in opposition to the rules of an 'economic genre' which sees the event as already part of an exchange, as already orienting itself toward a future moment of return or profit. Capitalism proceeds, in other words, *as if* the event had already happened, in the same

way that the prefatory, time-saving, text proceeds as if the event of thought had already occurred. The time of reflection, of thought, of writing, is thus contracted into the equivalence of two moments: the moment of investment and the moment of return. The introductory map of a given text produces a space in which the reader can rapidly orient herself in relation to certain conceptual landmarks without entering into the unpredictable time of reading and reflection. This would be the logic, for example, of the critical or theoretical anthology (and perhaps of anthologies in general). While, presumably, the editors of these textbooks (and the teachers who recommend them) would want to claim that they function as prefaces or prologues to the main event of careful study and reflection, this is also, precisely, where they fail: the logic of Lyotard's argument suggests that to save time in this manner is in fact to preclude the possibility of attending to the event of reflection. In a text which obeys the institutional edict to save time, but also acknowledges the need to step outside that temporal economy, Geoffrey Bennington has commented: 'this book will not avoid narrative and representation, pedagogy and stupidity, time-saving and post-modernity.'²⁷ While Bennington's preface to his introduction to Lyotard points out the gaps in that account, he is well aware that this acknowledgement of the book's limitations does not get him off the hook. The book is still, despite its attention to those elements of Lyotard's thought which are unamenable to rapid explication, engaged in an activity of *saving time*, of telescoping time into a marketable space.²⁸

Capital Times

In his essay 'Merchant's Time and Church's Time in the Middle Ages', Jacques Le Goff posits a connection between time, capital and knowledge:

Could knowledge be sold, since, as Saint Bernard had pointed out in his usual forceful manner, it, too, belonged only to God? What is at stake here is the whole process of secularization of the basis and context of human activity: labour time, and the conditions of intellectual and economic production.²⁹

Time, like knowledge, belongs to God: hence the criticism leveled by the church against the merchants, 'the charge that their profit implied a mortgage on time.'³⁰ The gradual accommodation offered by the church to the temporal economy of capital is intimately connected, argues Le Goff, to a notion of the spatial and temporal movement of knowledge, of the *translation* of knowledge from one civilization of one epoch to another:

The history of civilizations was no more than a sequence of *translationes*. Two aspects of the notion of *translatio* are well known. First, in the intellectual sphere, there was the theory according to which knowledge was handed from Athens to Rome, then to France, and finally to Paris, where the most famous university was to grow out of the urban schools: *translatio studii*, which Alcuin had already noted in the Carolingian era. More generally, historians believed they were observing a movement of civilization from East to West.³¹

Knowledge, in other words, is conceived of here as a movement both in space and time: the task of the institution, however, is to fix or immobilize that knowledge spatially or geographically (and ultimately, as Le Goff acknowledges, nationally). For Le Goff, there is a direct connection between this conception of the time and space of knowledge and the manner in which the merchant conceives of the temporalities of exchange and labour. As he points out in his essay 'How Did the Medieval University

Conceive of Itself?’ the separation of intellectual from manual labour is thought of — as, for example, for Thomas Aquinas — in terms of the conservation of time:

The academic had his trade. The job of working with one’s hands was to be left to others — it, too, had spiritual value — but the intellectual worker was not to waste time in what was not his affair.³²

This conception of the division of labour in terms of a proper use of one’s time is, according to Le Goff, homologous with the way in which the merchant conceives of time in the fourteenth century: it becomes essential for the speculators of an emergent bourgeoisie to be able to measure time and to fix in advance certain temporal durations (the length of a journey, for example, or of the working day).

There arises in this period, says le Goff, ‘a whole spirituality of the calculated use of time’: with the introduction of bells and, later, clocks, the quantification of daily life demands that the worker account for the manner in which he spends his time:

From the first half of the fourteenth century on, the theme became more specific and dramatic. Wasting one’s time became a serious sin, a spiritual scandal. On the model of money and of the merchant who, in Italy at least, became an accountant of time, there arose a calculating morality and miserly piety.³³

The quantification of the time of labour (intellectual as well as manual) is also a way of representing as a spatial field a temporal movement which needs to be fixed in order to be controlled. As in the example of Virilio’s theorization of representation and the time of war, and as in the case of the institutional demand to produce a map of the changing terrain of the philosophical text (as theorized by Lyotard), it is a question here of rendering time as a spatial ‘picture’, a representation of time as a series of

points which are all simultaneously present. This is the logic of the capitalist *spectacle*, as elucidated by Guy Debord:

With the development of capitalism, irreversible time is *unified on a world scale*. Universal history thus becomes a reality because the entire world is gathered under the development of this time. But this history, which is everywhere simultaneously the same, is still only the refusal within history of history itself. What appears the world over as *the same day* is the time of economic production cut up into equal abstract fragments. Unified irreversible time is the time of the *world market* and, as a corollary, of the world spectacle.³⁴

For Debord, time in this capitalist model becomes nothing more than its own exchangeability: the time, that is, of 'human development' is reduced to the abstract equivalence of discrete segments or intervals. This is time as the total obliteration of the concrete human experience of which Agamben writes in the 'Project for a Review'. For Debord as for Agamben, real experience is elsewhere, in another time.³⁵

As I shall argue in the Conclusion, in the light of the evidence presented in Chapters One to Five, this notion of the temporality of experience (and the history of its occlusion in those modes of criticism which obey the law of the conservation of time) enables us to conceive of a temporality other than the abstract, quantified continuum. This is not to suggest (at least, not at this early stage) that criticism can leap outside of the temporal economy which I have identified here, and somehow fulfil itself, 'live' or 'experience' itself fully, but rather that we must first of all be attentive to the essentially paradoxical nature of a discourse (the discourse, as we have seen, of the preface) which would attempt to map in advance the movements of reading and interpretation. As Agamben has shown, such efforts are immediately subject to a

peculiar anachrony: the preface comes before and after the text, which it then constitutes as unwritten. This is also to acknowledge that the effort to think oneself out of the time in which one writes (as, for example, in the form of the manifesto) is necessarily doomed to the production of a point or a place outside of one's time, from which that time can be surveyed in the manner of Virilio's aerial photographer. In other words, there is no clear passage or route (that is, no *method*) between the written and the unwritten works which Agamben describes: that is, between the lived experience of the work and the frozen image of its death mask. As we shall see in Chapter Four, such a passage is in fact death itself: for Augustine, as for Wittgenstein, death can never be an experience (an event in life); it is, rather, the 'in-between', the interim which can never be fixed as an instant.

Allegorical Time

If, as I have concluded above, the relationship between time and space with which I have been concerned so far must be thought in relation to death, it is in response to (and in pursuit of) this observation that Chapter One takes as its starting point a discourse on representation and death. The ultimate destination or fulfilment of the perspectival representation of the unified moment is, for Jacques Le Goff, the photograph. Photography, ostensibly the representation of a fixed instant in time, an instant *as it really was*, is revealed, however, in certain key critical texts as a temporally paradoxical form, traversed by anachrony. The photograph is the index of a certain loss and the form of grief or mourning for the object of that loss. The theories of photography examined in this chapter are indebted also, though, to a wider critical heritage to be found in the history of concepts of allegory, conceived as a form of representation that has as its object a lost or 'dead' referent. Accordingly, the

argument presented here proceeds on two fronts: first, outlining a conception of the relationship between representation and death, in a reading of theories of allegory in Walter Benjamin and others, and, second, showing how certain discourses on photography present a complex conception of the temporality of representation (while at the same time offering a particular inflexion of the earlier, allegorical, conception). The chapter begins by positing a relationship between the temporalities of allegory and photography in the work of Walter Benjamin. As Eduardo Cadava has argued recently, much of Benjamin's thinking about history and temporality is formulated in the context of a meditation on the photographic image, a line of enquiry which is in part a continuation of his earlier consideration of the allegorical image in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*.³⁶ The link between Benjamin's early and late works is formulated here in terms of the temporality of representation. In *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* Benjamin presents a conception of allegory as the representation of an object which has been irrecoverably lost: allegory presents the ruin, an object denuded of significance, which can then be accorded any meaning whatever by the allegorist. In this conception, representation is the ghostly or spectral return of a lost object. Drawing on the works of Christine Buci-Glucksmann, Julia Kristeva, Jean Baudrillard and Roland Barthes, I argue for an intimate connection between this Benjaminian conception of allegory and the temporality of photography (the link is made by way of a mediating examination of Benjamin's writings on Baudelaire). Photography emerges here as a ghostly, melancholic, allegorical form: the manifestation, to the gaze of the present, of an absolute anteriority. The rhetorical figure which governs the argument presented here is that of *apophrades*: the return of the dead.³⁷ For Roland Barthes, *apophrades* provides a means of conceiving of the temporal paradox of the photograph. Photography presents an object from the past as if it were present, the ghostly 'this-has-been' of an object both present and absent. For Barthes, as for Benjamin, the portrait provides the exemplary instance of this spectral presence: specifically, in *Camera*

Lucida, the photograph of his mother which Barthes describes but does not reproduce. In a similar meditation on the family photograph, Siegfried Kracauer proposes a conception of the photograph as return of the dead. While Kracauer's essay 'Photography' asserts first of all the 'historicism' of the photographic image — its insertion, that is, in a defined, discrete instant, as 'what really happened' — the text inevitably moves (in the examination of a photograph of Kracauer's own grandmother) toward the recognition of the anachrony of the image. Kracauer's text is placed here in productive proximity to his interpretation of one of the numerous photographic moments in Proust. Where for Kracauer's earlier argument the photograph is opposed to the authentic work of memory, in this Proustian scene the photographic image stands precisely for the casting of the subject (Marcel, returning to find his grandmother unrecognizable and therefore 'photographic') out of the chronological stream of linear and abstract time. Photography, then, as conceived in this chapter, following the theorizations of Benjamin and Kracauer, is a profoundly allegorical form: a ghostly and melancholic form of representation which allows us to posit a conception of representation decidedly at odds with any notion of a unified representative time or representational space which could be governed from an overarching vantage-point.

Sublime time

The conception of an allegorical temporality as the time of melancholia or mourning is developed in the second chapter in the context of a reading of the aesthetics of the sublime. Edmund Burke's conception, in his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, of *grief* as the maintenance before the mind's gaze of a dead or lost object, provides the initial impetus here. In the writings of John Ruskin — an exemplary late instance of the aesthetics of the sublime — this version of

grief or mourning is construed precisely as a mode of representation: the *pathetic fallacy* consists in the imaginative imputation of a 'life' to an inanimate object, a poetic practice which typically takes the form of a mourning for the passing of that object. The pathetic fallacy is figured by Ruskin as a weakening or 'evaporation' of the subject, engaged in a process of identification with an equally enfeebled object. The theory of the pathetic fallacy formulated in Ruskin's *Modern Painters* does not prevent him, though, from succumbing to the same error himself in his enigmatic late text, 'The Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century'. In this lecture, Ruskin presents a vision of the corruption, unrecognizability and blurring of the natural world, a vision already sketched in his comments on the vagueness of modern landscape painting in *Modern Painters*. In the later work, however, it is not a representation but the natural object itself that has become ignoble and indistinct. In a degraded version of the sublime experience of the unformed or boundless, the storm-cloud of the nineteenth century appears to Ruskin as proof of the irreparable loss of a stable relationship between subject and object of representation. More crucially for my purposes here, it stands also for a vision of history as subject to terrible shifts or blurrings that render unstable any notion of a clear chronological progression. This latter is argued in relation both to the apparent anachrony of Ruskin's own text and to a melancholic vision of history that it shares with the work of Walter Benjamin.

The opposition set up here between a stable chronological history and a movement, blurring or shifting, is further developed in a reading of the founding conception of the aesthetics of the sublime to be read in the treatise of Longinus. The argument here proceeds from a consideration of the etymology of the word 'sublime'; stressing the original sense of a movement, I propose a conception of the Longinian sublime as being oriented toward a certain temporal predicament: the text is concerned in an important regard with a notion of tradition, with the relationship of a text to the past (its precursors) and the future (its audience and imitators). The greatness of which

Longinus speaks is to be found not in the author, or in the text itself, but in a generalized movement: the movement of knowledge in time, from one writer to another, and the movement of both author and reader out of themselves. This latter movement, the *ekstasis* occasioned by sublime writing, is related here to the estrangement of the self in language, as identified in the reading of Longinus offered by Neil Hertz, and in Paul de Man's writings on the sublime. Again, as with the weakened sublime of Ruskin, what is in question here is a certain association with history, understood in terms of the relationship between subject and representation, or between the self and rhetoric.

The Temporality of Rhetoric

The third chapter expands upon the relations in de Man's criticism between self and rhetoric, between subject and trope, and returns explicitly to the question of the reduction of the time of representation to a representational space. At the beginning of his essay 'The Rhetoric of Temporality', de Man proposes a vision of the history of the relationship between rhetoric and subjectivity in literary criticism in terms of a number of visual metaphors: it is a history which has been *eclipsed*, its true nature blurred and now invisible to the contemporary critic. The task of the essay is first of all one of historical clarification; de Man proposes a revaluation of the concepts of symbol, allegory and irony which will elucidate the true history of their relations. This will involve, he claims at the outset, traversing history in an effort to recognize the significance of the tropes outside of a restrictive and illusory ahistorical conception of the relationship between romanticism and contemporary criticism. De Man, in other words, wishes to do justice to the historicity of the concepts with which he is concerned, and to recognize the 'temporal predicament' from which criticism always

proceeds. I argue here, however, that this initial concern with time and history is abandoned in de Man's work in favour of an ahistorical, universalized conception of the relations of subject and representation, characterized in 'The Rhetoric of Temporality' by a theory of irony.

De Man is first of all concerned with the romantic distinction between allegory and symbol, and with complicating the now traditional valorization of the latter at the expense of the former. In a reading of Coleridge, de Man demonstrates that the opposition between the concreteness of the symbol and the abstraction of allegory is impossible to maintain. Allegory seems, here, according to de Man, to undermine the very distinction between the concrete and the abstract, presenting as it does, in an enigmatic fashion, a ghostly or immaterial referent. For de Man, allegory 'designates primarily a distance in relation to its own origin,' a temporal gap between subject and object which is situated purely within the subject, where it takes the form of *irony*. Irony, according to de Man, is an ahistorical form of the presentation of anteriority that he reads in allegory; it consists, in other words, in the presentation of an endlessly distanced origin within consciousness (that is, for de Man, within language). An essay by Baudelaire, 'De l'essence du rire', provides the framework on which de Man builds this theory of ironic temporality. My argument here shows, however, how de Man's interpretation of Baudelaire persistently misses the element of temporal anteriority in the text in favour of a spatialized model of irony. In other words, de Man avoids the problematic temporality of the allegorical and sets up a conception of representation based on the vantage-point of irony. Essentially, this allows him to produce a criticism which is no longer troubled by history at all.

Irony provides for de Man a means of situating safely within language a phenomenon which would otherwise recall his criticism to an intractable historicity: that is, death. Death is the absent referent of two texts of Wordsworth's in relation to which de Man extends the arguments above: 'A slumber did my spirit seal' and the first

'Essay Upon Epitaphs'. Both texts are shown here to present the event of death as both past and future: in the manner of Agamben's preface, Wordsworth's poem can be said to both precede and follow the event of Lucy's death, while the form of the epitaph addresses both past and future. Neither can be said to inhabit a recognizable present, that is, the moment of death, which could never, of course, be experienced. Irony, however, apparently allows de Man to posit a linguistic perspective from which the writer could speak, as it were, from beyond the grave, bypassing the troublesome and unrepresentable event itself.

The present

The event of death appears to vanish into the past and the future in a similar fashion in Augustine's *City of God*. For Augustine, we cannot identify or fix a moment at which the dying person could be said to be 'in death': rather, we can only speak of one who 'is dying' (that is, *going to die*) or 'dead'. In this sense, the instant of death is analogous to the present itself. In Chapter Four, the question of the present which has been the more or less repressed referent of the texts examined in earlier chapters is elaborated with reference to a text which has become, for recent commentators on time and representation, the inaugurating instance of a fundamental reflection on the nature of time: Book XI of Augustine's *Confessions*. In the first nine books of the *Confessions*, Augustine offers a conception of his life as having been oriented throughout toward a future of which, at any given moment in that life, he was but dimly (or not at all) aware. Having provided, in Book X, a justification for his autobiographical method (in the context of a reflection on memory), Augustine proceeds in Book XI to investigate the nature of time itself and, specifically, of the present.

Ultimately, Augustine formulates a conception of a time which is guaranteed by God, who gives plenitude or meaning to the empty, abstract, continuum. The text, however, first attempts to define the categories with which language struggles to describe the passage of time: past, present and future. The present, Augustine is forced to conclude, has no duration; it is a purely abstract point which has meaning only in relation to the adjacent past and future: that is, to memory and prediction. What saves Augustine from this vision of an empty and meaningless present, though, is his examination of the temporal intervals involved in the reading of poetry. Poetry is measured not by mechanical categories of syllables, feet and lines, but according to the duration of a speaking voice, a voice which is analogous, it transpires, to the divine word that guarantees the time in which we live.

My argument here concerns an opposition in Augustine's writings between this divinely fulfilled time and an abstract, purely quantitative time which is identified elsewhere by Augustine as the time of theatrical representation and of commerce. For such thinkers as Jean-François Lyotard, Giorgio Agamben and Éric Alliez, the works of Augustine have provided a means of conceiving of the time of capital as the abstract equivalence of instants: for the merchant, the *now* has meaning or value only insofar as it refers to another, future, moment at which it will be fulfilled (that is, repeated). The central text examined here is Agamben's essay 'Time and History'. For Agamben, the history of Western time is the history of the progressive abstraction and quantification of time, a process which finds its most comprehensive expression in the capitalist governance of labour time. In opposition to this time of exploitation, to which Marxism has been unable to propose an alternative, Agamben imagines a qualitative temporality: the time (as in a formulation of Lyotard's also considered here) not of the instant but of the *event*, not of the abstract quantity but of the concrete duration of a lived time. Once more, as in the case of the texts discussed earlier, Agamben situates this time of real human experience in the interruption of the chronological continuum.

I argue in conclusion here for a conception of criticism in precisely these terms: as the interruption of a straightforwardly progressive history, or as the eruption of an unpredictable time into the carefully mapped spatial field of literary history.

Any-time-whatever

In Chapter Five I propose an opposition between two conceptions of the temporality of the object of criticism. The first takes the form of an understanding of literary history as a series of *privileged instants*, the second a conception of such a temporal field in terms of *any-instants-whatever*. Considering again the Augustinian autobiographical project, I identify here first of all an impulse toward the construction of the past as a succession of moments understood in their relation to a future from which they gain meaning. This is the logic of the *Confessions*: at the local level of Augustine's autobiography, the instants singled out for narrating and examining refer proleptically to the author's eventual conversion. From a wider perspective, every significant event refers forward to the eventual redemption of the world. History is thus thought of (as is scripture for Augustine) as a series of privileged instants which unite in their orientation toward the future.

This is precisely the logic of a certain conception of the relation of criticism to history: the first example referred to here is Matthew Arnold, whose conception of literary history as a succession of *touchstones* consists in the reduction of a history which takes place in time to a tradition which can be grasped from the perspective of the critic. This conception of literary history is taken up by T.S. Eliot, for whom the critic is conceived as one who surveys a landscape, reorienting himself, at certain temporal intervals, in relation to its landmarks. My argument then turns briefly to the work of Georges Poulet, whose conception of time in literary history reveals itself as

the mapping once more of a certain topography, albeit one traversed by the temporal confusions of a particular understanding of modernism.

In the second half of this chapter I propose, in opposition to this spatial field of recognizable and privileged points, a conception of the temporality of criticism as *any-moment-whatever*, that is, as a field in which movement is privileged over stasis, unrecognizability over recognition, the gap or interim over the stable co-ordinate. This section of the argument will return us to the terrain of Chapter One: it is in relation to conceptions of photographic and cinematic representation that a criticism which is attentive to temporal shifts and slippages can be most productively formulated. For Deleuze and Lyotard, cinema is understood in terms of movement, not of the image. I offer first here a conception of photographic and cinematic representation which attends to the spectrality and anachrony of the image. Drawing on Deleuze's notion of cinema as the representation of any-instant-whatever (and on similar arguments proposed by Agamben and Thierry de Duve), I suggest, in place of the static cartography of Arnold and Eliot, an aesthetic of the 'in-between', of temporal movement or passage. This conception of an aesthetic of movement has already, in part, been formulated by Paul Virilio in the context of his reflections on representation and technology: I take as an exemplary formulation of such an aesthetic, a text which is crucially concerned with time, vision and technology. In a reading of Virginia Woolf's short story 'The Searchlight', I show how the temporal movement, the anachronous and ghostly temporality with which I have been concerned throughout, eludes and confounds attempts to fix time within recognizable and stable chronological or spatial boundaries.³⁸

Finally, this aesthetic of the interim, of the gap between stable temporal coordinates, allows us to conceive also of a criticism which would be thought precisely in terms of an 'inter-vention': that is, as both invention and an 'in-between-ness' that I shall cast, in conclusion, in terms of a philosophy of the event.

Notes

¹ Giorgio Agamben, *Infancy and History*, trans. Liz Heron (London: Verso, 1993), p. 3.

² Ibid.

³ Walter Benjamin, 'The Image of Proust', in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1992), p. 197.

⁴ Giorgio Agamben, *Infancy and History*, p. 3.

⁵ Ibid., p. 7.

⁶ For a sustained commentary by Agamben on the gap between voice and language, see his study of Heidegger in *Language and Death*, trans. Karen E. Pinkus & Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

⁷ Giorgio Agamben, *Infancy and History*, p. 143.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., p. 144.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 143.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 148.

¹² Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations*, p. 254.

¹³ Agamben writes: 'It is certainly no accident that every time modern thought has come to reconceptualize time, it has inevitably had to begin with a critique of continuous, quantified time.[...] There moves in Benjamin that same Jewish messianic intuition which had led Kafka to write that "the Day of Judgement is the normal condition of history" and to replace the idea of history developing along infinite linear time with the paradoxical image of a "state of history", whose key event is always unfolding and whose goal is not in the distant future, but already present.' Giorgio Agamben, 'Time and History', in *Infancy and History*, p. 102.

¹⁴ Agamben speaks of 'our time'. Cf., in this regard, Jean-Luc Nancy's comments on 'our time' as the time of the suspense or suspension of history: 'our time', for Nancy,

is time rendered spatial, conceived of as an *epoch*: 'What is spaced in and by the epoch? Not some spatial points, which are already spaced, but the points of temporality itself, which are nothing but the always becoming and disappearing *presents* of time.' Jean-Luc Nancy, 'Finite History', in *The Birth to Presence*, trans. Brian Holmes et al. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 150.

¹⁵ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Poems*, ed. Ernest Hartley Coleridge (London: Oxford University Press, 1912), p. 296.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 297.

¹⁷ In a philosophical context, the problem we are examining here might be productively considered with reference to Descartes's *Discours* and *Méditations*, both texts intended (after the fact) to introduce Descartes's thought and (especially in the case of the latter) to reduce the radical charge of that thought. Both texts present the principles of their authors' philosophy in temporally complex ways: the *Discours* in terms of an autobiographical narrative, the *Méditations* in terms of a 'present': the daily formulation of each meditation. The extent to which the *method* (etymologically, a pathway) stands outside of the thought it describes and governs is made clear in the second text: 'I have already slightly touched upon the questions respecting the existence of God and the nature of the human soul, in the *Discourse on the method of rightly conducting the Reason, and seeking truth in the Sciences*, published in French in the year 1637; not, however, with the design of there treating them fully, but only, as it were, in passing, that I might learn from the judgments of my readers in what way I should afterwards handle them.' René Descartes, *Meditations*, in *A Discourse on Method, Meditations & Principles*, trans. John Veitch (London: Dent, 1962), p. 71.

¹⁸ Jacques Le Goff, 'Merchant's Time and Church's Time in the Middle Ages', in *Time, Work and Culture in the Middle Ages*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 36-37. I am grateful to Felicity Dunworth for

pointing out the importance of Le Goff both here and in the discussion of Augustine in Chapter Four.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 36.

²⁰ Paul Virilio, *Popular Defense and Ecological Struggles*, trans. Mark Polizzotti (New York: Semiotext(e), 1990), pp. 14-15.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 15-16.

²² Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London: Verso 1989), p. 17.

²³ Jean-François Lyotard, 'Time Today', in *The Inhuman*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington & Rachel Bowlby (Cambridge: Polity, 1993), p. 66.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 67. The purely quantified, abstract nature of this time of capital is insisted upon by Éric Alliez: 'If money bears within itself an ineffaceable debit, it is because time, converted into the money form, is discovered as an empty *form*, a pure order of time, quantitative and differential, measurable and coinable, which nothing can come to fill. The time without qualities of a future-oriented humanity that cuts time into segments of linear duration that are put to profit in order to realize investments and 'accumulation'. And so time itself is 'invested': there is no advance but in time, no payment due that is not temporal.' Éric Alliez, *Capital Times: Tales from the Conquest of Time*, trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 13.

²⁵ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend*, trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), p. xiv.

²⁶ Ibid., p. xv.

²⁷ Geoffrey Bennington, *Lyotard: Writing the Event* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), p. 4.

²⁸ The book produces, for example, a version of Lyotard, the contours and landmarks of whose work are to some degree recognizable and assimilable to an academy already

at home in the landscape of Derrida's thought. Bennington is presented as a pertinent example here largely because of the degree of self-consciousness with which he sets about constructing a 'preface' to Lyotard, and because he is clearly aware that self-consciousness does not render his text any less susceptible to the time-saving impulse. For an instructive (and hilarious) reflection on the pitfalls of *introducing* a thinker or a work, see Bennington's account of the entry of the thought of Derrida into the Anglo-American academy, in Geoffrey Bennington, 'Deconstruction and the Philosophers (The Very Idea)', in *Legislations: The Politics of Deconstruction* (London: Verso, 1994).

²⁹ Jacques Le Goff, *Time, Work and Culture in the Middle Ages*, p. 30.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 129.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

³⁴ Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black & Red, 1983), ¶ 145 (unpaginated).

³⁵ On the reduction of work and the freeing of time — the time of experience and creativity — see André Gorz, *Farewell to the Working Class*, trans. Michael Sonenscher (London: Pluto Press, 1982), pp. 126-144 & *passim*.

³⁶ Cadava links *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* with Benjamin's late 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' through the medium of the photographic image: 'As Benjamin explains it, it is because historical thinking involves "not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well" that photography can become a model for the understanding of history, a model for its performance. Like the stage setting that in Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* book names the spatial enclosing and freezing of history, photography names a process that, seizing and tearing an image from its context, works

to immobilize the flow of history. This is why, following the exigency of the fragment or thesis, photography can be said to be another name for the arrest that Benjamin identifies with the movement of revolution.’ Eduardo Cadava, *Words of Light: Theses on the Photography of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. xx. While Cadava’s fragmented, ‘thetic’ text offers many such useful insights into Benjamin’s work, his is not the method adopted here. Photography provides Cadava with a vantage-point or perspective from which Benjamin’s writings appear as so many points or theses. The book’s often frantic overplaying of the place of the photographic image in Benjamin’s work is linked to its hasty identification of the thesis as the basic unit of that work (the latter based partly on an accident of translation: Harry Zohn’s reading of ‘Uber den Begriff der Geschichte’ as ‘*Theses on the Philosophy of History*’).

³⁷ Cf. Harold Bloom’s conception of the temporality of literary influence. The ‘temporal paradox of the relation of the Romantic text to its pretext — presented above with reference to Coleridge — is also crucial for Bloom: ‘Apophrades, or the return of the dead [...]. The later poet, in his own final phase, already burdened by an imaginative solitude that is almost a solipsism, holds his own poem so open again to the precursor’s work that at first we might believe the wheel has come full circle, and that we are back in the later poet’s flooded apprenticeship, before his strength began to assert itself in the revisionary ratios. But the poem is now *held* open to the precursor, where once it *was* open, and the uncanny effect is that the new poem’s achievement makes it seem to us, not as though the precursor were writing it, but as though the later poet himself had written the precursor’s characteristic work.’ Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 15-16.

³⁸ Cf. the comments of Deleuze and Guattari: ‘The only way to get outside the dualisms is to be-between, to pass between, the intermezzo — that is what Virginia Woolf lived

with all her energies, in all of her work, never ceasing to become.’ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Athlone Press, 1987), p. 277.

Chapter 1: Apophrades: The Return of the Dead

‘Man, fascinated with himself, constructs his double, his intelligent spectre, and entrusts the keeping of his knowledge to a reflection.’

(Paul Virilio, *The Aesthetics of Disappearance*)

‘Time which antiquates Antiquities, and hath an art to make dust of all things, hath yet spared these *minor* monuments.’

(Thomas Browne, *Hydriotaphia*)

I

The purpose of this chapter is to investigate a certain conception of the relations between time, history and representation. Allegory, I wish to argue, is that mode of representation or thinking which is characterized by the explicit presentation — in form and content — of its own temporal status. In its traditional forms, and in its centrality to discourses on representation to be found in the criticism of the twentieth century, allegory is of special significance in thinking about the representational status of the image. It is, then, to a particular temporality of the image that I wish to draw attention. My argument will focus on photography, but I will also point out the ways in which the allegorical temporality described here has been at work in the history of painting, and finds its limit case in the genre of *trompe-l’oeil*, an ‘unpainterly’ form which presents precisely the paradoxical temporality of its object. The history of allegory — and of its theorization — is also the history of the complex relations

between text and image (as we shall see later, one of the most common definitions of allegory depends upon the attribution to the allegorical image of — for better or worse — the characteristics of text). While I do not intend to offer here an overall picture of that history, the argument I present concerning the temporality of the allegorical (photographic) image will demand an engagement with those texts which treat of the allegorical in rhetorical and literary discourses.¹ The justification for proceeding simultaneously on these two fronts — the discursive and the figural, the rhetorical and the pictorial — is to be found initially in the first formulation of the allegorical which I will consider: that proposed by Walter Benjamin. The most pertinent writings in this regard are *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’ and ‘A Small History of Photography’, all of which will be explored here.² The eclectic and disparate nature of Benjamin’s work — by turns discursive, polemical, theoretical and empirical, but veering continually toward the enigmatic, opaque and famously mystical passages of the ‘Theses on the History of Philosophy’ — is such that we cannot simply extract from a given text the assertive core of ‘what Benjamin says’ on a particular subject. The complex web of contradictions and obscure correspondences which constitutes the corpus of Benjamin’s writing renders such a desire for transparency both restrictive and misleading. It may be suggested that such vigilance is the precondition for serious engagement with the works of any writer; I wish merely to point out at this early stage the particular dangers inherent in the form of Benjamin’s texts. The essay or fragment dedicated to a particular topic may lead us toward one of two errors: first, we may be tempted to posit too hastily a unity between the fragments of Benjamin’s work; second, to presume the autonomy of the essay or fragment in its adherence to a relatively restricted subject matter. These errors work together to produce the kind of critical response to which Benjamin’s writings were for many years condemned in the English-speaking world. That Benjamin has acquired a talismanic authority for critics as the source of numerous

citational or quotational 'touchstones', may be explained partly by the halting and fragmentary history of both German publication and English translation of his works. It seems more plausible to suggest, though, that the tendency is anticipated, condemned and typified by those works themselves. Benjamin's conscription as critical reinforcement is not merely the result of the sluggishness of academic machinery or imagination; rather, the question here is precisely that of the 'citation without reference' of which Benjamin himself writes: that is, of the relationship between history and its contemporary representation or reproduction. It is a question, then, of tradition, of memory and of *presence* (the presence of the *past*). The practice of incantatory quotation described above is at once decidedly 'un-Benjaminian' and a sin of which Benjamin himself is undoubtedly, and repeatedly, guilty (indeed, it could be said to constitute his very method). It is this ambivalence over the status and authority of history, of the historical object or event, which I wish to examine in what follows. Specifically, I wish to argue that the concept of allegory which Benjamin fashions from a number of critical, rhetorical and philosophical inheritances offers the means to think the question of representation as a question of time: a question, that is, of tradition, memory, return and recognition (all of which are inescapable once we begin to quote, to cite or to criticize). For Benjamin, as for others discussed below, these questions are inseparable from a meditation on the image. It is here that we must begin, then, to listen for the secret voice of allegory and to await its spectral apparition.

Speed and Modernity

Before engaging with Benjamin's texts, I wish to outline some of the things at stake in those texts. For Benjamin, an essay by Baudelaire, 'The Painter of Modern Life', proves an exemplary presentation of the aesthetics of urban modernity. In Baudelaire's

text, the visual representation of the modern world is characterized by a particular conjunction of memory and speed, of accuracy of recollection and rapidity of execution. Modernity, writes Baudelaire, is 'the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable'.³ Modern art does not result from the conjunction of the eternal and the transient; rather, modernity appears here as a necessary element within artistic beauty (art, we might then say, is *never fully modern*):

Beauty is made up of an eternal, invariable element, whose quantity it is excessively difficult to determine, and of a relative, circumstantial element, which will be, if you like, whether severally or all at once, the age, its fashions, its morals, its emotions.⁴

For Baudelaire, the modern painter is not an 'artist' in this sense, but rather a 'man of the world': his allegiance is to the speed, the frenzy, the business of modernity. Baudelaire does not maintain the initial separation of art from modernity, though: the modern painter, Constantin Guys (the 'Monsieur G' of Baudelaire's text), is 'the painter of the passing moment and of all the suggestions of eternity that it contains'.⁵ His aim is 'to extract from fashion whatever element it may contain of poetry within history, to distil the eternal from the transitory'.⁶ Constantin Guys, Baudelaire tells us, paints from memory: a memory which, in its attempt to render with the greatest speed and accuracy the transitory nature of modern life, places the artist in the position of the narrator of Poe's 'The Man of the Crowd', who 'remembers, and fervently desires to remember, everything'.⁷ Memory, however, in a suggestive passage in which Baudelaire presents this frenzied effort at recollection and reconstruction, inevitably *misses* the event or object to be represented:

When Monsieur G. wakes up and opens his eyes to see the boisterous sun beating a tattoo upon his windowpane, he reproaches himself remorsefully and regretfully: 'What a peremptory order! what a bugle-blast of life! Already several hours of light — everywhere — lost by my sleep! How many *illuminated* things might I have seen and have missed seeing!'⁸

'Monsieur G.' wakes in daylight and regrets having missed the hours since dawn; yet he is ostensibly witness to — and immediate recorder of — the *harmony* of daily life, a harmony which in this instance must be produced retrospectively by filling the temporal gap in the representable occasioned by his late awakening. Representation, then, is not in this case a matter of the immediate capturing of the fleeting moment in artistic production, but a question of the active remembering of a dismembered temporal continuum, an activity which is intimately concerned with death and a particular ghostliness: the disappearance of the artist in the immateriality of that which he attempts to represent.⁹

The narrator of Poe's tale has been close to death: convalescing, he looks through the window of a café at a crowded London street:

The latter is one of the principal thoroughfares of the city, and had been very much crowded during the whole day. But, as the darkness came on, the throng momentarily increased; and by the time the lamps were well lighted, two dense and continuous tides of population were rushing past the door. At this particular period of the evening I had never before been in a similar situation, and the tumultuous sea of human heads filled me, therefore, with a delicious novelty of emotion. I gave up, at length, all care of things within the hotel, and became absorbed in contemplation of the scene without.¹⁰

Noting the dress, expressions and movements of the pedestrians, the narrator classifies them according to profession: merchants, clerks, prostitutes, gamblers, artisans and labourers all pass before him, until the twilight begins to give way to the glare of gas-lamps. It is then that he sees the face of an old man in the crowd and, convinced that the 'absolute idiosyncrasy of its expression' conceals a 'wild [...] history', begins to follow him. His pursuit is fruitless: the old man traverses the city like a ghost condemned to repeat the same enigmatic journey every night. At dawn, the 'man of the crowd' and his pursuer return to the same street once more. Nothing has changed; nothing has been learned; the return (to the realm of the living and of light: the city is awakening) makes no sense.

For Baudelaire, the modern painter is similarly possessed of a 'passion and [...] profession [...] to become one flesh with the crowd. For the perfect *flâneur*, for the passionate spectator, it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite.'¹¹ His work is characterized by the same effort to construct a meaningful unity out of a fleeting appearance: 'It is the fear of not going fast enough, of letting the phantom escape before the synthesis has been extracted and pinned down.'¹² The modern artist is 'always, spiritually, in the condition of the convalescent', continually reminded of the proximity of (his own) death, poised before the annulment of the self in a final disappearance into the crowd.¹³ The mysterious relationship between the narrator of Poe's story and his decrepit quarry is also the relationship which obtains — for Benjamin as for the other thinkers discussed below (chiefly, Siegfried Kracauer and Roland Barthes) — between the work of art and its referent. Threatened with an annihilation which mirrors the meaningless decay of its object, the work exists only as the attenuated, partial, memory or reconstruction of a rapidly receding *past*. In the face of this vanishing act on the part of reference and meaning, however, something nonetheless persists. It is an apparition, an appearance to which the fascination which

grips Poe's narrator attests: his 'craving desire to keep the man in view', spurred by a street lamp's brief illumination of *details*: the texture of the old man's coat, 'a glimpse both of a diamond and of a dagger'.¹⁴ Within the terms of Benjamin's discourse on the work of art, this doomed adherence to fleetingly luminous detail indicates a particular historical moment: between the poles of cult and exhibition value, between the perilous retention and the certain loss of the aura of the work. For Benjamin, this historical moment has a name, or, rather, an image: the photograph.

'this-has-been'

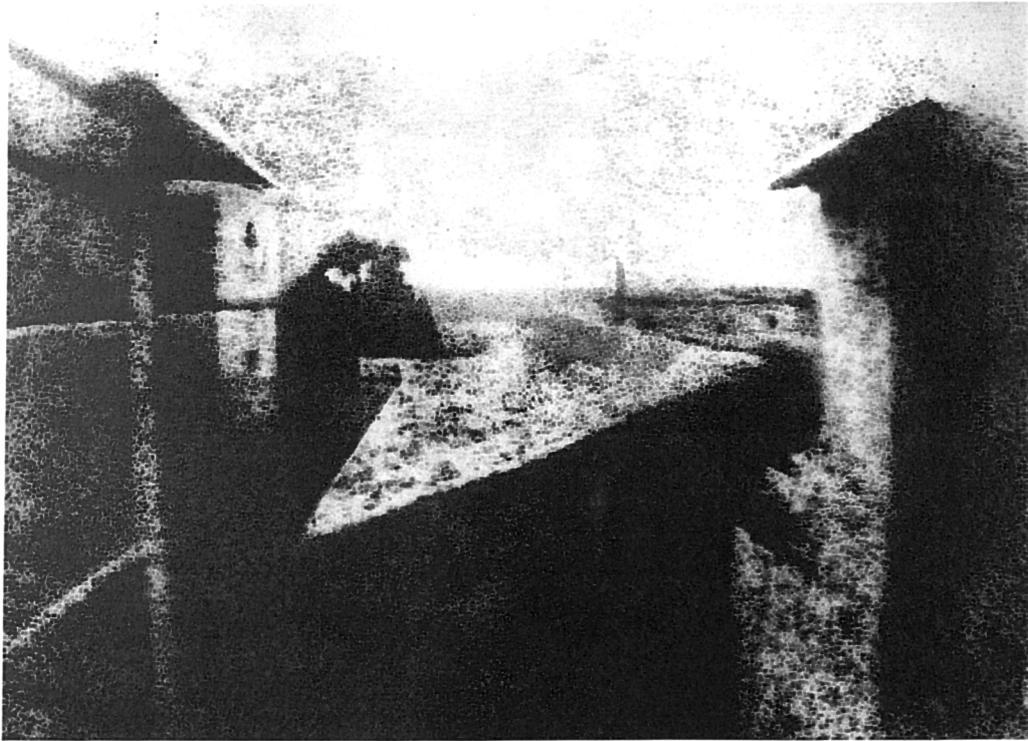
A crucial moment, for Benjamin, in the transition from manual to mechanical reproduction of the work of art is that at which photography and the discourses surrounding it are faced with a choice between the retention of cult value and the acceptance of exhibition value: that is, between the persistence in the image of a certain mnemonic authority (a particular relation to the *original* object) and the loss of that authority in the conceivably endless reproducibility of the photograph. The transition is not a matter of inexorable historical inevitability; a gap opens here, in the attribution to the photograph of a cult value which resists the possibilities offered by the new technology. The 'true' nature of the photograph, its independence from the original, lies dormant while the photographer fills the place previously occupied by the miniaturist:

In photography, exhibition value begins to displace cult value all along the line. But cult value does not give way without resistance. It retires into an ultimate retrenchment: the human countenance. It is no accident that the portrait was the focal point of early photography. The cult of remembrance of loved ones,

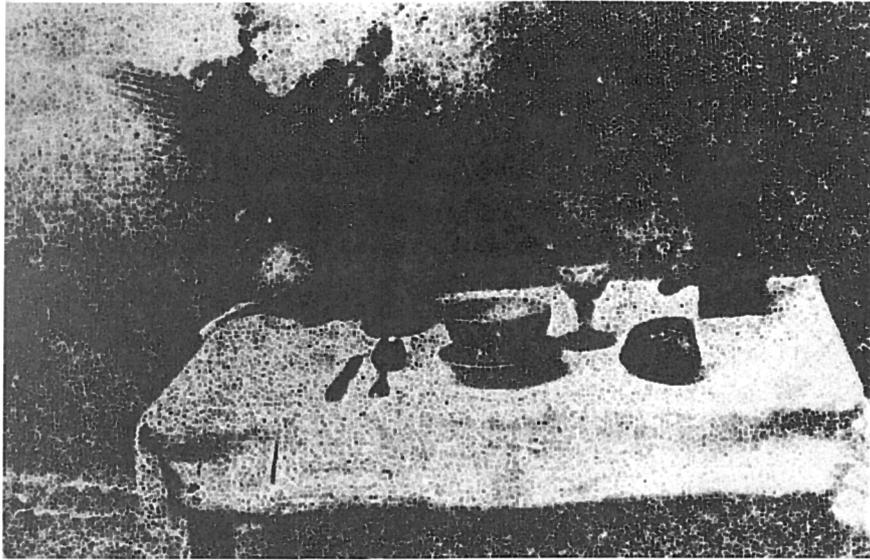
absent or dead, offers a last refuge for the cult value of the picture. For the last time the aura emanates from the early photographs in the fleeting expression of a human face. This is what constitutes their melancholy, incomparable beauty.¹⁵

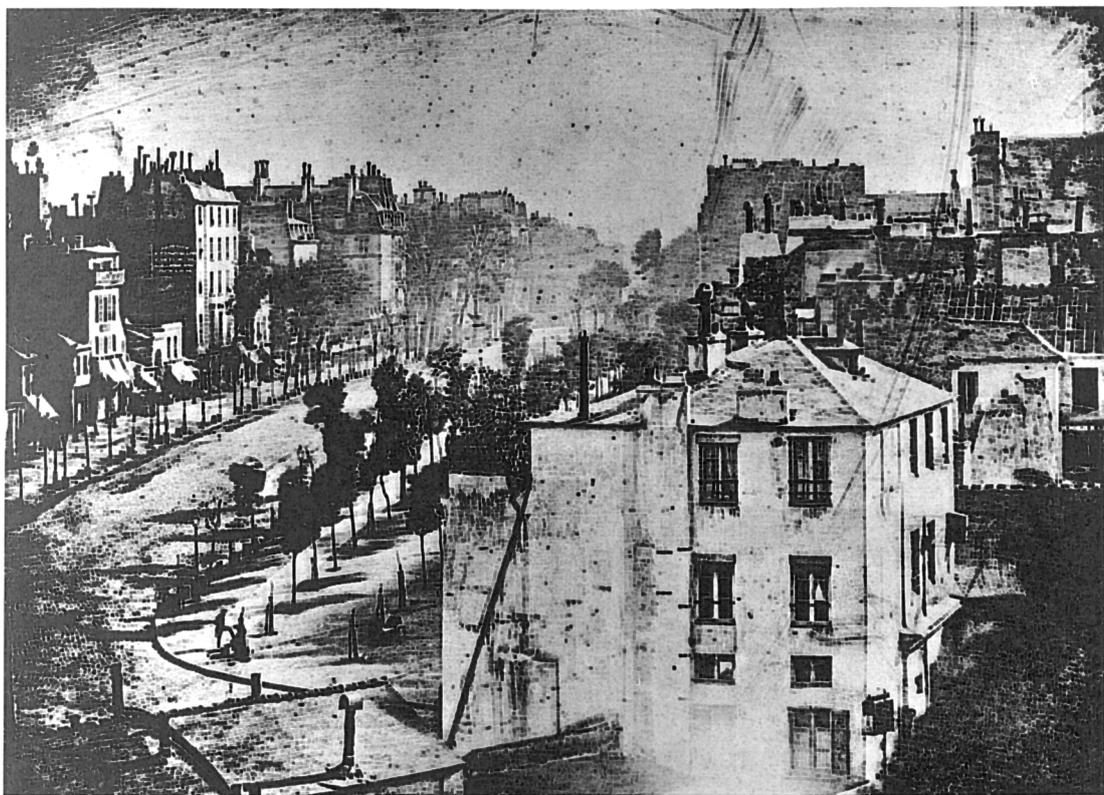
This function is the precise opposite of that of Dadaism, which Benjamin describes as ‘the creation of a demand which could be fully satisfied only later’, that is, in film.¹⁶ Dadaism, in other words, produces a content for which its material resources are inadequate, whereas the early history of photography is marked by the submergence of the full — ultimately, political — potential of the medium by reactionary forces which failed to recognize the radical alteration which photography had made to the nature of art itself (preferring instead the obfuscatory debate as to whether photography was an art like those traditionally so conceived).¹⁷ Like the efforts of Constantin Guys and Poe’s narrator to represent the modern city, the first photographs of the human countenance were images of death or absence, ghostly images which attest, as Roland Barthes notes, to the death — real or imagined — of the person photographed. The human face, of course, is literally absent from the earliest photographs. Niépce’s first successful attempts (in the mid-1820s) to fix permanently the fleeting images produced by his discovery — the enigmatic granular emanations of his *Point de vue pris d’une fenêtre* (1826) and *The Dinner Table* (1823) — contain no trace of the human form that would later make its blurred, spectral, presence felt in Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre’s *Vue du boulevard du Temple* (1839). The viewer of Daguerre’s photograph knows that the city has not been deserted: one briefly stationary figure attests to the real presence of a crowd whose absence from the picture turns Paris into a ghost town.

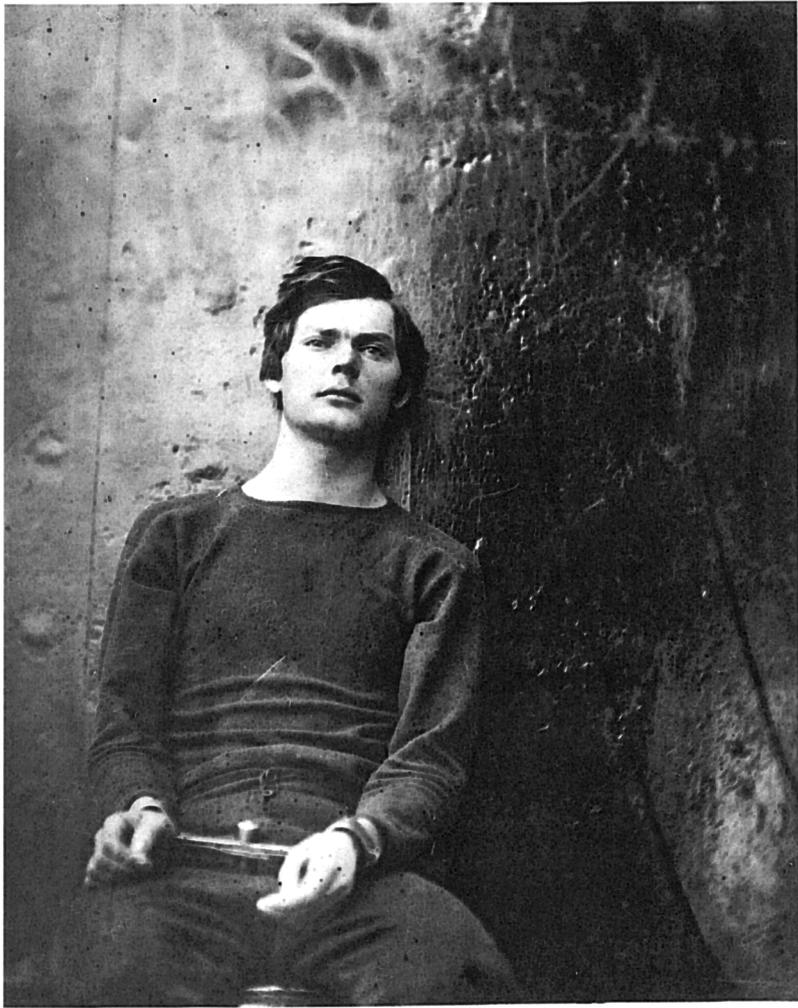
For Barthes, the *noeme* of photography is ‘this-has-been’: the image is evidence of the existence and subsequent demise of the object (whether or not this has yet occurred). The most pertinent example here is Alexander Gardner’s portrait of the



1 of 4







condemned Lewis Payne (conspirator against Lincoln) in his cell, of which Barthes writes: 'he is dead and he is going to die.'¹⁸ The photograph asserts simply that a certain moment has occurred, but offers this moment as both *living and dead*:

I read at the same time: *This will be* and *this has been*; I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake. By giving me the absolute past of the pose (aorist), the photograph tells me death in the future [...]. I shudder [...] *over a catastrophe which has already occurred*. Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe.¹⁹

The intransigence of the image in the face of the discourses of art, semiotics and the photographic profession leads Barthes to assert that 'with the Photograph, we enter into flat Death.'²⁰ After the photograph, there is nothing to say: 'the only "thought" I can have is that at the end of this first death, my own death is inscribed; between the two, nothing more than waiting; I have no other resource than this irony: to speak of the "nothing to say".'²¹

Barthes's conception of the deathliness of the photographic image is close to the Benjaminian concept of cult value; in both cases, the image presents absence or death, both of the object and of the discourses dedicated to the interpretation of the photograph. For Benjamin, the photograph as cult object is opposed to the work of Eugène Atget, which heralds the conjunction of the photographic and the discursive:

They demand a specific kind of approach; free-floating contemplation is not appropriate to them. They stir the viewer; he feels challenged by them in a new way. At the same time picture magazines begin to put up signposts for him, right or wrong ones, no matter. For the first time, captions have become obligatory.²²

The 'cult' photograph resists discourse in the same way that for Barthes the image resists interpretation. The photograph is the 'spectre' which in Baudelaire's text escapes the efforts of the painter of modernity (in both senses of the genitive) to capture it.

Authenticity and Authority

'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' is dedicated to the production of concepts which will not 'lead to the processing of data in the fascist sense': the text is productive of new concepts and a new practice. As Alexander Garcia Düttmann points out, Benjamin's discourse is not merely critical or descriptive: 'everything is argued as though ideology critique and theoretical description were deemed inadequate to the questions of Fascism and Communist revolution as they appear in the domain of art and of the reproduction of the work of art.'²³ Benjamin's opposition to Fascism is allied with an awareness that the destruction of the parliamentary democracy which failed to halt the rise of Fascism, and the advent of the star and the dictator in the age of mechanical reproduction, are both parts of a crisis of representation:

If, as Benjamin claims, politics — and this is as true for fascism as it is for Communism — depend on the exposure and the control of the body that cinematographic and photographic representation make possible (film and photography being the most representative, as well as the most efficacious, of the reproductive techniques that Benjamin analyses), then it is possible to

consider the politics of art or the politics of the mechanical reproduction of the image as exemplary of all politics.²⁴

For Benjamin, the realm of the political is precisely also that of visual representation, not simply at the level of the photographic or filmic representation of the 'political world' (that of — in the age of mechanical reproduction — *the dictator as star*); rather, it is in the new forms of technological representation that political struggle takes place: a struggle centred around the aura of the work of art.

The first thesis of Benjamin's essay is that 'in principle a work of art has always been reproducible', implying that that which is not reproducible is not — in principle — art. The authority of the work is guaranteed by its original placing; the unification of time and place constitutes — as it does for Heidegger — the origin of the work: 'the presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity [...]. The whole sphere of authenticity is outside technical — and, of course, not only technical — reproducibility.'²⁵ The authenticity [*Echtheit*] of the work is lost in the reproduction, but, as a footnote at this point tells us, the authenticity of the original is an effect of reproduction:

Precisely because authenticity is not reproducible, the intensive penetration of certain (mechanical) processes of reproduction was instrumental in differentiating and grading authenticity. To develop such differentiations was an important function of the trade in works of art. The invention of the woodcut may be said to have struck at the root of the quality of authenticity even before its late flowering. To be sure, at the time of its origin a medieval picture of the madonna could not yet be said to be 'authentic'. It became authentic only during the succeeding centuries and perhaps most strikingly so during the last one.²⁶

The authenticity of the work cannot be preserved in reproduction; what can be retained is the authority [*Autoritat*] of the work: this is the case in manual reproduction. Mechanical reproduction, on the other hand, fails to preserve authority due to its independence of the authenticity of the work. With the advent of modes of reproduction for which there is no original, we can no longer speak of a 'work' as such, in the sense — shared by Benjamin and Heidegger — of the setting-in-place of the object as the 'setting-into-work of truth'. The work no longer *conceals*; we are in the era of the temple from which the god has flown:

One might subsume the eliminated element in the term 'aura' and go on to say: that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art. This is a symptomatic process whose significance points beyond the realm of art. One might generalize by saying: the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition.²⁷

'Finis'

Detachment from tradition is also the fate of communication as elaborated in Benjamin's 'The Storyteller': with the decline of orally transmitted narration, there is a consequent decline in the faculty of remembrance. 'Memory creates the chain of tradition which passes a happening on from generation to generation'; epic remembrance is a linking of experiences in a series in which 'one ties on to the next.'²⁸ The perpetuating remembrance of the novelist contrasts with 'the short-lived reminiscences of the storyteller'. If, as Lukacs claims, the novel is the only art form

for which time is a constitutive principle, the nature of that constitution is time as *closure*:

There is no story for which the question as to how it continued would not be legitimate. The novelist, on the other hand, cannot hope to make the smallest step beyond that limit at which he invites the reader to a divinatory realization of the meaning of life by writing 'Finis'.²⁹

Leaving aside for the moment the dichotomy between the radical potential which the loss of aura seems to have for Benjamin in 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' and the apparent nostalgia for the auratic of 'The Storyteller', we may identify in the novel — in the movement from traditional narration to the realm of 'information' — a form of remembrance which, in contrast to the 'living' tradition of oral and epic forms, has in common with photographic representation the memory of a death: 'what draws the reader to the novel is the hope of warming his shivering life with a death he reads about'.³⁰ As with photographic remembrance, which remembers the death of the object whether or not this death has taken place, novelistic remembrance has as its object the demise of that which is narrated:

'A man who dies at the age of thirty-five', said Moritz Heimann once, 'is at every point of his life a man who dies at the age of thirty-five.' Nothing is more dubious than this sentence — but for the sole reason that the tense is wrong. A man — so says the truth that was meant here — who died at the age of thirty-five will appear to *remembrance* at every point of his life as a man who dies at the age of thirty-five. In other words, the statement that makes no real sense for real life becomes indisputable for remembered life.³¹

Criticism and Death

The function of allegory is, for Benjamin, precisely this banishment of life or meaning from the object: an evacuation which results in the object being regarded *from the present* as something irrevocably *anterior*: the past seen in its 'pastness', as emptied of significance. This leads in turn to the situation described by Benjamin in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*: a state of affairs in which any object can be accorded any meaning by the allegorist, the corpse-like object put to any use:

Criticism means the mortification of the works. By their very essence these works [of German Baroque drama] confirm this more readily than any others. Mortification of the works: not then — as the romantics have it — awakening of the consciousness in living works, but the settlement of knowledge in dead ones.³²

The representation that I have identified here initially as the preserve of the photographic is also the logic of baroque allegory as elaborated in Benjamin's earlier work. In *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* the allegorical object is presented as dead, but also, in an important sense, as *always already dead*. The allegorical work presents the certain perdition of its object, a presentation it shares, I shall argue, with both the *trompe-l'oeil* (as theorized in Baudrillard's *Seduction*) and Kristeva's account of the allegorical as a melancholic form. What is shared by these accounts of the 'ghostliness' of representation is a particular concern with the image. I wish to argue in what follows for a conception of allegory — outlined here chiefly on the basis of the writings of Benjamin, Kristeva and Baudrillard, but also with regard to traditional rhetorical and aesthetic formulations — as an articulation of the paradoxical temporality

of (primarily visual) representation. My argument will then return to the problems associated specifically with the photographic image, which appear to present most clearly the complexities of allegorical time.

II

The Disappearance of the Object

The 'death' of the object, which I have identified as constitutive of Benjaminian allegory, does not go unchallenged or unquestioned by commentators on Benjamin's work. For Susan Buck-Morss, the arbitrariness of allegory and its evacuation of meaning from the object constitute a perspective on the historical object which — according to Buck Morss's reading — is merely one stage on the way toward the ultimate 'overcoming' of allegory in Benjamin's later work.³³ In discussing a number of critical reactions to Benjamin's work, Buck-Morss, in a reading of Jauss's interpretation of Benjamin's texts on Baudelaire, takes issue with Jauss's characterization of the allegorical style as '*beauté inutile*', claiming that 'discussions of Benjamin's thinking within [Jauss's conceptual frame] are distortions. For Benjamin was concerned with the *rescue* of historical objects, not their disappearance. One begins to question whether the literary concept of 'allegory' is adequate for describing what dialectical images are all about.'³⁴ Buck-Morss's reading is mediated through Paul de Man's commentary on Jauss's *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, a commentary which takes place within the terms of de Man's tracing of the valorization of symbol over allegory from the period of German classicism up to Gadamer: a history of interpretations which designate the symbolic as 'ultimately leading to a total,

single, and universal meaning' and allegory as 'a sign that refers to one specific meaning and thus exhausts its suggestive potentialities once it has been deciphered.'³⁵ For de Man, the defence of the allegorical accords with Benjamin's suggestion that 'the intensity of the interrelationship between the perceptual and the intellectual element' be made the main concern of the interpreter of poetry:

this indicates that the assumed correspondence between meaning and object is put into question. From this point on, the very essence of any outward object can become superfluous [...]. The 'disappearance of the object' has become the main theme.³⁶

According to Buck-Morss's version of the Benjaminian 'project' (the task of *The Dialectics of Seeing* is very much the elaboration of a certain structure in Benjamin's work, a structure itself allegorized in the form of the *diagram*), such a conception of allegory is opposed to the task of Benjamin's late works, a task in which 'allegory's arbitrariness is transcended' as the historical present becomes visible and 'pregnant with the potential for a worldly utopia'.³⁷ It will be the task of this section of my argument to propose, *contra* Buck-Morss, that the 'rescue of historical objects' consists precisely in their 'disappearance' *as objects* and their insertion in a space — theoretical or pictorial, discursive or figural — which is no longer that of representation but (in the terms offered by Jean Baudrillard) of seduction and of *trompe-l'oeil*. It is not my intention in what follows to make of the disparate concerns of Benjamin's texts — allegory, mechanical reproduction, the 'dialectical image' — a coherent theoretical framework which runs counter to the avowedly redemptive character of Benjamin's historical materialism, but to read that which is destructive in those texts, to pay attention to the *explosion of the continuum of history*. If Benjamin was indeed concerned with the *rescue* of the object, he was concerned also to *shake off again* (re-

excutere) the sedimented representations that constitute the status 'object'. The temporal logic at work in the baroque allegory described in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* is also that offered by the photographic image in its presentation of a dead or denuded subject.

In opposition to the reading of Benjaminian allegory proposed by Susan Buck-Morss (allegory as a destructive moment later to be overcome by the dialectical image, which rescues the object once consigned to perdition), Christine Buci-Glucksmann offers a version of Benjamin's thought in which the early and late works share a concern with the destructive, melancholy power of allegory:

Long before modern art, then, allegory testified to the preeminence of the fragment over the whole, of a destructive principle over a constructive principle, of feeling, as the excavation of an absence, over reason as domination.³⁸

Allegory is presented here as distinct from — but having a great deal in common with — the modernity which Benjamin identifies in the works of Baudelaire. The connection between the two modes of representation — the allegorical and the 'modern' which I have identified here with photography — is described by Benjamin himself as a move from the literal presentation of death as the theme or content of the work (as in Baroque tragedy) to the exposure of the temporal predicament of the object (itself, like the corpse in *Trauerspiels*, dead but present):

Melancholy bears a different character, however, in the nineteenth century from that which it bore in the seventeenth. The key figure of the older allegory is the corpse. The key figure of the later allegory is the 'souvenir' [*Andenken*]. The

souvenir is the schema of the transformation of the commodity into a collector's item.³⁹

Baroque allegory presents the reality of the past as unreality, as a reality that can only be recovered as illusion, as the ghost of its real presence:

Allegory thus consigns reality to a permanent antinomy, a game of the illusion of reality as illusion, where the world is at once valued and devalued. Hence the peculiar seductiveness of the baroque: the primacy of the aesthetic — of appearances and play — joins up with metaphysical wretchedness on the ground of grief or melancholy. The metaphor of the world as theatre expresses this specific temporality of the baroque, an almost choreographic or 'panoramic' temporality, in Cysarz's expression that Benjamin makes his own. In this eternal reflecting of appearances one ubiquitous yet already distant spectre reigns supreme: God. But the gulf between reality and illusion cannot be bridged: theatre now *knows* itself to be theatre.⁴⁰

Allegory, Beauty, Melancholia

Benjamin's conception of Baroque allegory as the presentation of an object evacuated of all life or meaning finds some justification in the Freudian conception of melancholia. For Freud, melancholia consists in the maintenance (to thought, to vision) of an object presented as irredeemably lost or dead. Whether or not this loss has actually taken place, the melancholic grieves for an object which is nonetheless kept constantly *present*. For Julia Kristeva, as for Freud, this process is inseparable

from the function of the beautiful in art, a function Kristeva expresses precisely in terms of the allegorical:

This is *allegory*, as lavishness of that which *no longer is*, but which regains for myself a higher meaning because I am able to remake nothingness, better than it was and within an unchanging harmony, here and now forever, for the sake of someone else.⁴¹

In Kristeva's account, allegory is part of 'a specific economy of imaginary discourses'⁴² in Western thinking, a mode which is constitutively very close to depression or melancholia but also functions as the overcoming of the melancholic lack of meaning. In other words, allegory presents here and now, in the realm of signification and meaning, the total absence of meaning and the collapse of signifying systems:

A temporary fetish, allegory does no more than clarify a number of historical and ideological components of the Baroque imagination. Beyond its concrete moorings, however, this rhetorical figure discovers what Western imagination basically owes to loss (to mourning) and its reversal into a threatened, fragile, spoiled enthusiasm [...]. Indeed, we sense the imaginary experience not as theological symbolism or secular commitment but as flaring-up of dead meaning with a surplus of meaning [...]. The imaginative capability of Western man, which is fulfilled within Christianity, is the ability to transfer meaning to the very place where it was lost in death and/or non-meaning.⁴³

For Kristeva, the melancholic impulse in art is typified by Holbein's painting, *Dead Christ*. Kristeva's description of this painting leads us toward the next stage of my argument: in the abolition of perspective and complex composition, in the reduction of

the figure to an inert *object*, we can read the features of another allegorical mode: *trompe-l'oeil*:

The unadorned representation of human death, the well-nigh anatomical stripping of the corpse convey to viewers an unbearable anguish before the death of God, here blended with our own, since there is not the slightest suggestion of transcendency. What is more, Hans Holbein has given up all architectural or compositional fancy. The tombstone weighs down on the upper portion of the painting, which is merely twelve inches high, and intensifies the feeling of permanent death: this corpse shall never rise again. The very pall, limited to a minimum of folds, emphasizes, through that economy of motion, the feeling of stiffness and stone-felt cold.⁴⁴

Le trompe-l'oeil

For Jean Baudrillard, the allegorical form of *trompe-l'oeil* opposes itself to the perspectival space of Renaissance painterly composition. Concerning itself with the 'low-level representation of second-rate objects', *trompe-l'oeil* abstracts from the great compositions of Western art those objects which fulfill an allegorical function. *Trompe-l'oeil* is distinct, then, from the tradition of still life [*nature morte*], which preserves the law of perspective: still life may play with disorder and fragility, but, says Baudrillard, 'it always retains the gravity of real things' (underscored by the horizontal plane on which it presents natural objects). *Trompe-l'oeil* lacks the weight accorded the object on a horizontal plane: the object is instead suspended, weightless, against a vertical background. Devoid of both perspectival space and the relation to historical objects and situations to be seen, for example, in the works of Holbein, the

object appears in *trompe-l'oeil* 'as though the discourse on painting had been eliminated.'⁴⁵ Objects no longer represent; they are blank, empty signs juxtaposed at random. They are in a sense no longer objects: 'they describe a void, an absence, the absence of every representational hierarchy that organizes the elements of a tableau, or for that matter, the political world [...].'⁴⁶ The 'isolated, decayed, spectral objects' of *trompe-l'oeil* are characterized by their obsolescence: frayed paper, letters, watches; 'these are things that have lasted, in a time that has already passed. Anachrony alone stands out, the involuted representation of time and space.'⁴⁷ The allegorical resemblances of the *trompe-l'oeil*, like those of the *Trauerspiels* for Benjamin,

become dated, because it is part of their nature to shock. If the object becomes allegorical under the gaze of melancholy, if melancholy causes life to flow out of it and it remains behind dead, but eternally secure, then it is exposed to the allegorist, it is unconditionally under his power. That is to say it is now quite incapable of emanating any meaning or significance of its own; such significance as it has, it acquires from the allegorist.⁴⁸

For Baudrillard, the shock involved in *trompe-l'oeil* results not from realism of execution, an excess of reality, but from a sudden break in reality and the 'giddiness of feeling oneself fall.'⁴⁹ The perspectival organization of space is opposed to the 'touch' or 'seizure' resulting from the abolition of representative space. The distant vanishing point of Renaissance perspective is abolished; perspective is projected forward, undermining the privileged position of the gaze; the eye no longer generates a space which spreads out, but is 'the internal vanishing point for a convergence of objects.'⁵⁰ If, as Baudrillard claims, *trompe-l'oeil* institutes an 'allegorical resemblance', it is an allegory stripped of the *unconditional power* of the allegorist, of which Benjamin writes. The object 'becomes allegorical under the gaze of melancholy' and 'remains

behind dead' but is not 'exposed to the allegorist' who accords it meaning or significance (however arbitrary): the inversion of perspective produces a space in which 'there is nothing to see, where things see you.'⁵¹

The Evil Demon of Images

The operation of *trompe-l'oeil* is — claims Baudrillard — no longer confined to painting: it provides 'the prototype for the malevolent use of appearances', that is, for a specifically political use.⁵² Since the sixteenth century, the seduction of political space — within the private space of the Renaissance prince — allows us to 'surmise ironically' that the palace, political space, the space of power, 'is itself perhaps only an effect of perspective'; this is a dangerous secret which the prince must keep to himself, 'for it is the very secret of his power': a power founded on the mastery of simulated *space*.⁵³ If we accept that such a mastery over appearances, over *trompe-l'oeil*, accords in certain important respects with the concept of allegory as theorized by Benjamin (juxtaposition of disparate objects, lack of representation or referentiality, the decay or obsolescence of the object), then we may be led to agree with Buck-Morss that the revolutionary appropriation or 'rescue' of the object cannot be thought under the aegis of the allegorical. Rather, allegory must be overcome, the arbitrary assignment of meaning to objects in the space of political power replaced by the revolutionary, who 'rescue[s] the metaphysical experience of the objective world.'⁵⁴ It is my contention, however, that the allegorical presentation of historical objects in Benjamin's texts stops short of the re-inscription of meaning which Buck-Morss considers intrinsic to his philosophical project. It is, rather, in the presentation of an object evacuated of all reference, juxtaposed with other — similarly 'empty' — objects that the radical nature of that project consists.

III

A Politics of Memory

Allegory, then, as so far elaborated, consists in the presentation of the absence, death or *ghostliness* of an object which — in the model provided by Benjamin — ‘disappears’ at precisely the moment when it is also made present to the gaze. I wish now to return to the discourse on photography with which I opened this chapter and to suggest that it is in relation to photography that the implications of the conception of allegory outlined above have been most productively worked out. The discourse on the ghostliness of the photographic image is also, inevitably, a discourse on those temporal aspects of representation which we have already encountered in theorizations of the allegorical: that is, on history, memory, genealogy and recognition. While my argument here will focus on Siegfried Kracauer’s essay of 1927, ‘Photography’, as a text which productively elaborates upon the problems of time and representation already encountered, it is again with reference to Walter Benjamin that this argument intersects with the discourse on allegory. Also crucial here will be Roland Barthes’s *Camera Lucida* and aspects of Proust of which Kracauer makes particular use in his later *Theory of Film*.⁵⁵ The language of ghosts, apparitions and phantoms at work in Kracauer’s essay constitutes an attempt to think the historicity of representation in opposition to an ahistorical temporality which Jacques Derrida has described as a ‘the linking of modalized presents (past present, actual present: “now”, future present)’ and which Giorgio Agamben (following Benjamin) has characterized as ‘homogeneous, rectilinear and empty’, a secularized version of irreversible Christian time, ‘albeit sundered from

any notion of end and emptied of any other meaning but that of a structured process in terms of before and after', the time both of historicism and of the modern experience of manufacturing work.⁵⁶ Kracauer begins by arguing that this is precisely the temporality of the photograph, a meaningless instantaneity which must be opposed by the properly 'historical' work of memory. This opposition between photographic instantaneity and historical remembrance is rendered untenable in Kracauer's text by the attribution to the photograph of the quality of 'ghostliness'. This discourse on photographic spectrality is also a discourse on genealogy and inheritance: specifically, on the anachrony and unrecognizability of a ghostly appearance within a network of transgenerational resemblances. For Kracauer, a photograph of a deceased ancestor presents the absolute anteriority of origin, the irrecoverable pastness of that which is also intransigently present (as image and as lineage). If the photographic portrait denotes for Benjamin the retrenchment of cult value in the process of familial remembrance ('loved ones, absent or dead'), so for Kracauer the family portrait resonates with the details of the past, but these details have become, in Kracauer's essay, estranged: they no longer touch him as a past that is also *his* past.

For Kracauer, the ghostliness or spectrality of the photograph renders his own grandmother unrecognizable, thwarting the relations between the image, memory and oral accounts of the grandmother passed on by his parents. Despite Kracauer's subsequent characterization of the photograph as historicist and as the presentation of an 'eternalized present', the temporal confusion occasioned by this spectrality persists in the text. The spectral image works to undermine all attempts to produce a recognizable vision of the body in history. Historicity can only be conceived according to the ghostly and paradoxical logic of the photograph, a pure temporal anteriority which nonetheless persists and demands to be thought. In contrast to the eternalized present of historicism, photographic historicity is the historicity of an *event*. What is preserved, or what returns, is not the present of an object or a body, but rather the

event of presentation itself. That presentation is at the same time a certain invisibility or disappearance of the object. The act of disappearance, the event of vanishing, constitutes the present of photography, the historicity of a spectre.

The 'ur-image'

Kracauer's essay begins by describing two photographs. The first, taken from a contemporary illustrated magazine, depicts a young film actress standing in front of a hotel; the second, taken in a studio in 1864, is of a woman — like the actress, aged twenty-four when the photograph was taken — whom Kracauer refers to as Grandmother (and later as 'the grandmother'). Kracauer argues that the first — contemporary — photograph invites or demands a certain *recognition* on the part of the viewer. That viewer is also, of course, a *reader* of the illustrated magazine, and has been furnished with the name and biographical details of the 'film diva' in a caption which accompanies the photograph. The reader of the magazine is also a spectator at the cinema and, says Kracauer, 'everyone recognizes her with delight since everyone has already seen the original on the screen.'⁵⁷ The photograph of the grandmother, however, presents certain difficulties for the grandchildren who attempt to recognize there the ancestor they only dimly recollect: 'the ur-image has long since decayed.'⁵⁸ The photograph may not, in fact, depict the grandmother at all, but rather a friend who resembled her. If it is not the grandmother as she appears to memory who is presented in the photograph, and if the likeness can no longer be verified with reference to the 'ur-image', then all that persists in the photograph is time itself. The grandchildren 'think they glimpse a moment of time past, a time that passes without return.'⁵⁹ The details in the photograph — details, for example, of the fashions of 1864 — do not outlast time, but time makes images of itself out of them.⁶⁰

Photography, notes Kracauer, emerges at the same time as historicism. Historicists, he writes, 'believe at the very least that they can grasp historical reality by reconstructing the series of historical events in their temporal succession without any gaps. Photography presents a spatial continuum; historicism seeks to provide the temporal continuum.'⁶¹ Both historicism and photography, then, attempt to render entirely homogeneous the objects they represent: for historicism, a temporal sequence; for photography, a spatial one. As we have already seen from the example of the photograph of the grandmother, photography also inevitably entails a certain temporal persistence; indeed, it seems nothing persists in the photograph but time itself. It will be the purpose of the latter part of my argument to discover whether the temporality of the photograph is in fact also that of historicism, to question Kracauer's assertion — an assertion that is much more than an analogy — that 'historicism is concerned with the photography of time.'⁶² Kracauer proceeds to oppose what he sees as the historicism of photography to *memory*. While photography seeks to reproduce everything presented to the lens as a spatial continuum, 'memory-images retain what is given only insofar as it has significance. Since what is significant is not reducible to either merely spatial or merely temporal terms, memory images are at odds with photographic representation.' From the perspective of memory, 'photography appears as a jumble that consists partly of garbage.'⁶³ Photographic historicism is counterpoised to the true historicity of the image presented to memory. The memory-image of a person *is* that person's history; the term Kracauer uses to describe this presentation of personal history is 'monogram': the condensation of the name (or of an individual's history) into a single meaningful graphic figure. The monogram present in the memory-image is also that which is represented by painting; the portrait painter refuses to submit to the mere 'natural necessity' reproduced by the photographer. That 'natural necessity' corresponds to the presentation by the historicist of the sequence of events as a homogeneous continuum; in contrast, 'the greater the artwork the more it approaches the transparency of the final

memory-image in which the features of “history” converge.’⁶⁴ In order that this history can present itself, the artist must first destroy the mere surface coherence offered by photography, revealing what that surface conceals: the ‘real spirit’ of the object or person photographed. The so-called ‘artistic’ photographer simply imitates an artistic manner, minus its substance.

This strand of Kracauer’s argument is developed throughout the essay; photography is concerned, according to this argument, with a conception of temporality which Walter Benjamin, in the ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History’, would also characterize as historicist.⁶⁵ The photograph presents homogeneous, empty time: a time from which the historical object must be redeemed by memory, art or possibly — as Kracauer implies at the end of the essay — by film. The text returns, however, to the initial description of two photographs — to the ‘film diva’ and the ‘grandmother’ — and the references to these photographs begin to complicate and then undermine the main argument concerning the temporality of photography. This occurs in a persistent meditation on the place of death in the photograph, and on the ‘ghostliness’ of the photographic image.

‘Time: the present’

The first paragraph of Kracauer’s essay describes, as already noted, the photograph of the film actress:

This is what the film diva looks like. She is twenty-four years old, featured on the cover of an illustrated magazine, standing in front of the Hotel Excelsior on the Lido. The date is September. If one were to look through a magnifying glass one could make out the grain, the millions of little dots that constitute the

diva, the waves, and the hotel. The picture, however, does not refer to the dot matrix but to the living diva on the Lido. Time: the present. The caption calls her demonic: our demonic diva. Still, she does not lack a certain allure. The bangs, the seductive position of the head, and the twelve eyelashes right and left — all these details, diligently recorded by the camera, are in their proper place, a flawless appearance. Everyone recognizes her with delight since everyone has already seen the original on the screen. It is such a good likeness that she cannot be confused with anyone else, even if she is perhaps only one twelfth of a dozen Tiller girls. Dreamily she stands in front of the Hotel Excelsior, which basks in her fame — a being of flesh and blood, our demonic diva, twenty-four years old, on the Lido. The date is September.⁶⁶

The image Kracauer describes here is an example of what he calls ‘current event photography’ and is characterized by the manner in which it solicits a particular kind of recognition: ‘present day photography performs a mediating function; it is an optical sign for the diva who is meant to be recognized.’⁶⁷ Immediately we can note the insistence of certain details which Kracauer repeats: the actress is aged twenty-four, the date is September, the place: in front of the Hotel Excelsior, the time: the present (a contemporary photograph). Already we note too that practically none of this can be inferred from the photograph alone; this is patently *not* what the film diva *looks like*. Rather, the reader of the illustrated magazine has been informed of these details by a caption below the image, provided with a name, date and location as well as certain other prompts: the reader/viewer is willing to believe that she is indeed ‘demonic’, and a glance at the ‘seductive position of the head’ confirms that description. It is on these secondary — essentially, textual — details that recognition depends, as well as on the ‘original’ which is really no original at all: the cinematic image of the film diva.

The second paragraph of the essay shatters the 'flawless' appearance of the film diva, and with it the array of recognizable coordinates that surround her:

Is this what *grandmother* looked like? The photograph, more than sixty years old and already a photograph in the modern sense, depicts her as a young girl of twenty-four. Since photographs are likenesses, this one must have been a likeness as well. It was carefully produced in the studio of a court photographer. But were it not for the oral tradition, the image alone would not have sufficed to reconstruct the grandmother. The grandchildren know that in her later years she lived in a narrow little room with a view onto the old part of town and that, to amuse the children, she would make toy soldiers dance on a glass plate; they also knew a nasty story about her life and two confirmed utterances which change a bit from generation to generation. One has to believe the parents — who claim to have gotten it from the grandmother herself — that this photograph depicts the very same grandmother about whom one has retained these few details that may also in time be forgotten.⁶⁸

In the failure to recognize the grandmother in this photograph, the 'cult' function which Benjamin attaches to the portrait photograph — 'the cult of remembrance of loved ones, absent or dead' — is emphatically disrupted. For Kracauer, such a photograph has lost all reference to the original. The aura or monogram no longer persists here; reduced to a mere spatial configuration, the photograph is, says Kracauer, the *sediment* that has settled from the monogram. The photographed object is a 'remnant that wants to continue to hold its ground. It dissolves into the sum of its details, like a corpse, yet stands tall as if full of life.'⁶⁹ It is at this point in the essay that Kracauer begins to describe the photograph explicitly as a ghostly image:

Now the image wanders ghost-like through the present, like the lady of the haunted castle. Spooky apparitions occur only in places where a terrible deed has been committed. The photograph becomes a ghost because the costumed mannequin was once alive. The image proves that the alien trappings were incorporated into life as accessories. These trappings, whose lack of transparency one experiences in the old photograph, used to be inseparably meshed with the transparent aspects. This terrible association which persists in the photograph evokes a shudder.⁷⁰

The 'terrible association' takes place between the grandmother and the inanimate objects that surround her.⁷¹ The reduction of the living person to merely one more set of spatial coordinates like those around her is also the presentation of a certain temporality: the photograph attests to an absolute anteriority which is also somehow intractably present. The ghostly temporality invoked here, the logic of an irredeemable pastness which is also that of a spectral return or persistence, is bound up with — as we have seen — questions of recognizability, which I now propose to examine in the context of a Proustian discourse on photography, genealogy, recognition and death.

'he is dead and he is going to die'

Kracauer's *Theory of Film* offers a rather different conception of photography, and it is in this context that he refers to the place of photography in Proust.⁷² In this later work, Kracauer claims that the real significance of photography lies not in its ability to reflect its object as real, but rather in the ability to render it strange. Both the explicit and the allusive references to photography in Proust are far too numerous for me to construct here an entirely coherent and comprehensive model of their significance.⁷³ One of the

ways, however, in which photography functions in the text, is as a counter to the refusal of objects (specifically, of individuals) to become *fixed* and to be understood *in the present*. Marcel sees them, rather, in an *animated system* and this series of moving frames does not allow him to see the 'still' which would allow a more accurate appraisal of the person concerned. Old age, however, seems to provide an exception to this rule, and the example chosen by Kracauer reveals the photograph not as a means toward identification but as the source of a radical estrangement and unrecognizability (a foreshadowing, also, of death, of ghostliness).

In the first chapter of 'The Guermantes Way', Marcel, after a long absence, returns, unannounced, to the drawing-room of his grandmother. Instead of the beloved grandmother of his memory, he sees, 'sitting on the sofa, beneath the lamp, red-faced, heavy and common, sick, lost in thought, following the lines of a book with eyes that seemed hardly sane, a dejected old woman whom I did not know.'⁷⁴ He immediately compares this terrifying vision of his grandmother with a photograph, as the antithesis of a scene charged with familiarity, intimacy and memory:

Of myself — thanks to that privilege which does not last but which gives one, during the brief moment of return, the faculty of being suddenly the spectator of one's own absence — there was present only the witness, the observer, in travelling coat and hat, the stranger who does not belong to the house, the photographer who has called to take a photograph of places which one will never see again. The process that automatically occurred in my eyes when I caught sight of my grandmother was indeed a photograph.⁷⁵

Marcel's grandmother looks like a photograph precisely because she no longer accords with the image of her in his memory, thus disrupting that image in the network of family likenesses, and also because it is obvious from this scene that confronts him that

she is going to die. The grandmother suddenly occupies a pure present and is therefore fated to pass from that present into death. This is perhaps also the most we can say of Kracauer's film diva: despite her flawless appearance — her bangs, the seductive position of her head and the twelve eyelashes right and left — the film diva looks like death. Not only does Marcel's grandmother come to resemble a photograph in her proximity to death, in the sign of her future absence, but Marcel himself, as the photographer, is present at the scene of his own absence: his return stages nothing but that absence.

As Miriam Hansen points out in an article on the genesis of Kracauer's *Theory of Film*, this photographic scene from Proust provides — as does the photograph of Kracauer's own grandmother — 'a momentary encounter with mortality, and awareness of a history that does not include us.'⁷⁶ In the essay on photography, Kracauer claims that the proliferation of photography is motivated in part by the desire to avoid death, the recollection of which 'is part and parcel of every memory-image.'⁷⁷ What the photograph of the grandmother and the example from Proust suggest, however, is that photography, far from presenting the seamless chronological continuum of historicism, bears witness instead to a heterogeneous and paradoxical temporality, to the temporal predicament of an object which is both radically anterior and manifestly present. As Hansen argues, photography also offers a potential antidote to its own historicist ideology.

An Untimely Present

Earlier I quoted Kracauer's statement — with reference to the image of the grandmother — that the photograph haunts the present like the lady of a haunted castle. Another ghost, another castle and another time — a time 'out of joint' — make their

presence felt here. Jacques Derrida, in *Specters of Marx*, writes of a 'spectral moment' that accords with and complicates Kracauer's discourse on photographic spectrality:

A spectral moment, a moment that no longer belongs to time, if one understands by this word the linking of modalized presents (past present, actual present: 'now', future present). We are questioning in this instant, we are asking ourselves about this instant that is not docile to time, at least to what we call time. Furtive and untimely, the apparition of the spectre does not belong to that time, it does not give time, not that one: 'Enter the ghost, exit the ghost, re-enter the ghost' (*Hamlet*).⁷⁸

This conception of an untimely present, of a 'living present' which is non-contemporaneous with itself, demands a 'responsibility', a 'respect for justice concerning those who *are not there*, [...] those who are no longer or who are not yet *present and living* [...].' The thought of a 'responsibility' toward absence becomes, in Derrida's reading of *Hamlet*, an attention to the *invisibility* of the spectre: 'this thing meanwhile looks at us and sees us not see it even when it is there. A spectral asymmetry interrupts here all spectrality. It desynchronizes, it recalls us to anachrony. We will call this the *visor effect*: we do not see what looks at us.'⁷⁹ The visor effect, the simultaneous appearance and disappearance of the spectral object, stages precisely the play of recognizability and unrecognizability that is at stake in Kracauer's essay and in the passage from Proust.

The rhetorical trope that Roland Barthes identifies in photography in *Camera Lucida* — *apophrades*, the return of the dead — functions, then, in Kracauer's text in three ways. The personalized project of Barthes's work — the search for a recognizable image of his recently deceased mother, the quest for what Barthes calls 'the impossible science of the unique being'⁸⁰ — becomes untenable in Kracauer's essay

precisely because of the photographic encounter with death. First, the temporality of the photograph turns out not to be that of historicism at all, but rather an anachronistic and paradoxical conjunction of the anterior and the contemporary. Blasted out of the continuum of history, of a history conceived as a homogeneous continuum, the photograph attests instead to historicity itself. Secondly, the 'return of the dead' is here also the simultaneity of recognition and non-recognition, of the failure to recognize an estranged object, and the recognition of that failure as an ethical responsibility: the responsibility to acknowledge the object in its strangeness. Finally, the photographic logic of appearance and disappearance opposes itself to that of appearance and reality, of the latent and the manifest. The ghostly play of visibility and invisibility leads to a conception of the photograph that accords with the revision Jean Baudrillard performs on Barthes's conception of the photograph as 'flat death'. The *platitudo* of the photograph, writes Baudrillard, does not even succumb to the pathos of an encounter with death. Rather, 'photography is itself an art of disappearance, which captures the other vanished on film, which, unlike a gaze, saves nothing of the other but his vanished presence [...]. Death is the source of moral fright, vanishing is alone the source of a seductive aesthetic of disappearance.'⁸¹

A Small History of Allegory

For Walter Benjamin, as I have demonstrated above, there is an intimate connection between the temporality of allegory and that of photography: the photograph entails the representation of a particular absence or death of the object photographed. It is my contention, then, in elaborating on this argument with respect to Kracauer's essay, that the history of the critique of photography in the early part of this century can be read in part as a condensed history of modern allegory. What I wish to stress here is the

conception of the relations of time and representation which is developed in that history. A 'ghostly' temporality, the paradoxical time of the photograph, constitutes, then, the modern form of the allegorical temporality which Benjamin identifies in German Baroque drama. The allegorical representation of a deceased object finds its most condensed, lapidary expression in Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida*. For Barthes, as I have already noted, the photograph is the evidence of the presence of a being *at one time*, and the assurance of that being's subsequent disappearance:

In Photography, the presence of the thing (at a certain past moment) is never metaphoric; and in the case of animated beings, their life as well, except in the case of photographing corpses; and even so: if the photograph then becomes horrible, it is because it certifies, so to speak, that the corpse is alive, as *corpse*: it is the living image of a dead thing.⁸²

The photograph attests to an undisputed reality, but by situating it in the past, it suggests that that reality no longer exists, that the object depicted has expired. Photography raises, then, the spectre of a representation with no foundation; there is a question mark over the foundation or reality of an object whose representation we can nonetheless have. A ghostly representation thus raises the question of the relationship between time and representation: something returns, but *for the first time*.⁸³

Notes

¹ Thomas Elyot's *Dictionarie* of 1559 describes *allegoria* as 'a figure called inversion, where it is one in woordes and another in sentence or meaning.' Quoted in Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1964), p. 2. n.1. Edward Phillips, writing in 1678, concurs with Elyot in defining allegory as 'inversion or changing: in Rhetorick it is a mysterious saying, wherein there is couched something that is different from the literal sense.' (Fletcher, p. 2. n.1.) Similarly, George Puttenham in 1569 praises allegory as 'the Courtly figure' in which 'we speake one thing and thinke another, and that our woordes and our meanings meet not.' George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie* (Menston: Scolar Press, 1968), p. 155. Henry Peacham, in *The Garden of Eloquence* (1593), contrasts allegory with metaphor 'In Metaphore there is a translation of one word only; in an allegory of many, and for that cause an Allegorie is called a continued Metaphore.' Metaphor, claims Peacham, is a single 'star', while allegory is 'a figure compounded of many stars... which we may call a constillation', implying the possibility of a multiplicity of valid interpretations of the allegorical text. See Henry Peacham, *The Garden of Eloquence*, quoted in Marjorie Donker & George M. Muldrow, *Dictionary of Literary-Rhetorical Conventions of the English Renaissance* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1982), p. 4. As Sir John Harrington notes in *A Brief Apology* (1591), 'manie times also under the selfsame words they [poets] comprehend some true understanding of naturall Philosophie, or [...] politike government, and now and then of divinitie.' Sir John Harrington, *A Brief Apology*, quoted in *Dictionary of Literary-Rhetorical Conventions of the English Renaissance*, p. 4.

The above fragmentary piling-up of Renaissance definitions of and commentaries on the allegorical, introduces a number of topics I wish to address here (and in my later discussion of allegory in the work of Paul de Man). Allegory, for the Renaissance, is first of all a discourse characterized by a certain duplicity: it says one

thing while meaning another. This literal duplicity appears in a more abstract form in the opposition between the allegorical and the symbolic, which is so crucial for Romanticism: allegory fails, according to the Romantic definition, to achieve the necessary unity of language and meaning which is constitutive of true literary or aesthetic representation. The transparency of the Romantic symbol is contrasted with the opacity of allegory: the latter *conceals* its meaning. The hidden, enigmatic nature of allegorical meaning is further complicated by the multiplicity of obscure meanings to which the allegorical gives rise. Allegory thus establishes a split between language and meaning: the truth of allegory consists precisely in the lack of ‘fit’ between discourse and intention. It proposes a model of speech or of writing which necessarily escapes from intention, while at the same time privileging a hidden or enigmatic meaning.

² Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 1992); ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’, in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1992); ‘A Small History of Photography’, in *One Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (London: Verso, 1992).

³ Charles Baudelaire, ‘The Painter of Modern Life’, in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon, 1995), p. 12.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁹ The frenzied recollections of the painter of modern life contrast markedly with an earlier — Romantic — conception of the workings of memory and representation: we are decidedly no longer in the realm of Wordsworth’s ‘emotion recollected in

tranquillity'. The project announced by the *Preface* to the *Lyrical Ballads* famously comes to grief, though, at precisely the moment when Wordsworth would have us believe his mnemonic powers are at their height. The creative anamnesis of 'Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey' founders on the poet's inability to *picture* his past self: 'I cannot paint what then I was.' Wordsworth's solution to this problem is, of course, the appropriation of another *view* of the (mis)remembered scene: the perspective offered by his sister Dorothy. The particular *failure* which Baudelaire shows us in the scene of Constantin Guys's belated awakening presents, perhaps, the spectacular collapse of Romantic memory: a failure already articulated by Coleridge's frank admissions of the disintegration of memory in his prefaces to 'Kubla Khan' and 'Christabel'. See, in this regard, my discussion, in Chapter Three, of Paul de Man's readings of Romantic and Baudelairean versions of allegory and irony.

¹⁰ Edgar Allan Poe, 'The Man of the Crowd', in *The Fall of the House of Usher and Other Writings* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), pp. 179-80.

¹¹ Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life*, p. 9.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁴ Edgar Allan Poe, *The Fall of the House of Usher and Other Writings*, p. 184.

¹⁵ Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Illuminations*, p. 219.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 230.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 220.

¹⁸ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Fontana, 1984), pp. 95, 96.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

²¹ Ibid., p. 93.

²² Benjamin, *Illuminations*, p. 220. Atget considered his photographs of Paris and its outskirts as a record of the city's past; writing to the director of the Beaux-Arts in 1920 to suggest that they buy his negatives, he claims that his images bear witness to a 'picturesque' past. Paying particular attention to those aspects of the city which were soon to vanish, Atget attached his own captions in the form of notes saying 'will disappear'. See Françoise Reynaud, 'Exhibits: "These are only documents"', trans. Gill Bennet, in *Eugène Atget* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989), unpaginated.

²³ Alexander Garcia Düttmann, 'Tradition and Destruction: Benjamin's Politics of Language', *MLN*, 106, (1991): 528-554, 531.

²⁴ Ibid., 532.

²⁵ "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", p. 214.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 236.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 215. Cf. Martin Heidegger, 'The Origin of the Work of Art', in *Poetry Language Thought*, trans. A. Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971); Gianni Vattimo, *The Transparent Society*, trans. David Webb (Cambridge: Polity, 1992). Benjamin's essay was written, as Vattimo points out, in the same year as Heidegger's essay on the origin of the work of art. The link made here is — as Vattimo acknowledges — 'an analogy that looks paradoxical at first sight'. (Vattimo, p. 47) Vattimo takes as his starting point the analogy between Heidegger's *Stoss* and Benjamin's *shock*, and gives to the connection between the two essays a rather different inflection from the one suggested here: 'The analogy will elude us and seem absurd if we contrast the apparent insignificance of Benjamin's shock with too inflated a view of the work of art as an inauguration and foundation of historico-cultural worlds[...]. It becomes clear, however, that, as with anxiety, what interests Heidegger about the *Stoss* is its disorientating effect with regard to any world whatsoever — whether the given

world or that set out in positive terms by the work.’ (Vattimo, pp. 53-54) Perhaps most pertinent for the argument I advance below, is the shared concern of the two essays with *death*: as Vattimo has it, ‘not so much with the risk of being run over by a bus, as with death as a possibility that is constitutive of existence.’ (Vattimo, pp. 49-50)

²⁸ Walter Benjamin, ‘The Storyteller’, in *Illuminations*, p. 97.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

³² Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 1992), p. 182.

³³ Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1991), p. 223.

³⁴ *Ibid.* For Buck-Morss, the ‘dialectical image’ is the concept which weaves together the disparate strands of Benjamin’s thought. Buck-Morss’s own initial attempt at a definition of the concept provides some indication of the proximity of Benjamin’s later work to the concept of allegory I wish to outline here: ‘The conception of “dialectical image” is overdetermined in Benjamin’s thought. It has a logic as rich in philosophical implications as the Hegelian dialectic, and, indeed, the unfolding of its complexities is a task of each and every chapter of this study. In the present context it refers to *the use of archaic images to identify what is historically new* about the “nature” of commodities. *The principle of construction is that of montage, whereby the image’s ideational elements remain unreconciled, rather than fusing into one “harmonizing perspective”.*’ Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing*, p. 67, my emphasis.

³⁵ Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight*, p. 188.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

³⁷ Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing*, p. 237.

³⁸ Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *Baroque Reason: The Aesthetics of Modernity*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London: Sage, 1994), p. 71.

³⁹ Walter Benjamin, 'Central Park', quoted in Buci-Glucksmann, *Baroque Reason*, p. 72.

⁴⁰ *Baroque Reason*, p. 71.

⁴¹ Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), p. 99.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 100.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

⁴⁵ Baudrillard, *Seduction*, trans. Brian Singer (London: Macmillan, 1990), p. 60.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 61. The isolation and decay of the objects depicted in *trompe-l'oeil* is strikingly close to the traditional attributes of the allegorical object as outlined in Angus Fletcher's classic study of the allegorical mode: '*The isolated image*. The most striking sensuous quality of images in allegories is their "isolation" from each other. Allegorical painting and the emblematic poetry that takes after it display this very sharply. They present bits and pieces of allegorical "machinery": scales of justice, magic mirrors, crystal balls, signet rings, and the like. These devices are placed on the picture plane without any clear location in depth. Their relative sizes often violate perspective (they are often out of proportion), and at the same time they preserve their identities by being drawn with extremely sharp-edged outlines. This is not part of a sheerly compositional criterion on the painter's part. "Isolation" of imagery follows from the need to maintain daemonic efficacy.' Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1964), p. 87.

⁴⁸ Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, p. 183.

⁴⁹ Jean Baudrillard, *Seduction*, p. 63.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 64.

⁵³ Baudrillard's suggestion that the space of political power is nothing more than 'an effect of perspective' was already known to Jonathan Swift, who reveals in the first two parts of *Gulliver's Travels*, the literal effects of perspective on political power. Part III presents, in the voyage to Laputa, the extension of the focussed perspective of Renaissance painting into a generalized mathematization and geometrical abstraction of — *inter alia* — the fields of politics, economics, ethics and aesthetics. Historically, this abstraction evolves partly in the form of a modern cartography based on the development of projective geometry by Blaise Pascal and Philippe de la Hire (an elaboration, in turn, of the work of Girard Desargues, the first major mathematician to fully explore the implications of the perspectival systems of the Renaissance). See Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985); Morris Kline, *Mathematics in Western Culture* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), chapters X, XI & (on Swift) XVIII.

⁵⁴ Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing*, p. 223.

⁵⁵ Siegfried Kracauer, 'Photography', in *The Mass Ornament*, trans. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995); *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Reality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960).

⁵⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. xx; Giorgio Agamben, 'Time and History', in *Infancy and History*, trans. Liz Heron (London: Verso, 1993), p. 96.

⁵⁷ Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament*, p. 47.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 48.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 49.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., p. 50.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 51.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 52.

⁶⁵ Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations*.

⁶⁶ Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament*, p. 47.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 54.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 48.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 55.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 56.

⁷¹ For Kracauer, the fashions of a previous era, the details and objects that surround the twenty-four year old in 1864, can be viewed now only as foreign, strange objects with no real connection to the 'memory-image'. This passage can be productively compared with Baudelaire's description of drawings of the fashions of the revolutionary period. For Baudelaire, these images of a fleeting present nonetheless retain an intimate connection between body and attire: 'These costumes, which seem laughable to so many thoughtless people — people who are grave without true gravity — have a double-natured charm, one both artistic and historical. They are often very beautiful and drawn with wit; but what to me is every bit as important, and what I am happy to find in all, or almost all of them, is the moral and aesthetic feeling of their time. The idea of beauty which man creates for himself imprints itself on his whole attire, crumples or stiffens his dress, rounds off or squares his gesture, and in the long run

even ends by subtly penetrating the very features of his face. Man ends by looking like his ideal self.' Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life*, p. 2.

⁷² Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, pp. 13-18. Kracauer sees the photographic moment in Proust as one of *alienation*: Proust exaggerates the impersonality of the photographic gaze. Kracauer is engaged at this point in his argument in constructing a concept of photographic *realism* as both creative and faithful to the object represented. He goes on to describe the *melancholy* of the photographic image in terms that are close to the allegorical melancholy that I wish to suggest here (Kracauer's description also echoes the ghostly intensity of Poe's 'Man of the Crowd'): 'Now melancholy as an inner disposition not only makes elegiac objects seem attractive but carries still another, more important implication: it favours self-estrangement, which on its part entails identification with all kinds of objects. The dejected individual is likely to lose himself in the incidental configurations of his environment, absorbing them with a disinterested intensity no longer determined by his previous preferences. His is a kind of receptivity which resembles that of Proust's photographer cast in the role of stranger.' (p. 17)

⁷³ Such an undertaking would have to begin, of course, with the 'magic lantern' effect in the opening paragraph of Proust's novel — the play of light and darkness in Marcel's room that connects him with the ghosts of his own past and with the book he has just been reading before falling asleep (*Remembrance of Things Past*, Vol. 1, trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff & Terence Kilmartin (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989), p. 3.) — and include the meditation on the apparently individual *perspective* of the spectator at the theatre (Vol. 1, p. 481), as well as engaging with the more explicit passages such as that addressed here. The logic of this particular passage — the connections between light, memory and familial recognition — might be productively explored, too, with regard to the wider significance of photography in modernist fiction. Cf. Roger Shattuck, *Proust's Binoculars* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1964); Howard Moss, *The*

Magic Lantern of Marcel Proust (London: Faber & Faber, 1963). See also, in this regard, my discussion of Virginia Woolf in Chapter 5.

⁷⁴ Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, Vol. 2, p. 143.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 141-42. The passage continues with a description of the ‘animated system’ mentioned above: ‘We never see the people who are dear to us save in the animated system, the perpetual motion of our love for them, which, before allowing the images that their faces present to reach us, seizes them in its vortex and flings them back upon the idea that we have always had of them, makes them adhere to it, coincide with it.’ *Remembrance of Things Past*, p. 142. Philosophically, this play of motion, stasis and appearance can be traced from the paradoxes of Zeno, through Locke’s investigations of movement and duration in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* to Henri Bergson’s comments on the indivisibility of movement in *Matter and Memory*: ‘You substitute the path for the journey, and because the journey is subtended by the path you think that the two coincide. But how should a *progress* coincide with a *thing*, a movement with an immobility?’ Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. N.M. Paul & W. Scott Palmer (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1911), p. 248. See Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson & Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), Chapters 1, 4 & *passim*. Cf., also, my argument concerning Bergson and Deleuze in Chapter Five.

⁷⁶ Miriam Hansen, “‘With Skin and Hair’: Kracauer’s Theory of Film, Marseilles 1940’, *Critical Inquiry* 19 (Spring 1993): 437-69, 456. As Hansen points out (456, n. 30), this encounter resonates in Roland Barthes’s *Camera Lucida*. As I note below, though, the conceptions of temporality and historicity which Kracauer’s essay ultimately suggest do not necessarily accord with the *pathos* of Barthes’s relation to the photograph.

⁷⁷ Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament*, p. 59.

⁷⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. xx.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁸⁰ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 71.

⁸¹ Jean Baudrillard, "Please Follow Me", in Sophie Calle & Jean Baudrillard, *Suite vénitienne/Please Follow Me*, trans. Dany Barash & Danny Hatfield (Seattle: Bay Press, 1988), p. 86.

⁸² Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 79.

⁸³ Cf. Derrida's on the return (for the first time) of the ghost in *Hamlet: Specters of Marx*, Chapter 1.

Chapter 2: The Ecstatic Sublime

‘He whose feeling places him among the melancholy is not so named because, robbed of the joys of life, he aggrieves himself into dark dejection, but because when his feelings are aroused beyond a certain degree, or for various causes adopt a false direction, they are more easily terminated in that than in some other condition. He has above all a *feeling for the sublime*.’

(Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*)

‘...grotesque, terrific, inevitable dreams...’

(John Ruskin, *Diaries*)

I

This chapter will examine the concept of the sublime and the opportunity it provides to examine once more the temporality of representation. A particular version of the aesthetics of the sublime — the version offered by Edmund Burke’s *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* — allows us to continue, in a different register, the investigation of representational time (the time, as we have seen in the case of allegory, of ghostliness, melancholia and death). Burke’s conception of the sublime offers a vision of *grief* as that which retains a dead or lost object in the mind’s eye. The aestheticization of grief becomes for John Ruskin — a later exponent of the sublime — a melancholic identification with a past which cannot be recaptured but which nonetheless appears in the present. Two of Ruskin’s texts

enter into a productive relationship in this regard: the section of *Modern Painters* which treats of the pathetic fallacy, and his lecture of 1884, 'The Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century'.¹ The first text condemns a poetic practice to which Ruskin himself famously succumbs in the second: the attribution of a certain 'power of character' to objects or phenomena in the natural world. The *pathos* of this encounter with an inanimate world imbued with emotion or character, gives rise to an experience I shall designate as a weak or attenuated sublime. In part, what concerns Ruskin in both of these texts is an artistic inheritance or tradition which was exempt from the pathetic fallacy and knew nothing of the degenerate cloud of the modern landscape. Contemporary art must emulate the past; elsewhere in Ruskin's writings, the practical equivalent of this exhortation is his advocacy of a return to the principles of Gothic architecture. This claim places Ruskin's thought in relation both to an eighteenth-century discourse on the ancient and the modern, and to the critical origins of the discourse on the sublime in the treatise attributed to Longinus.

A certain *pathos*, then, in Ruskin's description of modern landscape painting, modern poetry and the real landscape which they represent, functions as a weakened and displaced version of an experience which the eighteenth century had called sublime. For Ruskin, such an experience — represented here by the writings of Burke and, to a lesser degree, Joseph Addison — consists in a misdirection of the passions, an error arising from a weakening of the intellect when confronted with certain natural objects, living or inert. The pathetic fallacy, according to the argument of *Modern Painters*, results from a weakened subjectivity, that weakness caused by a particular kind of grief which 'unhinges' the mind. A mind thus cast adrift by grief can no longer maintain the proper relationship between truth and beauty. For Ruskin, the correct affiliation between intellect and imagination is one in which 'the whole man stands in an iron glow, white hot, but still strong, and in no wise evaporating; even if he melts, losing none of his weight.'² The morbid and grieving imagination, in an

effort to maintain a relation to a lost object, attributes to that object a 'power of character' which the intellect ought to recognize as false. A subjectivity susceptible to such an 'error' is one which has begun, in Ruskin's terminology, to evaporate. It is this dissolution which reveals an explicit link between the sublime, the melancholic and the pathetic: a link established explicitly in terms of grief and mourning.

On Grief

Burke, in the *Philosophical Enquiry*, characterizes grief as that which keeps its object perpetually *visible*:

The person who grieves, suffers his passion to grow upon him; he indulges it, he loves it: but this never happens in the case of actual pain, which no man ever willingly endures for any considerable time. That grief should be willingly endured, though far from a simply pleasing sensation, is not so difficult to be understood. It is in the nature of grief to keep its object perpetually in its eye, to present it in its most pleasurable views, to repeat all the circumstances that attend it, even to the last minuteness; to go back to every particular enjoyment, to dwell upon each, and to find a thousand new perfections in all, that were not sufficiently understood before; in grief, the *pleasure* is still uppermost; and the affliction we suffer has no resemblance to absolute pain, which is always odious, and which we endeavour to shake off as soon as possible.³

Grief, then, is neither a positive pleasure nor a positive pain; it is, rather, a form of the *delight* which is inherent in the experience of the sublime.⁴ The delight occasioned by the experience of grief results from the simultaneous proximity, and distance from,

pain: it is this observation that leads Burke, in the next section of the *Enquiry*, to consider the role of self-preservation in the sublime experience: ‘The ideas of *pain*, *sickness*, and *death*, fill the mind with strong emotions of horror; but *life* and *health*, though they put us in a capacity of being affected with pleasure, they make no such impression by the simple enjoyment.’⁵ In the face of the manifestation of pain (as in grief, for example), the pleasure of the sublime is in the fact that we are preserved from really experiencing that pain. For Ruskin, in contrast, this element of self-preservation, which is crucial to the Burkean sublime, is no longer available: the pathetic fallacy rather consists in the attribution to the lost object of a capacity to feel that pain itself, the construction of a lost ‘subjectivity’ for the object, which is then also the object of a particular identification on the part of the grieving poet or artist. This project is doomed from the outset: in taking ‘the side of the object’, the pathetic fallacy succeeds only in presenting all the more clearly the absence, loss or death of that object. It follows, then, that the process of identification with the (now deathly or ghostly) object leads Ruskin to posit an equally spectral, ‘evaporating’, subject.

Objectionable Words

Ruskin’s chapter on the pathetic fallacy is intended to describe a tendency which, he claims, is ‘eminently characteristic of the modern mind’: the endeavour of the modern painter to express something which he imagines in the lifeless object. The chapter follows Ruskin’s announcement that he is about to examine the effects of landscape on classical, medieval and modern minds; the argument is intended to provide practical grounds for the conclusion that landscape painting is ‘a noble and useful art’. Before embarking on this examination of the place of landscape in painting, Ruskin states that ‘there is one point of some interest respecting the effect of it on *any* mind, which must

be settled first, and this I will endeavour to do in the next chapter.’⁶ That chapter, entitled ‘Of the Pathetic Fallacy’, abandons any direct consideration of painting, Ruskin choosing instead to present the pathetic fallacy as primarily the preserve of poetry. Indeed, as we shall see, the fallacy comes almost to define the poetic for Ruskin.

The issue in question with regard to the pathetic fallacy is ‘the difference between the ordinary, proper, and true appearance of things to us; and the extraordinary, or false appearances, when we are under the influence of emotion, or contemplative fancy.’⁷ Before attempting to describe this difference, Ruskin finds it necessary to distance his discourse from that of German Idealist philosophy and, in particular, from the concepts of subject and object. Lest his readers should think that the philosophical apparatus that surrounds these terms should be at all useful in describing the difference between true and false appearances, he is quick to dismiss them as ‘two of the most objectionable words that were ever coined by the troublesomeness of metaphysicians.’⁸ Philosophers, claims Ruskin, define as subjective all those qualities of objects which depend upon human perception of them and on their effect on human nature; those qualities which do not depend on anything (‘any other nature’) outside of the object are considered objective. He goes on to claim that the ingenuity of philosophers leads them from this view to a position from which they recognize no objective truth at all, but only the reality of appearances and effects. This, of course, does not necessarily follow from the distinction between the subjective and the objective, even as tendentiously outlined by Ruskin, who here abandons the subject/object distinction on the grounds that it is *too subjective* (in a weaker, less philosophical, sense). The argument against the distinction is not, in fact, an *argument* at all, as becomes apparent in a footnote in which Ruskin, purporting to ‘meet our German friends in their own style’, parodies the language of German idealism:

In fact, all that has been subjected to us on this subject seems object to this great objection; that the subjection of all things (subject to no exception) to senses which are, in us, both subject and object, and objects of perpetual contempt, cannot but make it our ultimate object to subject ourselves to the senses, and to remove whatever objections existed to such subjection.⁹

The move from painting to poetry, then, also involves the rejection of a certain philosophical discourse in favour of that of literary criticism. As we have seen, the pathetic fallacy consists in the erroneous imaginative imputation to an object of a character or subjectivity that it does not possess. The fallacy is initially presented in two forms: first, a ‘wilful fancy’ which carries with it no real expectation that it will be believed, and, second, a ‘fallacy caused by an excited state of the feelings, making us for the time, more or less irrational.’¹⁰ Ruskin quotes from Charles Kingsley’s ‘The Sands of Dee’:

They rowed her in across the rolling foam —
the cruel, crawling foam.¹¹

The foam, Ruskin points out, ‘is not cruel, neither does it crawl.’¹² Only a mind ‘unhinged by grief’ could make the mistake of attributing the characteristics of a living creature to an inert object. Only a poet of the ‘second order’ — Ruskin claims there are two kinds of poet: great ones and those who, having read the great ones, often fail to learn by their example — could succumb to such a fallacy: a poet, for example, like Coleridge. Ruskin quotes from ‘Christabel’: ‘the one red leaf, the last of its clan, that dances as often as dance it can’, and concludes that the poet exhibits a morbid and false idea about the leaf, imagining that it possesses a life and a will; Coleridge ‘confuses its powerlessness with choice, its fading death with merriment, and the wind that shakes it

with music.’¹³ Crucially, as I shall discuss in detail below, what is in question here is grief or mourning for an object which has not yet been lost. There are, as noted above, two versions of this state of grief. The more noble version is that in which the intellect asserts its rule over the passions and, as in Burke’s description of sublime self-preservation, does not succumb to the evaporation of subjectivity in which grief threatens to overcome the poet: he remains ‘still strong and in no wise evaporating, even if he melts, losing none of his weight.’ In contrast, the morbid or corrupt version, the truly fallacious imagining of the inferior poet, tends towards a complete dissolution: the mind and body are too weak to control the emotion aroused by the object; this state is more or less noble according to the emotion that induces it.¹⁴ Ruskin is, however, prepared to concede that the great poet ought at least sometimes to be weakened by certain subjects, and brought, as he puts it, ‘into the inaccurate and vague state of perception, so that the language of the highest inspiration becomes broken, obscure, and wild in metaphor.’¹⁵ In other words, the language of a poet of the first order comes to resemble that of an inferior poet of the second. This is the condition of ‘prophetic inspiration’, which, however, is not sufficient for the production of great poetry. Ruskin concludes that the pathetic fallacy, so far as it can be judged as a falling away from the proper poetic regulation of passion, always points to a morbid and weak state of mind.

The Lost Object

Two aspects of this account of the pathetic fallacy are worthy of elaboration. First, Ruskin sees the pathetic fallacy as being rooted in a particular experience and expression of grief and mourning (both for a strong and rational subject and for a stable object). It is this conception of grief that is linked to Burke’s conception of the

sublime. Secondly, both the grieving subject and the lost object — or, more accurately, the object imagined as lost — are described by Ruskin as dissolving or melting, as becoming cloudy or vaporous. This dissolution is the guiding motif — along with, again, a certain kind of mourning — of the text I take to be the prime example of Ruskin's own susceptibility to the pathetic fallacy: 'The Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century'.

In Chapter Three of the first volume of *Modern Painters*, Ruskin rejects the distinction between the sublime and the beautiful, which he had encountered primarily in the works of Burke and Addison. An early draft of Part Four of Volume III, however, contains a chapter on *magnitude* in which Ruskin states that:

It will readily, I believe, be admitted, that many things are sublime in the highest degree, which are not in the highest degree beautiful, and vice versa, i.e. that the two ideas are distinct, and one is not merely a particular form or state of the other.¹⁶

The thirteen years between the publication of Volumes I and III have not, however, seen a complete capitulation to the tenets of eighteenth-century aesthetics. Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry* follows a tradition of writing on the sublime that leads from the treatise attributed to Longinus, to John Dennis's *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry* of 1704, in identifying terror as the principle source of the sublime:

Whatever [...] is terrible, with regard to sight, is sublime too; [...] for it is impossible to look on anything as trifling, or contemptible, that may be dangerous.¹⁷

Terror alone, though, cannot account for the *pleasure* of the sublime; rather, the pleasure arises from the deferral or withdrawal of the source of that terror. The sublime, then, for Burke, is characterized by an experience of self-preservation. It is this aspect of the theory of the sublime that Ruskin continues to reject: 'It is not the fear, [...] but the contemplation of death; not the instinctive shudder and struggle of self-preservation, but the deliberate measurement of the doom, which is really great or sublime in feeling [...]. There is no sublimity in the agony of terror.'¹⁸ It is precisely in this deliberate measurement of doom that we find a link between the sublime and the pathetic fallacy; the chapter on the pathetic fallacy condemns the cold and deliberate contemplation of a fancied doom or deathliness of the object. Far more reprehensible for Ruskin than the lapse of the great poet into the fallacy, is the deliberate abandonment of the poetic self to pathos and grief.

Burke, as we have seen, had already made the link between grief and the sublime; both afford us what he calls 'delight', that is, neither a positive pleasure nor a positive pain, but rather a kind of 'negative pleasure'. The person who grieves, for an object so totally lost that there is no chance of enjoying it again, not only willingly endures, but indulges and loves, his grief: keeping it, as Burke puts it, perpetually in view. As in the description of the sublime quoted earlier, grief is characterized ultimately by self-preservation and control: the phantasm of the lost object is visible, but maintained at a certain distance. For Ruskin, such self-preservation is no longer possible; sublime grief becomes instead a form of mourning or melancholia. The mourning in question here is, of course, as we have been told by Ruskin, misplaced; the loss, death or doom of the object is the fantasy of a weak or morbid imagination. That loss would overcome a strong poet of the first order; the weak poet, though, abandons himself to mourning *before* the object has been lost. The pathetic fallacy, then, emerges here as a melancholic sublime. As Giorgio Agamben points out with respect to Freud's essay on 'Mourning and Melancholia', 'melancholia offers the

paradox of an intention to mourn that precedes and anticipates the loss of the object.’¹⁹ The pathetic fallacy exhibits the kind of confusion between subject and object (the presentation of an object *as* a subject) that occurs, for Freud, in melancholia. In Freud’s text, melancholia is presented as a morbid distortion of the work of mourning, in which the subject identifies with the object; the spectre of the lost object thus threatens to conjure in turn a lost subjectivity. As Freud puts it:

The distinguishing mental features of melancholia are a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment[...]. This would suggest that melancholia is in some way related to an object-loss which is withdrawn from consciousness, in contradistinction to mourning, in which there is nothing about the loss which is unconscious.²⁰

The mourning at the heart of the pathetic fallacy results both in the weakening of the mourning subject, and in the production of a doomed or deathly object, fantasized as already lost.

‘a dry black veil’

All of this takes place, as I have noted, in the context of a distinction Ruskin makes between strong poets of the first order — Shakespeare, Homer and Dante — and weak or grieving poets of the second: Wordsworth, Keats and Tennyson.²¹ The distinction is expressed not only in terms of strength and weakness, it also pertains to an opposition

between the classical and the modern. This section of *Modern Painters* is concerned in general with what Ruskin calls the 'noble and useful art' of landscape painting, and the chapter on the pathetic fallacy, in particular, with the morbid fashion in which the modern mind perceives landscape. Ruskin addresses precisely this question in 'The Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century', a text I take to be — on the terms of Ruskin's own description of the pathetic fallacy — a paradigmatic example of the 'morbidness' of the modern. 'The Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century' was the title Ruskin gave to two lectures delivered at the London Institution on 4 and 11 February 1884. The first lecture purports to provide its audience with what Ruskin calls an 'absolutely true' account of the phenomenon he claims to have been observing — and recording in his diary — for almost twenty years. Something has changed, he claims, in the weather of northern and Mediterranean Europe during that period; a new kind of cloud has appeared, a cloud Ruskin calls the 'plague-cloud', invariably accompanied by a vicious, intermittent 'plague-wind' which appears to blow from all directions at once. The second lecture, originally intended to be simply a repetition of the first, takes instead the form of a commentary both on the first lecture and on reactions to it in the press and on the part of members of the public who had corresponded with Ruskin in the intervening week. During that week, Ruskin's lecture had been ridiculed in the press and had been interpreted as further evidence that the great critic had finally and definitively lost his mind.

In 1884, Ruskin was 65 years old and had recently resumed the Slade Professorship of Fine Art at Oxford, having resigned the post in 1879, following a libel case in which he had been obliged to pay the sum of one farthing in damages to James McNeill Whistler, who had sued when Ruskin accused him of charging 'two hundred guineas for flinging a pot of paint in the public's face'. The increasingly erratic behaviour of Oxford's first professor of art (including his brandishing, in a lecture, a painting of a large pig to illustrate the spirit of Protestantism) was largely the result of

the first major attack of mental illness which had been the real reason for his resignation, and which would eventually, in 1889, incapacitate him completely and render him not only unproductive but also almost entirely silent for the last decade of his life.

Clearly aware, in 1884, of the encroaching failure of his mental faculties, Ruskin is at pains in 'The Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century' to assure his audience of his sanity. In May of that year, the text was published in book form, and Ruskin took the opportunity to add a preface in which, as in the lecture itself, he attempts to forestall accusations that the sinister and portentous cloud is the product of his own periodic mania: 'the statements in the text are founded on patient and, in all essential particulars, accurately recorded observations of the sky, during fifty years of a life of solitude and leisure; and in all they contain of what may seem to the reader questionable, or astonishing, are guardedly and absolutely true.'²² This claim that what he is about to describe is nothing more than a series of facts which he will lay before his audience is reiterated in the opening paragraph of the lecture itself. Ruskin writes: 'I mean simply what I have said, and propose to bring to your notice a series of cloud phenomena'; in an earlier draft of the lecture, however, he had written, crucially, '...and propose to bring to your notice *no pictorial images of political gloom*, but only a series of cloud phenomena'.²³

Traditions of Air

The cloud formation Ruskin intends to describe has, he claims, been visible for less than twenty years; as evidence for this claim, he offers a list of writers whose works contain no reference to the 'plague-cloud', including Homer, Virgil, Aristophanes, Horace, Chaucer, Dante, Milton, Scott, Wordsworth and Byron. The plague-cloud has

no place in what Ruskin calls the 'traditions of air', nor in his own recording of the weather in his diary on a daily basis, from 1831 to 1871. The first part of the lecture expands on this claim, and Ruskin spends the next twenty pages informing his audience precisely what the storm-cloud of the nineteenth century *is not*, before finally quoting a passage from his diary from 1875, and beginning the central section, the description of the cloud. It is that description, constantly deferred by Ruskin in this first section of the lecture, that is itself the most clouded and impenetrable part of the text, and which offers a vision of the natural world (and of writing and representation in general) as disturbingly illegible and unreliable.

First, though, this opening section takes as its starting-point the conventional Christian motif of the heavens as the legible evidence of the truth and unity of divine creation. As Ruskin puts it: 'In the entire system of the Firmament, thus seen and understood, there appeared to be, to all the thinkers of those ages, the incontrovertible and unmistakable evidence of a Divine Power in creation, which had fitted, as the air for human breath, so the clouds for human sight and nourishment.'²⁴ The sky here is both created by God and constitutes a visible language in which we can read the existence of God. The specific biblical reference in this passage is to Psalm 19: 'The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.' The whole of this first section of the lecture is taken up, broadly, with the assertion of the unity, visibility and legibility of the 'traditional' cloudscape. The weather of the past, claims Ruskin, was characterized by a particular clarity:

When weather was fine, it was luxuriously fine; when it was bad — it was often abominably bad, but it had its fit of temper and was done with it — it didn't

sulk for three months without letting you see the sun, — nor send you one cyclone inside out, every Saturday afternoon, and another outside in, every Monday morning.²⁵

The kind of cloud Ruskin is describing at this point — the good old fashioned cloud of Homer and Byron — takes its place in the legible schema of the heavens, a unified object amongst others, its outlines readily discernible. A cloud, he writes, may be defined simply as ‘visible vapour of water floating at a certain height in the air’; a *traditional* cloud, that is, is immediately recognizable to the naked eye, allowing us to assert, as he puts it, ‘that there is a shower in one place, and not in another; and not allow the scientific people to tell you that the rain is everywhere, but palpable in Tooley Street, and impalpable in Grosvenor Square.’²⁶ Finally, in concluding this section, and ostensibly reinforcing his descriptions both of the clear delineation of normal clouds one from another and of the clarity of distinction between bad weather and good, Ruskin offers the first in a long series of quotations from his own writings. The passage comes from *The Eagle’s Nest*, from a chapter entitled ‘The Relation of Art to the Sciences of Inorganic Form’, originally written for a lecture delivered in 1872. The section quoted describes a cumulus cloud of a kind which, says Ruskin, is no longer visible in the skies over London; again, he is at pains to show how this grand, magnificent cloud is identifiable first of all from its unity and integrity: ‘It is true that you can more or less imitate the forms of cloud with explosive vapour or steam; but the steam melts instantly, and the explosive vapour dissipates itself. The cloud, of perfect form, proceeds unchanged. It is not an explosion, but an enduring and advancing presence.’²⁷ This passage, though, is not only concerned with the pure, beautiful, unified clouds of the past; it is also, though Ruskin does not acknowledge it, one of the first places in his writing where he mentions the existence of that other cloud, the ‘plague-cloud’, which will take up the rest of his lecture. Ruskin writes:

There has been so much black east wind lately, and so much fog and artificial gloom, besides, that I find it is actually some two years since I last saw a noble cumulus cloud under full light. I chanced to be standing under the Victoria Tower at Westminster, when the largest mass of them floated past, that day, from the north-west; and I was more impressed than ever yet by the awfulness of the cloud-form, and its unaccountableness, in the present state of our knowledge.²⁸

In fact, this description of the noble cumulus cloud is also a lament for its passing and marks the beginning in Ruskin's writings of an obsession which would occupy him on an almost daily basis for the rest of his working life. Not only does the traditional cloud in this passage only gain its particular beauty by virtue of its difference from the clouds we are now used to seeing, but it has already begun to be characterized by a peculiar illegibility which we will soon see is properly the preserve of the cloud that has replaced it: the 'thin, scraggy, filthy, mangy, miserable cloud', or plague-cloud. The passage from *The Eagle's Nest* ends by declaring (supposedly of the traditional cloud): 'The more you think of it, the less explicable it will become to you', a claim which would appear to apply much more readily to the phenomenon to which Ruskin, now two-thirds of the way through his lecture, finally turns.²⁹

A Wind of Darkness

In turning his attention to the stated topic of his lecture, Ruskin immediately offers another quotation, this time from a diary entry from 1875, in which he describes a wind which has been rising for an hour and is now accompanied by a few ragged clouds:

This wind is the plague-wind of the eighth decade of the nineteenth century; a period which will assuredly be recognized in future meteorological history as one of the phenomena hitherto unrecorded in the courses of nature, and characterized pre-eminently by the almost ceaseless action of this calamitous wind. While I have been writing these sentences, the white clouds above specified have increased to twice the size they had when I began to write; and in about two hours from this time — say by eleven o'clock, if the wind continue, — the whole sky will be dark with them, as it was yesterday, and has been through prolonged periods during the last five years. I first noticed the definite character of this wind, and of the clouds it brings with it, in the year 1871, describing it then in the July number of *Fors Clavigera*; but little, at that time, apprehending either its universality, or any probability of its annual continuance.³⁰

The diary entry goes on to state that both the wind and the cloud can now be observed from the North of England to Sicily almost all year round, with the exception of early autumn (writing this in July 1875, Ruskin hopes that this annual intermission is about to begin).

Ruskin then proceeds to quote from a variety of diary entries and other texts from the early 1870s onwards, listing the qualities of the plague wind: it is a 'wind of

darkness'; it blows tremulously; it is 'malignant', intermittent, degrading, and (apparently its worst effect) it blanches the sun which ought to be red at sunset. The cloud which accompanies this wind, writes Ruskin,

looks partly as if it were made of poisonous smoke; very possibly it may be: there are at least two hundred furnace chimneys in a square of two miles on either side of me. But mere smoke would not blow to and fro in that wild way. It looks more to me as if it were made of dead men's souls — such of them as are not gone yet where they have to go, and may be flitting hither and thither, doubting, themselves, of the fittest place for them. You know, if there *are* such things as souls, and if ever any of them haunt places where they have been hurt, there must be many above us, just now, displeased enough!³¹

The latter part of this passage is a reference to the recent Franco-Prussian War, and it becomes clear at this point in the lecture that the phenomenon which, at the beginning of his description of the plague-cloud, Ruskin claims could destroy the roofs and walls of the buildings of London, has begun to expand to encompass first Europe and, at the end of the text, the world.³² The lecture offers nothing more in the way of argument from this point on, other than more quotations from Ruskin's own writings, before concluding with extraordinary haste: 'Blanched Sun, — blighted grass, — blinded man. — If, in conclusion, you ask me for any conceivable cause or meaning of these things — I can tell you none, according to your modern beliefs; but I can tell you what meaning it would have borne to the men of old time.'³³ The storm-cloud of the nineteenth century, claims Ruskin in conclusion is nothing other than a divine retribution for the wars and other blasphemies of the preceding twenty years. Again the text turns into a series of quotations, this time biblical declarations of reward and punishment, and Ruskin finishes the lecture in portentous mode:

All Greek, all Christian, all Jewish prophecy insists on the same truth through a thousand myths; but of all the chief, to former thought, was the fable of the Jewish warrior and prophet, for whom the sun hasted not to go down, with which I leave you to compare at leisure the physical result of your own wars and prophecies, as declared by your own elect journal not fourteen days ago, — that the Empire of England, on which formerly the sun never set, has become one on which he never rises.³⁴

‘The Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century’ is by no means rare among Ruskin’s writings in concerning itself with clouds. As a reading of the numerous and lengthy quotations of which a large part of the text is made up shows, weather, for Ruskin, is both worthy of study in its own right — as a pure example of creation — and functions as a text to which are attached a variety of other, more enigmatic, meanings. The storm-cloud of the latter part of the nineteenth century differs from the clouds which came before it in one crucial respect: it is not *legible* in the straightforward fashion that the heavens ought to be; rather, this cloud, and the wind which accompanies it, are characterized by a strange and terrible lack of clarity: it is precisely this vagueness, in fact, which makes them readable in a different sense, of course: legible in a manner which Ruskin had himself identified many years earlier, in Book Three of *Modern Painters*, in the formulation of the concept of the pathetic fallacy which I identified above as a form of Freudian melancholia.

The Cinema of Weather

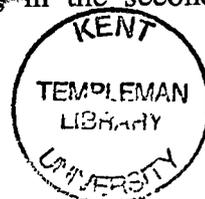
Ruskin, it seems, may not have been entirely unaware of the morbidity of his obsessive recording of the worsening state of the weather; in the mid-1880s he compiled an index to the diary he had kept since the early 1830s, in an attempt to find some correlation between the advent of the storm-cloud and the series of mental breakdowns which he had already suffered. It is unclear, unfortunately, whether Ruskin viewed his numerous diary entries on the subject as symptoms of his illness or whether, in fact, he believed (as seems more likely, on the basis of the diaries themselves, which continue until his final, illness) the storm-cloud of the nineteenth century to be responsible for his illness.

The index to the published version of Ruskin's diaries — based partly on his own index — is itself a curiously skewed document, which records over fifty references to the plague-cloud or plague-wind, thirty-five to fog, thirteen to thunderstorms and one to a 'vilely wretched sky'. In contrast there is *one* reference to good weather (this in the course of fifty-seven years of daily observation). The text of the diaries, however, reveals no such bias, and it looks as if, for most of his writing life, Ruskin enjoyed quite tolerable weather, most of the time. In the early 1870s, though, something does indeed appear to go very wrong, and by the summer of 1875 Ruskin can write the following entries:

[30 June] Here by Kenilworth yesterday, in drenching rain the whole day, and under the hell-sky. Utter blackness above, as we walked round cathedral at night, and to me increasing wonder and horror continually. The sky might just as naturally, it seems to me, be covered with constant fire. [...] [2 July] Thunder and all manner of foul weather, all the evening. Morning, all fog, grey and black, now breaking into gaps of blue, but all impure and abominable.

[...] [3 July] Crashing rain, through November fog; could not see to shave at seven o'clock. [...] [23 July] Utter extinction of everything in unbroken rain-mist and universal black cloud above.³⁵

Unsurprisingly, it is an entry from this month that Ruskin chooses in 'The Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century' as both a definition of, and persuasive evidence for the existence of, the plague-cloud. As we saw earlier, the entry for 4 July 1875 is ostensibly the point where Ruskin first fully describes and names the phenomenon, and he offers what he claims is a lengthy quotation from it in the lecture. In fact, the diary entry for 4 July 1875 reads: 'At last a rightly sunny morning; wood, moor and Wharfe, glowing and glittering through my open window.'³⁶ Allowing for the possibility that Ruskin may be quoting in 'The Storm-Cloud...' from another text, one which has not made it into the otherwise comprehensive published collation of his extensive and varied diaries, and allowing for the fact that the quoted passage may have been written later than the brief diary entry (the passage as quoted by Ruskin appears to have been written about nine o'clock in the morning, the original diary entry possibly some hours earlier), nonetheless something odd seems to be happening here. While all of the other quoted entries are verifiable in the published diaries, it seems that at precisely that moment when Ruskin wants to fix, measure and weigh his cloud, the text itself becomes clouded in references to a variety of other disparate writings. At precisely that moment when the 'traditions of air' ought to be most readily recalled to memory and set out before his audience, Ruskin finds himself disrupting the chronology of that tradition, moving back and forth both temporally and geographically: a process that becomes even more uncertain in the second lecture, when Ruskin is forced to admit, in response to a number of letters and press reports of the first lecture, that even the stable, *noble*, unified cloud of the past is not quite amenable to the clarity of delineation he had earlier claimed for it. It transpires, in the second lecture, that



traditional clouds share with the storm-cloud the quality of evading both scientific analysis and pictorial representation, vanishing into an invisibility or illegibility which allows Ruskin nowhere to turn but toward the prophetic and apocalyptic tone to which we have already seen him resort.

'All that is solid melts into air'

It is in this striking combination of metaphoric cloudiness and sententious political declaration that Ruskin's text comes, strangely, to resemble writings with which, politically, the self-proclaimed worshipper of kings would have been most at odds. He is not alone in decrying the state of the weather in the early 1880s. Some months before Ruskin delivered 'The Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century', the death of Karl Marx was the subject of an article by Engels, published in *Der Sozialdemokrat* in May 1883.³⁷ Describing the last months of Marx's life, Engels notes with regret the terrible weather which appears to have hastened his end. He writes of the cold and damp weather which seemed to have followed Marx from North Africa to Monte Carlo. After a wet summer, Marx decided to spend the winter on the south coast of England. Engels writes:

When he came to London in September, he looked well and often climbed Hampstead Hill (about 300 feet above his lodging) with me, without complaint. When the November fogs threatened to descend he was sent to Ventnor, the southern tip of the Isle of Wight. Immediately he was subjected again to wet weather and fog. The inevitable consequence was a fresh cold, coughing and so

on; in short, weakening through confinement to his room when he should have been restoring himself by moving about in the fresh air.³⁸

That Marx and Ruskin both suffered under the inclement London sky in the same year, and that the weather should have helped, in both cases, to bring their careers to a close, is quite fitting. For Marx, as for Ruskin, a spectre haunts Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century. For Ruskin, as for Marx, nineteenth-century capitalism has produced a political state of affairs in which — quite literally, for Ruskin — ‘all that is solid melts into air’.

The vision of Europe that Ruskin offers is united not by commerce, or by the transport systems that allow Ruskin to track the storm-cloud across the continent, from the north of England to Sicily, but by *air* (and here Ruskin’s text recalls the copious writings in eighteenth and nineteenth century medicine on the dangers of air-borne contagion, which invariably comes from the south, from outside Europe).³⁹ If a certain idea of European civilization is founded, for Ruskin, on a particular aesthetic (of the integrity and clarity of the heavens), the dissolution of that tradition (which turns out to be a ‘tradition of air’ in more than one sense) is accompanied by the horrific breakdown of the weather, the tradition becoming one in which, as Marx puts it, ‘All fixed, fast frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify.’⁴⁰ For Walter Benjamin, Paris is the capital of the nineteenth century; Ruskin is aware that the twentieth century will have no capital (or, if it does, it won’t be in Europe). Instead, Europe will be a place where — as in the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian war — even the dead cannot find a resting place, where the mass mobilization of industry and of war will send clouds of dead souls drifting across its blasted landscape. Melancholic, mystical, prophetic, Ruskin’s text takes its place as a work of

rhetorical power and political fury alongside Benjamin's famous passage, in the 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', on the 'angel of history':

This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.⁴¹

II

The transcendence of the human in the human.

It is now customary to date a certain renewed critical interest in the sublime from the publication of Samuel Holt Monk's *The Sublime: A Study of Critical Theories in Eighteenth-Century England*.⁴² The contemporary theoretical interest in the sublime might be more productively dated from the publication of Neil Hertz's 'A Reading of Longinus' in 1973. If the argument presented here has not properly come to terms with the massive body of work on the sublime of the eighteenth century (and its connection with theories of the beautiful, the picturesque and the grotesque), the Romantic sublime, the Gothic sublime, the sublime of Turner (and, of course, the enormous influence still exercised by the sublime in the nineteenth century: Ruskin is

only the most prominent and prolific instance), the denigration of the sublime by the New Criticism and its subsequent revival at the hands of poststructuralist critics, it is because what I intend here is the description of a certain trajectory of the sublime, the history of no more, perhaps, than a word (or handful of words), rather than situating the sublime immediately within a specific debate or movement (already mapped by criticism as the comprehensive representation of an intellectual or artistic territory: the eighteenth century, Romanticism, the Gothic novel). To trace instead a particular kind of movement (movement or transport will be crucial here, as my account of the development of the treatise of Longinus will demonstrate) would be to recognize the insight provided by the opening paragraph of Thomas Weiskel's *The Romantic Sublime*, itself a crucial text in the movement of the sublime through the discourses of contemporary criticism. Weiskel begins:

The essential claim of the sublime is that man can, in feeling and in speech, transcend the human. What, if anything, lies beyond the human — God or the gods, the daemon of Nature — is matter for great disagreement. What, if anything, defines the range of the human is scarcely less sure.⁴³

As Harold Bloom's foreword to *The Romantic Sublime* points out, Weiskel implies — in claiming that '[a] humanistic sublime is an oxymoron' — that there are other versions of the sublime which all evade oxymoronic status: the Hebraic sublime, the Christian sublime, the Homeric sublime, the daemonic sublime, the natural sublime. What interests Weiskel, says Bloom, is that 'sublime poets who are crucially humanistic in some respects — Milton, Blake, Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, Whitman, Stevens — must forsake the sublime when they foreground humanistic concerns.'⁴⁴ Clearly, while the sublime may not sit easily with humanism, it manifestly has something important to do with the human: the transcendence of the human, certainly,

but, as we shall see in the discussion below, the transcendence of the human in the human. The problem for Weiskel, as for the writers discussed below, is a confusion about the place (or — as I shall argue later — about the time) of this transcendence: in Longinus, for example, the uncertainty over whether the sublime is the cause, the site or the action of transport [*ekstasis*]. What unites the various conceptions of the sublime outlined below — be they concerned with ‘greatness’ in literature, the source of that greatness, or its effect on a perceiving subject — is an attempt to describe a certain transcendence or movement outside of subjectivity. This is variously described as movement *toward* greatness, or toward the divine (as, for instance, in the Longinian and Christian conceptions) or *away from* a subjectivity conceived of as stable or unified. What is at issue in the discourse on the sublime is the possibility of the simultaneous habitation and transcendence of a certain place (the locus, for example, in Longinus, of rhetoric: the scene of oratory), or the transcendence of a certain time, the present, *in the present*. The discussion presented here is intended to prepare the ground for a conception of the temporality of the sublime. The present chapter, while presenting in a relatively neutral fashion what I take to be the central concerns of the discourse on the sublime, is an attempt also to show how the notion of a sublime transport or transcendence demands an engagement with a philosophy of time.

Of the High

I wish first, though, to trace briefly the etymology of the word *sublime*. The word *hypsos*, of which Longinus writes, has been translated, since the publication of Boileau’s *Traité du Sublime*, as *the sublime* or *sublimity*. The translation of *hypsos* as ‘sublime’ involves a complicated detour through a number of Latin words and phrases. As Jan Cohn and Thomas H. Miles have pointed out, ‘sublime’ has been traced to the

same root as *subliminal* and *sublimation*.⁴⁵ As the *OED* has it, both of these derive from *sub-* plus *limin/limen*. In the case of ‘subliminal’, the root forms ‘below the threshold’, while ‘sublime’ means ‘up to the lintel’. *Limen* is a threshold and is akin to *limes*, a boundary or limit (in particular, a boundary between fields), that in turn connected with *limus*, meaning sidelong or oblique. *Limen* is both lintel and threshold, the prefix *sub* denoting a movement or placing above *or* below. The sublime is thus immediately concerned with a kind of movement; it remains unclear, however, whether that is movement *up or down* (literally, towards threshold or lintel). As Renout and Meillet argue, *limen* is cited as both *limen inferum* and *limen superum*, ‘hence a threshold or lintel’.⁴⁶ This interpretation is complicated by the proposal of three possible origins: *limen*, *limes*, and *limus* (the last having no sure etymology and no clear connection with the first two). Renout and Meillet argue that *limus* is the most plausible origin, thus providing, in conjunction with the prefix, an upward and diagonal or oblique movement. That a certain confusion has surrounded the movement of these roots into English is evident in the introduction into the language of the word *subliminal*, which appears in English in the late nineteenth century to translate the German *unter der Schwelle*: below the threshold (of consciousness).

Sublime appears initially in English as a chemical term, the verb *to sublime* meaning to subject to heat in order to purify (later replaced by *sublimate*). The progress of the word in its scientific context is traced by Cohn and Miles:

[In the sixteenth century] the nouns *sublimation*, *sublimate*, and *sublimy* are all used to mean mercury corrosive sublimate, the product of refining. By the seventeenth century, *sublime* appears as a medical term indicating difficult respiration. In the eighteenth century, the new science of geology adopted *sublime* to mean higher and more problematical. In this science, *sublimate* appears as a term for a mineral deposit, by analogy to the alchemical process:

minerals in a vapour state, thrown up from the interior of the earth, are deposited near the earth's surface (*OED*). The nineteenth century applies the term sublime to anatomy in describing those muscles which lie near the surface. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the newest science, psychoanalysis, adopted the word *sublimation* for its own uses and added the neologism *subliminal*.⁴⁷

In the middle of the fifteenth century, *sublimate* had meant raised or exalted, *sublimation* indicating quite literally an elevation or promotion to a higher rank. By the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth centuries, a wide connotational field had opened up for *sublime*, as John Donne's 'A Valediction: of the Booke' shows: 'To all whome loves subliming fire invades' (l. 13).⁴⁸

The use of the term *sublime* in criticism, philosophy or aesthetics to denote a phenomenon which is both stylistic and psychological appears to date precisely from the publication of Boileau's *Le Traité du Sublime*. Two English translations had been published before Boileau's: John Hall's *Of the Height of Eloquence* (1622) and John Pulteney's *Of the Loftiness of Elegancy of Speech* (1680); after Boileau, all English titles use *sublime*.⁴⁹ From the late sixteenth to the eighteenth century there was a confusion between the rhetorical and the psychological uses of the term:

While the *sublime* resided first in the style in which ideas were expressed, it eventually came to mean the elevated ideas themselves [...]. The important alteration of meaning, however, occurs when the *sublime* is used in English by critics in the Longinian sense to describe not the external cause of a particular aesthetic state in the beholder, but that state itself; the sublime has moved from the object to the subject [...]. Boileau's work would carry into English two significant aspects of the word *sublime* itself: the sense that the sublime need not

and indeed should not reside in a deliberately grand style, and the implication that the measure of the sublime would lie in the effect it had on an audience.⁵⁰

While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to trace the influences of early Christianity in Longinus' text, it is perhaps enough to note here the fact that Christianity had already made the distinction between the sublime and the stylistically elevated. As Erich Auerbach points out, antique theory had maintained a strict separation between the sublime or elevated style (*sermo gravis* or *sublimis*) and the low style (*sermo remissus* or *humilis*). In Christianity, however, the two merge, 'especially in Christ's Incarnation and Passion, which realize and combine *sublimitas* and *humilitas* in overwhelming measure.'⁵¹ In a discussion of the sentence from Genesis so often cited (from Longinus to Kant and Hegel) as an example of the sublime — '*dixitque Deus: fiat lux, et facta est lux*' (1. 3) — Auerbach states that 'the sublime in this sentence from *Genesis* is not contained in a magnificent display of rolling periods nor in the splendour of abundant figures of speech but in the impressive brevity which is in such contrast to the immense content and which for that very reason has a note of obscurity which fills the listener with a shuddering awe. It is precisely the absence of causal connectives, the naked statement of what happens — the statement which replaces deduction and comprehension by an amazed beholding that does not even seek to comprehend — which gives the sentence its grandeur.'⁵² The sublime, then, is not necessarily characterized by an elevated *style*. For Christianity, in fact, writes Auerbach, sublimity is not an aesthetic or stylistic category at all, but an ethico-theological one; 'yet in this latter sense too, that is in terms of style, the antithetical fusion of the two was emphasized, so early as the patristic period, as a characteristic of Holy Scripture.'⁵³

Boileau's translation of Longinus is undoubtedly the most important factor in the move from a conception of the sublime as a stylistic concept to the psychological

and ethical concerns which would occupy the eighteenth century.⁵⁴ As Monk argues, Boileau is not concerned in the *Traité du Sublime* with the formulation of rules for great writing. As Théodore A. Litman writes (following Monk), ‘la pensée de Boileau [...] est [...] déchirée entre plusieurs alternatives: celle de la raison et du génie, celle des règles et du sublime, celle du bon sens et de l’enthousiasme, celle de l’ordre et du désordre.’⁵⁵ Both critics propose a distinction between the texts by Boileau which accord with a certain ‘classicism’ (the *Satires*, *Epîtres* and *Art poétique*) and the *Traité*, which resists the classicist concern with rules for the production of a great or elevated style.⁵⁶ Boileau finds this distinction in the treatise itself; Longinus does not intend a certain style, but ‘cet extraordinaire et ce merveilleux qui frappe dans le discours, et qui fait qu’un ouvrage enlève, ravit, transporte.’⁵⁷ Again, the passage from Genesis provides Boileau with an example of a sublimity which does not reside in the style but in the movement, transport or ecstasy which it occasions in the reader or hearer. Boileau’s distinction between a sublime style and the sublime proper suggests also a certain conception of *genius*, of the ‘je ne sais quoi’ of which Père Bouhours wrote: ‘le génie [...] il est indépendant du hasard et de la fortune, c’est un don du ciel, où la terre n’a point de part; c’est je ne sais quoi de divin.’⁵⁸

Pedagogical Ecstasy

Longinus’ treatise on the sublime proposes itself initially as a corrective to an earlier text, a ‘little treatise’ by Caecilius.⁵⁹ Longinus’ text is addressed to a pupil, Terentianus, the treatise thus announcing itself already as a passage or movement of some kind: a movement, that is, of *knowledge* from the anterior and inadequate treatise, through the version of the sublime offered by Longinus himself, to his pupil. What is at stake here is assuredly a kind of knowledge, a knowledge which none of

these three — Caecilius, Longinus, Terentianus — can properly be said to possess at this point. At least two discoveries have yet to be made: the nature of sublimity and the methods by which ‘we’ might acquire it. This ‘we’ would include, first, the three participants in this pedagogical scene, and, second, *we* the readers of the treatise. Although the addressees of the text might at first appear to be clear, it is in fact difficult to say just who is expected to learn from the text we are about to read. Caecilius certainly has, according to Longinus, something to learn: his monograph, we are told, ‘was not worthy of its subject, failed to touch the essential points, and gave little help to the reader.’⁶⁰ The writer of this lost text, however, is not entirely to blame for the shortcomings of his work: ‘we should perhaps not blame the man for what he does not say but rather praise him for his intention and his earnestness.’⁶¹ In a text profoundly concerned with literary influence, Longinus is unclear how his own writing on the subject of the sublime will affect the author with whom he is polemically about to engage. Nor can we compare the two texts: Caecilius’ work on the sublime is unknown outside of the brief references made to it by Longinus. Similarly, we cannot gauge the reaction of Longinus pupil, Postumius Terentianus, who, again, is quite unknown outside of Longinus’ treatise. The ‘frank criticism’ which Longinus invites from his pupil cannot be read, nor can we judge of Terentianus’ ‘kindly service and truthfulness’.⁶² As Ernst Robert Curtius points out, ‘the whole of late Antiquity has not a single word to say about “Longinus”.’⁶³

Nonetheless, the text is concerned with a certain narrative of pedagogy. This initial scene, involving both the transfer of knowledge and the correction of certain errors, constitutes the preliminary staging of the entire problematic of the sublime as it will be treated in the rest of the text. What Longinus introduces here is precisely a certain passage or movement; as yet, however, this movement is not constructed according to the ‘ecstatic’ logic that will later characterize sublimity or great writing.⁶⁴ All that is proposed in the beginning is the question of education, of the movement or

passage of knowledge, which has yet to be thought in terms of the danger and disintegration which will constitute the sublime.

Pedagogy, as both an impulse in the treatise and one of its most important thematic concerns, will inform in a number of ways the argument advanced below. The sublime appears for Longinus to propose an alternative model of rhetoric, or to exceed the boundaries of rhetoric as it has traditionally been conceived. The sublime, as I have noted, does not persuade, it transports. This movement out of himself of the reader or hearer of sublime discourse is described by Longinus in educational terms. A discourse which merely persuades is incapable, for Longinus, of educating, of instructing its audience in the production of the effects which it itself elicits. This would be, for Longinus, the operation of rhetoric in its traditional form. Sublime discourse, on the other hand, moves its audience, takes it out of itself in order that it can reconstruct an alternative self; it is precisely in this movement that another self becomes a possibility.⁶⁵ In opposing rhetoric, the sublime thus proposes an encounter with an otherness which is also the opportunity for the construction of identity. At the same time, we learn in the encounter with sublime speech how to produce that speech for ourselves, to become sublime ourselves.

Longinus' treatise is concerned throughout with a movement out of the self; this movement or *ekstasis* is thought of in various forms in the text: as a fragmentation (of language or of the body), or as the transcendence of language and of the body, or, finally, as the transcendence of sublimity itself in those writers who overreach themselves, attempting to outdo the exemplars of the sublime identified by the author. This latter phenomenon presents in a condensed form the problem which is at the heart of Longinus' thinking about the 'movement' of the sublime. If it is possible for certain poets or historians to exceed the bounds of sublimity, and if this excess is to be thought of in terms of error, then it becomes necessary to ask precisely what kind of movement or ecstasy is involved here. It is not possible to read the passage toward absolute

alterity as a definition of the sublime itself. Rather, there must be a moment of stasis or resolution, a moment at which the subject affirms itself, as it were, as having moved. In other words, the sublime appears as a movement toward the other, but also a movement of recuperation or stock-taking. This is, for example, the reading of the Longinian sublime offered by Paul de Man in his consideration of the place of the sublime in Hegel's *Aesthetics*. This would also be one meaning of Weiskel's assertion that the sublime consists of the transcendence of the human *in the human*.⁶⁶

The figure through which much of this is elucidated in Longinus is that of metaphor. Again, a certain kind of movement is involved here; if metaphor is a 'carrying across', from one place to another, this figure appears to inform the entire treatise.⁶⁷ The movement (of knowledge) from teacher to pupil, from persuasion to movement itself, from rhetoric to *ekstasis*, from 'here' to 'there', conceals, or rather (by a logic that is present as much in the movements or slippages of Longinus' argument as in his positive assertions) reveals in this resolutely spatial model, a temporality which accords with the repositioning of the self described above. The text is crucially concerned with time, with the temporality of pedagogy, of literary influence, and of the representation of the past. What is under investigation here is the temporal nature of mimesis itself; the treatise attempts to answer a series of questions about time. What, asks Longinus, is our relation to the writers of the past? How can we write in the knowledge, quite simply, that they have done it before us? Ought we, for example, to imitate Homer? If so, what is it that we are imitating? How can we be sure that we *are* the successors of Homer? If we simply imitate style (i.e., that which persuades), are we doing justice to the past, and can we imagine a future for which our words will make sense? The Longinian sublime appears, in the light of these fundamental questions, as a supreme anxiety about the twin problems of belatedness and expectation, of the status of the present in relation to the past and the future.

This question of time, the question of metaphor, is also a question of and about translation. As Paul de Man points out in 'The Epistemology of Metaphor', the attempt to circumscribe the realm of language, to limit the influence of figural language (the example discussed is Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*) is fraught with considerations of, and metaphors of, translation, which joins here with education and *ekstasis* as a movement which is also the establishment of identity, an attempt to produce, out of the encounter with alterity, an identity which is then postulated as having been stable all along, as having 'translated', as having been represented, as having 'crossed over', while the actual movement is effaced.⁶⁸ What is elided in this circumscription of metaphor is precisely the temporal element which I wish to call sublime. What I identify here is not an *alibi*, the movement across of a stable referent or subject of enunciation from one place to another. Equally, the sublime does not consist in the absolute dissolution of that subject in fragmentation, excess, or a literally 'puèrile' infancy, an inability to speak (though all of these are 'present' in the movement of the sublime). Rather, I see the sublime here as an *alias*, a different time rather than a different place. Finally, the conception of time described here stands in an uneasy relation to a notion of time and history as progress. There is certainly in the sublime temporality described above, a narrative of progress which it will be the task of the latter part of this chapter to elucidate. If the movement in question is a movement toward the assertion of an identity, it must also be acknowledged that this movement is continually occurring. The initial scene of education and the author's concern with literary influence do not allow us to situate Longinus' interests simply within the immediate frame of reference of the text itself. Indeed, the text is clearly troubled by that which escapes it, the future, and seeks to — at least metaphorically — circumscribe that future in the very examples which I will suggest most radically assert the uncontrollability of the future. One of the concerns which animates the text is its

own future reception, a concern which offers a productive means of thinking about the temporality of criticism.

Rhetoric

I wish to return briefly to the question of the place of Longinus' treatise in a certain rhetorical tradition. Rhetoric begins, as Renato Barilli has noted, when the concept of truth comes into question or when one doubts that truth can exist outside the interaction of human beings, 'their exchange and comparison of opinions that necessarily occur through language.'⁶⁹ Rhetoric can thus be summed up, for example, in Protagoras' statement that 'man is the measure of all things.' Protagoras introduces for the first time a conception of rhetoric as doing a certain violence to its hearers; in the formulation that Plato will oppose, rhetoric consists in 'making the weaker argument stronger'. Rhetoric thus appears as an overpowering force; that force becomes more explicit in the writings of Gorgias, for whom 'speech is a powerful lord [that] can stop fear and banish grief and create joy and nurture pity.'⁷⁰ For Gorgias, rhetoric overwhelms the audience, carrying them away, reducing them to an 'incapacity' for which they themselves cannot be held responsible (Helen, for example, cannot be blamed for yielding to the invitation of Paris). As Barilli puts it, 'the individual who falls under their charm is not guilty because it is impossible to resist their strong fascination, and the moral responsibility lies entirely with the user of such a powerful narcotic,'⁷¹ a qualification of which the Gorgias of Plato's dialogue is well aware:

The orator can speak on any subject against any opposition in such a way as to prevail on any subject he chooses, but the fact that he possesses the power to deprive doctors and other professional men of their reputation does not justify

him in doing so; he is as much bound to make a proper use of his oratory as the possessor of physical superiority.⁷²

If the history of rhetoric is already the history of the circumscription of rhetoric, a reaction which finds its most powerful expression in Plato, the treatise of Longinus repeats in its opening chapters a certain unease with regard to the violence of oratory. The question which animates Longinus at the beginning of the treatise is, as we have seen, one of pedagogy. It is necessary to establish at the outset, says Longinus, the precise origin of the greatness of the sublime. The second chapter begins with the assertion that ‘the first problem we have to face is whether greatness and depth in literature is a matter of art.’⁷³ Caecilius, Longinus tells us, considered greatness to be inborn, indeed that ‘the one true art of greatness is to be born great.’⁷⁴ Longinus tells us, *contra* Caecilius, that nature itself does not act without method:

though generally a law unto itself in passionate and distinguished passages, [it] is not usually random or altogether devoid of method. Nature supplies the first main underlying elements in all cases, but study enables one to define the right moment and appropriate measure on each occasion, and also provides steady training and practice.⁷⁵

Natural greatness becomes precarious if left to its own devices, ‘unsteadied and unballasted by knowledge, abandoned to mere impulse and untutored daring,’ and requires ‘the bridle as well as the spur.’⁷⁶ The latter part of this chapter, a section of which is lost (four pages of the MS are missing at this point), draws an analogy, with reference to Demosthenes, between, on the one hand, good luck accompanied by ‘good counsel’, and, on the other, nature attended by art. In the case of style, ‘the clinching

proof is that only by means of art can we perceive the fact that certain literary effects are due to sheer inborn talent.’⁷⁷

Turns of Thought

The *ekstasis* which we have identified above as characteristic of sublime discourse is addressed by Neil Hertz in terms of the familiar identification of the author of the treatise on the sublime with his subject.⁷⁸ This tendency, says Hertz, mimics one of Longinus’ ‘favourite turns of thought — to identify enthusiastically two elements that would more commonly be thought of as quite distinct.’⁷⁹ What W.K. Wimsatt refers to as a ‘sliding’ from one theoretical distinction to another in the treatise, is conceived of by Hertz in terms of Longinus’ ‘transports’.⁸⁰ Hertz is entirely correct in his assertion that Longinus moves with apparent ease from situating the sublime in great writing or in its author, to a sublime which is more accurately discerned in the audience addressed by that writing (Longinus writes: ‘we come to believe we have created what we have only heard’). This movement from one pole to another is, as we have seen, already apparent in the pedagogical scene established at the beginning of the treatise: the movement of knowledge from author to reader or from speaker to hearer. As I have suggested, that movement ultimately implies the construction of a subject, an identity, through the encounter with the other. It is unclear, though, where this movement begins and, literally, in what direction it is going (this is to return to the etymological uncertainty of the word *sublime* itself: are we speaking of a movement toward lintel or threshold?). It will become clear that the movement referred to might be most productively thought of as an oscillation between two poles, rather than as the teleological progression which Longinus appears to wish to impose.

The transport or sliding which Hertz identifies leads to a movement of return or recuperation which produces both that subject and, as Hertz argues with regard to Longinus' reading of Sappho, the unity of the literary work. That the unity of a work should be identified here with that of the subject which speaks or writes it, testifies to the complexity and unease which continue to affect the text after the initial assertion has been made, and which persist in rendering the identity of the subject in question far from stable. The identification of the subject with literary language constitutes in fact a radical destabilization of the subjectivity it was intended to support in the first place; that identification introduces a temporal element for which the spatial model of identification through movement fails to account. This line of argument requires us to enter a de Manian territory which will be more fully explored in the next chapter. First, though, I wish to engage more thoroughly with Hertz's argument, as it is crucial both to my own argument below and to de Man's understanding of the Longinian sublime.

Hertz's essay first draws attention to the 'sliding' between disparate texts and between the poles of author and audience. This sliding, argues Hertz, leads to a particular confusion on the part of the reader of the treatise:

One finds in the treatise a rhetorician's argument conducted with great intelligence and energy, but one also discovers that it is remarkably easy to lose one's way, to forget which rhetorical topic is under consideration at a particular point, to find oneself attending to a quotation, a fragment of analysis, a metaphor — some interesting resonant bit of language that draws one into quite another system of relationships.⁸¹

Longinus, says Hertz, is given to interweaving language of his own with that of the authors under discussion and organizing his argument around the linkage of quotations

one to another, without explicitly stating what the connections between them might be. The argument of the treatise thus arises out of the connections which the juxtaposition of these quotations suggest: Longinus' own discourse is fashioned out of the concealed affinities between the examples he provides.⁸² Hertz, for example, refers to Chapter 9 of the treatise, in which, having already provided several Homeric examples (the chapter is concerned with what the author calls the first source of greatness, 'natural high-mindedness'), Longinus turns to what is, crucially, already an instance of quotation: Moses' repetition of the divine *fiat lux*:

In this manner also the lawgiver of the Jews, no ordinary man, since he recognized and expressed divine power according to its worth, expressed that power clearly when he wrote at the beginning of his Laws: 'And God said.' What? 'Let there be light, and there was light; let there be land, and there was land'.⁸³

As Hertz points out, Longinus provides no further commentary on this quotation; preferring instead to turn to another text, he returns to Homer:

I trust I shall not weary you, my friend, if I compare with this one more passage from our poet, this time about humans, so that we may realize how he is wont to rise to heroic greatness. The words are spoken by Ajax who is helpless because fog and paralyzing darkness have spread over the Greeks in battle:

Ward off this gloomy darkness, father Zeus,
Restore the light, grant that our eyes may see,
And, in the light destroy us, if you must.⁸⁴

Longinus goes on to describe the appropriateness of these lines to the feelings which they represent, but, as Hertz remarks, fails to make explicit the connection between this quotation and the preceding Biblical one: both instances involve calls for light, the first by a god, the second by a mortal. The connection, as Hertz concedes, is a flimsy one, but it is precisely this apparently arbitrary linkage of texts — through certain resonant figures or metaphors — that structures Longinus' argument. In other words, Hertz's argument runs, it is through the unacknowledged rhetorical movements or slippages that a coherence emerges: 'these problems and the linked motifs out of which they emerge are recurrent ones in the treatise, and they draw to them other elements as well: reading along one has the sense of moving through a verbal medium rich in repetitions and glancing analogies, the thematic equivalent of slant rhymes.'⁸⁵

The comparison with a certain poetic coherence here is an apposite one: Hertz next considers Longinus' reading of an ode by Sappho:

Peer of the Gods he seemeth to me, the blissful
Man who sits and gazes at thee before him,
Close beside thee sits, and in silence hears thee
Silvery speaking,

Laughing Love's low laughter. Oh this, this only
Stirs the troubled heart in my breast to tremble,
For should I but see thee a little moment,
Straight is my voice hushed;

Yea, my tongue is broken, and through and through me
'Neath the flesh, impalpable fire runs tingling;

Nothing see mine eyes, and a noise of roaring
Waves in my ears sounds;

Sweat runs down in rivers, a tremor seizes
All my limbs and paler than grass in autumn,
Caught by pains of menacing death, I falter,
Lost in the love trance.

Longinus comments on this ode as follows:

Do you not marvel how she seeks to make her mind, body, ears, tongue, eyes, and complexion, as if they were scattered elements strange to her, join together in the same moment of experience? In contradictory phrases she describes herself as hot and cold at once, rational and irrational, at the same time terrified and almost dead, in order to appear afflicted not by one passion but by a swarm of passions. Lovers do have all those feelings, but it is, as I said, her selection of the most vital details and her working them into one whole which produce the outstanding quality of the poem.⁸⁶

Sublime discourse approaches in this instance its own dissolution in a certain *infancy*, that is, in the total absence of language. As Hertz puts it, 'the elements that Sappho is bringing together into the body of her poem are precisely the names of the fragments of her natural body, seen as the debris of a shattering erotic experience that has brought her, in the words of the ode, "only a little short of death".'⁸⁷ The overpowering of the body in the experience of love is accompanied by its fragmentation. That fragmentation, however, is recuperable within language: the sublime, then, consists here in the approach toward the end of language, but also in the stepping back from

that finality in order to express it. It is only in speaking of the end of her language that Sappho can properly express the experience in language. What 'fascinates' Longinus here, claims Hertz, is 'the point where the near-fatal stress of passion can be thought of as turning into — as indistinguishable from — the energy that is constituting the poem.'⁸⁸ The fragmentation of the body and of language thus becomes, in a movement of recuperation, the establishment of both the unity or coherence of the poem and of the speaking subject.

This is precisely what, according to Paul de Man, characterizes the Longinian sublime itself:

The language of negativity is [...] a dialectical and recuperative moment, akin to similar turns that Neil Hertz has located in Longinus' treatise. Hegel's sublime may stress the distance between the human discourse of the poets and the voice of the sacred even further than Longinus, but as long as this distance remains, as he puts it, a *relationship* [...], however negative, the fundamental analogy between poetic and divine creation is preserved.⁸⁹

In Longinus' text, de Man argues, language declares its own weakness, but no matter how strongly the autonomy of language is denied, the sublime remains a recuperable and ultimately positive mode as long as language can know and declare itself to be weak or mute: 'one can pretend to be weak when one is strong, but the power to pretend is decisive proof of one's strength.'⁹⁰ This recuperative action is threatened or weakened, says de Man, when language functions as trope: 'when language functions as trope, and no longer only as representation, the limits of the Longinian sublime as well as of its considerable powers of recuperation, including the power of self-ironization, are reached.'⁹¹

De Man then proposes a contradiction between the Longinian sublime and the figure of *apostrophe*, which highlights the inadequacy of Longinus' model of the sublime as representation: 'Apostrophe is not representation; it occurs independently of any report, be it as quotation or narration, and when it is put on a stage, it becomes ludicrous and cumbersome. Whereas representation can be shown to be a form of apostrophe, the reverse is not true.'⁹² What occurs here, then, is a recuperation which de Man calls an 'economic concept' which 'allows for a mediated passage or crossing between negative or positive valorization.'⁹³

De Man follows Hegel in seeing in the sublime an apparent estrangement of the self in language, an ecstatic movement which is also inevitably a return to the establishment of that self as an autonomous and stable entity. Hegel once more refers to the *fiat lux* of the Old Testament:

'God said: let there be light; and there was light'; this Longinus quoted long ago as in every way a striking example of the sublime. The Lord, the one substance, does proceed to manifestation, but for the manner of creation is the purest, even bodiless, ethereal manifestation; it is the word, the manifestation of thought as the ideal power, and with its command that the existent shall be, the existent is immediately brought into being in silent obedience.'⁹⁴

The existence of the word, however, does not constitute a moment of absolute alterity; the divine subject returns upon itself. In the very act of creation (a creation which does not occur outside of the word), God withdraws into himself: his 'work' is brought forth and has no independent existence apart from him; 'on the contrary it is there only as the proof of *his* wisdom, goodness, and justice as such.'⁹⁵ This return of the subject upon itself, the assertion of the power of the subject over itself, in the face of its

dissolution in time, is the precise referent of de Man's comments on allegory and irony in 'The Rhetoric of Temporality', the text to which I turn in the next chapter.

Notes

¹ John Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, Vol. III, Pt. IV, Ch. XII, in *The Works of John Ruskin*, Vol. V, ed. E.T. Cook & Alexander Wedderburn (London: George Allen, 1903-1912) & 'The Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century', in *The Works of John Ruskin*, Vol. XXXIV, ed. E.T. Cook & Alexander Wedderburn (London: George Allen, 1903-1912).

² *The Works of John Ruskin*, Vol. V, p. 208.

³ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 34-35.

⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34, on the concept of delight and its relation to pleasure.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁶ *The Works of John Ruskin*, Vol. V, p. 200.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 203.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 205.

¹¹ These lines come from a song which first appeared in Chapter XXIV of Kingsley's *Alton Locke* (London: Macmillan, 1889), pp. 189-90. The entire verse is: 'They rowed her in across the rolling foam, / the cruel crawling foam, / the cruel hungry foam, to her grave beside the sea: / But still the boatmen hear her call the cattle home, / Across the Sands o' Dee.'

¹² *The Works of John Ruskin*, Vol. V, p. 205.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 207.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 208.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 433. [Appendix V, 'Additional Passages from the MSS']

¹⁷ Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 57.

¹⁸ *The Works of John Ruskin*, Vol. III, p. 129.

¹⁹ Giorgio Agamben, *Stanzas*, trans. Ronald L. Martinez (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 20.

²⁰ Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. XIV, trans. & ed. James Strachey et al. (London: Hogarth Press, 1978), p. 244.

²¹ This distinction, of course, has most recently been made by Harold Bloom, particularly in the context of English Romanticism; for Bloom, a specifically Oedipal drama is played out between the poet and his precursor, the 'strength' of the poet consisting in the symbolic killing off of the poetic 'father'. See Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

²² *The Works of John Ruskin*, Vol. XXXIV, p. 7.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 9, n. 1.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 31-32.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

³² It is also at this point that the text becomes prophetic, the recent war 'digging ... a moat flooded with waters of death between the two nations for a century to come'. *The Works of John Ruskin*, Vol. XXXIV, p. 33.

³³ *The Works of John Ruskin*, Vol. XXXIV, p. 40.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 41. The *Pall Mall Gazette* had, on 2 January, after a month of sunless weather, published a 'simple ditty' to this effect.

³⁵ John Ruskin, *Diaries*, ed. Joan Evans & J.H. Whitehouse (Oxford: Clarendon, 1959), pp. 851, 854.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 851.

³⁷ Frederick Engels, 'On the Death of Karl Marx', in Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 24 (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1989), pp. 473-481.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 475.

³⁹ John Arbuthnot's *Effects of Air* (1733) suggested that 'plague may be produced by some malignant quality of the air without any contagion,' while James Lind published his theories of 'noxious vapours' and 'noisome effluvia' in *Essays on Diseases Incidental to Europeans in Hot Climates* (1768). James Johnson, in *The Influence of Tropical Climates on European Constitutions* (1812) and *Change of Air* (1831) continue a line of inquiry which can be traced to Hippocrates and which is linked — as for Ruskin — with the collapse of a culture in Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*. Cf. Frederick Sargent, *Hippocratic Heritage: A History of Ideas About Weather and Human Health* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1982). See also, in this regard, David Carroll, 'Pollution, defilement and the art of decomposition', in Michael Wheeler, ed., *Ruskin and Environment* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), pp. 58-75 and Denis Cosgrove, '*Mappa mundi, anima mundi*: imaginative mapping and environmental representation', in *Ruskin and Environment*, pp. 76-101. On the themes of disease and decay in Ruskin's earlier work, see Owen Rogal, "'Morbid and Fearful Conditions of Mind" in Ruskin's *Modern Painters II*', *The Victorian Newsletter* 85 (1994), 9-13.

⁴⁰ Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), p. 83.

⁴¹ Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1992), p. 249.

⁴² Samuel Holt Monk, *The Sublime: A Study of Critical Theories in Eighteenth-Century England* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960). While the argument put forward below is not directly concerned with the discourse on the sublime as it has resurfaced in contemporary criticism, my discussion will of necessity engage with some recent works on the sublime. It has become a commonplace of recent critical, theoretical and philosophical work to speak of the 'return' of the sublime and to suggest in particular a revival of Kantian aesthetics in contemporary 'continental' thought. Kantian problematics, we are told, have come to replace the Heideggerian concepts which dominated the era of 'poststructuralism' (and which, presumably, had in turn replaced the concerns of a particular 'Hegelian' moment). Such an account of the recent history of French philosophical thought — which is best exemplified by Vincent Descombes' *Modern French Philosophy*, and which invariably includes the assertion that poststructuralist thought arises, along with certain 'libidinal' concerns typified by *l'Anti-Oedipe* and *l'Économie Libidinale*, as a direct consequence of the events of May 1968 — has been followed by critics such as Terry Eagleton, for whom all of these disparate texts and modes of thought contribute to a prevalent mood designated simply as 'theoretical' (or, lately, 'postmodern').

More or less congruent with this putative 'return' to Kant, there has occurred in English studies a reappraisal of the eighteenth-century discourse on the sublime. There arises within criticism, then, a distinction between a critical discourse on the texts of the sublime as exemplifying certain historically situated problems (Eagleton, for example, is concerned in *the Ideology of the Aesthetic* to show how the sublime — the Burkean sublime in particular — functions as part of a certain bourgeois ideology: a bourgeois conception of sublime *labour*, opposed to the aristocratic *ease* of the

beautiful) and a more strictly philosophical resuscitation of the sublime as a contemporary force, as a concept which remains viable as a way of thinking, for example, about avant-garde art, or as exemplifying a political state of affairs that demands to be thought *now*. See Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), pp. 70-101.

⁴³ Thomas Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), p. 3.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, vii.

⁴⁵ Jan Cohn & Thomas H. Miles, 'The Sublime: In Alchemy, Aesthetics and Psychoanalysis', *Modern Philology*, vol. 74 (1976-77), 289-304.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 291. The reference is to A. Renout and A. Meillet, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue latine* (Paris, 1967).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 294.

⁴⁸ The word appears, in fact, to have oscillated between the various meanings outlined here. For example, Chaucer, *The Yeoman's Tale*, 'The care and wo that we hadden in oure matires sublymyng' (Preamb., 51); Ben Jonson, *The Alchemist*, II. v, 'Can you sublime and dulcefie?'; Goldsmith, *Essays*, 'A judicious use of metaphors wonderfully raises, sublimes, and adorns oratory or elocution'.

⁴⁹ Cohn and Miles, *op. cit.*, 293, n. 9.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 297.

⁵¹ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 151.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 110.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

⁵⁴ Boileau admits that his translation of *Peri Hypsos* is a 'free' one: 'J'ai songé qu'il ne s'agissait pas simplement ici de traduire Longin; mais de donner au public un Traité du

Sublime qui peut être utile.’ Nicolas Boileau-Despreaux, *Oeuvres*, tome II, *Le Traité du Sublime*, Préface M. Amar (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1878), p. 362.

⁵⁵ Théodore A. Litman, *Le Sublime en France* (Paris: A.G. Nizet, 1971), p. 71.

⁵⁶ The distinction between the classical and the sublime here is perhaps too stringently adhered to; as will become obvious later, this distinction cannot be maintained in the face of Longinus’ efforts to establish a certain order of the sublime.

⁵⁷ Boileau, quoted in Litman, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

⁵⁸ Dominique Bouhours, *Entretien d’Artiste et d’Eugène* (Paris: Editions Bossard, 1920), p. 168. Cf. Litman, *op. cit.*, Chapters 3, 4 & *passim*.

⁵⁹ As Renato Barilli points out, the most plausible attribution of this text places it in the first half of the first century AD (references to contemporary events in the text do not go beyond the rule of Claudius). If this dating of the treatise is accurate, it was thus written towards the end of the dispute between Atticists and Asiatics, between a conception of rhetoric that concentrates on concision and agility of phrasing and a rhetoric which ‘grants considerable space to lexis and pathos’. What Barilli calls ‘the last great moment of Greek rhetoric’ is thus characterized by a movement from *techne* towards a conception of rhetoric as that which moves an audience. This opposition, as I shall argue later, is at the heart of the treatise on the sublime, and informs in particular Boileau’s reading of Longinus. Cf. Renato Barilli, *Rhetoric*, trans. Giuliana Menozzi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. 20 ff.

⁶⁰ Longinus, *On Great Writing*, trans. G.M.A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991), p. 3.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 400. Curtius’s brief

comments on Longinus do little to break the silence with which he claims the treatise has been met, or to rectify the ‘errors’ of those who have attempted to interpret the text. In Curtius’s history of the reception of the treatise, Boileau, for example, merely succeeds in silencing the text once more, by effacing it in polemics. ‘Longinus’ appears to Curtius, as to Boileau, Pope and others, as an example of the sublimity he describes. In this instance, however, we are offered an author who embodies to such a degree the ‘greatness’ or ‘height’ with which he is concerned, that not even Curtius — who appears to want to rescue the author of the treatise from silence and obscurity — can find anything to say about him. Curtius’s comments thus appear as an exemplary late instance of the phenomenon which concerns me here: while narratives of influence and pedagogy pervade Longinus’ text, it is singularly difficult to situate the treatise within such a narrative; rather, the work appears to present a fiction of learning or development and education.

⁶⁴ The two terms here — sublime and ‘great writing’ — require some clarification. I refer throughout to G.M.A. Grube’s translation of the treatise of Longinus, for a number of reasons, of which one of the most important, for purposes of clarity, is that this edition accords with the chapter divisions adhered to by most of the commentators to whom I shall refer. Grube differs from traditional translations, though, in rendering the title of the treatise as *On Great Writing*, rather than the more usual *On the Sublime*. As much of my argument here is as concerned with a tradition that translates *hypsos* as ‘sublime’ as it is with the treatise itself, I do not believe that this problematizes my argument to any great extent. It would ostensibly have given more coherence to the argument to have chosen a more traditional translation, but that would have been to sacrifice the clarity which Grube provides. As it is, I have referred to other editions where I have encountered productive or problematic differences, or where commentary on the treatise translates Longinus in a way that is at odds with or qualifies Grube’s

rendering. For a brief but useful commentary on the translation of the title, see D.A. Russell, ed., *On the Sublime* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), p. 57. Russell does not consider 'On Great Writing' a satisfactory translation of the title, but is equally unwilling to recommend the exclusive use of any one of the alternatives: 'sublimity', 'grandeur', 'elevation', 'magnificence', etc. The treatise itself is, of course, crucially concerned with questions of translation that are not unlike those that beset the commentator on Longinus. Specifically, the problem is one of temporal distance (for us, from Longinus; for Longinus, from Homer): how can that distance be overcome, and to what extent is mimesis a temporal activity?

⁶⁵ The terms in which the argument is couched at this point recall de Man's conception of irony in 'The Rhetoric of Temporality'. As will become clear below, however, Longinus' text is subject to a radical ambivalence on this point. While the sublime appears to construct a linguistic self in much the same way as irony does, what I will want to stress here is precisely what I will suggest later is a problematic element in de Man's formulation. While de Manian irony is thought in explicitly spatial terms, I wish to argue here that the Longinian sublime presents the temporality of that movement from one self to another, the movement that constitutes the self to begin with. In this respect, the sublime in Longinus will be seen to be closer to the conception of allegory which I outlined earlier.

⁶⁶ Weiskel's argument clearly concerns a Romantic conception of the sublime, which implicates, again, de Man. I will be less concerned here, in terms of an engagement with de Man, with situating this version of the sublime historically, as with elucidating a logic which I see at work in texts as historically and generically disparate as Longinus, Locke, Hegel and de Man.

⁶⁷ Nietzsche's assertion in *On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense* that truth is 'a moving army of metaphors' reveals only enigmatically the mobility of metaphor. See

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Early Greek Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. M.A. Mügge (Edinburgh: Foulis, 1911), p. 180. Again, de Man provides the exemplary formulation here: cf. Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), Chapter 4, *passim*.

⁶⁸ To 'translate' is, crucially, both to 'carry across' and 'to enrapture'. It is thus 'moving' in two senses of the word.

⁶⁹ Barilli, Renato, *Rhetoric*, p. 4.

⁷⁰ *The Older Sophists*, ed. Diels-Krantz (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1972), p. 52, quoted in Barilli, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

⁷¹ Barilli, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

⁷² Plato, *Gorgias*, trans. Walter Hamilton (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. 35.

⁷³ Longinus, *On Great Writing*, p. 4.

⁷⁴ The entire problematic of the sublime for Longinus is present in this statement of Caecilius'. The notion of a 'natural' origin which can nonetheless be appropriated as *techne* presents *in nuce* the paradox of a movement which is always already a return.

⁷⁵ Longinus, *On Great Writing*, p. 5.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Most famously, Alexander Pope describes Longinus thus in *An Essay on Criticism*: 'An ardent judge, who, zealous in his trust, / With warmth gives sentence, yet is always just; / Whose own example strengthens all his laws, / And is himself that great sublime he draws.' (ll. 677-80)

⁷⁹ Neil Hertz, 'A Reading of Longinus', *Critical Inquiry* 9 (March 1983), 579-596, 579.

⁸⁰ W.K. Wimsatt, Jr., & Cleanth Brooks, *Literary Criticism: A Short History* (New York: New York University Press, 1957), p. 101, quoted in Hertz, *op. cit.*, 580.

⁸¹ Hertz, 'A Reading of Longinus', p. 580.

⁸² This is one justification for Hertz's comparison between Longinus and the critic he claims most resembles the author of the treatise on the sublime, Walter Benjamin (although it must be noted that Hertz himself seems to repeat here — in the very lack of detailed explication of this affinity — the method he identifies in Longinus and Benjamin). Longinus and Benjamin, writes Hertz, exhibit a 'method of writing, which consists in the more or less violent fragmentation of literary bodies into "quotations", in the interest of building up a discourse of one's own, a discourse which, in its turn, directs attention to passages that come to serve as emblems of the critic's most acute, least nostalgic sense of what he is about. "Quotations in my work", Benjamin wrote, "are like robbers by the roadside who make an armed attack and relieve an idler of his convictions"'. Hertz, p. 591. The locus classicus for this juxtaposition of quotations is, of course, *The Waste Land*. One source for Eliot's critical concern with quotation is the criticism of Matthew Arnold: 'you cannot read his essay on *The Study of Poetry* without being convinced by the felicity of his quotations: to be able to quote as Arnold could is the best evidence of taste. The essay is a classic in English criticism: so much is said in so little space, with such economy and with such authority.' Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1933), p. 118 . To be able to quote as Eliot can, however, is not so much evidence of taste as of the disappearance of the community of taste which Arnold could still take for granted. Arnold seeks the *right* quotation, a quotation which will, in its perfection, act as a measure for all other poetry: 'Indeed there can be no more useful help for discovering what poetry belongs to the class of the truly excellent, and can therefore do us most good, than to have always in one's mind lines and expressions of the great masters, and to apply them as a touchstone to other poetry.' Arnold, 'The Study of Poetry', in *Essays in Criticism* (London: Macmillan, 1895), p. 17.

⁸³ Longinus, *On Great Writing*, p. 14.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Hertz, 'A Reading of Longinus', p. 582.

⁸⁶ Longinus, *On Great Writing*, pp. 17-18.

⁸⁷ Hertz, 'A Reading of Longinus', p. 583.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 583.

⁸⁹ Paul De Man, 'Hegel on the Sublime', in Mark Krupnick, ed., *Displacement: Derrida and After* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), p. 146.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 148.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 149.

⁹² Ibid., p. 148.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 149.

⁹⁴ G.W.F Hegel, *Aesthetics*, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), p. 374.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

Chapter 3: The Temporality of Rhetoric

'I wish to conjure up the figure of a ghostly writer who imagines himself posthumous so as to mediate between his past and future and to judge the present.'

(Jean-Michel Rabaté, *The Ghosts of Modernity*)

'Tel était le but des expériences: projeter dans le Temps des émissaires, appeler le Passé et l'Avenir au secours du Présent.'

(Chris Marker, *La Jetée*)

I

The opening paragraph of Paul de Man's 'The Rhetoric of Temporality' is concerned in a number of ways with historical change, specifically, with a particular kind of moment: a moment of transition which reveals itself as at the same time a moment of return.¹ What returns first of all in this essay is rhetoric. The traditional form' of rhetoric, says de Man, have fallen into disrepute. This was, however, merely a temporary aberration; the word de Man uses to describe this situation is 'eclipse'.² The eclipse of rhetoric by 'subjectivist' criticism is also, according to the logic of the metaphor, a certain *alignment* of those two modes of thought (that alignment in turn depending for its definition on the position of the critic), an instant at which they are simultaneously visible, though difficult, indeed dangerous, to see with the naked eye (and more perilous still when viewed through the scrutinizing lens of the theorist):

Since the advent, in the course of the nineteenth century, of a subjectivistic critical vocabulary, the traditional forms of rhetoric have fallen into disrepute. It is becoming increasingly clear, however, that this was only a temporary eclipse: recent developments in criticism reveal the possibility of a rhetoric that would no longer be normative or descriptive but that would more or less openly raise the question of the intentionality of rhetorical figures. Such concerns are implicitly present in many works in which the terms “mimesis”, “metaphor”, “allegory”, or “irony” play a prominent part. One of the main difficulties that still hamper these investigations stems from the association of rhetorical terms with value judgments that blur distinctions and hide the real structures.³

For de Man, it is precisely in terms of the difficulty of seeing that he couches the relationship between his own historical moment (the moment of the *return* of rhetoric, which, it turns out, is made up of several moments in the history of French and German criticism in this century) and the period in which rhetoric falls out of sight. Instead of a clear view of the relationship between rhetoric and the subjectivism which conceals it, the critic sees only a halo of ‘value judgments’. Temporarily blinded by the association of rhetoric with value judgments, the critic sees only the value-laden concepts of mimesis, metaphor, allegory, and irony where he ought to see the more substantial structures of rhetoric; ‘hence the need for historical clarification as a preliminary to a more systematic treatment of an intentional rhetoric.’⁴ In order properly to recognize the return of rhetoric for what it is, the critic must return to another, anterior, moment of transition, ‘the moment when the rhetorical key-terms undergo significant changes and are at the centre of important tensions.’⁵ In order to clearly account for one kind of temporal passage — the movement of rhetoric out of the shadow of subjectivist criticism — it is first necessary to traverse time in the opposite direction. If the alignment of the objects in our field of vision prevents us from seeing

clearly in and from the present, then we must attempt to survey that field from another vantage point: the name for that vantage point, at this early stage in de Man's essay, appears to be 'history'. History, though, will fail to retain this privileged position throughout the text; history, this text will conclude, is a lookout post from which we see nothing.

The above allegorization of de Man's opening remarks contains *in nuce* the problems which I want to address in this chapter (retaining, if possible, an awareness of the extent to which the text demands this kind of allegorization of the insights it presents). De Man's preliminary statements presage the later discussions of allegory and irony by identifying as illusory and mystifying a picture of the relationship between rhetoric and value that presents them first as existing simultaneously and second as involving the logical priority of one over the other: rhetoric is occluded by value judgments. This is precisely the illusion which de Man later identifies in what Baudelaire calls the *comique significatif*, the mistaken belief that the ironic sundering of the self in laughter (which happens instantaneously, or so de Man tells us) necessarily entails the prioritization of one 'self' over another, a mastery of one self over the other, in which irony becomes the comforting assertion of control by the subject over itself. There is no such prioritization, argue both Baudelaire and de Man (that this statement — or any other statement as to what de Man 'argues' in 'The Rhetoric of Temporality' — is complicated in ways which will form the very basis of the argument below). If this picture of the place of rhetoric in criticism is an explicitly static one, it is so at the expense of the awareness of its own anachronicity: 'their use [...] governed by assumptions that go back as far as the romantic period.' To escape the illusion of the spatial simultaneity of contemporary criticism and romanticism means in part to adopt another vocabulary: one which acknowledges time: 'one has to return [...] to the moment [...].' To recognize the irreconcilable anteriority of one's origins (in this case, the origins of modern criticism) is allegorical; to recognize the anteriority of that

realization, is ironic. The acknowledgement of the impossibility of inhabiting a present, spatially conceived, is, according to de Man, the insight shared by allegory and irony. However, the move de Man effects from allegory to irony fails to retain this element of temporality which he is at pains to assert is the same in both cases. What is elided in the shift from the consideration of allegory to that of irony, is time itself. The problem I wish to elucidate in de Man's text is partly the problem we have seen him already identify in the opening paragraph of 'The Rhetoric of Temporality': history, in the sense that de Man uses it here — 'history' as an awareness of chronology, of one's place in relation to a particular literary tradition (in other words, a limited definition of history, which will become more complex and problematic as the text progresses) — is in one sense peculiarly blurred (to use de Man's image) in this text. While de Man is quite attentive to the theorizations of allegory proposed in the romantic and post-romantic periods, the history he gives us is for the most part the history of the denigration of allegory in favour of the subjectivism of the symbol. One of the things that my present argument will suggest is that 'one has to return, in the history of European literature,' not only to the moment that de Man isolates, in the second half of the eighteenth century, when symbol and allegory enter into an important tension, but also to the rhetorical tradition which bequeaths those concepts to the eighteenth century. This project is not only a philological one, but is intended to restore to the picture of allegory which de Man presents, both a historical specificity and an awareness of the complex history of the question of time in discourses on allegory, be they rhetorical, aesthetic, or political.

In several crucial respects, the history of conceptions of allegory does not justify the homology proposed by de Man between allegory and irony. De Man's text is in a sense quite aware of this problem, and therefore unwilling to claim for allegory the transhistorical status that is claimed for irony: de Man ultimately sees allegory as a historically shifting and unstable concept which nevertheless affords

certain insights into temporality which become more clearly visible in irony. While de Man claims for allegory and irony an identical insight into the perilous temporal predicament of subjectivity — a claim which it is difficult to refute on the basis of de Man's own evidence — it is the impulse to level distinctions between the two concepts that concerns me here. To collapse allegory into irony is to forget de Man's own earlier claim that allegory is historically conditioned, while irony is a 'problem' inherent in subjectivity. The homology between the two is thus seriously at risk of proposing a *simultaneity* between the two moments of insight, a moment at which the timelessness of irony intersects with the temporality of allegory. At the same time, de Man wants to argue that such a simultaneity is precisely what is revealed as an illusion by both the allegorical and the ironic. The homology thus cannot fail to appear as the appropriation of allegory by irony: no matter how vehemently de Man tries to argue that it is not a matter of privileging one concept over the other (and, in fact, he does not argue this so much as merely assert it, as if he were aware of the futility of claiming that his text is not saying something that it clearly is), allegory and irony in this text inevitably enter into an intersubjective relationship, a master-slave dialectic in which irony will always have the upper hand. This may not be the picture de Man gives us at the level of explicit assertion (quite the opposite, in fact), but it is the relationship which obtains in his text. In what follows I will attempt to elucidate this claim — and the implications it has for a reading of de Man's conception of the relationship between time and history — in a detailed reading of 'The Rhetoric of Temporality' which will at the same time foreground the temporal complexities of the history of the concept of allegory.

Allegory and Rhetoric

The first historical moment to which de Man wishes to draw attention is ‘that which takes place in the latter half of the eighteenth century, when the word ‘symbol’ tends to supplant other denominations for figural language, including that of “allegory”.’⁶ De Man follows Gadamer here in identifying in the symbol a mode of simultaneity or stasis which is also a kind of unity: the rise of the symbol at the expense of allegory is coincident with the ‘growth of an aesthetics that refuses to distinguish between experience and the representation of that experience.’⁷ Allegory, writes Gadamer, ‘seems endlessly suggestive in the indefiniteness of its meaning, whereas the latter, as soon as its meaning is reached, has run its full course.’⁸ The indefiniteness of meaning to which Gadamer refers, returns us to the rhetorical tradition which it is quite clear even at this early stage will not concern de Man unduly. According to Gadamer’s model, allegory *does* distinguish between experience and its representation, while at the same time refusing to make its meaning explicit. Before proceeding to examine the implications this has for the readings of Romantic thought which de Man goes on to propose, I wish to return to much earlier formulations of the workings of allegory. De Man appears here to propose the period with which Gadamer is concerned as an originary moment in the history of modern criticism, a moment at which, as we have already noted, rhetoric and subjectivism enter into a problematic relationship. Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter to suggest an alternative history of the relationship of allegory to concepts of subjectivity, that relationship is already strikingly evident in earlier considerations of the allegorical. Indeed, the list of critics in whose work rhetoric has ‘returned’, which de Man provides in a footnote at the beginning of the text, reveals a concern with pre-romantic conceptions of rhetoric and allegory in the works, for example, of Barthes, Benjamin and Northrop Frye.⁹

For classical rhetoric, allegory appears first of all in the restricted sense of a trope.¹⁰ According to Demetrius, allegory is an example of sublime or heightened language; the term particularly applies to threats, ‘as when Dionysius said that “the cicalas shall sing to them from the ground.”’¹¹ It is a question, though, of a veiled threat: allegory is close to (though not identical with) a riddle. It is a trope which the orator uses to ‘veil his language’, which thus becomes ‘more alarming, and different people interpret it in different ways. What is clear and evident is apt to excite contempt, like men who have stripped themselves naked.’¹² Opposed to this nakedness or visibility, allegory is described by Demetrius in terms of darkness and invisibility: ‘for this reason the mysteries are veiled in allegories in order to inspire awe and horror, and to suggest darkness and night.’¹³ This element of invisibility or secrecy is present in the earliest meanings of the term, as is revealed in a brief consideration of its etymology. *Allegoria* is derived from *agoreuein*, to speak in the assembly (*agora*). In Homer, *agorein* already means to speak, in a more general sense, but retains at the same time the original sense of public discourse. *Agora* referred to both the political, legislative assembly and to the open market. The addition of *allos* (other) inverts the sense, giving a word which denotes that which is said in secret and also that which is unworthy of the crowd: a secret, guarded, language which is also an elite language used in philosophical and religious contexts.¹⁴ The model of allegory provided by classical sources appears to be an explicitly spatial one: allegory is a kind of speech which takes place in a (secret, private) space other than those normally reserved for oratory: the legislative assembly and the market. The history of the theorizations of the term from Demetrius onward reveals a progressive abstraction from this original sense, and at the same time the construction of allegory as a certain intentionality on the part of the speaker or writer.

This classical tradition exerts a considerable influence over Renaissance conceptions of allegory, though it is altered to such a degree in, for example, George

Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesie*, that the excess of which Demetrius was so wary appears to have become a defining characteristic:

And ye shall know that we may dissemble, I meane speake otherwise then we thinke, in earnest as well as in sport, under covert and darke termes, and in learned and apparant speaches, in short sentences, and by long ambage and circumstance of wordes, and finally as well when we lye as when we tell truth. To be short every speach wrested from his owne naturall signification to another not altogether so naturall is a kinde of dissimulation, because the wordes beare contrary countenance to th'intent. But properly & in his principall vertue Allegoria is when we do speake in sence translative and wrested from the owne signification, neverthelesse applied to another not altogether contrary, but having much conveniencie with it as before we said of the metaphore [...].¹⁵

Allegory here is not merely other than plain, open or public speaking, but has entered into a highly problematic relationship with truth and with the intentionality of a speaking subject.

Allegory and Symbol

The discussion of the traditional opposition between allegory and symbol appears in 'The Rhetoric of Temporality' as a necessary preamble to the treatment of irony with which de Man is ultimately concerned. As we have already seen, the priority of allegory in the text is in part necessitated by de Man's assertion — which I shall return to later — that allegory is a historical phenomenon, while irony is in some sense more essential to the whole question of subjectivity and its relation to

temporality. Again, I wish to stress here de Man's assertion of the contemporaneity of the two concepts, and keep in sight the problem (a problem in our reading of de Man as much as for the structure de Man sets up) which this raises. The historicity to which he is at pains to draw attention in his opening paragraph (a historicity which at that moment in the text will allow us to see the place of allegory in criticism more clearly) is submerged in assertions of simultaneity and contemporaneity once de Man begins to consider in detail those romantic writers for whom the opposition between allegory and *symbol* is most crucial. The question of time with which the text opens, begins to be elided in favour of spatial or geographical (to be more precise, national) differentiations between the various theorizations under consideration. Just as de Man's first footnote — outlining the main twentieth-century (described, problematically, by de Man as merely 'recent') contributions to a rhetorical theory of allegory — had seen the topic in terms of French and German approaches, so the first broadening move of the argument is to identify the question as one addressed by German romanticism. For Goethe, Schiller and Schelling, allegory is seen either as excessively rational or as mystifying, as claiming for itself a contact with the superhuman origin of language. In both cases, it involves an appeal to an exterior principle, an impulse which German criticism abandons in the course of the nineteenth century, in favour of the primacy of symbolic unity. In the course of that transition, though, it becomes difficult to distinguish clearly the allegorical from the symbolic. The works of Hölderlin, for example, 'can at any rate not be described in terms of the antinomy between allegory and symbol — and the same could be said, albeit in a different way, of Goethe's late style.'¹⁶ The text reaches an apparent impasse at this point and it becomes necessary to shift the ground of the argument in quite a literal fashion: to move, specifically, to English theorizations of allegory, and in particular, to Coleridge. This move is effected, says de Man, in the interests of gaining 'a broader perspective'. The concept of perspective, of gaining a particular vantage point from which to view the allegorical problematic, is again worth

noting: it is proleptic of precisely the question of space and vision which will be crucial in the consideration of Coleridge's writings on allegory. As with so many of the shifts from one frame to another in this text, it can be seen as a prior figuring — in spatial and visual terms — of a problematic which will turn out to be complicated by the intrusion of temporality. While time will become a crucial element in the assertive core of the essay, de Man persistently stages the historical shifts he makes in terms of the mapping or surveillance of a spatial field.

As de Man points out, a superficial reading of Coleridge's many references to the opposition between allegory and symbol appears to place his thought squarely on the side of the unity and concreteness of the latter, in opposition to the abstraction of the former. Coleridge, however, is far from ignorant of the complexity of the history of these terms in a 'purely' rhetorical context. As John A. Hodgson has argued, Coleridge to some extent revives the notion — which persists from Classical writings to the Renaissance — of allegory as extended metaphor, and initiates the association of the symbol with the trope of synecdoche.¹⁷ Allegory is thus for Coleridge one element in a series of tropes and concepts which cannot simply be categorized as abstract or concrete. More important for de Man's argument, though, is the manner in which it becomes increasingly difficult for Coleridge to retain the initial distinction that he makes. The *locus classicus* of Coleridge's expression of that distinction is the passage from *The Statesman's Manual* to which de Man initially refers:

It is among the miseries of the present age that it recognizes no medium between *Literal* and *Metaphorical*. Faith is either to be buried in the dead letter, or its name and honors usurped by a counterfeit product of the mechanical understanding, which in the blindness of self-complacency confounds SYMBOLS with ALLEGORIES. Now an allegory is but a translation of abstract notions into a picture-language which is itself nothing but

an abstraction from objects of the senses; the principle being more worthless even than its phantom proxy, both alike unsubstantial, and the former shapeless to boot. On the other hand a Symbol [...] is characterized by a translucence of the Special in the Individual or of the General in the Especial or of the Universal in the General. Above all by the translucence of the Eternal through and in the Temporal. It always partakes of the Reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part in that Unity, of which it is the representative. The other are but empty echoes which the fancy arbitrarily associates with apparitions of matter, less beautiful but not less shadowy than the sloping orchard or hill-side pasture-field seen in the transparent lake below.¹⁸

The structure of the symbol in this passage is — as de Man points out — that of synecdoche: the symbol is always part of the totality that it represents, and there is a consequent continuity of perception and imagination. The allegorical abstraction, on the other hand, renders its referent even more immaterial than the allegorical sign itself ('and the former shapeless to boot').

As de Man shows, there is a crucial ambiguity in this passage: in stressing the value of the symbol, Coleridge emphasizes not organic or material richness, but rather 'translucence'. On the one hand, Coleridge clearly wants to assert the synecdochal nature of the symbol: the symbol is part of a larger whole, which it also signifies. The spatial relation of part to whole, though, is rendered ambiguous by the attribution to the symbol of the quality of translucence. The 'translucence of the special in the individual' is not essentially any different in its structure from that of allegory, which functions at the end of the passage as a kind of reflection. In both cases, what is made visible is something which cannot in itself be an object of the senses. In the case of the symbol, it is the eternal, in the case of allegory, abstract

qualities or concepts. It is curious, notes de Man, that Coleridge should characterize allegory as *mere* reflection when symbolic translucence is the revelation of an equally insubstantial source: 'symbol and allegory alike now have a common origin beyond the world of matter.'¹⁹ All of this is further complicated by Coleridge's assertion elsewhere that allegory can indeed combine the parts to form a consistent whole (in other words, produce a synecdochal structure).²⁰ As with the previous examples from German literature and criticism, a distinction that appeared clear has become blurred, this time in quite explicitly visual terms: if what is *seen* in allegory and the symbol is something extraneous to the image itself, it becomes extraordinarily difficult to maintain the distinction — on which Coleridge depends — between translucence and reflection.

As I have noted already, I consider it crucial that de Man is concerned to think through the theme of allegory at this stage in terms of metaphors of vision and space. More to the point, de Man seems here to want to hold onto a conception of representation as the visual surveillance of a spatial field containing elements which are all simultaneously present. That field, though, is also characterized by a particular kind of invisibility to which our attention was first drawn by the image of the eclipse. Both allegory and irony, in the discussion of Coleridge, simultaneously make visible and occlude their referents by situating them beyond the reach of sensory perception. Similarly, so far in de Man's argument, the unexpected *alignment* of allegory and symbol has rendered them strangely blurred or indistinct. As I argued at the outset, the notion of the eclipse at the beginning of de Man's text appears itself to occlude the temporal relations between the topics at hand (in the first instance, allegory and 'subjectivism').

Le temps découvre la vérité

Time, of course, does not remain absent for long from a text entitled 'The Rhetoric of Temporality' (though it is constantly elided at the text's own rhetorical level, and nowhere more so than in the assertion of the ostensibly authentic expression of the temporality of the subject: the later discussion of irony). I wish to suggest at this point that de Man has avoided the question of time at the outset, at the moment in his text when he is ostensibly already *elsewhere* in time, when he has traversed time in order to restore something he initially refers to as history. One of the ways in which this avoidance is effected is the curious absence from the essay of any reference to a text I take to be an exemplary exploration of the relations between allegory, visual or spatial representation and temporality: those passages in Schopenhauer which discuss aesthetics in terms of an opposition between the idea and the concept. I wish to turn briefly to Schopenhauer in order first of all to suggest a certain blindness on the part of de Man's text and secondly to shed some light on the problematic described above.

If the passage from *The Statesman's Manual* appeared at first to state unproblematically a certain prejudice against allegory, accusing it of referring solely to abstract concepts, Schopenhauer's remarks seem no less vehement. To start from the concept is, for Schopenhauer, 'forbidden' in art. Allegory is the 'intentional and avowed employment of a work of art for the expression of a concept;' it is a work of art which means something (a concept) different from what it represents. The idea, which is the true object of art, expresses itself directly; it does not require mediation. That which is expressed by something different is a concept, which cannot be made an object of perception. The most obvious failing of allegory is that it does not demand the completeness of the work of art. Schopenhauer goes on to propose — in a discussion of Correggio's 'Genius of Fame' — a distinction between the real and the nominal meaning of an artwork. The nominal meaning of the 'Genius of Fame' is an

allegorical one, while the real meaning is the expression of an idea, 'beautiful winged youth'. The transition from the idea to the concept is for Schopenhauer 'always a fall'; in the case of visual representation, this is a fall into language. Allegory involves 'making a picture also do service as a legend, as a hieroglyphic, invented for the pleasure of those for whom the true nature of art can never appeal'.²¹ The artwork is therefore forced to serve two purposes; the example which Schopenhauer gives — and it is not an entirely clear or persuasive one — is that of a statue which also serves as a candelabrum. The essential difference, argues Schopenhauer, between the real and the nominal or allegorical meaning of an artwork is that the latter need not necessarily have been expressed in painting or sculpture; it is a linguistic meaning, extraneous to the work itself:

Or if a man has made known a truth, which is of importance either as a maxim for practical life, or as insight for science, but it has not been believed; an allegorical picture representing time as it lifts the veil, and discloses the naked figure of Truth, will affect him powerfully; but the same effect would be produced by the legend 'Le temps découvre la vérité'. for what really produces the effect here is the abstract thought, not the object of perception.²²

Two things are worth noting about Schopenhauer's brief discussion of allegory. First, in the above quotation, it is important to recognize again the place of time in allegorical representation. If the earlier description presents a model of allegory which demands that an artwork preserve two entirely separate kinds of meaning at the same time, the picture described above complicates this claim by introducing temporality as both the referent of the allegorical work and the means by which that work reveals truth in the first place. It is impossible to avoid an identification in Schopenhauer's example, between the artist who makes known a truth, and the figure of time itself, which also

reveals truth. If the artist can be compared with time itself, if he allegorizes his own revelatory project in the figure of time, then it appears he is caught up in precisely the kind of splitting or simultaneous adherence to two kinds of meaning that Schopenhauer has already claimed afflicts the allegorical work. If the truth which the artist reveals is the truth of time, then it seems most productive to see the artist's predicament — his adherence to both painterly and linguistic meaning, to the real and the nominal — as a temporal predicament. I will attempt to clarify and justify this assertion by turning to Schopenhauer's discussion of poetic allegory, which follows immediately the passages on the plastic arts.

From the preceding denigration of allegory in pictorial representation, Schopenhauer moves swiftly to the assertion that there is one mode of expression in which allegory is acceptable:

in plastic arts it leads away from what is perceptibly given, the proper object of all art, to abstract thoughts; but in poetry the relation is reversed; for here what is directly given in words is the concept, and the first aim is to lead from this to the object of perception, the representation of which must be undertaken by the imagination of the hearer.²³

In poetry, the concept is the material, 'the immediately given', and therefore, according to Schopenhauer, it is acceptable in order to call up quite different perceptions. This difference, of course, is dependent on the imagination of a hearer or reader, and therefore introduces a temporal element in the production of meaning. To return to the pictorial artist who is caught between the poles of the plastic and the linguistic, in the light of this second description of allegory, is to recognize that the timebound revealer of truth is sundered not only by the antithesis of concept and idea, but also by the need to appeal to a subsequent moment: the moment at which his

picture/text is interpreted. If time is the revealer of truth, the allegorist is one who is unable to freeze the manifestation of truth in the simultaneity of idea and expression. That moment of putative simultaneity — which constitutes true art for Schopenhauer — is irretrievably split by its reliance on language: the linguistic concept appears in this text as different from the work itself in two temporal respects: it is paradoxically both anterior — an obscure prior conception requiring the mediation of the work in order to come to light — and posterior (the subsequent moment of reading or interpretation). The extreme form of the temporality of allegory is referred to by Schopenhauer as the *symbol*, and is in essence the antithesis of the unity to which romanticism gives the same name:

But in poetry, as in plastic art, the allegory passes into the symbol if there is merely an arbitrary connection between what is presented to perception and the abstract significance of it. For as all symbolism rests, at bottom, on an agreement, the symbol has this among other disadvantages, that in time its meaning is forgotten, and then it is dumb.²⁴

The meaning of allegory — at the extremity which is symbolism — is entirely dependent on a temporal accident of alignment which will in time be elided. If allegory is then no longer able to speak to its hearers, it is precisely because of the irreducible temporal distance between speaker and hearer. Allegory, again, according to this formulation, attests to the irrecoverable pastness of its meaning.

In the Void of Temporal Difference

Much of this, certainly, is already present in de Man's initial formulations of the allegorical problematic, and many of Schopenhauer's concerns here make it into the later consideration of the temporality of allegory and irony. The above discussion is intended, though, to highlight the close connection which already exists in Schopenhauer between the time of allegory and spatial representation, a connection which de Man is reluctant or unable to assert, though it persistently structures the shifts in his argument. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the passages in which de Man attempts to refute the traditional claim that the central problematic of romanticism is that of the relationship between subject and object. Again, this section of the argument relates to a particular moment of transition, and on the effort to construct a certain kind of (historical) perspective on that moment:

The main interpretative effort of English and American historians of romanticism has focused on the transition that leads from eighteenth century to romantic nature poetry. Among American interpreters of romanticism, there is general agreement about the importance of eighteenth-century antecedents for Wordsworth and Coleridge, but when it comes to describing just in what way romantic nature poetry differs from the earlier forms, certain difficulties arise. They center on the tendency shared by all commentators to define the romantic image as a relationship between mind and nature, between subject and object.²⁵

The move from eighteenth-century poetry to romanticism proper is a transition from a theory of analogy to something 'a lot less formal, less purely associative and external than it is in the eighteenth century.'²⁶ The relationship between mind and nature becomes in romanticism less a relationship between subject and object than one of

'affinity' or 'sympathy'; that is, according to de Man, an intersubjective relationship which is 'in the last analysis [...] a relationship of the subject toward itself.'²⁷ This latter realization becomes in turn a source of some unease for romantic poets; hence, suggests de Man, the propensity of Coleridge to overstate the priority of natural objects in an effort to preserve the intersubjectivity of the relationship.²⁸

It is at this point that time enters into the argument in an explicit fashion. Coleridge attempts to displace the intrasubjective relationship onto nature itself. As de Man puts it, 'the finite nature of the objective world is seen, at that moment, in spatial terms, and the substitution of vital (i.e., in Coleridge, intersubjective) relationships that are dynamic, for the physical relationships that exist between entities in the natural world is not necessarily convincing.'²⁹ Wordsworth, on the other hand, 'is more clearly conscious of what is involved here when he sees the same dialectic between the self and nature in temporal terms.'³⁰ Wordsworth provides, in fact, the temporal element which has thus far been missing from allegory. However, the problem I have been attempting to elucidate here does not vanish in the assertion that there is a temporality of the allegorical to which we must pay attention. What de Man asserts here in a reading of Wordsworth is the crucial observation that allegory is the awareness of a certain temporal predicament of the subject. The attempt to render spatial or simultaneous the relationship between subject and object is revealed here as an illusion: allegory is thus a form of demystification:

Whereas the symbol postulates the possibility of an identity or identification, allegory designates primarily a distance in relation to its own origin, and, renouncing the nostalgia and the desire to coincide, it establishes its language in the void of this temporal difference. In so doing, it prevents the self from an illusory identification with the non-self, which is now fully, though painfully, recognized as a non-self.³¹

The assertion of the superiority of the symbol over allegory thus also appears as a form of self-mystification. The moment at which de Man is able to make this claim is a classic one for deconstructive criticism: the moment at which the painful demystification occurs for Wordsworth is itself re-allegorized in the reading which de Man performs here.

A Temporal Predicament

As I have noted above, de Man claims that the temporalities of allegory and irony amount ultimately to the same phenomenon: the awareness of a certain 'temporal predicament' in which the subject is caught. In turning to the more explicit consideration of irony with which the latter part of 'The Rhetoric of Temporality' is concerned, I wish to argue that precisely what is lost or elided in that discussion is time itself. As we have seen, de Man is at pains to point out that irony and allegory are in no sense intersubjective phenomena. In this context, intersubjectivity appears to name the refusal to recognize the temporality which de Man has identified in the two concepts. It is, however, in the transition from allegory to irony that de Man himself begins explicitly to deny the temporality which he earlier claimed as the common ground of allegory and irony. As I have suggested, there is already in the opening paragraphs of the essay, a tendency to introduce the problematic temporality of allegory as if the problem at hand were one that could be conceived in spatial terms: hence the persistent figuring of the question in terms of a visual field and according to a certain geographic mapping of the various theories. It is in the discussion of irony, however — and specifically as it relates to Baudelaire's 'De l'essence du rire' — that this becomes most apparent. De Man fails, in this section of the essay, to avoid falling

back into an intersubjective and therefore spatial conception of irony. In other words, what is lost in this part of the argument is the temporality at the heart of the allegorical. Irony appears, in the discussion of Baudelaire's text, as a mode characterized by simultaneity, by a specifically spatial arrangement of 'selves' which occludes the historicity of allegory, in the name of the 'universality' of the ironic.

De Man claims that irony is 'a problem that exists within the self', not a historical problem, or the 'history of an error', and that this enables him to bypass history in the turn from allegory to irony.³² Indeed, he claims, irony itself demonstrates the very 'impossibility of our being historical'.³³ The conflict between allegory and symbol, we are told, is of a different order from that of irony: that tension is itself a historical phenomenon and it is, apparently, that very historicity which must be overcome before proper theorization can begin. In this sense, for de Man, the history of allegory and symbol *is* the 'history of an error', an error which must be exposed in advance of a proper theoretical exploration of the concepts themselves. In other words, history is that which leads theoretical reflection astray at the outset, demanding instead what looks itself more like a philological 'history' of allegory and symbol.³⁴ The 'historical' procedure which animates the first part of de Man's argument — the section on allegory and symbol — is justified, he says, by the historical facts of the case. There is a history to address here: the history of an error, of the mystifying power of the concept of symbol in the romantic period. The case of irony is different, the argument goes, because irony itself denies the possibility of historicity, or, rather, denies the possibility of 'our being historical'. This is already to place irony outside of the historical considerations of the first part of the text, to situate the problem of irony in relation to a 'we' which could not be posited in the earlier section (could not be posited because of a historical distance which had first to be overcome). Irony, unlike the problems thrown up by allegory and symbol, appears at this point to be a universal phenomenon by virtue of the interior structure of the trope itself:

But in the case of irony one has to start out from the structure of the trope itself, taking one's cue from texts that are de-mystified and, to a large extent, themselves ironical. For that matter, the target of their irony is very often the claim to speak about human matters as if they were facts of history. It is a historical fact that irony becomes increasingly conscious of itself in the course of demonstrating the impossibility of our being historical. In speaking of irony we are dealing not with the history of an error but with a problem that exists within the self.³⁵

The logic of the passage from which the above quotation is excerpted is, I think, problematic and telling. On the one hand, de Man justifies what he calls a historical approach toward the concepts of allegory and irony, an approach legitimized by the fact that those concepts are available only through the complicated history by which they have been bequeathed to us. To begin to theorize those concepts, one must first, as we saw at the outset, traverse the historical distance which separates *now* from *then*. I will leave aside for the moment the initially striking problem with this argument: the structure of allegory as it is presented by de Man in the first section of 'The Rhetoric of Temporality' appears to render extremely problematic any such uncomplicated movement from the present — 'theoretical' — moment to an anterior and 'historical' one. There is, of course, no essential reason why the logic of the topic at hand should problematize the logic of de Man's own argument; the move which the argument then makes, however, relies on just such an appeal to the interior logic of the object of de Man's analysis — in this case, irony — in order to justify the movement outside history which he claims is both possible and necessary when he comes to discuss irony itself. At the same time, of course — as the quotation above makes clear — history has not entirely disappeared: the ahistorical nature of irony is itself 'a historical fact'. The

irony of this assertion — and the context of the statement demands, I think, that it be taken ironically, though it remains unclear whether that irony is of the same order as the irony under discussion — ought to help us to keep within our sights the historicity which is apparently being abandoned at this point.

The Fall

De Man's text emerges from the extreme complexity of the passage described above — the passage in which de Man appears to take his leave of what he has been calling *history* — with the following audacious statement: '[t]hus freed from the necessity of respecting historical chronology, we can take Baudelaire's text, 'De l'essence du rire', as a starting point.'³⁶ As we shall see later, historical chronology is precisely what de Man's own text cannot escape, but for the moment it is enough to recognize the importance of the 'starting point' here. A starting point, de Man has claimed, is just what was unavailable in the earlier discussion of allegory and symbol. Rather, in that case, the critic was presented with a plurality of 'starting points' which it was necessary to arrange according to a geography rather than a chronology. Those points could not, as we have seen, properly be conceived as originary or inaugurating moments for the task at hand, because they were historical. A purely theoretical consideration of the allegorical had first to attempt to cross a historical horizon beyond which the antithetical concepts would become visible. In the case of irony, the vantage point from which the theorization can begin is apparently already within view. The text of Baudelaire's which de Man chooses to take as the starting point is one which is crucially concerned with time, movement, travel and the visual, and — as I shall argue — singularly unamenable to the ahistorical appropriation which de Man effects.

De Man's reading of Baudelaire's text centres around an example which he claims 'best reveals the predominant traits of an ironic consciousness: the spectacle of a man tripping and falling in the street.'³⁷ It is not, however, as we shall see, the 'spectacle' of the fall that is, for de Man, truly ironic; it is, however, for Baudelaire, as a spectacle, a fall observed by another subject, that this image is first introduced. Before describing the doubling of the self that occurs for the consciousness of a philosopher — and only philosophers, says Baudelaire, are capable of such *dédoublement* — he first describes what happens when we observe the fall of another in the street:

To take one of the most commonplace examples in life, what is there so delightful in the sight of a man falling on the ice or in the street, or stumbling at the end of a pavement, that the countenance of his brother in Christ should contract in such an intemperate manner, and the muscles of his face should suddenly leap into life like a timepiece at midday or a clockwork toy? The poor devil has disfigured himself, at the very least; he may even have broken an essential member. Nevertheless the laugh has gone forth, sudden and irrepressible.³⁸

Two things, I think, are worth noting in this initial mention of the example of the fall. First, at this stage it is clear that the phenomenon described is an intersubjective one: the spectator laughs because he feels a certain superiority over the faller: "look at me! I am not falling," he seems to say. "Look at me! I am walking upright. I would never be so silly as to fail to see a gap in the pavement or a cobblestone blocking the way."³⁹ This sense of superiority, says Baudelaire, is the 'primordial law of laughter'. The second point to which I wish to draw attention in this passage is Baudelaire's choice of metaphor for the one who laughs: he is like a timepiece or a clockwork

automaton; one laughs, in this example, *in time*, according to a chronological law over which one has no control. It is precisely this relation to time which is lost in de Man's reading of the text, for it is not from this example that he extrapolates a conception of the ironic consciousness, but from a very particular form of this phenomenon, which he then proceeds to read back into the other examples of the comic provided by Baudelaire. The passage on which de Man focuses does indeed begin to situate the comic within consciousness:

The comic and the capacity for laughter are situated in the laugher and by no means in the object of his mirth. The man who trips would be the last to laugh at his own fall, unless he happened to be a philosopher, one who had acquired by habit a power of rapid self-division and thus of assisting as a disinterested spectator at the phenomenon of his own ego. But such cases are rare.⁴⁰

This doubling of the self is characterized by Baudelaire as both a fall and a certain kind of knowledge. An earlier example he provides of the genesis of laughter involves the character of Virginie (from Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's novel of 1788, *Paul et Virginie*), a 'primitive' who, on seeing a caricature for the first time, reacts with fear of the unknown. Were she to continue to be exposed to the caricature, laughter would follow, a laughter linked to her fall from a state of innocence and purity, bringing with it — as in the Biblical Fall — a knowledge accompanied by suffering. Caricature, for Baudelaire, is the expression of a double, or contradictory, feeling, characterized by violence of representation and inaccessibility of idea:

Caricature is a double thing; it is both drawing and idea — the drawing violent, the idea caustic and veiled. And a network of such elements distresses a simple mind which is accustomed to understand by intuition things as simple as itself.

Virginie has glimpsed; now she gazes. Why? She is gazing at the unknown. Nevertheless she hardly understands either what it means or what it is for. And yet, do you observe that sudden folding of the wings, that shudder of a soul that veils herself and wants to draw back? The angel has sensed that there is offence in it.⁴¹

For de Man, the fall involved in the *dédoublement* of the self is a fall into consciousness, or rather into self-consciousness: into a realm which is entirely discontinuous with that of the falling, empirical, self. This, for de Man is the realm of the temporal and of the linguistic, both conceived only as categories of the self and of self-knowledge. Once the splitting of the self has occurred, and the linguistic self has retreated to an ironic distance from which the empirical self is observed (and, of course, in the Baudelaire text, ridiculed), there begins a series of re-ironizing movements, an escalation whereby the self avoids the mystificatory reunification which belongs to the symbolic. The empirical self exists in a state of inauthenticity, while the self in language asserts the knowledge of this inauthenticity. The capacity to assert this knowledge belongs specifically to those who deal in language: artists and philosophers (for Baudelaire, it is only the philosopher who can achieve *dédoublement*). The self is transferred from the empirical world into a world constituted out of, and in, language, a language which the self 'finds in the world like one entity among others, but that remains unique in being the only entity by means of which it can differentiate itself from the world.'⁴²

Language divides the self into an empirical self and a self which is 'like a sign in its attempt at differentiation and self-definition.'⁴³ This comparison is crucial: for de Man, the sign is characterized by a temporal relationship with an anterior sign: between the two exists a radical discontinuity: a temporal discontinuity, a 'relationship of pure anteriority'. But the event of *dédoublement* is not, for de Man, a temporal

one: rather it is an instantaneous process, an 'instant at which the two selves, the empirical as well as the ironic, are simultaneously present, juxtaposed within the same moment but as two irreconcilable and disjointed beings.'⁴⁴ De Man claims that, in Baudelaire, 'irony appears as an instantaneous process that takes place rapidly.' He fails to make the distinction, quite explicit in Baudelaire, between the 'instantaneous' and the 'rapid'. Baudelaire distinguishes between the 'grotesque' or 'absolute comic', which involves an instantaneous unity (shared, of course, with the symbolic), and the 'ordinary' or 'significant comic', which involves a delay:

But the absolute comic, which comes much closer to nature, emerges as a *unity* which calls for the intuition to grasp it. There is but one criterion of the grotesque and that is laughter — immediate laughter. Whereas with the significant comic it is quite permissible to laugh a moment late — that is no argument against its validity; it all depends upon one's quickness of analysis.⁴⁵

For de Man, on the other hand, the relationship of anteriority or of delay is the preserve only of a *re-ironization* of consciousness subsequent to the initial event: 'the ironic subject at once has to ironize its own predicament and observe in turn.'⁴⁶ De Man does not consider that the event — the fall — is itself an occurrence, as it were, 'in turn': that is, that it is already a temporal event, that the temporal is not merely a category within consciousness, that the 'empirical self' is itself a representation, that, finally, there is no simultaneity.

'les yeux pleins des grandes images...'

According to de Man's formulation, the initial event of irony — the splitting of the self — is not temporal but spatial: the simultaneous separation of the self into an observing self (linguistic, ironic) and a self which is under surveillance (empirical) effectively bypasses the representative relationship of anteriority in order to erect a model of just such a relationship within consciousness. The extent to which Baudelaire is aware of representation as already present at the level of the 'empirical' self can be ascertained from the example of the character of Virginie. Baudelaire provides a fictional narrative concerning a character in turn appropriated from the fiction of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre. Virginie herself is already, upon arriving in Paris, engaged in an act of representation, 'still bathed in sea-mists and gilded by the tropic sun, her eyes full of great primitive images of waves, mountains and forests.'⁴⁷ Thus, before the initial ironizing contact is established in Baudelaire's text, a series of representations, both textual and visual, has already been set up. Virginie's images of waves, mountains, and forests do not, of course, contribute to the kind of self-knowledge that de Man demands of the ironic; she remains 'the great and typical figure ... who perfectly symbolizes absolute purity and naiveté.'⁴⁸ They constitute nonetheless a group of images which takes its place in the series Virginie/de Saint-Pierre/Baudelaire. When Virginie comes face to face with a caricature, Baudelaire introduces, at an abstract level, the notion of a 'fall' — in this case, from a state of purity or innocence — which will later become concrete in the case of the man who falls in the street. The link between these two senses of 'falling' is crucial. The narrative of Virginie's encounter is broken off before laughter begins; that is not to say, however, that a certain splitting or doubling has not already taken place both at the level of Baudelaire's text (the citation of the de Saint-Pierre novel) and in Virginie herself (a split between the Virginie who is in Paris and the Virginie who is not: the Virginie whose eyes are full

of 'primitive images'). The 'fall', when it comes, happens not to Virginie, but to the man who trips: but the series of representations of which this fall is part has already taken place in the earlier narrative. When de Man fails to cite the example of Virginie, he tells — literally — only half the story. The advent of an ironic consciousness occurs, for de Man, *ex nihilo*: the series of discontinuous re-ironizations occurs only after the spontaneous event of *dédoublement*. The fall itself does not partake of the ostensibly allegorical relationship between signs; this relationship exists only within the boundaries of consciousness: that is, for de Man, of the authentically temporal predicament of the self.

It is at this point — in the assertions of the absolute interiority of the temporal and of the discontinuous relation of sign to previous sign — that de Man abandons entirely the radical potential of the concept of allegory. The insistence on the 'authentic' (temporal) relationship between signs has been won at the cost of the temporality of representation: that is, of a representation which is not an element within the escalating movement that is ironic self-knowledge. The knowledge — on the part of the ironic self — of the 'inauthenticity' of the empirical self is predicated on the 'secularization of time into space;⁴⁹ it is only by positing an irreversibility of ironic escalation that it can be contained within the limits of consciousness. To suggest that the relationship of temporal discontinuity and irrecoverable anteriority might be 'reversed', that the ironizing series might extend backwards to encompass both the initial *dédoublement* and the empirical self — as representations — would not be possible within the terms of de Man's argument. The notion of authenticity, and of authentic temporality as a function of the self would be liquidated in the process. This is precisely, however, what I wish to argue here: that the temporal relationship of discontinuity is not a function of interiority and self-knowledge, that it is within what de Man calls the 'empirical' that anteriority, discontinuity, and representation are to be encountered. In other words, I wish to argue for the temporality of the relationship

between self and non-self. Within the parameters of the discussion of allegory, symbol, and irony, the allegorical and the ironic cannot be subsumed under the rubric of 'figural language in general': the latter, for de Man, is identical with the interiority of the self; on the other hand, the concept of allegory provides a model of the extension or reversibility of discontinuity proposed above.

II

Towards the end of 'The Rhetoric of Temporality', de Man offers what he calls 'a brief comparison of the temporal structure of allegory and irony';⁵⁰ the comparison is centred around Wordsworth's poem, 'A slumber did my spirit seal'. It is in de Man's reading of this poem that the complexity of his response to the conceptions of time at work in allegory and irony reveals itself fully as the rejection of the fundamentally pessimistic vision of the temporality of representation offered by allegory.⁵¹ At the same time, the temporal structure with which de Man is concerned is shown to be one of crossing or *chiasmus*, in which it becomes impossible to maintain the proper distinctions between life and death, past and future, and self and other. Within the context of the parameters already set out by the essay at this point — the initial equivalence proposed between allegory and irony giving way to the apparent clarity of a point of view from which they are revealed as embodying two very different models of representative time — there is a further, curious, crossing involved here: de Man claims, at the outset of this section of his argument, that Wordsworth's poem 'has the fundamentally profigurative pattern that is one of the characteristics of allegory. The text clearly is not ironic, either in its tonality or in its meaning.'⁵² It seems odd that de Man should introduce such apparently unexamined terminology at this point in the essay: it is nowhere apparent in the discussion of Baudelairean allegory that precedes this section,

that we are dealing with a question of 'tonality' (still less, perhaps, with a straightforward 'meaning' that might be both contained and expressed by such a 'tone'). Rather, up to this point in the essay, de Man has been at pains to point out the complex temporality of irony as a *rhetorical trope*, not at all as a tone or a meaning. It is unclear, then, why he should apparently abandon that approach in favour of these ostensibly 'neutral' terms. A further confusion arises here, though, with regard to the claim de Man is making (that the poem is not ironic but allegorical). It is first worth quoting Wordsworth's poem in its entirety:

A slumber did my spirit seal,
I had no human fears:
She seem'd a thing that could not feel
The touch of earthly years.

No motion has she now, no force
She neither hears nor sees
Roll'd round in earth's diurnal course
With rocks and stones and trees!⁵³

De Man initially comments on the poem thus:

Examining the temporal structure of this text, we can point to the successive descriptions of two stages of consciousness, one belonging to the past and mystified, the other to the *now* of the poem, the stage that has recovered from the mystification of a past now presented as being in error; the 'slumber' is a condition of non-awareness.⁵⁴

The poem, then, seems to involve a movement from a state of ignorance to one of knowledge, from blindness to insight, a kind of 'fall' into the painful realm of experience on the part of the speaker, a fall which mirrors the descent of Lucy into the earth. In the first stanza, the speaker is deluded into thinking Lucy immortal, in the second he has been brought to his senses by her demise. Before we begin to examine the complexities of de Man's reading of the poem, it is worth noting even at the initial stage of this rather obvious reading of the poem's manifest significance, that there seems already to be an admittedly schematic sense in which this first-degree interpretation defies de Man's explicit statement that the poem is not ironic. Is this not precisely the structure of ironic *dédoublement* as earlier elaborated alongside Baudelaire's 'De l'essence du rire'? Wordsworth's text involves the positing of two 'selves': the initial self which succumbs to the error of imagining that Lucy's manifest appearance is the index of an inviolable extra-temporal being, and a second self which observes the first from a subsequent, enlightened, perspective. The text then necessarily suggests another, third, self: a further ironization in which both moments can be seen together as a movement toward this third point itself: the point from which the whole process can be spoken of as having taken place in the past (as we shall see, there is, however, a crucial sense in which nothing in this poem takes place in the past, but in a projected or imagined future). De Man, in fact, compares the dead Lucy to the falling man in Baudelaire's essay, but surely it is rather the speaker of this poem who ironizes his own fall? De Man, though, argues that the poem in fact lacks the splitting of the self involved in irony:

There is no real disjunction of the subject; the poem is written from the point of view of a unified self that fully recognizes a past condition as one of error and stands in a present that, however painful, sees things as they actually are.⁵⁵

This is, as we shall see, a problematic statement, especially considering the subsequent claim by de Man that Wordsworth speaks in this poem, as it were, from beyond the grave. Quite how such a speech from beyond the grave could *not* involve a 'disjunction of the subject' is unclear at this point; it *is* clear, however, that a temporal disjunction has taken place. It is my contention here that Wordsworth's text does constitute a certain ironic splitting of the self, and that that splitting is rendered considerably more complex by virtue of the temporal paradox the poem presents.

The space at the centre of the poem, the *gap* in which Lucy's death may be said to take place (though, of course, this taking place is precisely what the poem denies) constitutes an interval (*intervallum*: a breach in defences), a breach in the temporal defences mounted by the stanzas themselves. The poem can be read as a defence against this absent referent at its heart: death (Lucy's death, as well as the deaths, as we shall see, of William and Dorothy Wordsworth) must be denied a place (or a time), a presence in the poem, in order to be represented at all: death, after all, as we shall see in a later discussion of St. Augustine, is that which can only be represented proleptically or retrospectively. For Wordsworth, the epitaph is that poetic mode which not only speaks *after* the (absent) event, but also (and at the same time) *before* the event of death will have taken place. The epitaph addresses itself both to a future and a past, particularly in those instances (as is here the case, albeit complicated and not immediately obvious) when it involves a speech which purports to come from beyond the grave: that is, when it is written in the first person singular. Even in the case of the epitaph which presents itself as having been written after the fact (and, again, Wordsworth's poem belongs to this category too), the epitaph necessarily orients itself toward a future time at which it will be read, an unknowable future, after the death of the remembering writer, when the epitaph itself may be, as is the case with the elusive girl of the 'Lucy poems', the only evidence of a certain past (the existence of the deceased) and of the present (of its reading) as having been, once, also a future.

The Sublime Epitaph

'A slumber did my spirit seal' was written in Germany in the last months of 1798. In a letter to Thomas Poole on 6 April 1799, Coleridge writes: 'some months ago Wordsworth transmitted to me a most sublime Epitaph. Whether it had any reality, I cannot say. — Most probably in some gloomier moment he had fancied the moment in which his sister might die.'⁵⁶ Coleridge quotes the poem in its entirety, under the title 'Epitaph'. The letter is itself a reply to Poole's letter of 15 March, informing his friend (over a month after the event) of the death of Berkeley Coleridge on 10 February. Coleridge writes that his son 'has not lived in vain'; he has had a life like any other, a life of 'education and development':

Fling yourself into your immortality only a few thousand years, and how small will not the difference between one year old and sixty years appear! — Consciousness —! It is no otherwise necessary to our conceptions of future continuance than as connecting the *present link* of our Being with the one *immediately* preceding it; and *that* degree of consciousness, *that* small portion of *memory*, it would not only be arrogant, but in the highest degree absurd, to deny even to a much younger Infant.⁵⁷

For Coleridge, the infant's death is not sufficient to erase the fact of his having lived in time, of his existence having had a duration, however attenuated. The moment of death is thought of here, as in Wordsworth's poem, in terms of memory and projection, of past and future, not of the instant itself. It is a moment which, as a result of Poole's delay in informing Coleridge of his child's death (Poole apparently at first thinking it

desirable to spare Coleridge's feelings by concealing the news from the poet, who was then in Gottingen), Coleridge experiences in a different time. As he acknowledges in a letter to his wife, Sara, two days later: 'it is one of the discomforts of my absence, my dearest Love! That we feel the same calamities at different times.'⁵⁸

The poem which Coleridge quotes is, then, itself concerned with 'different times', and just as in Coleridge's exhortation to Poole to project himself forward into a future from which the past will appear clearly defined, so too 'A slumber did my spirit seal' is in part the projection of a relationship between past and future in which the future is thought of as the realm of clarity of perspective on a past which is shrouded in obscurity and error.

'...turn, turn, turn'

While critics are in general agreed about the first, obvious, temporal structure of Wordsworth's poem, the focus of critical dissensus has been the status of the dead Lucy in the final two lines.⁵⁹ A brief comparison of two readings in particular shows the extent to which the poem polarizes critical positions. The first is from F.W. Bateson, who confirms the interpretation of the poem's structure that I have been advancing so far:

The structural basis of the poem is clearly the contrast between the two verses. Verse one deals with the past (there are no less than four verbs in a past tense — *did, had, seemed, could*). [...] Verse two concerns the present (in addition to the *now* in the first line there are three main verbs in the present tense — *has, hears, sees*). Lucy is dead.⁶⁰

For Bateson, though, Lucy's death is not characterized by the finality of her entry into the realm of *things*, but rather by a unity with the natural world which Bateson seems to suggest is a positive one:

But the final impression the poem leaves is not of two contrasting moods, but of a single mood mounting to a climax in the pantheistic magnificence of the last two lines.⁶¹

The *unity* of which Bateson writes is expressed initially, he claims, by the poem's metre, and secondly through the identity or similarity of word-order in the first and second stanzas. Further, this unity is apparently heightened by the alliteration of the final two lines: 'the implication is that the pantheistic universe is solidly *one*.'⁶² Bateson writes of 'the tremendous positive of the last two lines':

Finally, the description of the living Lucy as a *thing* has prepared the transition to the dead Lucy who is passively *rolled*.⁶³

Precisely opposed to the interpretation offered by Bateson is the reading advanced by Cleanth Brooks in his essay on 'Irony as a Principle of Structure'.⁶⁴ Brooks reads the end of the poem in a manner strikingly at odds with Bateson's:

She is touched by and held by earthly time in its most powerful and horrible image. The last figure seems to me to summarize the poem — to offer to almost every facet of meaning suggested in the earlier lines a concurring and resolving image which meets and accepts and reduces each item to its place in the total unity.⁶⁵

The unity described by Brooks is clearly of a different order from that of Bateson's pantheistic oneness. For Brooks, 'the statement of the first stanza has been literally realized in the second, but its meaning has been ironically reversed.'⁶⁶ There is, consequently, says Brooks, a 'temptation' to claim that the entire poem is ironic, but this application of the terms is 'not necessarily' accurate:

In the work of both men [Wordsworth and Donne], the relation between part and part is organic, which means that each part modifies and is modified by the whole.⁶⁷

E.D. Hirsch attempts to adjudicate between these two readings in an argument structured again according to a chiasmic logic. In discussing the 'impasse' occasioned by the attempt to produce an 'inclusivist' criticism — a criticism which would be able to maintain a number of readings as valid though they may disagree violently — Hirsch offers the interpretation of 'A slumber did my spirit seal' as an exemplary instance of this impasse. There are, argues Hirsch, three possible ways of reconciling Brooks's description of the dead and turning Lucy with Bateson's vision of an overwhelmingly positive union with nature:

Three modes of reconciliation are available to the inclusivist: (1) Brooks' reading includes Bateson's; it shows that any affirmative suggestions in the poem are negated by the bitterly ironical portrayal of the inert girl being whirled around by what Bateson calls the 'sublime processes of Nature'. (2) Bateson's reading includes Brooks'; the ironic contrast between the active, seemingly immortal girl and the passive, inert, dead girl is overcome by a final unqualified

affirmation of immortality. (3) Each of the readings is partially right, but they must be fused to supplement one another.⁶⁸

For Frances Ferguson, it is precisely in terms of absence that Lucy is thought of throughout the so-called Lucy 'cycle':

Through the course of the poems, Lucy is repeatedly and ever more decisively traced out of existence; and it is this progressive diminishment of Lucy's existence in the poems which suggests that they may serve as paradigmatic cases in coming to terms with Wordsworth's elusive notions of poetic language.⁶⁹

And again:

By continually denying Lucy any place in the present, Wordsworth seems to have to move toward a poetics in which representation involves a recognition of Lucy's absence rather than a re-presencing in acknowledgment of her remembered presence.⁷⁰

'The unimaginable touch of time'

The extent to which Wordsworth can be said to write as if from beyond the grave, from an imagined point after his own death, is clear also in the reading de Man performs on the poem he calls variously 'The Winander Boy' and 'The Boy of Winander'. This poem was originally written for inclusion in the 1700 *Prelude*, but was eventually excluded from that edition. The lines were first published, under the heading of 'Poems of the Imagination', in 1800, and then as part of Volume V of the 1805

Prelude with some crucial alterations and additions.⁷¹ Chief among these is the fact that the published version of the poem is written in the third person singular, the earliest version (partly) in the first. De Man points out that (like 'A slumber did my spirit seal') the poem comprises two sections divided by blank space, 'and all readers of the poem have been struck by the abruptness of the transition that leads from the first to the second part.'⁷² Consequently, the central problem of interpretation is again the relationship between the two parts.

The poem presents, says de Man, a relationship of mimicry between humanity and nature, a relationship which becomes gradually less certain or stable and finally vanishes in a moment of vertiginous 'hanging', in a sensation of falling to which the poet himself succumbs in the final lines. The silence which overcomes the boy (and the poet) leaves him vulnerable to a *fall*: 'the dizziness revealed in the "hung/listening" has indeed resulted in a fall, has been the discovery of a state of falling which itself anticipated a fall into death.'⁷³ The voice of the poem is in a sense already dead:

The poem is, in a curious sense, autobiographical, but it is the autobiography of someone who no longer lives written by someone who is speaking, in a sense, from beyond the grave.⁷⁴

The poem is, then, paradoxically, both proleptic and retrospective; precisely in the manner in which we have already seen the present effectively banished from 'A slumber did my spirit seal', so in this text the moment of death is itself unimaginable or unrepresentable:

Seeming to be remembering, to be moving to a past, he is in fact anticipating a future. The objectification of the past self, as that of a consciousness that unwittingly experiences an anticipation of its own death, allows him to reflect

on an event that is, in fact, unimaginable. For this is the real terror of death, that it lies truly beyond the reach of reflection.⁷⁵

De Man makes much of the fact that Wordsworth has used as the source for this meditation on the unrepresentability of the instant of death, a poem originally written in the first person. Here, again, as in the case of the Lucy poem, it is a case of a voice which comes to us from the grave. As an abandoned passage from the manuscript of 'Time and History in Wordsworth' declares:

It is always possible to anticipate one's own epitaph, even to give it the size of the entire *Prelude*, but never possible to be both the one who wrote it and the one who reads it in the proper setting, that is, confronting one's grave as an event of the past.⁷⁶

The temporal predicament here (the impossibility of language coinciding with death) is precisely, for Wordsworth, that of the *epitaph*. In the first of his 'Essays Upon Epitaphs', Wordsworth acknowledges that the epitaph ideally expresses a 'midway point' between life and death; it represents the dead individual partly as he or she was in life and partly as now dead and the object of remembrance. In fact, Wordsworth argues, life and death inevitably shade into one another in our attempts to represent them; they are joined by

another and a finer connection than that of contrast. — It is a connection formed through the subtle progress by which, both in the natural and the moral world, qualities pass insensibly into their contraries, and things revolve upon each other. As, in sailing upon the orb of this planet, a voyage towards the regions where the sun sets, conducts gradually to the quarter where we have been

accustomed to behold it come forth at its rising; and, in like manner, a voyage towards the east, the birth-place in our imagination of the morning, leads finally to the quarter where the sun is last seen when he departs from our eyes; so the contemplative Soul, travelling in the direction of mortality, advances to the country of everlasting life; and, in like manner, she may continue to explore those cheerful tracts, till she is brought back, for her own advantage and benefit, to the land of transitory things — of sorrow and of tears.⁷⁷

This chiasmic movement results in a kind of living death:

The composition and quality of the mind of a virtuous man, contemplated by the side of the grave where his body is mouldering, ought to appear, and be felt as something midway between what he was on earth walking about with his living frailties, and what he may be presumed to be as a Spirit in heaven.⁷⁸

It is perhaps in this sense that the poem is truly ironic, declaring the endlessness of this return of the subject upon itself, the constant renewal of perspective, a fallen perspective that may in fact be, despite de Man's protestations in 'The Rhetoric of Temporality', a historical one:

History, like childhood, is what allows recollection to originate in a truly temporal perspective, not as a memory of a unity that never existed, but as the awareness, the remembrance of a precarious condition of falling that has never ceased to prevail.⁷⁹

This link between history and childhood returns us to the concerns of Giorgio Agamben, who conceives of the temporal predicament of the subject in terms of

infancy and history. In the next chapter, I turn to a text — the *Confessions* of Augustine — which is precisely concerned with the relationship between time and speech, between silence (*infancy*) and history.

Notes

¹ Paul de Man, 'The Rhetoric of Temporality', in *Blindness and Insight* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 187.

² Ibid. As Geoffrey Bennington points out in a discussion of de Man's late essay 'Pascal's Allegory of Persuasion', 'whenever one of a series of elements is also used transcendently with respect to that series in order to totalize, dominate or explain it, aberration begins.' The moment of eclipse here would also be an *aberration* in this sense: the putative spatial field in which rhetoric is partially visible (in a distorted form) purports to be a picture of the relation between rhetoric and 'subjectivism' which could be seen outside history, or which could explain that history from one — spatially conceived — point. For de Man, at this point in the text, the aberration is also an error. In Bennington's essay, aberration is close to abortion, the term which Pascal uses to describe those 'monstrous' and illegitimate copies of his original arithmetical machine. The discourse on the spatial and temporal which I wish to elucidate in de Man is also obviously a discourse on progeny and legitimacy: one of the main tasks of 'The Rhetoric of Temporality' is already — in this opening paragraph — to describe a 'legitimate' conception of rhetoric in opposition to the unsightly deformations currently recognized by criticism. This is rather to leap ahead of my own argument, but also to point out another temporal problem in de Man's text. See Geoffrey Bennington, *Legislations: The Politics of Deconstruction* (London: Verso, 1994), p. 139ff.

³ Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight*, p. 187.

⁴ Ibid., p. 188.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid. Cf. Hans-George Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. G. Barden & J. Cumming (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), pp. 63-73.

⁸ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 67.

⁹ Ibid., p. 187.

¹⁰ See Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), pp. 44-45. Curtius claims that allegory — for classical rhetoricians — is not a figure of speech but a ‘figure of thought’: ‘life and art, through the most various attitudes, produce an aesthetic impression. Discourse does the same thing by means of the figures. They are conventionally divided into figures of language and figures of thought. [...] Figures of thought are litotes, metonymy, allegory, and many others.’ This is already to separate allegory from the realm of the purely linguistic, and it is this separation that will become crucial in later formulations.

¹¹ Demetrius, *On Style*, in Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. & ed. John Warrington (London: Dent, 1963), p. 88.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., pp. 88-89. As is common in descriptions of allegory, ancient and modern, Demetrius warns in the next section of his text that the orator must exercise a certain vigilance when employing the figure of allegory: ‘But in this figure, too, we must beware of excess, in order that our language may not become a riddle.’ (p. 89). The excessive use of a figure or trope is a constant danger for the classical rhetoricians; language threatens to overshoot the mark and betray the intentions of the speaker or writer: cf., for example, Longinus’ treatise *On the Sublime*.

¹⁴ See John Whitman, *Allegory: The Dynamics of an Ancient and Medieval Technique* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p. 263.

¹⁵ George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie* (Menston: Scolar Press, 1968), p. 155.

¹⁶ Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight*, p. 190. The point about Goethe is exemplified by the remarks of Friedrich Theodor Vischer on the second part of *Faust*: ‘Not only is

there a great new mass of allegories inserted into this second part, but even the living, concrete characters of the first part, Faust, Mephistopheles, have vaporized into allegories'. Cf. F.T. Vischer, 'Die Litteratur über Goethe's *Faust: Eine Übersicht*', quoted in Rainer Nägele, *Theater, Theory, Speculation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), p. 84.

¹⁷ See John A. Hodgson, 'Transcendental Tropes: Coleridge's Rhetoric of Allegory and Symbol', in *Allegory, Myth, and Symbol*, ed. Morton W. Bloomfield (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 273ff.

¹⁸ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Statesman's Manual*, in *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, vol. 6, ed. R.J. White (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), p. 30.

¹⁹ Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight*, p. 192.

²⁰ See *Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism*, ed. Thomas Middleton Raysor (Folcroft, P.A.: Folcroft Press, 1969), p. 30. Coleridge writes: 'We may then safely define allegoric writing as the employment of one set of agents and images with actions and accompaniments correspondent, so as to convey, while in disguise, either moral qualities or conceptions of the mind that are not in themselves objects of the senses, or rather images, agents, actions, fortunes, and circumstances, so that the difference is everywhere presented to the eye or imagination while the likeness is suggested to the mind; and this connectedly so that the parts combine to form a consistent whole.'

²¹ Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*, Vol. I (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964), p. 307. As Gadamer puts it, 'symbol and allegory [are] opposed as art is opposed to non-art.' *Truth & Method*, p. 67.

²² Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*, p. 308.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 310.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 312.

²⁵ Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight*, p. 193.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

²⁸ There is, of course, nothing new about this reading of Coleridge: it is very close to Ruskin's description of the pathetic fallacy in *Modern Painters*. In fact, as we have seen in the preceding chapter, Ruskin's formulation is startlingly suggestive in its description of the temporality of the pathetic fallacy as a mode in which nature speaks not merely as a subject, but as a subject which is already dead. Ruskin's awareness of the *ghostliness* of modern landscape (an awareness which itself falls into pathetic fallacy quite spectacularly in 'The Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century') arises from the conjunction of the aesthetics of the sublime and the allegorical perspective. Cf. John Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, Vol. III, Pt. IV, in *The Works of John Ruskin*, Vol. V, ed. E.T. Cook & Alexander Wedderburn (London: George Allen, 1903-1912), p. 207 & passim.

²⁹ *Blindness and Insight*, p. 196.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 207.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 210-211.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ For a clearer response to the same problem, see Clément Rosset's comments on the occlusion of philosophical questions in the rush to historicize: 'Cette précision préliminaire est rendue utile par la confusion aujourd'hui fréquente entre les enjeux de la philosophie et ceux de l'histoire, et l'habituelle réduction qui s'ensuit des premiers aux seconds. Confusion qui entre déjà un peu, comme on le verra, dans mon sujet: l'intérêt moderne pour l'historicité du réel étant un indice parmi d'autres de la difficulté

qu'on éprouve à prendre en considération le réel tout court.' Clément Rosset, *L'Objet singulier* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1979), p. 9.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 211.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Charles Baudelaire, 'On the Essence of Laughter', in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays* (London: Phaidon Press, 1995), p. 152.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 154.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 151.

⁴² Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight*, p. 213.

⁴³ Ibid. p. 213.

⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 226.

⁴⁵ Charles Baudelaire, 'On the Essence of Laughter', p. 157.

⁴⁶ Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight*, p. 217.

⁴⁷ Charles Baudelaire, 'On the Essence of Laughter', p. 150.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 150.

⁴⁹ The phrase comes from Konvolut N of Walter Benjamin's notes for the projected *Passagen Werke*. Benjamin writes: 'Pursue the question of whether a link exists between the secularization of time into space and the allegorical perspective.' See Walter Benjamin, 'N: [Re the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress]', in *Benjamin: Philosophy, History, Aesthetics*, ed. Gary Smith (London: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p.63. My reading of the temporality of allegory in the present argument suggests that there is in fact a 'link'; it is not, however, in the homology between allegory and irony that this link is to be found (contra de Man); rather, as I hope to show, de Man is aware in later formulations of the allegorical that allegory is

precisely what undoes the secularization of time into space. It will also be my contention that this is precisely the link to which Benjamin refers.

⁵⁰ Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight*, p. 223

⁵¹ 'A slumber did my spirit seal' proposes a radical disjunction between two moments (or two *presents*), corresponding to the two stanzas; the poem presents a move from blindness to insight, an epistemological shift from the apparent to the real. At the same time as it sets up this opposition, the poem operates metaphorically to suggest an equivalence between the two stanzas; they are in fact both highly ambiguous, presenting a further distinction between stasis and movement, life and death, subject and object, but confusing in both cases (in both stanzas) the relations between the poles of these oppositions.

⁵² Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight*, p. 223.

⁵³ William Wordsworth, *Selected Poems*, ed. Walford Davies (London: Dent, 1984), p. 46.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, Vol. I (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), p. 479.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 479.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 481.

⁵⁹ The endless turning, 'in earth's diurnal course', is the image used also in the 'Essay Upon Epitaphs': the logic is reversed here: if, on the one hand, the move from life to death reveals itself in the essay as an endless global 'return' from one to the other, the logic of the metaphor suggests in the poem a state of affairs in which the supposed move from blindness to insight, from ignorance to knowledge, on the part of the poet, may itself be nothing more than an endless 'turning', a *trope* that can never come to

rest but insistently turns back upon itself, repeatedly revealing the movement of poetic understanding as a constant return to a state of non-awareness.

⁶⁰ F.W. Bateson, *English Poetry: A Critical Introduction* (London: Longman, 1971), p. 29.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁶⁴ Cleanth Brooks, 'Irony as a Principle of Structure', in Morton Danwen Zabel, ed., *Literary Opinion in America*, Vol. II (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1968).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 736.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 737. The structure of 'A slumber did my spirit seal' is, then, in a sense, one of *homoeoteleuton*, the omission of a clause or interval due to its being identical or similar to words or phrases concluding adjacent clauses, lines, or sentences. In fact, the two stanzas mirror one another precisely to the extent to which they both involve a *crossing* of the oppositions they set up between life and death, human and thing, past and future. What is lost here (simply passed over) is a present which is also the moment of death, of Lucy's death: the referent of the absent middle stanza, the empty chamber (*stanza*) in which Lucy dies.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ E.D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 229.

⁶⁹ Frances C. Ferguson, 'The Lucy Poems: Wordsworth's Quest for a Poetic Object', *ELH* (1973): 532-548, 533.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* If the epitaph, Coleridge's 'sublime epitaph', is written upon or spoken over a tomb, Lucy's epitaph not only does not record her name, but performs no deictic function ('here lies...'); there is no 'here' as such, just as there is no 'now' — Lucy's

tomb is not *located*, but is rather the earth, not as place but as thing, subject to a time stripped of chronological location and reduced to the tedious rotation of the globe.

⁷¹ It should be noted here that de Man's interpretation of the poem, while acknowledging textual variants in earlier (manuscript) and later (published) versions, depends to a large extent on the isolation of the 1800 edition; in particular, the division of the poem into two discrete parts simply does not occur in the earliest manuscript (in which the boy, Wordsworth, does not die, at least not 'literally') or in the *Prelude*, where the dead boy is subsumed first into the immediate landscape and then into nature in general, while the 'poem' becomes part of the larger project of the *Prelude*.

⁷² Paul de Man, 'Time and History in Wordsworth', in *Romanticism and Contemporary Criticism*, ed. E.S. Burt, Kevin Newmark, and Andrzej Warminski (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), p. 76.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 201, n. 8.

⁷⁷ William Wordsworth, 'Essay Upon Epitaphs', in *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. W.J.B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), p. 53.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁷⁹ Paul de Man, *Romanticism and Contemporary Criticism*, p. 88.

Chapter 4: The Carcass of Time

'Time is everything, man is nothing; he is at most the carcass of time'.

(Karl Marx)

'The distinctive service that philosophy renders thought is the evaluation of time'.

(Alain Badiou)

I

Concerning the Present

In this chapter I intend to demonstrate the particular significance of the temporality of representation for such postmodern thinkers as Jean-François Lyotard, Éric Alliez and — most significantly — Giorgio Agamben. I wish to show that the conceptions of temporality advanced by these thinkers are informed by a meditation on the nature of time which is concerned with the construction of a spatial model of temporality and a consequent effort to discover the place of the *present* in that model. The tortuous arguments employed in Book XI of Saint Augustine's *Confessions* inaugurate a philosophical tradition which is exercised first of all by a question concerning the present, a present which constantly threatens to evanesce into the adjacent categories of past and future. Augustine asks: where is the present? Can we be said to inhabit a present as if it were a place, a home, a *habitus* (as Lyotard will put it, expressly referring to the texts of Augustine and to Erich Auerbach's reading of Augustine in Chapter 3 of *Mimesis*)?¹ Second, the

accumulation of such instants or presents introduces a conception of the *future* as that which makes the present habitable or livable. It will be the task of this chapter to suggest that the conjunction of these two concerns — the struggle to elucidate the nature of the present, and the effort to think the relationship between the present and the future (a relationship of equivalence, proportion or exchange) — is crucial to our understanding of philosophical and cultural modernity. Specifically, it is in relation to these questions of *time* that modernity formulates the problem of representation. In conclusion, I shall argue that the investigations of temporality and representation that I trace here in the readings of Augustine proposed by Auerbach, Lyotard, Alliez, and Agamben have important consequences for the manner in which we conceive of the activity of criticism. It will be my contention that the model of time identified by Agamben in his essay ‘Time and History’ as the traditional mode by which the West understands the temporal, informs criticism to the extent that all modern critical thought can be conceived as a ‘criticism of the future’, appealing, as I shall argue here and in the concluding chapter, to a static conception of a temporal continuum in which the present or contemporary moment is rendered meaningful only by a posited future: the future ‘return’ on present critical investment.

The appeal to a projected future in order to accord meaning or plenitude to the present constitutes both the temporal logic of capital and — more importantly for my purposes here — that of modern criticism.² The latter point will be argued in relation to the well-known passages in *Mimesis* in which Auerbach identifies, in the *Confessions*, the genesis of a modern conception of time. *Mimesis* is itself a text which makes an explicit appeal to the future, Auerbach trusting in a particular understanding of European modernism as offering — in its concern with ‘fragmentation of the exterior action, [...] reflection of consciousness, and [...] stratification of time’ — a levelling of distinctions between societies and nations (the distinctions exploited by fascism, under the shadow of which *Mimesis* was written). For Auerbach, as later for Lyotard and Agamben, *Confessions* XI

presents *in nuce* the problematics of representation in modernity. My argument is that contemporary theory, as an attempt to think the category of representation, is in part itself represented by the series of philosophical and critical readings I trace here. I shall argue, in opposition to the mimetic appeal to the future, to a future moment as legitimation of the present, for a conception of criticism as a particular experience of the *now*, of the contemporary.

The first impulse identified here — the attempt to delimit the present as habitable instant — is essentially a (mono)theological one: to place oneself in this instant is really to claim to occupy a position which properly belongs to the divine; the impossibility of inhabiting this instant gives way in the *Confessions* to the less ambitious — and more theological — position from which the voice of God is audible, recognizable and representable. The second impulse is no less monotheistic (in the final analysis, no less Christian) than the first: it is the logic of capital, of a chrematistic temporality, the time of accumulation and the accumulation of time. It will be my contention that the modern consciousness of time proposed by *Confessions* XI — and, as I will show, other texts of Augustine's — is characterized by the difficulties inherent in reconciling these two models: what is advanced in both instances is an 'empty' time which must be filled in either of two ways. In the first case, the unstable, threatened, instant is afforded a 'plenitude' either by referring it to a divine perspective — the answer advanced in *De Trinitate* and *City of God* — or by recourse to the notion of a duration which takes place not in the divine consciousness but in human subjectivity.³ In the first case, what links the empty instants or points is the divine consciousness: time is possible because God *sees* in the instant which we ourselves can never inhabit. In the second instance, that of the stockpiling of time, the instant is accorded meaning purely by virtue of the ability to represent at or in the instant, the possibility of there being more such instants: the time of capital is meaningful because it is filled with the anticipation, quite simply, of more time. As we shall see later, the temporality of capitalism is characterized not simply by a logic of equivalence — be

it the putative equivalence of commodity exchange or of labour time — but by this representation of temporal potential, which goes under the name of *speculation*. As the work of Éric Alliez has shown, Augustine is not alone in identifying the ‘time of the merchants’ as a sinful conception of a temporality which ought properly to be governed by the divine. However, Augustine’s formulation of the philosophical description of time has embedded within it precisely this capitalist speculation on a future which is still, of necessity, an empty time, the time, as I hope to show, of the modern. What is advanced by the thinkers mentioned above is a critique of the static and empty continuum — static and empty precisely to the extent that it is not filled by speculation on the future, but afforded only the appearance of such a plenitude — as a model of temporality which bypasses history, the history which for Lyotard goes by the name of the ‘event’ and for Agamben is the definition of what he calls ‘experience’, the ‘cairos’ which is opposed to the empty continuum of ‘chronos’. As in previous chapters, I am concerned here also with the manner in which the occlusion of this historicity most typically takes the form of the substitution of the spatial for a properly conceived temporality. As in the case of de Man’s abandonment of the problematic temporality of allegory in favour of the spatial model of irony as the ‘universal’ conception of the relation of the subject to language, so here what is in question is again the substitution of space for time. If my earlier discussions of allegory and the sublime have been concerned to identify in those concepts a complex temporality which has been subordinated or — as in the case of de Man’s discussion of allegory in ‘The Rhetoric of Temporality’ — ‘historicized’ out of the philosophical picture, so too in the present argument I wish to point out the ways in which the temporal has been occluded at those very moments when it is most acutely present. In the present context, however, we are dealing with texts which address explicitly the temporality of representation. This chapter is intended to explain how that temporality has been most productively and sensitively thought in recent critical and philosophical works. In my final chapter, I shall return to the critical and aesthetic questions raised in earlier chapters, in order

to claim, in the light of the insights described and developed here, how these considerations of time and representation might afford an understanding of something I will call, in two senses of the genitive, 'the criticism of the future'.

An Augustinian Heritage

I shall begin here with an account of Augustine's discussion of temporality, focusing mainly on Book XI of the *Confessions*, though the problem encountered here — the 'disappearance' of the present into the adjacent categories of past and future — is to be found throughout Augustine's writings. The central opposition with which Augustine's thought operates in this context is posited as obtaining between the following poles: firstly, a *present* which is inevitably sundered by the temporal continuum past-present-future, and therefore the object of an intense effort at replenishment. The present here appears to be empty and needs to be filled, ultimately with the notion of a present constituted by subjectivity-in-motion, the duration of a narrating (or, in the example Augustine presents toward the end of Book XI, *reading*) 'I' which produces the present *as present*. According to this formulation, the present is what is passing (i.e., passing away, in the 'race towards death' of which Augustine writes in *City of God*) but that passing becomes — from the perspective of the subject — meaningful, becomes time, a *living time* rather than the dead and empty continuum which, for Augustine, time constantly threatens to become.

Secondly, there is a model of temporality which attempts to replenish the empty and static continuum of time, by filling the present with a perceived, hoped for, or planned future. I shall discuss in detail below, two of the ways in which, according to Augustine, this is attempted. First, there is the filling u' of the empty instant that occurs in the astrology which, the *Confessions* tell us, Augustine was at pains to denounce as the mere appearance of a temporal plenitude. Second, there is

the chrematistic model supplied by the merchants: the time of capital is the stockpiled possibility of a profitable future, the replenishment of time with time: telescoped into the present moment is a future — the object of speculation — which gives meaning to the present. As Alliez has argued, for Augustine, every speculator is also a spectator, one who assists at the scene of representation, or, in the richly suggestive example provided by Augustine, one who attends or waits upon a representation which, says Augustine, will fail at precisely the moment that it reveals itself both as representation and investment in an imagined or projected future. For Augustine, speculation is revealed as the theatricalization of time; theatre, or mimesis, in turn, is what reveals the speculator/spectator to himself, as one who wishes ‘to buy cheap and sell dear’.

In opposition to this capitalistic temporality, as I have stated above, Augustine proposes a replenishment of the present with ‘duration’, the duration, specifically, of a subject which gives meaning to the instant: it is a subject which sees (or hears, or reads) the instant *as it passes*. What is perceived in the instant, by this subject, is the word of God. That this version of the nature of the present repeats in some important respects the time of capital described above, is only one of the points I wish to make here. Far more important is the manner in which both ways of understanding time — the Christian and the chrematistic — in the construction of the instant and the apparently collapsible continuum, occlude an irreducible temporal element which will go here by the names of ‘history’, ‘event’, and ‘cairos’.

While I do not wish to move hastily from a consideration of the Augustinian meditation on time to a position in which it could be claimed that the problems Augustine encounters have been solved, to suggest that we no longer think of time in this way (on the contrary, I hope to stress the extreme difficulty attendant on any attempt to step outside the terrain mapped in the *Confessions*), I do wish to elucidate the ways in which Augustine’s text has been the starting-point for a series of critical and philosophical investigations of time which have reached very

different conclusions. Specifically, what occurs in the texts under discussion here — the works of Erich Auerbach, Jean-François Lyotard, Giorgio Agamben, Éric Alliez, Guy Debord and Paul Virilio — is that the problems addressed in the Augustinian text are taken to be problems not just for a philosophy of time, but quite expressly bearing upon the temporality of representation (not all of these thinkers, as we shall see, will cite Augustine: those who do not, however — Debord and Virilio — are perhaps most indebted to the complexities of *Confessions* XI). I hope to show here, while directing the thrust of this argument toward situating the texts discussed below in relation to my previous chapters on allegory and the sublime, that the temporality of representation is of pressing concern for this text, the theological focus of which might appear to be elsewhere.

The first reading of Augustine I will consider will be that of Erich Auerbach in *Mimesis*, Ch. 3: 'The Arrest of Peter Valvomores'. Auerbach finds the beginnings of a properly modern consciousness in the move from classical hypotactic discourse to the Augustinian 'and' of biblically-inspired parataxis. The question here is one of 'background': for Auerbach, the modern form of parataxis is 'fraught with background' — the biblical text leaves unilluminated the background of the events and actors it describes. The linking of clauses with 'and' implies a perspective or point of view from which the gaps could be filled: that perspective is essentially a divine one, which accords meaning to the events narrated in paratactic sequence by providing the missing background. I shall discuss in detail the use Auerbach makes of a number of passages from different texts of Augustine's, in order to show how the Augustinian formulation of the nature of time becomes for Auerbach a conception of the time of representation and not only of the representation of time. For Auerbach, Augustine's discussion of time in *Confessions*, *De Trinitate* and *City of God*, is crucially also an investigation of representation (I shall want to stress this point more explicitly than Auerbach, with reference to several 'scenes' of representation in Augustine's writings, but the basic point is already to be found in *Mimesis*: my expansion of Auerbach's remarks

will be carried out chiefly in order to demonstrate the importance of his arguments for the later thinkers under discussion).

The reading which Auerbach performs on Augustine (also on Homer, Rabelais and Pascal, but Augustine provides the most productive instance of the phenomenon in question) is taken up by Jean-François Lyotard in a number of texts, most notably the essays 'Return upon the Return', 'Universal History and Cultural Differences' and 'Time Today'.⁴ In these essays, the references to Augustine, and to Auerbach's reading of Augustine, serve to introduce the question of the present, of a present which is still part of the static continuum, made up of instants to which Lyotard will oppose the concept of the *event*. The event, for Lyotard, is precisely that which does not allow itself to become an Augustinian *present* from which the temporal continuum could be surveyed and understood. Nor can the event be subsumed into the 'replenished' time of capital: in 'Universal History and Cultural Differences', Lyotard writes explicitly of this capitalist time: the ostensible equivalence between the present and a future which is contracted into that present involves a stockpiling of time.⁵

Sidereal Time

Before turning to the explicit discussion of time which takes place in Book XI of the *Confessions*, I wish first to consider an earlier passage which effectively summarizes the problematics to which Book XI will address itself. In this passage from Book VII, Augustine tells how he came to reject what he calls 'the ridiculous prophesyings and blasphemous follies of the astrologers'.⁶ Augustine describes how a man, Firminus, came to him to discuss 'certain affairs of his own in which he placed very considerable worldly hopes, wishing to know how I thought his constellations, as the astrologers call them, stood in the matter'.⁷ Augustine does not refuse the man's request, but points out to Firminus that he has been persuaded

of the folly of the exercise. Firminus then explains that his father and a friend had been deeply interested in astrology: ‘they observed the moments at which the dumb animals about their houses brought forth their young, and noted the position of the sky at those moments, by way of getting experience in the art’.⁸ It transpired that Firminus’ mother and a slave of his friend’s were pregnant at the same time:

The friends had numbered the days and hours and even the smallest part of the hours, the one for his wife and the other for his servant, with the most careful observation. And it chanced that both women brought forth their child at the same instant. Thus they were compelled to cast the same horoscope even to the exact minute for both children, the one for his son, the other for his slave. For when the women began to be in labour, each man let the other know what was happening in his own house, and they had messengers ready to send to each other as soon as either should know that the child had been born — [...] and the messengers sent by each [...] met at a point equidistant from both houses, so that neither could observe any position of the stars or any moment of time different from the other.⁹

What is initially in question here is the relationship between time — the present — and the arrangements of the stars; later, in Book XI, as we shall see, Augustine further denies the apparently more credible belief that time can be measured (as distinct from influenced) by the movements of the stars. More interesting, for my purposes here, than Augustine’s scepticism about astrology is the extent to which everything in this brief narrative hinges around one instant: the instant of the two births. The children born in that instant turn out, unsurprisingly, to have had entirely different lives: the instant, then, is irrevocably sundered. Despite the careful ‘numbering’ of days and hours by the two men, despite their dispatching messengers to meet at a point equidistant from their houses, despite ensuring that those messengers are afforded precisely the same *perspective* on the positions of the

stars, in other words, despite their efforts to control time through the mastery of space, the moment itself is fugitive and treacherous; it fails to provide the requisite conjunction of the axes of the lives of their respective sons.

The 'present', then, turns out to be no present at all: the instant ostensibly inhabited by the newly-born infants, prefigured here by the supposed contemporaneity of the servants, sent out by the two men in search of a *point* equidistant from the two houses: that point turns out to be uninhabitable in precisely the same way as the instant is for the two sons. Neither can truly be said to live in the moment of his own birth: it is necessarily conditioned by the past (the lives of their parents, etc.) and by a future which is clearly already mapped out. The impossibility of inhabiting this moment of birth, as a moment of 'plenitude' (of significance, of meaningful co-incidence) is strikingly close to the impossibility of inhabiting the moment of one's own death, of which Augustine writes in *City of God*. In Book XIII, Chapter 6 of that text, Augustine asks how we can identify the moment or instant of death, if, once the body is 'dead', one must conclude that the moment has passed: what does it mean to be 'in death' if it does not mean to be dead? Ordinarily, says Augustine, we speak of the 'experience' of death, an experience undergone 'by those who are, as we say, dying'. In Chapter 9, Augustine claims that there are certain problems concerning the terms we use to describe this 'experience' ('death', 'dying', 'dead'):

There is a problem about the period when the souls separated from the body exist either in a state of good or in a state of evil. Are we to say that this period is *after* death, or *in* death? If it is after death, then it is not the actual death, which is by now past and gone, which is good or bad, but the present life of the soul after death.¹⁰

As long as a 'dying' person can still *feel*, says Augustine, they are obviously still alive, in which case we should say that they are 'before death', not 'in death' — it

seems, then, that we cannot describe people as dying, when they are not yet dead. This thought is complicated further in the following chapter by the observation that, in fact, from the moment of birth, we are 'dying':

In fact, from the moment a man begins to exist in this body which is destined to die, he is involved all the time in a process whose end is death.¹¹

The space of time lived through leaves less time to live: the remainder decreases with every passing day, 'so that the whole of our lifetime is nothing but a race toward death, in which no one is allowed the slightest pause or any slackening of the pace.'¹² The paradoxical conclusion to which the logic of this argument drives Augustine is this: life is, in fact, 'in death'. Once death has completed its work and 'life' has ended, 'the period *after* death follows the period in death' — the possibility therefore arises that man is in life and death at the same time. There are, then, says Augustine, three situations: before death, in death and after death, and three corresponding adjectives: 'living', 'dying', and 'dead'. In each of these series, the middle term now vanishes: 'dying'/'in death' appears to name a state neither living nor dead. The period 'in death' disappears, and it is here that Augustine introduces the question of time:

The same thing happens in the passage of time; we try to find the present moment, but without success, because the future changes into the past without interval.¹³

The present, then, is for Augustine analogous to the moments of birth and death — it is not a moment in which we can be said to live.

II

Being on Time

In an essay entitled 'Time and History', Giorgio Agamben makes a substantial claim for the centrality of the experience of time in Western culture and thought:

Every conception of history is invariably accompanied by a certain experience of time which is implicit in it, conditions it, and thereby has to be elucidated. Similarly, every culture is first and foremost a particular experience of time, and no new culture is possible without an alteration in this experience. The original task of a genuine revolution, therefore, is never merely to 'change the world', but also — and above all — to 'change time'.¹⁴

The latter point was, of course, already known to Joseph Conrad, whose novel *The Secret Agent* stages precisely this centrality of changing time to the revolutionary act. The planned destruction of the Greenwich Observatory is to symbolically alter the manner in which the British Empire organizes space according to the chronological mean of the Greenwich Meridian. The explosion which is to achieve this revolutionary change occurs too soon, killing Stevie. The revolution fails to occur *on time* in two senses: firstly, it simply happens too soon, and secondly it does not occur on the Meridian itself. The revolution, which consists in the destruction of time, or at least of a certain governing conception of time, must nonetheless occur on time, must be punctual if it is to succeed in instituting a revolutionary 'untimeliness'.

The fullest exploration of the importance of time in 'every conception of history', and its centrality in the revolutionary impulse, occurs in the work of Paul Virilio. '*Speed*', says Virilio, '*is the hope of the West*': the technologies of

industry and war, technologies of mass mobilization, move inexorably toward the government of time, not of space. Modern warfare, for example, 'becomes a question of time won by man over the fatal projectiles toward which his path throws him.'¹⁵ The 'chrono-politics' of which Virilio writes extends from the experience of a solitary soldier on a First World War battlefield to the Cold War reduction of 'warning time that results from the supersonic speeds of assault [and] leaves so little time for detection, identification and response that in the case of a surprise attack the supreme authority would have to risk abandoning his supremacy of decision by authorizing the lowest echelon of the defence system to immediately launch anti-missile missiles.'¹⁶ Territorial space disappears in 'the violence of speed', to be replaced by the struggle for control of a kind of temporal territory. Geography is replaced by chronography:

The new capital is no longer a spatial capital like New York, Paris or Moscow, a city located in a specific place, at the intersection of roads, but a city at the intersection of the practicabilities of time, in other words, of speed.¹⁷

As Virilio puts it in *Speed and Politics*:

The loss of material space leads to the government of nothing but time. *The Ministry of Time* sketched in each vector will finally be accomplished following the dimensions of the biggest vehicle there is, the *State-vector*. The whole geographic history of the distribution of land and countries would stop in favour of a single *regrouping of time*, power no longer being comparable to anything but a 'meteorology'. In this precarious fiction speed could suddenly become a destiny, a form of progress, in other words a 'civilization' in which each speed would be something of a 'region' of time.¹⁸

The untimeliness of the revolutionary act in *The Secret Agent* is mirrored in Virilio by the storming of the Bastille: the revolutionary masses discover that they have arrived too late; there is nobody left to liberate. One of the most potent symbols of the French Revolution is founded, therefore, on a failure of punctuality, the site of which — the Bastille itself — must then be made to disappear: a further evacuation must take place if the revolutionary act is to be at all believable. The control of space must mask a failure to control time. This is to suggest that a revolutionary — and hence teleological — conception of history must grapple with, as in the example from *The Secret Agent*, a dichotomy between an abstract and linear time (the time, for example, in which the goal of the bourgeois revolution will be attained) and a particular and intractable present (the time of failure). It will be my contention in what follows that the failure to adequately master temporality philosophically or theoretically is at the heart of those modes of thought which attempt to articulate a particular mastery of the temporal. As we shall see later in this discussion, the spectacular difficulty encountered by Augustine, the seeming indomitability of time as a subject for philosophical meditation, forms a crucial part of the discussion of time in Book XI of the *Confessions*. Paul Ricoeur has observed that Augustine's discussion of time is not merely complex, but *aporetic*; the 'assertive core' of the argument 'can never be apprehended simply in itself outside of the aporias it engenders.'¹⁹ Despite arriving at a particular conclusion regarding the interiority of the experience of temporality, Augustine clearly fails to dispose of the aporias in question, which have not only dogged him throughout his argument, but have provided the basis for that argument. The writers discussed below all attempt to provide coherent descriptions of time. I will argue that in attempting a certain mastery of time, they experience and articulate a certain kind of failure.

The present constitutes, in the theories advanced by, amongst others, St. Augustine, Hegel, Husserl and Eric Auerbach, a deeply problematic element in a

conception of time as essentially linear and progressive. The question addressed here is this: how is it possible for these thinkers to consider time as progressive and teleological — as a continuum which moves towards an ultimate goal, be it that of Christian redemption in Augustine's *Confessions*, or, for Hegel, of the end of history in the self-consciousness of absolute spirit — and at the same time as composed of discrete instants, of 'nows', which exist in and of themselves as *present*, irreducible to past and future?

I shall also endeavour to show why the thinkers under discussion should turn to the topic of temporality, be it from a philosophical perspective, as in the works of Lyotard and Agamben, or in the context of the temporality of literature in Auerbach and Ricoeur. That the discussions of time to which I shall refer should all take as the paradigmatic Western formulation of a theory of temporality, the meditation on time in Book XI of Augustine's *Confessions*, will necessitate an analysis of Augustine's argument and its context as part of a larger discussion of time and eternity. Finally, it will be my contention that the temporal problematic addressed by the texts under discussion has profound implications for an understanding of literary history; for at least two of the thinkers discussed below — Erich Auerbach and Paul Ricoeur — the question of the experience of time is at the heart of (and is perhaps most fully addressed in) *narrative*: specifically, for Ricoeur, in literary narrative.

'...if the lights of heaven should cease'

For Auerbach, Augustine's conception of temporality finds its most pertinent expression in the move from the hypotactic structure of classical Latin prose to the parataxis which characterizes Augustine's sentences. The latter, says Auerbach, is Biblical in origin, a syntax distinguished by the linkage of statements or clauses by 'and': for example, in Genesis: *Dixitque Deus: fiat lux, et facta est lux*. According

to Auerbach's interpretation of Augustine, the instants which make up the linear series are linked in what he calls 'figural interpretation', which

establishes a connection between two events or persons in such a way that the first signifies not only itself but also the second, while the second involves or fulfils the first. The two poles of a figure are separated in time, but both, being real events or persons, are within temporality. They are both contained in the flowing stream which is historical life, and only the comprehension, the *intellectus spiritualis*, of their interdependence is a spiritual act.²⁰

Figural interpretation makes sense of events in terms of their relation to a governing teleology. For example, in Biblical exegesis, the story of the injunction to sacrifice Isaac prefigures the sacrifice of Christ. The two events take place on the 'horizontal' axis of human time; a meaningful connection is established between the two when they are both referred to the 'vertical' axis of the divine:

a connection is established between two events which are linked neither temporally nor causally – a connection which it is impossible to establish by reason in the horizontal dimension [...]. It can be established only if both occurrences are vertically linked to Divine Providence, which alone is able to devise such a plan of history and supply the key to its understanding. The horizontal, that is the temporal and causal, connection of occurrences is dissolved; the here and now is no longer a mere link in an earthly chain of events, it is simultaneously something which has always been, and which will be fulfilled in the future; and strictly, in the eyes of God, it is something eternal, some thing omni-temporal, something already consummated in the realm of fragmentary earthly event.²¹

The conception of temporality which Auerbach discovers in Augustine is based largely on a reading of *City of God*, not of *Confessions*. Both texts present a model in which discrete instants are linked by some governing principle. In the former this is divine, in the latter, human (consciousness or interiority). It will become clear later that these two ostensibly irreconcilable positions are linked in the presentation of the voice in *Confessions*. I will argue that it is in the human repetition of the divine word that Augustine reconciles human time with that presided over by God.

Time becomes essentially human in, for example, St. Augustine's separation of time from the movement of the sun, moon and stars. It is senseless, says Augustine, to suggest that time is constituted by the movements of astronomical bodies; why, he asks, 'should not the motions of all bodies rather be times?' Surely time would continue, and could be measured, without recourse to the movements of heavenly bodies?

Supposing the light of heaven were to cease and the potter's wheel we could measure its rotations and say that these were at equal intervals, or some slower, some quicker, some taking longer, some shorter? And if we spoke thus, should we not ourselves be speaking in time: would there not be in our words some syllables long, some short — because some would sound for a longer time, some for a shorter?²²

Despite having severed time from external, natural, phenomena, and made it the preserve of internal human consciousness, the early Christian idea of time retains the Greek conception of the continuous succession of precise instants. The instant is analogous to the geometric point: in other words, it takes up no *space*. Thus, Augustine:

If we conceive of some point of time which cannot be divided into even the minutest parts of moments, that is the only point that can be called present: and that point flees at such lightning speed from being future to being past, that it has no extent of duration at all. For if it were so extended, it would be divisible into past and future: the present has no length.²³

The Blink of an Eye

In the writings of St. Augustine, there are three distinct modes of temporality: eternity, 'angelic time', and human time, the time of God's creature. The first, of course, is not strictly *time* at all: heaven, we are told in Book XII of the *Confessions*, does not change. Nothing in heaven comes to be, and nothing passes away; this we have already been told in the course of the discussion of time in Book XI. We are told explicitly in Book XII, however, that *neither heaven nor earth* is within the compass of time. The former, '*quamvis mutabile* [though in itself it be changeable]', has never been subject to change, and, existing in order to contemplate God, 'yet suffers no mutation and delights in Your eternity and immutability.'²⁴ As for the latter, the earth, it soon transpires that it was untimely only up to the point where it was given form and visibility, whereupon 'the successive changes of times began to take place' there. The second sort of time of which Augustine writes is posited in *City of God* XII, xvi. Angelic time, which appears to contradict the statement in *Confessions* XII, xii concerning the immutability of heaven, is suggested by Augustine in order to differentiate the temporality of angels from the atemporality of God: if angels, which do not partake of human time, were not subject to some sort of change, but had always been both immortal and unchanging, and had always existed, then they would, says Augustine, be inseparable from God. Instead, they exist in a time which is not that which began with the motions of heavenly bodies, but rather a time which 'existed

before this in some changing movement, in which there was succession of before and after, in which everything could not be simultaneous.’²⁵ Angelic time appears to be situated between eternity and time proper.

Human time, the time of consciousness, which is, ultimately, the focus of the general discussion of temporality in *Confessions* XI, is the site of a confusing and anxiety-provoking mutability from which, following the tortuous meditation on earthly time, Augustine wishes to be delivered into the calm of heavenly stasis:

But now my years are wasted in sighs, and Thou, O Lord, my eternal father, art my only solace; but I am divided up in time, whose order I do not know, and my thoughts and the deepest places of my soul are torn with every kind of tumult until the day when I shall be purified and melted in the fire of thy love and wholly joined to Thee.²⁶

This entry of the human into the eternal immutability of the divine begins and ends the discussion of temporality. In Book XI, xiii, where the text turns from the argument that there was no time prior to the act of creation, to the theme of temporality which will take up the rest of Book XI, we are told that divine atemporality awaits humanity at the end of time, the moment of salvation or redemption:

Your years neither go nor come: but our years come and go, that all may come. Your years abide all in one act of abiding: for they abide and the years that go are not thrust out by those that come, for none pass: whereas our years shall not all be, till all are no more.²⁷

Divine atemporality is invoked in Book XI as a counter to the *difficulty* of earthly time, specifically the difficulty Augustine encounters in attempting to elucidate just what time *is*. The struggle in which Augustine engages is a struggle to define the

present. The entire discussion is made all the more tortured, and wracked by doubts and failures of nerve on Augustine's part, by the switch from past to present tense at the beginning of the Book: the argument is embedded in its own problematic, in the 'tortuous vicissitudes' of human temporality. The first question which Augustine addresses is the division of time into past, present and future. Although in the course of everyday conversation, as we shall be reminded throughout the discussion, the nature of this division appears to be self-evident and unproblematic — 'what commoner or more familiar word do we use in speech than time?'²⁸ — a proper definition at first eludes Augustine. A preliminary attempt, he says, might state 'that if nothing passed there would be no past time; if nothing were approaching, there would be no future time; if nothing were, there would be no present time.'²⁹ A problem arises here, however, in that time past 'is now no longer', and time to come 'is not yet': neither can be said to exist. Even worse, the present itself now disappears under Augustine's scrutiny:

On the other hand, if the present were always present and never flowed away into the past, it would not be time at all, but eternity. But if the present is only time, because it flows away into the past, how can we say that it *is*? For it is, only because it will cease to be. Thus we can affirm that time *is* only in that it tends towards not-being.³⁰

Time itself, then, appears to vanish in the conception of the present as that which *comes to be*, and *passes away*. If past and future do not exist for the present, then the third category of time, which is constituted according to the categories of past and future, cannot exist either. It seems that a complete impasse has been reached before Augustine's discussion of time has properly got under way. Augustine's argument at this point appears to prefigure that of Jacques Derrida. In *Speech and Phenomenon* Derrida offers a critique of Husserl's conception of time as a series of punctuated instants having no relation to one another. For Derrida,

Husserl's introduction of the concepts of protention and retention undermines the thesis in the *Logical Investigations* of the instant as 'the blink of an eye'.³¹ As Derrida puts it: 'As soon as we admit this continuity of the now and the not-now.... we admit the other into the self-identity of the *Augenblick*; nonpresence and nonevidence are admitted into the *blink of the instant*. There is a duration to the blink, and it closes the eye.'³² The present — *the blink of the eye* — thus disappears into past and future: it is no longer present to itself *as present*.

Augustine, however, now attempts to overcome this impediment by recourse to the concept of duration. Again, the notion of duration, according to which a time *can be said to be long*, arises from our ordinary quotidian discourse: 'And yet we say long time, and short time: though neither do we speak this, but of the time past or to come.' We speak confidently of 'an hundred years since' and 'ten days hence'. But, Augustine asks, 'in what sense is that either long or short, which at all is not?' As we have already seen, the past *is* no longer, and the future *is* not yet: neither can be said to *be*. The duration of which we speak, apparently unproblematically, cannot, then, be situated in either past or future. Augustine now tries to situate duration in the present. But first, he says, we must ask whether it is possible for a hundred years to be present:

If it is the first year of the hundred years, then that year is present, but the other ninety-nine are still in the future, and so as yet are not: if we are in the second year, then one year is past, one year is present, the rest future. Thus whichever year of our hundred-year period we choose as present, those before it have passed away, those after it are still to come. Thus a hundred years cannot be present.³³

Repeating the logic of this argument with the one year he has been left after the discussion of a hundred, Augustine finds that it too undergoes a drastic reduction: it is possible only to speak of the presence of one day. Logically, of course, the

investigation cannot stop here, and that day soon shrinks to a point, the present, of which it is impossible to say that it has any duration at all.

If we cannot affirm that time has a certain duration, if we cannot speak of a *length of time*, — past, present or future — then how do we account for the fact that we do nonetheless appear to *measure* time, to ‘compare one period with another and say that some are longer, some shorter’?³⁴ If we cannot measure past or future because they do not exist, and we cannot measure the present because it has no duration, it must then, says Augustine, be ‘time actually passing’ that we measure: ‘while time is passing, it can be perceived and measured; but when it has passed it cannot, for it *is* not.’³⁵ It is this statement which begins to introduce the crucial conception of the experience of time as interiority, but not before the intense confusion at this point in the argument has led Augustine to proclaim: ‘I am seeking, Father, not saying: O, my God aid me and direct me.’³⁶ The reiteration of his plea for divine assistance at the beginning of Chapter xvii arises from the fact that Augustine must now entertain again the possibility that past, present and future *do* in fact exist. The present has vanished into a past and future which themselves do not exist: this is the conclusion to which Augustine’s investigation has brought him, a conclusion which is manifestly at odds with the fact that he and others continue to speak of time (and to speak of it in terms of duration and measurement). Perhaps, he first suggests, there is only the present, ‘because the other two do not exist’. Or perhaps past and future do exist, and the present, which does not endure, is merely a movement from future to past. It is precisely the fact that we *speak* about past and future that forces Augustine to reconsider their existence:

For where have those who prophesied the future seen the future, if it does not exist? What does not exist cannot be seen. And those who describe the past could not describe it truly if they did not mentally see it: and if the past were totally without existence it would be totally impossible to see it. Hence both past and future must exist.³⁷

The crucial observation here is, of course, that past and future are 'seen' mentally. Augustine goes on to ask where past and future might be: he does not yet know the answer to this question, but is certain that 'wherever they are, they are there not as future or past, but present.' We know already that past and future cannot exist as such, because 'if wherever they are they are future, then in that place they are not yet; if past, then they are there no more. Thus wherever they are and whatever they are, they *are* only as present.'³⁸ When the events of the past are related or retold, it is not the past as such that memory offers, but 'words conceived from the images of the things: for the things stamped their prints upon the mind as they passed through it by way of the senses.'³⁹ For example, Augustine's own boyhood, which no longer exists, is past, in other words it *is in time past*, which no longer exists, but the likeness of his boyhood exists in the present when he recalls it and talks of it.⁴⁰ Similarly, events in the future exist in the minds of those who foretell them, that is, they exist in the present.

In the proposition that future and past both exist as 'likenesses' or as concepts in the mind, Augustine solves both the problem of the existence of the future and past, and that of the *endurance* of the present; the present is that which, in its existence, guarantees that of the past and future. Past, present and future, then, exist within consciousness. Time, as Agamben points out, has been severed from natural events, and become 'an essentially human, interior phenomenon.'⁴¹

Augustine has now identified the *place* of time, the site where time endures, passes and can be measured, as human consciousness: this is the interiorization of the experience of temporality which both Lyotard and Agamben (and Auerbach before them) identify as a constitutive element in the Western conception of time. As Agamben points out, this model retains from the Greeks the notion of a homogeneous series of *instants*, of presents which are conceived, paradoxically, as past and future. There is, claims Augustine, a present, but that present is merely the presence of recollection or of prediction in the mind, a present which still 'has

no space, which disappears into past and future, and corresponds, again, to ‘the mathematical time of classical Antiquity’, that is, to the geometric point which has no extension in space, and which Agamben identifies in Aristotle:

The instant in itself is nothing more than the continuity of time [*synecheia chronos*], a pure limit which both joins and divides past and future. As such, it is always elusive, and Aristotle expresses its paradoxically nullified character in the statement that in dividing time infinitely, the now is always ‘other’; yet in uniting past and future and ensuring continuity, it is always the same; and in this is the basis of the radical ‘otherness’ of time, and of its ‘destructive’ character.⁴²

Agamben goes on to quote Aristotle’s *Physics* to the effect that since the now is the end of the past and the beginning of the future, ‘it must present a relation analogous to the kind of identity that exists between the convexity and the concavity of the same circumference, which necessitates a difference between that with respect to which it bears the other.’⁴³ I wish to argue here that what Agamben calls the ‘otherness’ of time — the manner in which, as for Aristotle, the present opens a breach in the continuum, thereby instituting the alterity of past and future — is addressed by Augustine, not in the geometric terms utilized by Aristotle, but in relation to the *voice*. As we have seen, Augustine’s positing of the interiority of temporal experience arises in part from the fact that, despite the apparent impossibility of crediting past, present or future with existence, we nonetheless continue to speak about time, to speak of past events as past, to predict future events, to refer to temporal duration, lengths or spaces of time. This is the stubborn quotidian fact which Augustine must explain: the question addressed by *Confessions* XI ceases to be : what is time? and becomes instead: what do we speak about when we speak about — and in — time?

I confess to You, Lord, that I still do not know what time is. And again I confess to You, Lord, that I know that I am uttering these things in time. I have been talking of time for a long time, and this long time would not be a long time unless time had passed. But how do I know this, since I do not know how to express what I know.⁴⁴

And again:

Does not my soul speak truly to You when I say that I can measure time? For so it is, O Lord my God, I measure it and I do not know what it is that I am measuring.⁴⁵

The discussion of the relationship between the voice and time – of the voice *in* time – in *Confessions* XI, xxvi – xxvii begins to elaborate the precise nature of the interiority of the Western experience of time.

The Voice of God

The interiority of the experience of time outlined above appears to contradict that proposed by Auerbach. For Auerbach, the discrete instants or nows are accorded a teleological significance in their relation to the divine, and not to human consciousness. I wish now to suggest, following Paul Ricoeur's analysis of Augustine's argument, that the two apparently incompatible versions of time which appear in Augustine's writings are to a large extent reconciled in the discussion of the voice presented above. While Ricoeur does not propose a model of time governed by reference to God in the same way that Auerbach does, he nevertheless acknowledges that the entire argument concerning human time in *Confessions* XI takes place in the context of an opposition between the temporal and the eternal.

The divine is — quite obviously — the constant focus of an appeal for knowledge or enlightenment on Augustine's part. There is, says Ricoeur, a 'hymnic' aspect of Augustine's discussion: his pleas for assistance are addressed directly to the realm of the divine. The meditation on time becomes a question of speaking to the divine and of interpreting the voice of God, 'showing what the investigation of time owes to its inclusion within a meditation on the eternal Word'.⁴⁶ This becomes clear in the section of the argument which deals with the question of whether time is dependent on the movement of the heavenly bodies. The first stage of this argument, as we have seen, states that there is no reason why heavenly bodies in particular should constitute the source of temporality. Why, asks Augustine, should not time have its origin in the movement of any or all bodies? Further, he argues, if the movement of the heavenly bodies were to cease, there would still be time, we would still be able to speak about our experience of time, to compare long periods with short, and so forth. The question of the voice is crucial here: the next step in the argument moves from the human voice speaking about and in time, to the divine word. The sun and stars do not produce time, but rather *mark* it, and this assertion is accompanied by the citation of *Genesis* 1; 14, when Augustine states that 'there are stars and the lights of heaven to *be for signs and for seasons and for days and years*'.⁴⁷

III

The Chrematistics of Time

A narrative recounted elsewhere by Augustine presents briefly the stakes both of a wider Augustinian concern with the philosophy of time, and of the present argument. In Book XIII of *De Trinitate*, Augustine describes an occurrence at the theatre:

And hence comes that story of the comic actor's witty joke, who promised that he would say in the theatre, in some other play, what all had in their minds, and what all willed; and when a still greater crowd had come together on the day appointed, with great expectation, all being in suspense and silent, is affirmed to have said: You will to buy cheap, and sell dear. And mean actor though he was, yet all in his words recognized what themselves were conscious of, and applauded him with wonderful goodwill, for saying before the eyes of all what was confessedly true, yet what no one looked for.⁴⁸

In this passage Augustine reveals at a stroke the connections between time, representation and capital. As Éric Alliez has commented, Augustine presents here the economics or chrematistics of time: the temporal interval between the two performances, between the announcement of a forthcoming revelation and its thwarted arrival, is precisely the interval between capital investment and subsequent return, inseparable from an understanding of time as the abstract equivalence of present and future. For Augustine, the avarice revealed by the actor is bound up with a conception of time as that which can be stockpiled or speculated upon. As Alliez has it:

The merchant appropriates time by speculating on it. He is the one who projects the serialization of time, who produces its acceleration by endlessly re-creating it, disjoined from the world as God wished it. Between buying and stocking in the expectation of shortages, reselling at the right moments, the merchant is the man of *occasio*. While sin resides wholly in the will to acquire, the merchant's time is the endlessly renewed occasion for gain. By the merchant's grace, money is time.⁴⁹

An abstract, empty time, then, is coincident with the time of capital: in *Capital Times* Alliez goes on to argue that the fourteenth century sees not only the advent of complex technologies for the measurement of time, but also of a particular *time of avarice*, a chrematistic temporality which has as its focus the future as object of speculation, and which is already evident to Augustine as the source of sin.⁵⁰ The stockpiling of time, as Alliez puts it, is 'the metaphysical figure of capitalism'.

The story which Augustine tells, though, not only suggests the conjunction of capital with a certain philosophy of time; it is also a story about representation. The scene takes place, crucially, in the theatre (the site, in Augustine's writing, of another kind of sinfulness).⁵¹ We are presented here also with a particular temporality of mimesis or representation, with a representational logic operating in precisely the same manner as that of investment, speculation and profitable return. Again, Alliez is instructive here: '[i]n his soul, every spectator is a speculator'.⁵² The mimetic performance of the actor in Augustine's narrative is construed by the audience as a form of investment: mimesis here promises nothing more than *more mimesis*, a future profitable accumulation of mimetic skill and accuracy: if the audience is willing to make the necessary temporal and economic investment, then at the second performance, it is announced, the actor will return, this time bearing the profit on the audience's speculation, the revelation of their innermost thoughts. The first performance, then, functions as a promissory note and as a speculative

gamble. The first instance, the first moment, the first 'present', is nothing other than the projection of the second as its spectacular fulfilment. It functions, then, both as the 'original' instituting of a temporal continuum, and as an *empty*, abstract instant which can only be given its full meaning in the fulfilment of the promise. If the actor succeeds, then the second, revelatory, performance confers validity on the first in two ways. Firstly, the promise has been *true*; an equivalence becomes apparent between the two scenes. Secondly, and more importantly, the very act of mimesis, of theatrical representation, is guaranteed by the success of the second theatrical event. In this way, the mimetic act becomes the declaration of the transitivity of mimetic truth: not only is the actor's representation accurate, but it reveals at the same time the truth of representation in general, a truth revealed in the repetition in time of the mimetic act. It is worth noting here that this form of legitimation is in no sense undermined by the nature of the actor's statement: indeed, his declaration, in revealing the fictional nature of the theatrical apparatus, serves only to reinforce the power of representation. Two moments, then, corresponding in the realm of representation to the instants of capitalist speculation: two moments rendered significant to the extent that they constitute a model of time abstracted in terms of past and future: the one announcing the other, the other retrospectively conveying meaning on the first. In conjunction with this vision of the temporality of representation, an avaristic logic of capital investment, functioning in exactly the same way.

Before drawing a number of inferences from all of this (which I shall elucidate with reference to Agamben), and by way of suggesting, proleptically, the implications for the activity and institutions of criticism, it is worth drawing attention also to a third feature of Augustine's parable. A story about money and theatre, about capital and mimesis, the narrative recounted in *De Trinitate* also describes a recognizable pedagogical scene: the promise to reveal at a future point or moment, the truth of the topic or text at hand. Augustine's anecdote stages a transition from fictional, theatrical representation to the scene of instruction (itself,

it turns out, no less spectacular); the actor transforms himself into a teacher and — as I have suggested — both reveals the truth of the act of representation *and* confers validity on aesthetic representation in general, the pedagogical moment itself gaining legitimation — or, at least, a degree of persuasiveness — from art. The temporal logic of this move bears repeating. The first instant described here — the moment of a particular theatrical representation — is also, as I have pointed out, the announcement that this first moment will find its ultimate fulfilment and legitimation in the second: the mimetic *activity* [*energeia*] (to adopt an Aristotelian terminology to which Agamben will have recourse) becomes the *process* [*genesis* or movement: *kinesis*] of instruction, a process which becomes meaningful only as the linking of two moments. In this sense, the question to ask of Augustine's narrative is: what happened in the interim, between the two performances, in the temporal interval (as Augustine puts it, a time of anticipation and silence) that constitutes the movement from mimesis to education [*paideia*], and it is to this question, of the 'interim' (an interim that Agamben will call, following Aristotle, *pleasure* and that Augustine thinks, crucially, in terms of *reading*), that I shall turn in conclusion.

Temporal Exile

The Augustinian formulation of time becomes for Auerbach, a conception not only of the representation of time but of the time of representation. For Auerbach, who finds throughout his exploration of 'the representation of reality in Western literature' that mimesis is — from Homer to Virginia Woolf — bound up inextricably with conceptions of temporality, Augustine's discussion of time in *Confessions*, *De Trinitate* and *City of God*, is also an investigation of representation.

In 'Return upon the Return' — a text largely concerned with a reading of Homer and Joyce — Lyotard refers to Auerbach's interpretation of the Homeric

narrative in such a way that the connections between the question of background and the wider Augustinian formulation of the temporal become clear. At stake in this instance is a conception of time and of the present in terms of a particular 'return': the return or recognition of the subject upon or of itself. Modernity, argues Lyotard, cannot think time outside of a certain kind of movement which, by virtue of the conception of the future with which it operates, is inevitably a movement toward self-recognition through temporal exile or alienation. What governs the narrative of alienation in time (for example, in the *Odyssey*) is the projected future return, just as — in capitalism — the investment in the present is founded on the assumption or projection of a forthcoming return. In 'Time Today', Lyotard writes: 'Let us say merely that what is called capital is grounded in the principle that money is nothing other than time placed in reserve, available'.⁵³ That Lyotard's argument in this context takes place with regard to Auerbach's reflections on the temporalities of epic and theological writing, suggests a concern in his thought with thinking time and representation in a basic or fundamental sense. It is this contemporary return of a question which exercises both Augustine and Auerbach to which I now wish to turn with reference to the text which deals most explicitly — though also most enigmatically — with the problems of time I have been outlining: specifically, the status of the 'interim' to which I referred earlier in relation to Augustine.

Time and History

Giorgio Agamben's essay 'Time and History', published in 1978, shares more than a title with the fifth chapter of Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*.⁵⁴ Both texts present a narrative concerning the move from the Greek conception of a cyclical time, through the teleological time of Christianity to the abstract and irreversible temporality of capitalism. Where Debord, though, adds little to the Marxian

analysis of capitalism as the stockpiling of time, Agamben announces at the outset his intention: the formulation of a philosophy of time which would be adequate to the Marxist conception of history. Marxism, he says, has failed to develop a philosophy of time, and so 'harbour[s], side by side, a revolutionary concept of history and a traditional experience of time',⁵⁵ a vision of linear and unified time which has weakened the Marxist model of history:

The vulgar representation of time as a precise and homogeneous continuum has thus diluted the Marxist concept of history: it has become the hidden breach through which ideology has crept into the citadel of historical materialism. Benjamin had already warned of this danger in his 'Theses on the Philosophy of History'. We now need to elucidate the concept of time implicit in the Marxist conception of history.⁵⁶

Agamben suggests a number of concepts of time to fill the gap in Marx's thought, concepts which he claims 'lie scattered among the folds and shadows of the Western cultural tradition'.⁵⁷ Thus, the Gnostic vision of 'an incoherent and unhomogeneous time' and the Stoic rejection of both the Platonic image of eternity and the Aristotelian notion of the precise instant constitute, for Agamben, two instances of the *arresting* of the homogeneous continuum which is the Western conception of time and which he finds also in Benjamin's 'Theses on the Philosophy of History': a temporality which is no longer that of the circle or the straight line, but 'is ready at any moment to stop time,' a concept of history in which what is at stake is not a goal residing in the distant future, but the now, the state of emergency which is the rule. History, claims Benjamin, 'is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now [*Jetztzeit*]',⁵⁸ a claim which, in accordance with the method Benjamin refers to as dialectic at a standstill [*Dialektik im Stillstand*], institutes a decisive break with the Enlightenment vision of history as linear progress.

Benjamin's concept brings together historical materialism and the mystical concept of the *nunc stans*, concentrating its energies on those moments in history which are laden with now-time, for example the manner in which the French revolution viewed itself as ancient Rome reincarnate: 'thus, to Robespierre ancient Rome was a past charged with the time of the now which he blasted out of the continuum of history'.⁵⁹ The 'state of emergency' would be a perpetual interruption of chronology: an interruption which has not ceased to take place:

a revolution from which there springs not a new chronology, but a qualitative alteration of time (a *cairology*), [which] would have the weightiest consequence and would alone be immune to absorption into the reflux of restoration. He who, in the *epoche* of pleasure, has remembered history as he would remember his original home, will bring this memory to everything, will exact this promise from each instant: he is the true revolutionary and the true seer, released from time not at the millennium, but *now*.⁶⁰

The *now* is, for Agamben, contrasted with the abstract instant found in the traditional Western concept of time: the *cairos*, the time of plenitude which Augustine finds in the experience of a connection with the divine, and which he opposes to the abstract *chronos* typified by the time of the merchants — and, as we have seen, the audience at the theatre — this 'now' is to be found, to be experienced, in *pleasure*. Agamben here follows Aristotle, who in Book X of the *Ethics* argues that pleasure is not a process, that is, it does not acquire meaning or value in terms of its completeness, but is a certain experience of the present: it is not dependent upon a projected future point at which it will become *whole*:

The act of seeing is regarded as complete at any moment of its duration, because it does not lack anything that, realized later, will perfect its specific

quality. Now pleasure also seems to be of this nature, because it is a sort of whole, i.e., at no moment in time can one fasten upon a pleasure the prolongation of which will enable its specific quality to be perfected. For this reason pleasure is not a process; because every process is in time, and has an end (e.g. the process of building), and is complete when it has accomplished its object. Thus it is complete either in the whole of the time that it takes or at the instant of reaching its end.⁶¹

Agamben finds in Aristotle's description of pleasure, what he calls 'humankind's original home', which is not a process [*genesis*] or a movement [*kinesis*], and does not occur in a measurable space of time. The time of pleasurable plenitude which Agamben discovers in Aristotle is decidedly not, however, that extra-temporal realm which enables Augustine, in the *Confessions*, to step outside of the abstract flow of time: it is not, in other words, the eternal. For Agamben, '[t]he Western experience of time is split between eternity and continuous linear time. The dividing point through which the two relate is the instant as a discrete, elusive point. Against this conception, which dooms any attempt to master time, there must be opposed one whereby the true site of pleasure, as man's primary dimension, is neither precise, continuous time nor eternity, but history'.⁶² In the course of this argument, Agamben reads Book XI of Augustine's *Confessions* as an attempt to think beyond the static continuum of irreversible time. In Augustine's effort to identify the present between the recognizable poles of past and future, he inevitably has recourse, argues Agamben, to the notion of a conjunction between time and eternity, described above. It is in the intervention of the eternal — as Auerbach was aware — that Augustine identifies the possibility of a full, meaningful experience of time.

I wish now to turn to a moment in the *Confessions* where this recourse is particularly apparent, and to suggest, as Agamben does not, that those passages in Book XI on the measurement of the time of poetry, specifically, the temporality of reading and of the voice, offer for Augustine — albeit momentarily — a glimpse of a time which is not that of the static continuum but which is not yet the eternal. It is the time, in a formulation that will take us back to the theatrical scene of *De Trinitate*, of a certain kind of representation, the time also, as in the interval between the actor's promise and its perverse (in the mathematical sense of the formation of a mirror-image) fulfilment, of a particular *silence*.⁶³

Confessions XI, xxvi leads into the discussion of the temporality of the voice with a consideration of the measurement of temporal intervals in poetry. It appears at first, says Augustine, that poetry is 'measured' unproblematically, according to syllables, feet and lines, by comparing the relative lengths of time it takes to speak each. It is not, however, strictly speaking the poem that we measure in this manner, but the time a voice takes to speak the poem, and thus a poem might occupy a different temporal duration, depending on how quickly it is uttered: 'it may well be that a shorter line may take longer if it is recited slowly than a longer line hurried through. And the same is true of a poem or a foot or a syllable.'⁶⁴ The extension of time which is measured here is, says Augustine, probably that of the mind itself, and the question arises whether it is time past, present or future which is being measured. The answer would seem to be 'time in passage but not past'. Augustine now begins to consider explicitly the measurement of a speaking voice:

Consider the example of a bodily voice. It begins to sound, it sounds and goes on sounding, then it ceases: and now there is silence, the sound has passed, the sound no longer is. It was future before it began to sound, and so could not be measured, for as yet it did not exist; and now it cannot be

measured because now it exists no longer. Only while sounding could it be measured because then it was, and so was measurable. But even then it was not standing still; it was moving, and moving out of existence. Did this make it more measurable? Only in the sense that by its passing it was spread over a certain space of time which made it measurable: for the present occupies no space.⁶⁵

The voice which sounds here sounds *in time* in precisely the same manner as the times of money and mimesis: it is an abstract time in which the beginning has meaning only in relation to its ceasing. As the narrator of Samuel Beckett's *Company* — a text which begins with the words 'A voice comes to one in the dark. Imagine', and which is clearly indebted to these passages from Augustine — describes the temporality of the voice: 'a device, perhaps, from the incontrovertibility of the one to win credence for the other'.⁶⁶

Ultimately, as we might expect, the Augustinian meditation on the voice — surrounded, as it is, by the incessant repetition of Augustine's prayers for guidance — leaps out of this abstract continuum to hear the voice, not of the reader of poetry, but of the divine: the voice of God. The measurement of the time of the voice is in the last analysis the experience of the voice of the god whose aid Augustine seeks in his fraught wrangling with the question of time, and it is in the impress, the trace left by that passing voice on his own mind, that Augustine finally identifies the measurable quality of the voice, as opposed to its abstract and treacherous quantity in time. In the interim, however, there intervenes another sound, another voice: a voice that is silent and yet remains a voice: silence, or the absence of a voice, is measured in the same way, as if silence were in fact a sound capable of leaving a similar *impress* in the mind. The voice, then, becomes momentarily for Augustine, the interim itself, the time described in *De Trinitate* as the time of suspense and silence. What is this silence: the silence that intervenes in reading, in the more or less (un)trustworthy and quantified *speed* of the reading

voice? This interim, this punctuation of reading by a silence (the silence, perhaps, of a pause for breath in the headlong rush to complete the reading) is nothing less than the 'now time' of which Benjamin wrote, and which Agamben finds in the Aristotelian understanding of *pleasure*. Another name for this pleasure is *reading itself*, a reading which cannot be quantified in terms of those abstract divisions of poetry which Augustine rejects, and which constitutes a gap, a breath, a suspense, a halting of the speed of the representation of the poem by the reading voice. This silence is the interim or the gap between theatrical performances, between the instant which announces the imminent arrival of *truth* and the institution of a *process* conceived in terms of its completing or fulfilling final instance. The name I will give, in conclusion, to this silent *now* that intervenes, for Augustine as for Agamben, is *criticism*. Criticism is precisely the halting of the quantifiable rush toward completion, toward a final instance of representation which would also, as in the Augustinian parable, function as the legitimation of a temporal representation in terms of before and after. Criticism (*reading, pleasure*) is precisely *not* this process of original investment — in a text to be read, to be voiced or represented at some future point, to be 'given a voice'⁶⁷ — followed by profitable return, but rather the silent experience of the *now*, not the time of anticipation but the time of suspense, a time when, as Agamben says elsewhere, 'the voice drops, where breath is lacking, [and] a little sign remains suspended. On nothing other than that, hesitantly, thought ventures forth'.⁶⁸

Notes

¹ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 50ff.

² With capitalism comes the abstraction of labour in labour-time, the abstract and universal equivalence of the time of money, and the abstraction of lived time in clock-time. See, in this regard, Jacques Le Goff, 'Merchant's Time and Church's Time in the Middle Ages' and 'Labour-Time in the "Crisis" of the Fourteenth Century: From Medieval Time to Modern Time', in *Time, Work, and Culture in the Middle Ages*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982): 'Among the principle criticisms leveled against the merchants was the charge that their profit implied a mortgage on time, which was supposed to belong to God alone [...]. Against the merchant's time, the Church sets up its own time, which is supposed to belong to God alone and which cannot be an object of lucre.' pp. 29, 30.

³ Cf. Georges Poulet, *Études sur le temps humain*, I (Paris: Éditions du Rocher, 1989), p. 8 and passim. Poulet writes, of a medieval conception of time heavily indebted to Augustine, 'tout *devenir*, dans l'ordre de la nature comme dans l'ordre de l'esprit, requérait une détermination directe de Dieu. Ainsi l'opération divine fondait le temps non seulement en la permanence qui le rendait possible, mais en l'actualité qui le rendait nécessaire et réel. Actualité qui pouvait être instantané, mais qui, lorsqu'elle était temporelle, l'était selon la continuité d'un mouvement ininterrompu vers un fin.' p. 8.

⁴ 'Universal History and Cultural Differences', in *The Lyotard Reader*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989); 'Return upon the Return', 'Time Today', in *The Inhuman*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Cambridge: Polity, 1991).

⁵ This movement of capitalist investment and return informs the conventions of plot and narrative according to Lyotard, for example, in cinema: 'We are not only speaking of the requirement of profitability imposed upon the artist by the

producer, but also of the formal requirements that the artist weighs upon his material. All so-called good form implies the return of sameness, the folding back of diversity upon an identical unity [...]. It is precisely through the return to the ends of identification that cinematographic form, understood as the synthesis of good movement, is articulated following the cyclical organization of capital.’ Jean-François Lyotard, ‘Acinema’, trans. Paisley N. Livingston, in *The Lyotard Reader*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), pp. 72, 74. Opposition to this temporal logic of return takes, for Lyotard, the form either of an excess of movement or of extreme immobilization. Cf., also, Gilles Deleuze’s discussions of Bergson in his *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989). The cinematic process, claims Bergson in *Creative Evolution*, consists of the extraction of an impersonal and abstract movement from the movement of bodies or figures, an abstraction to which Deleuze opposes the concepts of the *mobile section* and the *movement image*. Cf. my discussion of these issues in Chapter Five.

⁶ St. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. F.J. Sheed (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), p. 112.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ St. Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson, ed. David Knowles (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 517.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 518.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 520.

¹⁴ Giorgio Agamben, *Infancy and History*, trans. Liz Heron (London: Verso, 1993), p. 91. Cf. André Gorz, *Farewell to the Working Class*, trans. Michael Sonenscher (London: Pluto Press, 1982), *passim*. Gorz argues for the centrality of the question

of time (of a 'politics of time') in an effective left-wing politics of the future, and quotes a study produced by the *Échanges et Projets* group (around Jacques Delors) in 1980: 'The freeing of time is a form of revolution or incitement to revolution insofar as it leads, almost automatically, to calling the productivist socio-cultural model into question... To a greater or lesser extent, all attempts to find an alternative model of development turn around the question of time... Everything connected with ecology, decentralised sources of energy, conviviality, self-reliance, mutual aid and social experimentation is based upon different modes of managing time.' *La Révolution du Temps Choisi*, quoted in Gorz, p. 137.

¹⁵ Paul Virilio, *Speed and Politics*, trans. Mark Polizzotti (New York: Semiotext(e), 1986), p. 22.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

¹⁷ Paul Virilio & Sylvère Lotringer, *Pure War*, trans. Mark Polizzotti (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983), pp. 64-5.

¹⁸ Paul Virilio, *Speed and Politics*, p. 141.

¹⁹ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin & David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 5.

²⁰ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis*, p. 73.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 73-4.

²² Augustine, *Confessions*, p. 225.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 220-221.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 241.

²⁵ Augustine, *City of God*, XII, xvi. [p. 491] The statement about time beginning with the motion of heavenly bodies is again manifestly at odds with *Confessions* XI. Angelic time, which can be measured in accordance with *any movement whatever*, would appear, then, to be close to human time as it is presented in *Confessions*, but not in *City of God*. As Georges Poulet puts it, in relation to Medieval conceptions of angelic time: 'Seule la pensée angélique pouvait passer d'idée à idée et d'instant

en instant, sans un milieu temporel qui les joignît ou les portât.’ See Georges Poulet, *Études sur le temps humain*, I (Paris: Éditions du Rocher, 1989), p. 9. Cf., also, Massimo Cacciari, *The Necessary Angel*, trans. Miguel Vatter (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994), *passim*.

²⁶ Augustine, *Confessions* p. 230.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 218-219.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Edmund Husserl, *The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness*, ed. Martin Heidegger, trans. James S. Churchill (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964).

³² Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomenon*, trans. D. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 65.

³³ *Confessions*, p. 220.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Early in the *Confessions*, Augustine is concerned with precisely this question of the representation of his own past; he writes, concerning his infancy and boyhood: ‘Thus, Lord, I do not remember living this age of my infancy; I must take the word of others about it and can only conjecture how I spent it — even if with a fair amount of certainty — from watching others now in the same stage. I am loth, indeed, to count it as part of the life I live in this world. For it is buried in the darkness of the forgotten as completely as the period earlier still that I spent in my

mother's womb. But if *I was conceived in iniquity, and in sin my mother nourished me in the womb*, then where, my God, where, O Lord, where or when was I, Your servant, innocent? But I pass now from that time. For what concern have I now with a time of which I can recall no trace?' *Confessions*, p. 9.

⁴¹ Giorgio Agamben, *Infancy and History*, p.95.

⁴² Ibid., p.93. Cf. Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time* (London: Verso, 1995), p. 48 and passim. Osborne writes: 'The former [Aristotle] generates a time-scale of serial succession out of the differentiation of two point-like instants, in relation to which it becomes possible both to *measure* time and to speak of a "before" and an "after" (but not of a "past" or a "future"). The latter [Augustine], on the other hand, produces a dynamically differentiated past and future as the effect of an irreducible self-referentiality.' p. 48.

⁴³ Aristotle, *Physics*, IV, xiii.

⁴⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, p. 226.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 227.

⁴⁶ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, p. 13.

⁴⁷ Augustine, *Confessions*, p. 225.

⁴⁸ St. Augustine, *De Trinitate*, trans. Arthur West Haddan (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1878), pp. 313-14.

⁴⁹ Éric Alliez, *Capital Times: Tales from the Conquest of Time*, trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 105. Cf. Jacques Attali, *Noise*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), p. 101 and *Histoires du temps* (Paris: Fayard, 1982), p. 183 ff. and *passim*. As Attali has it, '[a] precondition for representation, money contains exchange-time, summarizes and abstracts it: it transforms the concrete, lived time of negotiation and compromise into a supposedly stable sign of equivalence[...].' *Noise*, p. 101. On the abstraction of time, see also Michel Serres, *Hermes: Literature, Science, Philosophy*, ed. Josué V. Harari and David F. Bell (Baltimore:

Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982). pp. 115-16: 'Time itself would be nothing without objects situated in space, without their respective movements, their formation, their disintegration. My readers will forgive me this, but the clock that Lucretius placed right in the middle of nature cannot mark Newtonian time; as the clock is the totality of things, between their birth and death, it marks a Bergsonian, that is, thermodynamic, time — an irreversible and irrevocable time, marked like the endless flow of atoms, flowing, running, crumbling [...] toward their downfall and death.'

⁵⁰ On the measurement of 'merchant's time' in the fourteenth century, see Le Goff, *op. cit.*, p. 38 and *passim*.

⁵¹ See Augustine, *City of God*, I, xxxii; II, xiii and *passim*. Augustine identifies the theatres with the corruption of the Roman state and the obscenities of worship of false gods in Greece and Rome. The desire for theatrical shows is so pernicious, he writes, that '[it] has blinded the minds of the sufferers with such darkness, and has so deformed and degraded them, that quite recently, when Rome was sacked, those who were infected with this plague, and who managed to reach Carthage as refugees, attend the theatres every day as raving supporters of the rival actors! I wonder if posterity will be able to believe this, when they hear of it!' *City of God*, p. 44.

⁵² Éric Alliez, *Capital Times*, p. 104. Joseph Addison's *Spectator* presents this homology between spectator and speculator in some striking passages on his commercial relationship with his audience. Addison follows a speculation on the number of readers of his paper (an invisible or ghostly constituency considerably larger — his publisher tells him — than the number of people who have made the financial investment in what Addison calls his daily 'speculations') with an account of his own role as spectral 'spectator' at the telling of a ghost story (Addison here becoming the invisible 'readership'). See Addison, *Spectator* Nos. 10 and 12.

⁵³ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, p. 65.

⁵⁴ See Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black and Red, 1983). [unpaginated] For Debord, the triumph on a worldwide scale of an abstract, irreversible, time involves the elimination of lived time which had been supported for individuals and groups alongside cyclical time: '[the] triumph of irreversible time is also its metamorphosis into the *time of things*, because the weapon of its victory was precisely the mass production of objects according to the laws of the commodity.' ¶ 142.

⁵⁵ Giorgio Agamben, 'Time and History', in *Infancy and History*, trans. Liz Heron (London: Verso, 1993), p. 91.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 100.

⁵⁸ Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1992), pp. 252-3.

⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 253.

⁶⁰ *Infancy and History*, p. 105.

⁶¹ Aristotle, *Ethics*, trans. J.A.K. Thomson, rev. Hugh Tredennick (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), p. 318.

⁶² *Infancy and History*, p. 104.

⁶³ The link posited here between the voice and the present brings to mind, of course, the Heideggerian link between the voice and presence. For a sustained investigation of this topic, c.f. Giorgio Agamben, *Language and Death*, trans. Karen E. Pinkus & Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991). With regard to Augustine's *De Trinitate*, Agamben proposes an understanding of the voice as that which is no longer mere sound, and is not yet meaning, but rather 'the pure taking place of an instance of discourse' (p.34; the reference is to *De Trinitate*, trans. Stephen McKenna, Washington D.C., 1963, pp. 292-93). The voice, in other words, would be prior to signification; it would be

subject only to Lyotard's 'Is it happening?' (is there a voice?) and not to the question 'What is happening?' (what does this voice *say*?).

⁶⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, p. 227.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 228.

⁶⁶ Samuel Beckett, *Company*, in *Nohow On* (London: Calder, 1992), p. 5. For a treatment of some stylistic and thematic similarities between Augustine and Beckett, see Steven J. Rosen, *Samuel Beckett and the Pessimistic Tradition* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1976). An earlier formulation of the problematics of time in Beckett's work can be found in Richard Coe, *Samuel Beckett* (New York: Evergreen, 1964): '[...] the writer [is] writing about a past which can never catch up with the present moment of writing, because, even as he writes the word "now" or "it is midnight", the instant of "now" has already vanished, and "it was not midnight".' p. 52.

⁶⁷ Cf. Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, pp. 75-76.

⁶⁸ Giorgio Agamben, *Idea of Prose*, trans. Michael Sullivan and Sam Whitsitt (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), p. 104.

Chapter 5: The Criticism of the Future

‘Within the temporal sequence, the anticipation of the future is clearly to be preferred to the search into the past. Even in the divine Scriptures the past events which are recounted bear the prefiguration or promise or testimony of the future.’ (Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will*)

‘I am at all hours ready to become anything I can be.’ (Montaigne, *Essais*)

I

As we saw in the previous chapter, poetry, for Augustine, cannot be reduced to the model of succession offered by the abstract series, that is, to a chaplet of instants conceived as pages, lines, words or syllables. Rather, the present of poetry consists, like that of temporality in general, in the duration of those instants in the mind of a reader. The spatial model of homogeneous sections cannot hold for a text which is dependent for its meaning on a movement which continually resists the attempt to render it immobile, to reduce it to a spatial field to be mapped according to certain static coordinates. In order to conceive of poetry in this way, however, Augustine must posit a subject outside of the succession of instants, a subject which, as it were, *gives time* to that empty succession. In other words, he must project a future towards which the reading subject moves. The concept of duration here is dependent on such a future in precisely the way in which the earlier conception of time relied upon a notion of the future redemption of human time in the divine.

The structure of the autobiographical narrative takes the form of a series of events or instants that go to make up the complete life; but each of those instants has meaning only from the perspective of what was, at the time, the future. The event both stands for itself and acts as the indicator of a future point at which the whole will acquire meaning. This would be the case, for example, with the narrative Augustine recounts in Book II of the *Confessions*, concerning the stealing of some pears.¹ This story takes its place in the overall narrative of the life of Augustine to the extent that it both illustrates the sinfulness which he has already announced will be the subject of Book II, and demands both at the level of the events narrated and at the level of the narrative of Augustine's effort to understand the event, some future redemption or forgiveness. Added to these significances, another, allegorical, meaning clearly intervenes: the event is chosen for its proximity to the crucial event of the biblical Fall. As Augustine reminds us in *On Free Choice of the Will*, an event like the eating of the forbidden fruit has meaning primarily for its relationship with the future of humanity (it has this in common with the whole of Scriptural time: that it looks forward, projects itself in terms of a future occurrence).² This is clearly a problem in all autobiographical writing, but it is dramatized in a particularly striking fashion by Augustine, the entire narrative of sin and conversion depending upon the splitting of the author into two distinct selves inhabiting different times.³ The moments in the existence of the *prior* self can then be viewed as part of a space, temporality being relegated to the move from one self to the other, a move which is said to have occurred instantaneously in a sublime encounter with the Scriptural text. The narrative of Augustine's conversion suggests a more conventional conception of the temporality of reading than does the discussion of poetry in Book XI.

The conversion narrative occurs toward the end of Book VIII of the *Confessions*: having spent some years searching for the conversion that will lead him to truth (and which he knows must occur, though it has not yet made itself felt),

Augustine calls to mind the multitude of sins which he has already recounted in the narrative of his life to date. At this moment, the multiplicity of events that have taken place in time comes together in one appalling unified vision: as Augustine puts it, 'heaped [...] *in my heart's sight*, a mighty storm arose in me, bringing a mighty rain of tears.'⁴ Retreating into solitude, Augustine gives himself up to his tears and continues to lament:

How long, how long shall I go on saying tomorrow and again tomorrow? Why not now, why not have an end to my uncleanness this very hour?⁵

It is at this moment, anticipated and now demanded as a conjunction of divine atemporality and the agonizing time in which he finds himself immured, that Augustine hears the voice of a child chanting the words 'take and read, take and read':

Damming back the flood of tears I arose, interpreting the incident as quite certainly a divine command to open my book of Scripture and read the passage at which I should open [...]. So I was moved to return to the place where Alypius was sitting, for I had put down the Apostle's book when I arose. I snatched it up, opened it and in silence read the passage upon which my eyes first fell: *Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and impurities, not in contention and envy, but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ and make not provision for the flesh in its concupiscences*. I had no wish to read further, and no need. For in that instant, with the very ending of the sentence, it was as though a light of utter confidence shone in all my heart, and all the darkness of uncertainty vanished away.⁶

The moment of reading described here, the instant which is also the spontaneous advent of an *enlightenment*, is at one and the same time a singular moment of supreme significance as such, and an instant which casts retrospective and prospective light on the rest of Augustine's life. It is, in the manner of the present discussed in Book XI, both the end (of Augustine's life of sin and yearning for redemption) and the beginning (of a future). In this sense, it is, if read through the later meditation on past, present and future, a moment which is singularly resistant to representation or isolation. That this event occurs in time, in other words, is itself problematic, and Augustine immediately moves out from his own solitary reading to include his friend Alypius (who reads beyond the passage which has had so profound an effect on Augustine and takes the words 'now him that is weak in faith, take unto you' as evidence of his own inclusion in Augustine's spectacular realization of faith) and his mother, whose narrative of expectation for her son (grandchildren, marriage, etc.) is suddenly stalled in the moment of divine fulfilment, 'for she saw that You had given her more than with all her pitiful weeping she had ever asked.'⁷

The conception of the instantaneity of the encounter with the scriptural text, which is also an instant that stands for a wider narrative of which it nonetheless is not part, will inform my argument here. I wish to retain the terms set up in my discussion of Augustine, while shifting the ground of the argument to a context which is explicitly that of literary criticism (and which, I shall argue, is more than analogous with the Augustinian meditation on time and the poetic voice). Specifically, I wish to argue that the conception of temporality at work in modern criticism finds its most explicit expression in a certain manner of thinking about examples and quotations. Citation provides a means of construing the history of literature as a spatial continuum, a landscape in which the critic is oriented by landmarks which ultimately come to resemble nothing so much as the instant or present which we have seen Augustine take such pains to think as a temporal duration rather than a static geometric co-ordinate. In

opposition to the Augustinian effort to conceive of the *nowness* of poetry, the model of criticism proposed in the critical writings of Matthew Arnold and T.S. Eliot (including, for the purposes of the present argument, the poetry of the latter) identifies criticism with precisely this activity of mapping. The proper role of the critic, for Arnold and Eliot, is a deictic one; the critic points to certain moments in the history of literature and declares: *this* is a great poem (or: *this* is a great novel, *this* is a great play...). Certain other moments in literary history, of course, are *not* great plays, novels or poems; they belong instead to a realm that Arnold dismisses under the name of 'history'. History is not the proper object of a literary critic's endeavour: the novels of Fielding and Defoe, for example, belong to the history of English literature, but this does not mean that they constitute acceptable objects of study for the critic (or, at least, for a critic in the grip of what Arnold calls 'high seriousness'). The true object of criticism is rather a constellation of moments extracted from that history and arranged in a homogeneous spatial field which does not differentiate between the times of, for example, Chaucer, Milton and Wordsworth, but sees each one as existing in a kind of eternal present, or rather an eternal space: the space of poetry. Arnold is not referring here, though, to a constellation of writers or even of 'great books'; the moment to which Arnold's criticism draws attention may well take the form of the complete works of a given author, but it may also be a single text, a stanza, or — in the most extreme case — a single line, of which one can say: this is great.

The influence of the phenomenon to which I refer here is evident not only in the academic construction of literary studies as a series of 'historical' periods closely allied with notions of national or regional literatures and construed as homogeneous objects of specialized professional interest (thus abstracted from history and placed in an academic economy of exchange). Nor is it simply a question of the construction of a canon of 'great works'. Rather, the Arnoldian model functions as a way of conceiving of the temporality of criticism itself: a conception relying not only on the spatialization of the

past but also on the positing of a future point from which the entire field could be surveyed simultaneously. What disappears in this model of critical thought is precisely the *now*, effaced as a mere present among others (among, that is, a series of privileged presents organized from a mythical vantage point always just over the horizon).

The study of poetry

In 1861, Arnold wrote in his Oxford lecture entitled 'On Translating Homer', that modern 'critical endeavour' consisted in the attempt 'in all branches of knowledge, theology, philosophy, history, art, science, to see the object as in itself it really is.'⁸ In 1864, Arnold quotes this passage from his earlier text in an essay whose title begins to provide some clue as to the kind of temporality involved in Arnoldian criticism: an essay called 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time'. The function of criticism, I want to argue here, is precisely, for Arnold, the construction of a literary tradition as a perpetual 'present time'; to see the object 'as in itself it really is' means for Arnold to see it divorced from history and inserted into a continuum composed of points or instants in what Benjamin called 'homogeneous, empty time'.

It is in an essay published in 1880 that Arnold attempts to put into practice the tenets of the critical manifesto outlined in 1864. 'The Study of Poetry' is the essay in which Arnold famously proposes what he calls 'touchstones', passages or lines from the great works of literature, which function as reference points for the critic in reading the rest (the marginalized 'history' of English literature) and, in particular, in reading the contemporary. Arnold writes:

there can be no more useful help for discovering what poetry belongs to the class of the truly excellent, and can therefore do us most good, than to have

always in one's mind lines and expressions of the great masters, and to apply them as a touchstone to other poetry.⁹

All of these touchstones are, of course, derived from the past of literature, but in being singled out they come to occupy a certain kind of present, or rather series of presents: a spatialized and immobile continuum in which all are equally visible and instantaneously available. Arnold is quite explicit when he claims that criticism ought to be deictic, and nothing more; rather than engage in laborious philological and historical research,

it is much better simply to have recourse to concrete examples; — to take specimens of the high, the very highest quality, and to say: The characters of a high quality of poetry are what is expressed *there*. [...] If we are urgently pressed to give some critical account of them, we may safely, perhaps, venture on laying down, not indeed how and why the characters arise, but where and in what they arise.¹⁰

The essay in which all of this is presented is itself a model of just the kind of criticism Arnold is advocating. He proceeds to quote extensively from the canon of English, European and Classical literature, stressing in several cases just how little he needs to quote in order to make his point: 'short passages,' he says, 'even single lines, will serve our turn quite sufficiently,' before quoting from Homer, Dante, Shakespeare and Milton. In fact, Arnold's quotations seem to get shorter as the essay progresses, and at one extraordinary point he declares: 'I feel disposed to say that a single line is enough to show the charm of Chaucer's verse.'¹¹ The drastic reduction in length of the examples Arnold provides is reminiscent of the diminishing formal and metrical divisions to which poetry is subjected in Augustine's *Confessions*; what stops the present of poetry from vanishing, for Augustine, is the introduction of the concept of a

temporal duration not in the poem itself but in the mind of the reader. As I have suggested above, though, that human consciousness depends in turn on a future redemption. For Arnold, the surveillance of the spatial field of English literature is possible only from the privileged point of view of a critic possessed of 'high seriousness': at no point is Arnold troubled by the eruption of a problematic temporality into the poetic landscape he has sketched.¹²

The vast panorama

The extent of Arnold's quotation in 'The Study of Poetry' is such that at times the essay itself begins to look like a fragmented and stylistically shifting poem. To be precise, it begins to look like one specific poem, a poem for which the temporalities of literature and critical interpretation are particularly significant. T.S. Eliot, writing in 1933 in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, says of Arnold:

You cannot read his essay on *The Study of Poetry* without being convinced by the felicity of his quotations: to be able to quote as Arnold could is the best evidence of taste. The essay is a classic in English literary criticism: so much is said in so little space, with such economy and with such authority.¹³

The critic, as Eliot is aware, who is able to quote as Arnold could is, of course, T.S. Eliot. *The Waste Land* stages precisely the *tableau vivant* of quotations from and references to the elements of a tradition which ought, like Arnold's, to be instantaneously recognizable (it is, after all, at least in part, the same tradition). But tradition here is not recognizable: it is fragmented and estranged, held together only by the final term in the series of instants it proposes: Eliot's poem itself. The tradition

proposed by *The Waste Land* is a tradition only by virtue of the fact that it culminates in *The Waste Land*. The poem thus exists in an uneasy relationship with its own present; *The Waste Land* cannot be, strictly speaking, a contemporary poem. One of the things this poem does is to represent the present unrecognizability of a literary tradition composed of Arnoldian quotations; it must therefore conceive of itself as speaking from a future in which the dissociation of sensibility of which Eliot writes would be overcome. In other words, it must offer itself simultaneously as a poetry of the future — in the manner of the avant-gardes — and a decidedly less radical ‘criticism of the future’, a criticism which must appeal to temporal movement in order to construct the spatial field it knows cannot be represented on the basis of the present. The strategic advantage Eliot’s poem gains over the contemporary moment is in fact the advantage of *speed*. The spatial demarcation of a tradition is dependent upon a temporal relation: speed enables one to achieve a vantage point from which space can be observed. Once that advantage has been attained, criticism constructs the kind of spatialized continuum found in Arnold, but this time with a crucial difference: Eliot’s criticism is explicit about the reduction of time to space, but at the same time suggests that this reduction is a kind of progress. As Eliot writes (of Arnold, Johnson, and Dryden) in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*,

From time to time, every hundred years or so, it is desirable that some critic should appear to review the past of our literature, and set the poets and the poems in a new order. This task is not one of revolution but of readjustment. What we observe is partly the same scene, but in a different and more distant perspective; there are new and strange objects in the foreground, to be drawn accurately in proportion to the more familiar ones, which now approach the horizon, where all but the most eminent become invisible to the naked eye. The exhaustive critic, armed with a powerful glass, will be able to sweep the

distance and gain an acquaintance with minute objects in the landscape with which to compare minute objects close at hand; he will be able to gauge nicely the position and proportion of the objects surrounding us, in the whole of the vast panorama.¹⁴

The explicitly spatial and visual terms in which this description of the work of criticism is couched return us to some of the key concepts and motifs that we have already encountered: what is in question here is assuredly a *movement*, but it is a mobility conceived in the name of a renewed stasis, a new immobilization of the temporal which serves to present not a new way of thinking of the critic's relation to the temporality of literature *as such*, but merely a different picture, the value of which is perhaps only — in true modernist fashion — that it is new.

Criticism, then, according to the model advanced by Eliot, is conceived according to a certain simultaneity: the immediate *visibility* of all points or all instants to a single viewpoint. The obliteration of history in this model is perhaps the more obvious when placed in analogous conjunction with a more recent instance of the same phenomenon: the visual metaphors that we have already seen Paul de Man employ at the beginning of 'The Rhetoric of Temporality' work in precisely the same way, that is, to construct an apparently historical picture of a literary field. For Eliot, the construction and maintenance of that field is a process involving the periodic instituting of a new perspective: while the arrangement of the objects in the critic's field of vision may change with the taking up of a new vantage point, the fundamental nature of the field (and of the critic's relationship with it) does not change: it is, as Eliot points out, a matter of readjustment, not of revolution.

This conception of readjustment of critical perspective or focus does not, however, survive the poetic form to which Eliot submits it in *The Waste Land*: it becomes clear to the reader of the poem that it presents not the fragment as Arnoldian

touchstone, but as a transitory and barely recognizable part of a whole which can now no longer be reconstructed. What is lost in the poetic experiment of *The Waste Land* is the stability of a present from which the past can be observed: that present is now thrust into a duration which will not allow the poet or critic to occupy a stable position from which to direct his gaze. As Georges Poulet has put it:

Like a wayfarer, robbed, stripped, and thrown at night into a river, whose chill water brings him back to consciousness, the thought of Eliot finds itself plunged into duration. A swift current carries along and stupefies the mind. If only it were possible to cling to the present moment as to a fixed point! But there is no fixed point. The moments pass. They pass so swiftly, so completely, that the sole image which survives them is that of 'flickering intervals of light and darkness.'¹⁵

Henceforth, Eliot's writing becomes a struggle to reintegrate a tradition sundered by the critical work of his early essays and *The Waste Land*; an effort nowhere more clearly expressed than in the attempt to recapture the singularity of the moment in *Four Quartets*, a battle which can only take place in time. As Poulet puts it: 'The search for lost time in Eliot is therefore totally different from what one finds in Proust, but no less important. It depends on a voluntary memory, on a continuous abnegation, on a patient effort to recover, to reassemble, to readapt under new conditions, what was lost.'¹⁶ This temporal problematic, of course, is elided in *Four Quartets* in favour of a series of stable locations in space. The poem is ultimately concerned with a notion of *place* which will ground the subject, a refuge from an unstable temporality, a point to which all temporal movement eventually returns.

A continuous abnegation

In the previous chapter we saw Augustine reject the measurement of the temporality of the speaking voice according to the metrical or mechanical intervals and divisions traditionally applied to the reading of poetry. Precisely what he rejects here is the abstract and quantified equivalence upon which such a conception of the voiced poem depends — this equivalence in turn (just as in the exchange of capital and goods) supporting a system of accumulation and profit (the poem as the sum of its abstracted parts). This question of the relation of poetry to time — a question, for Augustine, of the *true* temporality of the poem as opposed to its apparent chronology — has never ceased to return in literary criticism, both as a problem for the individual or generalized poetic subject and — significantly, for my argument here — for a particular *critical* subject accorded a certain perspective both on the internal logic of the individual work, and on the place of that work in the continuum of literary history. The latter has tended to be identified with a series of *subjects*, whether those subjects are seen as specific *authors*, individual texts which can be said to offer a perspective with which the critic chooses (or not) to identify, or as a series of more or less valuable moments or instants in the history of literature. This is the tactic adopted by Georges Poulet in his ‘studies in human time’, studies which attach to individual authors extracted from a vast chronological span; first, though, he offers a theoretical introduction and a description of the kind of temporality experienced by the subject he will later refer to as ‘the man of the Middle Ages’:

For the Christian of the Middle Ages the sense of his existence did not precede a sense of his continuance. He did not have first to discover himself existing in a present moment in order next to conceive himself as existing in time. For him, on the contrary, to feel that he existed was to feel himself *to be*: neither

changing nor becoming nor in any way succeeding himself; it was simply to feel that he was and that he endured.¹⁷

There was, then, for 'Medieval man', no distinction between existence and duration. This duration, though, was dependent upon a continually recreated existence: time experienced as the conjunction of existence and duration. In fact, that experience is nothing but the effect of the continual creation of the universe by God. At every moment, at every instantaneous point in the continuum of time, the world is remade by God. While all things necessarily tended toward nothingness, they tended also toward continued existence; that is, toward a future.

Poulet presents us with an immense series of brief chapters, each dedicated to an individual author. In each case, the subject is immured in the same predicament: caught between the poles of past and future, it can find no way of grounding itself in the present while also assuring itself of a duration. Each chapter of Poulet's study stages this struggle to found a conjunction between existence and temporality. In each instance, the objects of Poulet's inquiry find themselves subject to an irresistible drift from the present moment. There is, then, a fundamental contradiction at work in Poulet's text: if, on the one hand, the authors with whom he engages cannot locate themselves in a stable present, on the other hand, the method of the work involves an apparently unproblematic placing of these writers with respect to the chronology outlined in the introduction to the first volume. Once situated, each in its place in time, the whole can then be surveyed, mapped and named according to an essentially spatial or geometrical logic. In these terms, the local temporal slippages which occur at the level of the texts examined are effaced in a global perspective which sees these aporias as nonetheless expressible and as expressions of particular world-views.¹⁸

In a sense, then, Poulet's criticism — ostensibly concerned with time — is another spatialization of an essentially temporal phenomenon; the movement of history

is subordinated to a conception of the field of enquiry as a space to be mapped (it is perhaps significant that in turning to a work saturated in time — *A la recherche du temps perdu* — Poulet is interested not in time at all but in Proustian space).¹⁹ That space is perceived, as we have seen, by T.S. Eliot (as it was for Paul de Man in ‘The Rhetoric of Temporality’) as a visual field, as an *image*. In the following section I propose to examine a number of discourses concerning photographic and cinematic images which will repeat the logic outlined above in terms of the privileged moments of a literary tradition, in an effort to delineate a philosophy which will allow us to think outside of the static terms proposed by Arnold, Eliot and Poulet: to think, in other words, the history which always occurs *in between*, in the interim between instants.

II

For Gilles Deleuze, cinema is characterized by *movement*; it is as movement that cinematic concepts are produced: an intelligible, pre-verbal, movement, a ‘*pure semiotics*’ which is unavailable to ‘semiology of a linguistic inspiration [which] abolishes the image and tends to dispense with the sign.’²⁰ In attempting to forestall this abolition and to isolate certain photographic concepts, I wish here to examine the photograph as precisely a writing-with-light (and darkness), specifically as both investment in and return on the medium of light. Certain tensions in the photographic image (and in its history) attest to a fundamentally ambivalent conception of the visual. A distinction arises between two tendencies of thought which I shall designate as the *optical/geometrical* and the *photic/luminous*. The former is dedicated to the spatialization of the visual, seeing it as primarily a phenomenon of spatial geometry. The latter is that tendency which acknowledges the visual as a product of light, represented in explicitly temporal terms. With regard to the temporal element in the

photographic image, a further distinction follows from the first. The photograph, as a product of the play of light and as the object of (and model for) theoretical speculation, involves a movement of return; the distinction in question obtains between the return of the same and the return of alterity. Philosophically, as we have seen in Chapter One, this topic is addressed in those works of Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Kracauer and Roland Barthes which concern themselves with visual representation.

The question of return in photography is intimately connected with the activity of *speculation* in a number of its senses: mental, visual and economic. The questions asked here are: who, or what, profits by photography? If photography is an investment of or in light, what is the nature of the return on that investment? What part does the subject play in the photographic process: as photographer, as spectator, or as object of photographic representation? And how do the photographic concepts elaborated in answer to these questions contribute to the operation of what we might call a 'photographic memory': that is, to the status of the photograph *in time*?

Photography and Speculation

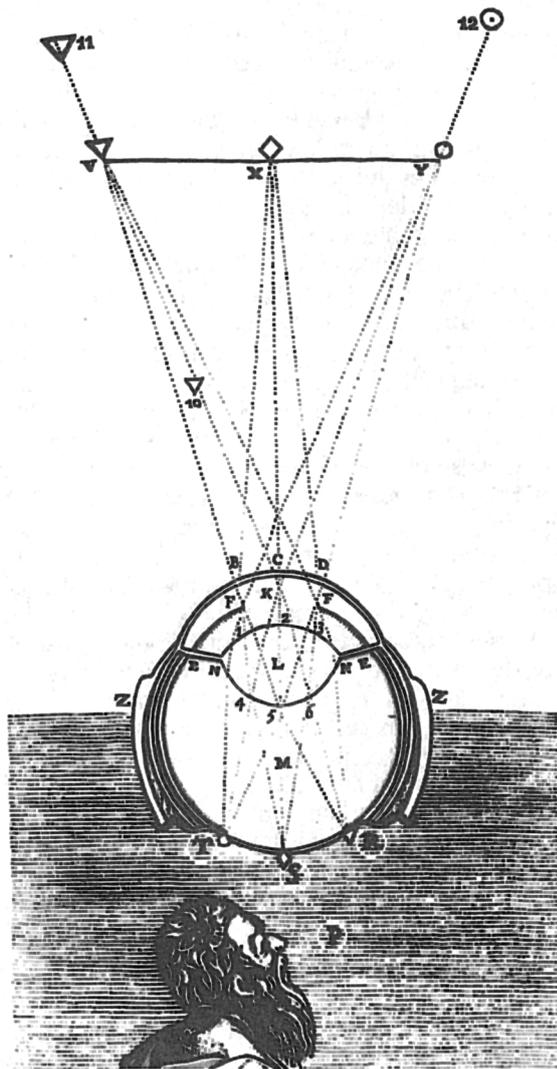
In the *Dioptrics*, Descartes advances a theoretical justification for the *optical* model of vision introduced above:

I would have you conceive of the light in a 'luminous' body as being simply a certain very rapid and lively movement or activity, transmitted to our eyes through air and other transparent bodies, just as the movement or resistance of the bodies a blind man encounters is transmitted to his hand through his stick.²¹

For Descartes, vision is primarily a geometrical phenomenon, conceived in terms of the straight line; the model is that of the *camera obscura*, the 'dark room' which itself serves as an explanation for the phenomenon of seeing:

This has been explained by a most ingenious comparison. If a room is quite shut apart from a single hole, and a glass lens is put in front of the hole, and behind that, some distance away, a white cloth, then the light coming from external objects forms images on the cloth. Now it is said that this room represents the eye; the hole, the pupil; the lens, the crystalline humour — or rather, all the refracting parts of the eye; and the cloth, the living membrane, composed of optic nerve-endings.²²

The same effect is to be had, says Descartes, using — in place of the glass lens — a human or animal eye, with a hole cut in the back, placed in a 'specially made shutter'. This apparatus provides Descartes with proof that 'a quite similar picture is produced on a living man's eye, on the living membrane, for which we substituted the white body.'²³ It is here that the essential Cartesian split opens up between vision and perception: it is not the accuracy or remembrance of pictures produced in the eye that makes the brain aware of an object, 'as though we had another pair of eyes to see it, inside our brain [...]; rather, we must hold that the movements by which the image is formed act directly on our soul qua united to the body, and are ordained by Nature to give it such sensations.'²⁴ In this passage from the object to the soul's perception of it, the realm of the visual itself is effectively bypassed in favour of 'the movements by which the image is formed,' which are apprehended through the blind man's stick, through the measurement of spatial relations and the straight line, rather than the play of light to which the theoretical apparatus of the *camera obscura* attests. What is essential in the object for Descartes — its extension in space — is judged by knowledge



1

of the object, 'and not in accordance with the pictures in the eye [...]. [I]t is the soul that sees, not the eye; and only by means of the brain does the immediate act of seeing take place.'²⁵

It is to this elision of the visual that Jacques Lacan addresses himself when he speaks of the 'geometral' as that in which 'what is at issue is simply the mapping of space, not sight,'²⁶ a cartography which takes the form — in, for example, da Vinci, Vitruvius and Alberti — of the problem of perspective. Traditional philosophical conceptions of vision follow the spatial model of Descartes, the figure of the blind man with his stick providing — as it does for Diderot — the exemplar and guarantor of 'geometral' optics:

'Cela est si vrai, continua-t-il, que je place ma main entre vos yeux et un objet, ma main vous est présente, mais l'objet vous est absent. La même chose m'arrive, quand je cherche une chose avec mon bâton, et que j'en rencontre une autre.' Madame, ouvrez la *Dioptrique* de Descartes, et vous y verrez les phénomènes de la vue rapportés à ceux de toucher, et des planches d'optique pleines de figures d'hommes occupés à voir avec des bâtons.²⁷

The field of the visual, geometrically conceived, is that of the straight line, the 'thread' which at first glance appears to correspond to the action of light but which in fact is a purely spatial phenomenon, having no need of light. Substituting, as in Lacan's example, the straight line of the thread for that of the ray of light, a blind man can be taught to 'project' an object onto a flat surface:

In the same way that we imagine, in pure optics, the variously proportioned and fundamentally homological relations, the correspondences from one point to another in space, which always, in the end, amounts to situating two points on a

single thread. This construction does not, therefore, particularly enable us to apprehend what is provided by light.²⁸

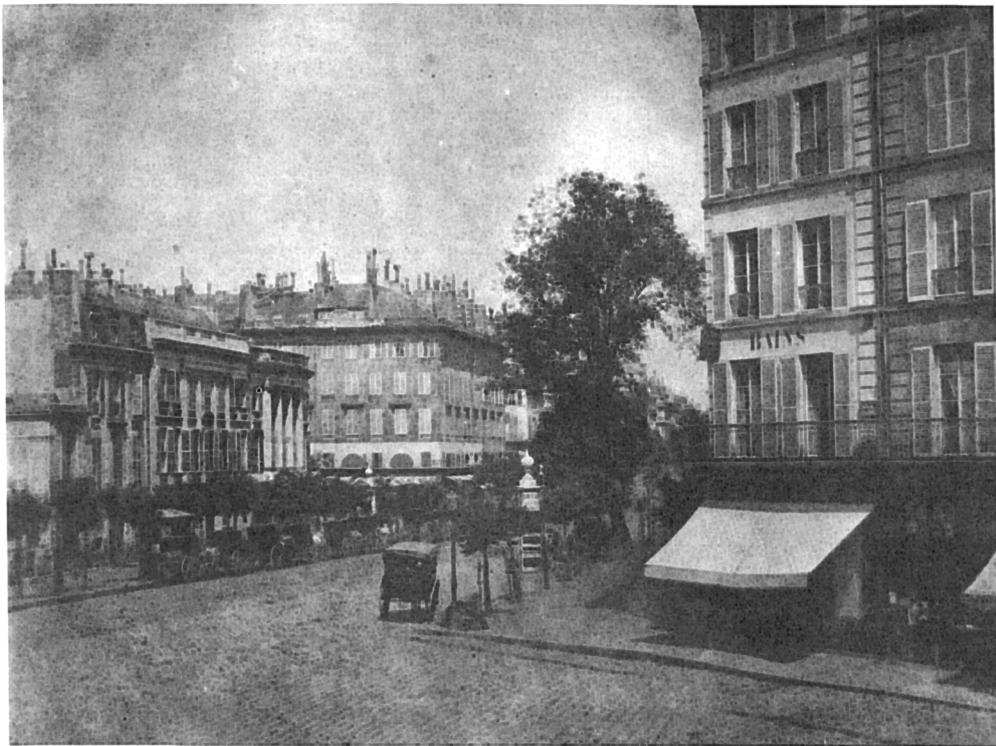
What is lost in the space of geometrical optics is precisely the luminous. The construction of a geometrical vision is closely linked, as Lacan notes, to the supposed deception of vision; as in the *Dioptrics*, it is knowledge of the geometrical relation between object and observing subject that guarantees perception. To trust in those 'pictures [which] normally contain ovals and diamonds when they cause us to see circles and squares'²⁹ is to give in to the 'evil demon' of images which threatens our proper perception of the world:

the whole trick, the hey presto!, of the classic dialectic around perception, derives from the fact that it deals with geometral vision, that is to say, with vision in so far as it is situated in a space that is not in its essence that of the visual.³⁰

For Lacan, the relation between appearance and reality lies elsewhere, not in the straight line of geometry but in the point of light, 'the point of irradiation, the play of light, fire, the source from which reflections pour forth.'³¹ The picture which light produces in the eye is in no sense mastered by the subject (by the Cartesian 'soul' or 'brain' which transforms vision into perception). Rather, it is ambiguous and variable; it 'grasps' and 'solicits' the subject; it cannot be reduced to an element in the visual field of Cartesian subjectivity and its overarching explicatory geometry: as Lacan puts it, 'the picture, certainly, is in my eye. But I am not in the picture.'³² The field of the luminous is that which, in the visual, 'is not, in advance, situated for me in its distance'; it introduces, for Lacan, a 'depth of field' which is fundamentally different from the space presided over by geometry.

Photography, particularly in its earliest images, stages explicitly the conflict between the two impulses outlined above: the geometrical and the luminous. The photograph — product both of the geometrical, perspective, tradition that produced the *camera obscura*, and of a chemical process capable of reproducing the images captured by that apparatus — constitutes the battleground between light and extension, and ultimately, between two versions of return which crystallize the opposition between the temporal and the spatial. The initial tension which can be identified in certain of the earliest photographs has less to do with the strict opposition between the straight line and the luminous point than with a dissatisfaction with a general tendency of the photograph: the illumination of those elements in the space photographed which do not accord with the ostensible scene or landscape to be captured, the invasion of the image by the minutiae of daily life, by those elements of the visual field with which the photographer had not bargained.³³

William Henry Fox Talbot's *The Pencil of Nature* (1844) attests to the fortuitous disruption of the image by such details. The camera, which, says Fox Talbot, 'would delineate a chimney-pot or a chimney-sweeper with the same impartiality as it would the Apollo Belvedere,'³⁴ records in 'A View of the Boulevards at Paris' (1843) such objects as wheelbarrows, carriages, the water used to keep down the dust on a hot dry day, as well as accidental details which tell us when the photograph was taken: 'inscriptions and dates are found on buildings, or printed placards most irrelevant, are discovered upon their walls: sometimes a distant sundial is seen, and upon it — unconsciously recorded — the hour of the day at which the view was taken.'³⁵ A more obvious example appears in Blanquart Evrard's *Album photographique de l'artiste et de l'amateur* (1852); a photograph of 'The Apse of Notre-Dame, 8 December 1852' contains — dominating the foreground — a long row of delivery carts parked along a kerb, across the street from which, a sign reading 'commerce' is just visible: the routine commercial life of the city has disrupted a

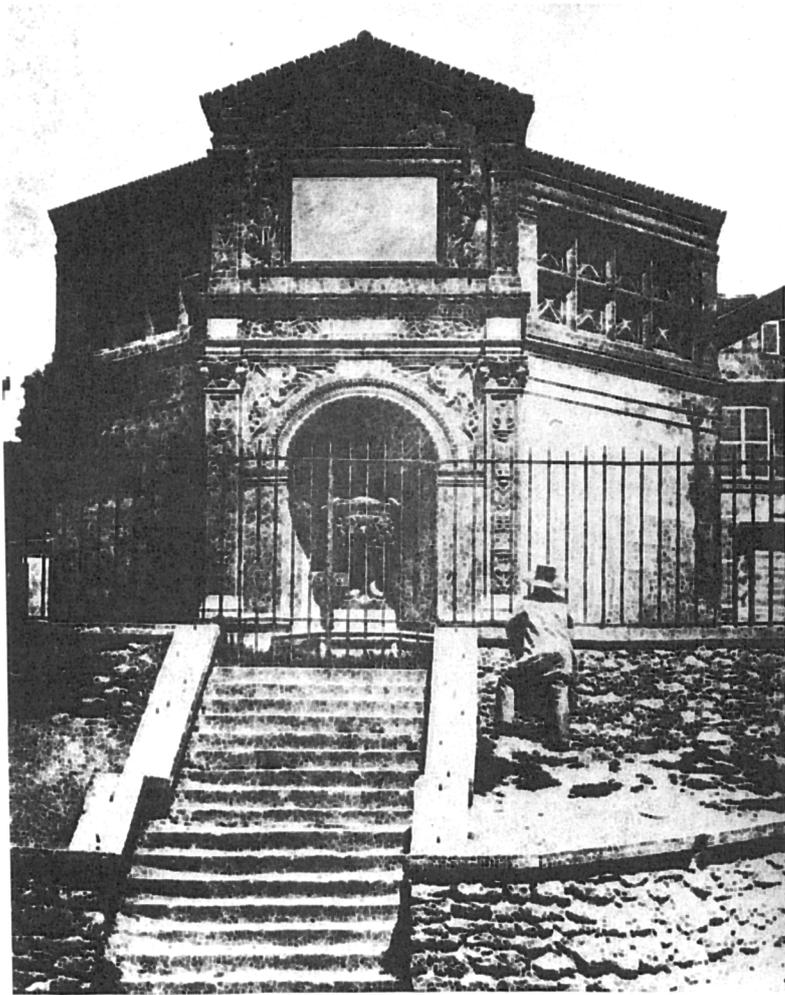


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carefully composed view of Architecture, History, and Culture. As Ian Jeffrey points out, 'photographers quickly became wary of this irreverent capacity in their medium. Conscious of pictorial propriety, they learned to compose, to edit and to avoid many of these distracting irrelevancies to which Fox Talbot referred.'³⁶

The search for a certain order in the photographic image led early photographers — Fox Talbot, with his images of symmetrical oak trees, among them — to search for ready-made compositions in nature, scenes whose purity was safe from the accidental vagaries of the commonplace. This impulse resulted — paradoxically — in a concern with ancient architecture and sculpture, which combined symmetry of line and form with the uninterrupted quality sought in 'natural' composition. The work of Félix Taynard in *Égypte et Nubie* (1858) and Maxime du Camp in *Égypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie* (1852) put the architecture of ancient Egypt to just such a use. Such images, combined with the deliberate arrangement of objects seen, for example, in the earliest images produced by Niépce, conspired to evict from the photograph those elements perceived as undesirable. More difficult to erase, however, were those effects specific to the photographic process itself, particularly those distortions of perspective — of the geometrical impulse — which produced an image, the luminous effects of which undermined the perspectival absolutes of spatial geometry. Particularly pertinent in this regard are the photographs of Hippolyte Bayard; his 'Place J.-B. Clément' (c.1845) shows a small basilica at the top of a flight of steps, the dimensions of the latter (but not of the building) deducible by reference to a figure looking over a wall towards the building. The scale of the building, and its distance from the railings at the top of the steps, are unclear. The areas on either side of the steps appear to be raked, although we 'know' that the two lateral walls are *probably* vertical and the space in between relatively flat. The photograph itself does not provide the latter information, nor the ground plan of the basilica, which we can only surmise from its visible elevation. Such



a photograph is *of the visual* in the sense of which Lacan speaks, yet demands a geometrical explanation which the image itself can never provide.

Less open to insertion in the logic of a spatialized vision is another of Bayard's photographs, the 'Studio' (c.1846-48), in which various objects — statuettes, drapery, bottles, saw — appear against a flat background. The arrangement of the objects against the vertical plane recalls nothing so much as the compositions of *trompe-l'oeil* painting, the antithesis of perspectival representation. Early photography shares with *trompe-l'oeil* a concern with the object itself, suspended in an undifferentiated field. The photograph produces a series of luminous points, reflective surfaces whose spatial relation is not immediately obvious and cannot be constructed theoretically in the Cartesian manner. It is instead a matter of a light which 'looks at me, and by means of that light in the depths of my eye, something is painted — something that is not simply a constructed relation, the object on which the philosopher lingers — but something that is an impression, the shimmering of a surface that is not, in advance, situated for me in its distance.'³⁷ This distance, which is that of the measurable geometric space, of the extension of objects in the Cartesian optical system, is opposed to the depth of field inherent in the luminous, a depth which is not recoupable by the observing subject as part of the dioptric model of vision (that of the intersecting straight lines in Descartes). Such a reappropriation of the image would involve the subject in the recouping of an investment in the field of 'the line and light' which involves conceiving of visual representation as the return of the same (this is precisely the operation of *a priori* knowledge in the Cartesian formulation), as that which is always 'situated for me in its distance.' Photography would thus function as the representation of the object, as Matthew Arnold put it with regard to criticism, 'as in itself it really is,' object and image each serving as guarantor of the other (of ontological status and mimetic accuracy, respectively). Jean-François Lyotard suggests that in cinema — 'writing-



with-movement' — the act of directing takes the form of the inclusion of certain movements, and the elimination of certain others:

there is a crowd [...] of elements in motion, a throng of possible moving bodies which are candidates for inscription on film. Learning the techniques of film-making involves knowing how to eliminate a large number of these possible movements. It seems that image, sequence and film must be constituted at the price of these exclusions.³⁸

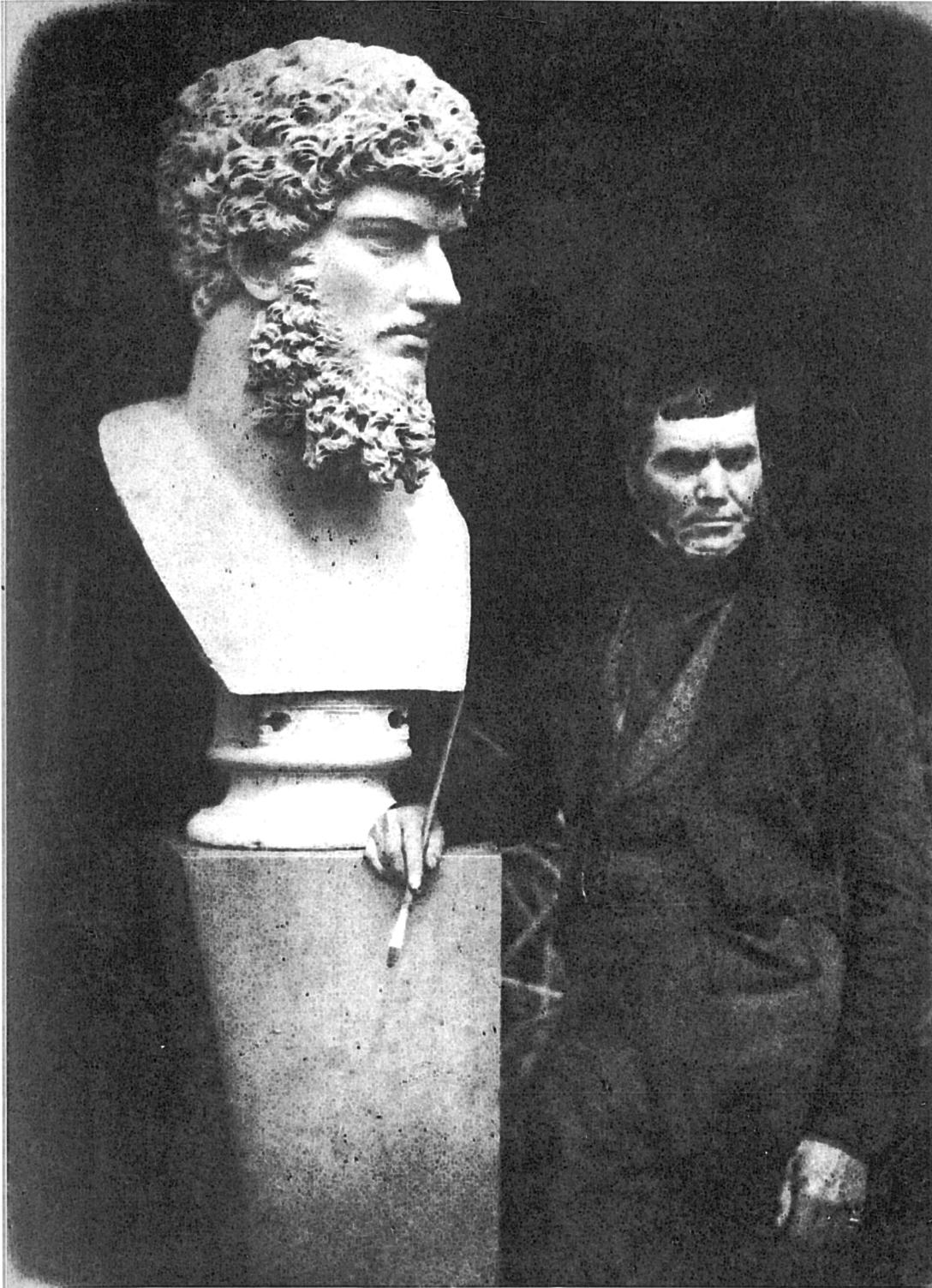
Thus a certain *oppression* characterizes cinematography, an oppression of all that does not conform to a logic of return:

this oppression consists of the enforcement of a nihilism of movements. No movement, arising from any field, is given to the eye-ear of the spectator for what it is: a simple *sterile difference* in an audio-visual field. Instead, every movement put forward *sends back* to something else, is inscribed as a plus or minus on the ledger book which is the film, *is valuable* because it *returns* to something else, because it is thus potential return and profit.³⁹

The elimination of all that does not accord with the movement of return fulfils the task of making the image recognizable to the eye, of inserting the image in a logic for which that which is presented to the gaze is *already known*, or rather, works to convince the viewer that the object of representation is already cognizable: 'the image must cast the object or set of objects as the double of a situation that from then on will be supposed real.'⁴⁰ Lyotard casts this return of identity as a form of Freudian life instinct, a repetition of the same which is opposed to the repetition of the other in the death drive:

it must be asked if indeed any repetition is involved at all, if on the contrary something different returns at each instance, if the *eternal return* of these sterile explosions of libidinal discharge should not be conceived in a wholly different time-space than that of the repetition of the same, as their possible copresence.⁴¹

Where Lyotard proposes a distinction between the conventional insertion of cinematic movement into an economy of investment and return, on the one hand, and, on the other, a notion of movement as a simple 'sterile difference', I wish here to suggest a similar opposition in the realm of the photographic, organized around the play of light in the photographic image: a return on the photographic investment in the luminous field. In its most fundamental sense, this return takes the form of a literal *enlightenment* within the frame of the image: the object itself appears as the source of light, illuminating the darkness around it. This is especially true of certain portrait photographs in which the figure photographed against a dark ground seems to radiate a halo of light. A pertinent example here is the Hill and Adamson calotype of the sculptor John Stevens, in which the artist and his sculpture 'The Last of the Romans', as the only illuminated objects in the frame, appear to be the sources of light. The image draws attention not only to the illuminating genius of the creative artist — captured here with all the (albeit 'decadent') grandeur of his own sculpture — but also recalls those dark rooms in which eighteenth-century men of reason discovered classical statuary by candlelight, the pure white sculptures — stripped, in many cases, of their original brightly-coloured paint — providing perfect reflective surfaces for the speculations of enlightenment. The human countenance as the pure source of enlightenment — especially in post-Renaissance versions of the classical world which situate the illumined body as a *light from the past* — recalls Benjamin's concept of cult value, but also the operation of cinematic expressionism which, as formulated by



Deleuze, 'operates with darkness and light, the opaque black background and the luminous principle,' an opposition arising out of 'the struggle of the spirit with darkness.'⁴²

The kind of image described above stages a similar struggle: to recoup from the darkness a light which is effectively a return on the subject's investment in the visual, a light which *remembers* (as in cult value) the human figure as it struggles against the surrounding darkness. Such a process is dedicated to the production of an adequate identification of the photographed object: the return of the object in representation announces a twofold recognition: the first, as Lyotard points out, having to do with 'good form', the process of inclusion and exclusion which produces the recognizable image (here, the luminous emanation of the figure). The second level of recognition is that of the establishment between representation and real of a relationship of 'doubling accompanied necessarily by a relative devaluation of the scene's realities, now only representative of the realities of reality.'⁴³ The light which pours from the photographed countenance simultaneously attests to the interior presence which the representation has successfully translated, and formally guarantees that presence 'in reality'. The photographic process is thus in a sense nothing more than a detour which returns us to the path of a capable and adequate memory or representation.

The formal tendency introduced above — that of the 'luminous principle' and its dark background — proposes precisely the struggle of the subject toward a presence which is understood in opposition to the undifferentiated darkness of non-identity. The dark chamber of photography serves as the necessary absence from which a subject can emerge in its full lucidity, that absence or darkness in turn accorded only a negative status. As Virilio has it, 'the rational study of the real is just like the movies; the *tabula rasa* is only a trick whose purpose is to deny particular absences any active value.'⁴⁴ In Deleuze's terms, this opposition of light and darkness is one in which, as we have seen, the spirit of returned and remembered light is victorious as the form of

identity, of the return of the same. The alternative, for Deleuze, is 'lyrical abstraction' which seeks to 'express an alternative between the state of things itself and the possibility, the virtuality, which goes beyond it.'⁴⁵

The image in lyrical abstraction is that of a pale and luminous space, containing areas of darkness: a luminous field, rather than the luminous point of the form elaborated above. Illumination constitutes not a guarantee of presence but rather a dispersal of light which allows darkness — absence, or lack of return — to become manifest. Certain photographs by Atget exemplify this tendency: in particular, those images of Parisian courtyards, which, with their patterns of vertical and horizontal lines punctuated by the black squares and rectangles of windows and doors, resemble — in the way in which they come close to abstraction — a conjunction of the paintings of Mondrian and Malevich. It is not simply a matter of an opposition between portraiture and the relatively deserted cityscapes of Atget's work: it is, rather, a distinction founded on the effects of light in the two kinds of image. Where the representation of the luminous point (what we might call the *punctual image*) demands a certain enlightenment, the image of the luminous field (the *photoleptic image*) is that from which light absconds at crucial moments. Atget's courtyard images, for example, are punctuated by dark openings through which we see nothing, or glimpse only the barest hints of what might lie behind the pale flat planes of the objects photographed. These images give no adequate return, or rather, what returns is unrecognizable, not simply in terms of mimetic adequacy, but as an index of a fundamental presence which the punctual impulse attempts to reconstitute.





Any-movement-whatever

Deleuze identifies three separate theses on movement in the writings of Henri Bergson. The first is that movement is distinct from the space covered: the space covered is past, while movement is present, it is the act of covering. The space covered in movement is infinitely divisible; movement itself is indivisible, 'or cannot be divided without changing qualitatively each time it is divided.' According to Deleuze,

This already presupposes a more complex idea: the spaces covered all belong to a single, identical, homogeneous space, while the movements are heterogeneous, irreducible among themselves.⁴⁶

Bergson considers how movement might be reconstituted; this cannot be achieved through the employment of 'immobile sections', that is, positions in space or moments in time. It is only by adding the abstract idea of *succession* that such a reconstitution can be attempted, a process which invariably *misses* movement itself, relying as it does on a 'time which is mechanical, homogeneous, universal and copied from space, identical for all movements.'⁴⁷ Such a model of temporality misses movement in two ways: first, as Deleuze puts it, 'you can bring two instants or two positions together to infinity, but movement will always occur in the interval between the two, in other words behind your back.'⁴⁸ Secondly, however much time is subdivided, movement will always occur in a concrete duration, and not merely according to the measurements of an abstract continuum of positions or instants. Thus Bergson is led to the formulation of two irreducible positions concerning movement: on the one hand there is real movement, which takes place in a concrete duration; it is an act which takes place in a present. On the other hand, there is the representation or reconstitution of movement, which purports to measure that act by situating it in relation to points in

space — ‘immobile sections’ — and an abstract notion of time as a succession of such points or instants.

The latter formulation, the incorrect one, which inevitably fails in its attempt to represent real movement, is identified in 1907, in *Creative Evolution*, as the illusion presented by cinema, which offers a number of instantaneous sections (images) and an abstract and uniform time. In this respect, cinema repeats, for Bergson, the ‘error’ of natural perception, which also takes place in the conjunction of immobile images and an abstract model of temporality:

We take snapshots, as it were, of the passing reality, and, as these are characteristics of the reality, we have only to string them on a becoming, abstract, uniform and invisible, situated at the back of the apparatus of knowledge [...]. Perception, intellection, language so proceed in general. Whether we would think becoming, or express it, or even perceive it, we would hardly do anything else than set going a kind of cinematograph inside us.⁴⁹

The cinematic process, says Bergson, consists of the extraction from the movements of bodies or figures, an impersonal and abstract movement: that is, *movement in general*:

We put this into the apparatus, and we reconstitute the individuality of each particular movement by combining this nameless movement with the personal attitudes [...]. Instead of attaching ourselves to the inner becoming of things, we place ourselves outside them in order to recompose their becoming artificially.⁵⁰

Deleuze argues, against Bergson’s thesis in *Creative Evolution*, that cinema does not give us the immobile section — in cinematic terms, the photogramme — but rather an

intermediate image, 'to which movement is not appended or added; the movement on the contrary belongs to the intermediate image as immediate given.'⁵¹ In other words, cinema does not give us a series of static images, to which we affix movement in accordance with the idea of an abstract temporality; rather, it gives us immediately what Deleuze calls a movement-image. Cinematic movement is not abstracted from the perception of static sections, but is instead directly presented in *mobile sections*. The concept of the *immobile section*, as we have seen, relates to the division of time and space according to certain static instants or positions. In order to determine precisely what a *mobile* section might be, we need to turn to the first chapter of *Matter and Memory* where, says Deleuze, Bergson had already formulated a conception of movement which appears to make the critique of cinematic perception somewhat redundant:

On the one hand there is a critique of all attempts to reconstitute movement with the space covered, that is, by adding together instantaneous immobile sections and abstract time. On the other hand there is the critique of cinema, which is condemned as one of these illusory attempt, as the attempt which is the culmination of the illusion. But there is also the thesis of *Matter and Memory*, mobile sections, temporal planes [*plans*] which prefigure the future or the essence of the cinema.⁵²

The second thesis which Deleuze identifies in *Creative Evolution* concerns what he calls 'privileged instants' and 'any-instant-whatevers'. As in *Matter and Memory*, Bergson's argument here is directed towards the error of reconstituting or measuring movement in accordance with the path or trajectory through which the moving body passes; that is, representing the temporal duration of movement as if it were merely a question of measurable distances in space.

The conception of movement outlined in Deleuze's commentary on Bergson enables us to conceive of a relation between being and time that I would want to call, tentatively, a 'cinematic' one. Cinematic movement embodies a particular relation to the present and to presence, a relation which cannot be subsumed under the rubric of either the classical temporality of privileged instants, or that of a modernity which conceives of movement in terms of an abstract set of instants or points. Rather, cinematic movement takes place in what Deleuze calls *any-space-whatever*:

Any-space-whatever is not an abstract universal, in all times, in all places. It is a perfectly singular space, which has merely lost its homogeneity, that is, the principle of its metric relations or the connection of its own parts, so that the linkages can be made in an infinite number of ways. It is a space of virtual conjunction, grasped as pure locus of the possible.⁵³

'Whatever' here denotes not the loss or abandonment of spatial coordinates but rather a certain heterogeneity and possibility arising out of the singularity of space. The 'whatever' in question does not indicate the general or universal, nor does it point toward a certain particularity. Rather, it is concerned with that which is neither generic nor individual. Giorgio Agamben has offered the following definition of 'whatever':

In the Scholastic enumeration of transcendentals (*quodlibet ens est unum, verum, bonum seu perfectum* — whatever entity is one, true, good, or perfect), the term that, remaining unthought in each, conditions the meaning of all the others is the adjective *quodlibet*. The common translation of this term as 'whatever' in the sense of 'it does not matter which, indifferently' is certainly correct, but in its form the Latin says exactly the opposite: *Quodlibet ens* is not

‘being, it does not matter which,’ but rather ‘being such that it always matters.’⁵⁴

The loss of homogeneity of which Deleuze writes would thus not be a matter of *indifference* with respect to linkage with any other space, or with respect to the connection of its own parts, but rather a matter of, as Agamben puts it, ‘being *such as it is*’.⁵⁵ Likewise, any-instant-whatever would not pertain to the abstract and indifferent imposition of succession onto the flux of movements, but would again be a matter of the instant ‘such as it is’. The concept that Agamben uses to show how whatever entity escapes appropriation by the universal and the particular, is that of the *example*. The example holds for all cases of the same type and at the same time is included among those cases. It is treated as a real particular case, but cannot serve merely in its particularity: neither particular nor universal, according to Agamben, ‘the example is a singular object that presents itself as such, that *shows* its singularity.’⁵⁶

According to the definition of *whatever* presented here — what Agamben calls the ‘quodlibetality’ of a being — *whatever-instant* and *whatever-space* would designate the instant or the space *as it is*, in its haecceity, in its presence (that presence linked to a concept of the present: to think the instant *as it is*, that is *as it happens*, is the painful and doomed task undertaken by St. Augustine in Book XI of the *Confessions*).

This conception of being as ‘whatever’ being — that is, as being ‘such as it is’ — appears in a different context in an argument advanced by the art critic Thierry de Duve in his book *Kant After Duchamp*.⁵⁷ For de Duve, ‘whatever’ designates a number of possible responses to modern art, as well as, in a more radical sense, the very law of that art: the command ‘do whatever’ is, claims de Duve, the injunction to which modern art finds that it must — in various more or less radical ways — respond. First, though, ‘whatever’ simply translates the French ‘n’importe quoi’, which, says de Duve, is both the response of the ‘man in the street’ to modern art, and the damning

judgment of the art expert who dismisses all works considered beyond the boundaries of form, content, beauty or structure.⁵⁸ 'Whatever', then, is first of all a *judgment*, and so it will remain for de Duve in the face of several historical attempts to submit that judgment to a certain theory, programme or history. 'Whatever', for de Duve, must be (the imperative is central to the argument) '*absolutely* whatever'.

'Whatever' makes its appearance in art, and in discourses on art, with the works of Courbet and Manet: when Courbet paints the *Stone Breakers* he brings 'anyone' into the scene; with Manet's *Bunch of Asparagus*, 'anything whatever' enters the frame.⁵⁹ The judgment that what appears in these works is 'whatever', though, takes place within the official discourse of the art establishment, in the judgment that these works which seem to represent anything at all are simply not art. This is the first phase of the advent of 'whatever' in modern art; it is followed, de Duve argues, by the Dadaist appropriation of the judgment, turning the prohibition ('it is forbidden to make whatever') into an authorization ('it is permitted to make whatever'):

Thus the Dada artist adopts the posture of the jury in the nineteenth-century painting salons and derisively inverts it. He pretends to be a technician of the absence of technique, a warrantor of the destruction of the trade, a traditionalist of the anti-tradition. He depends on the exclusion of the avant-garde to call himself avant-garde; he relies on the judgment 'this is not art' to anoint his art with the negative ontology of non-art.⁶⁰

If Dadaism succeeds, though, in appropriating for its own ends the judgment of art as 'whatever', it does so at a price: its reception, acceptance or recuperation by and in the history of art. This leads to a situation in which the general public loses interest in art altogether, dismissing it as 'whatever', while the art establishment finds itself (despite itself) having to claim that the 'whatever' of modern art is not simply *anything*

whatever but a *whatever* of a specific kind (and therefore, of course, no longer *whatever*).

This process — what de Duve calls the sanitization of the *whatever* — occurs in the attachment to the *whatever* of certain principles, goals or conditions. Thus, the injunction ‘do *whatever*’ becomes either ‘do *whatever* in order to...’ or ‘do *whatever* provided...’; within the terms of immanent or transcendent imperatives, ‘*whatever*’ becomes subordinated in a general appropriation of art to internal or external ends. In the first instance (‘do *whatever* in order to...’), works are produced in the name of an immanent end: art for art’s sake, art as its own critique, or of a transcendent goal in, for example, ‘applied art’: advertising, pornography or — most importantly — political art. In the second case (‘do *whatever* provided...’) artistic experimentation is authorized to take place only within certain constraints, ranging from a demand that the work be beautiful to an imperative to produce works that deny their audience the pleasure of the beautiful, what Lyotard calls ‘the solace of good forms’.⁶¹ This phenomenon takes the form of the institutionalization of the *avant-garde*:

Instead of the formally or politically revolutionary *avant-garde*, here comes the *avant-garde* academy, or the *avant-garde* as academy.⁶²

The conception of ‘*whatever*’ at work in de Duve’s argument is a useful one for my purposes here: the ‘*whatever*’ is placed explicitly in relation to a conception of history and an idea of the future as that which regulates, structures or — in de Duve’s term — sanitizes the *whatever*. As in the conceptions of cinematic representation offered by Lyotard and Deleuze, in which the event or duration must be thought outside of a linear time conceived, respectively, as return and abstraction, so here it is a question of an event and the attempt to subordinate it to a past (‘do *whatever* provided...’; in other words, in accordance with the rules which already exist) or to a

future ('do whatever in order to...': art in the service of a goal or end, be it art itself, the future fulfilment of itself). The event of the whatever is denied, broadly, by its becoming a part of art history and criticism, so that it becomes possible, for example, to see Duchamp's readymades as leading to Surrealism, on the one hand, and to conceptualism on the other; for de Duve, both narratives are false: the first subordinates whatever to a politics, the second to an institution: 'The fact that there is a history of the whatever voids the concept, it would seem.'⁶³ The history of twentieth-century art then becomes the story of a series of (premature) redemptions of whatever: all executed after the fact, in the belief that the event/whatever exists merely to test the limits of art, those limits, as we saw in a literary context with Eliot's concept of tradition, never themselves questioned. As de Duve puts it:

The absolute whatever is the target at which history forever aims, abandoned to its own perpetual retelling, with its motor strength exhausted, always already denied, always already reaffirmed, accomplished in advance and therefore prevented from any real possibility of happening.⁶⁴

Elsewhere in *Kant After Duchamp* de Duve mounts a critique of the project of emancipation which the avant-garde inherits from the enlightenment: briefly, he wishes to preserve the possibility of emancipation while letting go of the project as such:

In the question I am trying to answer, the emancipation project at issue was only a project. Inasmuch as it declared itself ready to emancipate humankind, it was supposed to grant humanity an advance on its future capacity for self-determination, to anticipate on its not yet attained adulthood, and thus to wager on time, that is, on history, in the hope that progress will, in the end, align reality with the ideal.⁶⁵

The 'whatever' of which de Duve writes earlier would thus appear in this model as an exemplary way of conceiving of the 'now' which is necessarily effaced in a conception of history — the history of art — which sees the singular event only in the terms of a redemptive future moment: that is, in terms of its subordination to the chronology of a project or process. As we have already seen, this is the logic which obtains in an Arnoldian or an Eliotic conception of criticism; it is also the logic of a certain 'photographic' understanding of the time of cinematic representation.

What the telescope discovered

This tendency of the photograph is expressed both formally and in terms of subject matter in a number of key modernist texts. Virginia Woolf's *To The Lighthouse*, for example, is crucially concerned with the play of light and its relation to (ultimately, its opposition to) a mode of representation founded on geometric or perspectival principles. The former is represented by the painter Lily Briscoe, and by the hazy, watery light cast from the room in which the Ramsays and their guests are gathered for dinner. The photographic process is here reversed: the room, rather than operating as a camera (literally, a *chamber*), appears to act as a projector; the world outside the candlelit room is rendered immaterial, hazy, spectral: 'the night was now shut off by panes of glass, which, far from giving any accurate view of the outside world, rippled it so strangely that here, inside the room, seemed to be order and dry land; there, outside, a reflection in which things wavered and vanished, waterily.'⁶⁶ The conceptions of illumination and representation formulated in Woolf's novel suggest an opposition between movement and stasis that is conceived theoretically as a distinction between a historicist conception of the 'object as in itself it really is' (that is, fixed in a

punctual instance of stability and identity) and an alternative temporality of ghostliness, of a presence from the past, such as we have already encountered with regard to the ideas about photography advanced by Benjamin and Kracauer, in terms of a pathetic melancholy in Ruskin, and in de Man's conception of Romantic literature. That the conception of representation involved here should make its presence felt at such historically disparate points is evidence of the extent to which this question of the temporality of representation has been the more or less hidden object of critical reflection since — at least — Romanticism.

'The Searchlight' was published in 1944 in the selection of Woolf's short fiction edited by Leonard Woolf and entitled *A Haunted House*. At the centre of the story is a narrative concerning a boy whose solitary days are spent watching through a telescope the countryside surrounding the farmhouse where he lives. From his refuge in a tower he sees, one afternoon, a man and woman kissing in a farmyard some distance away. This scene sends him running from the tower and out into the road (we are not told where to). The story is told by a middle-aged, middle-class woman called Mrs. Ivimey, the tale having been told her by the boy, later her great-grandfather. Mrs. Ivimey is apparently moved to recount the story to a party assembled on a balcony at a private club, by the reflected light of a searchlight on some distant object (possibly, the short story's first narrator tells us, a mirror in a woman's hand-bag). The story concludes with the revelation that the woman seen from a distance by the boy was Mrs. Ivimey's great-grandmother. This brief description of the plot of 'The Searchlight', though, does little to suggest the extent to which the entire story is organized according to a series of complex metaphors of light, vision and reflection. 'The Searchlight', in fact, is a text which sets up a number of such guiding metaphors, to which both reader and Mrs. Ivimey's audience are encouraged to subscribe, and opposes to this structure a very different conception of vision and representation: one composed of movement and action rather than the kind of static and recognizable scene which both Woolf's

story and Mrs. Ivimey's narrative encourage us to expect. In short, 'The Searchlight', like the illuminating beam of its title, gives us both a light that moves (that searches) and that is static or rigid (at the moment of discovery): the story, in other words, contains an opposition between a cinematic and a photographic vision.

The source of the central scopic event of 'The Searchlight' is a passage in the *Autobiography* of Sir Henry Taylor, published in 1874. The author of this book was a friend of Woolf's aunt, the photographer Julia Margaret Cameron and had stayed at her home at Freshwater in the 1860s, during which time, as he records, he 'was photographed [...] almost every day.'⁶⁷ In her diary entry for 31 January 1939, Woolf wrote: 'I wrote the old Henry Taylor telescope story that's [sic] been humming in my mind these 10 years.' The text had begun to take shape in a draft written in 1929, entitled 'What the Telescope Discovered' (subsequent drafts written the following year are entitled 'Incongruous Memories' and 'Inaccurate Memories', while a revised version possibly completed shortly before Woolf's death in 1941, calls the story simply 'A Scene from the Past').⁶⁸ Throughout its various versions, the central event remains more or less the same; the passage from Taylor's *Autobiography* is brief and without any subsequent reflection or extrapolation:

All the day long I saw no one but the servants, except that I sometimes looked through a telescope [...] at the goings on of a farmstead on a road which skirted our grounds at the farther end. Through this telescope I once saw a young daughter of the farmer rush into the arms of her brother, on his return after an absence, radiant with joy. I think this was the only phenomenon of human emotion which I had witnessed for three years.⁶⁹

While the basic facts of this short narrative remain unchanged, Woolf's drafts adopt different tones: in the first — 'What the Telescope Discovered' — the narrator

emphasizes the immobility of the boy, in contrast to the busy scene he is watching: as the boy focusses the telescope we are told: 'He kept it motionless fixed motionless upon them [while] they kissed violently, brutally, passionately. [...] Through the telescope he had discovered a new world.'⁷⁰

The second draft makes the reference to Taylor explicit. First of all, though, the narrative opens with a preamble on veracity in fiction, and on the power of language in fiction and autobiography. The central event is considerably more dramatic in its impact:

An extraordinary expression was on their faces; they closed together; they kissed. It was miles away, but the shock was like a blow on his own shoulder. There was life, there was love, there was passion! [...] Sweeping the telescope aside, Henry crammed his hat on his head, rushed down stairs out onto the road, out into the world — and so became in time — was it Sir Henry Taylor of the Colonial Office? It may have been — at any rate his name was Henry.⁷¹

The connection with the passage in Taylor's autobiography is made all the more explicit in a draft which situates the framing narrative at Freshwater in the 1860s and describes Taylor posing in the role of King Arthur for Julia Margaret Cameron's camera. Another such draft highlights the sense of a temporal gap between narrative and event in a further distancing, while at the same time situating the story in the time of its writing: 'But since Hitlers [sic] bombs the other day destroyed a copy of the DNB it has been impossible to verify these facts.'⁷² Woolf here introduces a conception of a history which fails to adequately represent the past: it is, crucially, a biographical history which literally can no longer furnish a proper description of the event. The proof of the truth of the central narrative is thus obliterated by technologies of war for which the searchlight of the final version of the story is looking in the night sky over

London. Yet another draft makes the distance between the central story and its framing narrative even more profound: we are told that the story ‘has been handed down from year to year, till, like the gleam of a searchlight it rests broken it is true upon our — are we to call it real world?’⁷³

‘The Searchlight’, then, reveals a complex pattern of connections between light (and the technologies of light), history, memory, autobiography and narrative. The story situates Mrs. Ivimey and the narrative she recounts within the compass of an array of framing and controlling metaphors. It is structured according to a number of oppositions: between stasis and movement, image and gesture, photography and cinema, an enclosed theatrical space or scene and the unlimited space of outdoor illumination (in Deleuzian terms, ‘any-space-whatever’). Both Mrs. Ivimey’s audience and Woolf’s readers are encouraged to believe that the narrative will end with a static, recognizable image — as it were, a photograph which will in an instant reveal the significance of the narrative within a stable history or biography.⁷⁴ Woolf, however, denies us this punctuality, the timely arrival of a meaning at the conclusion of Mrs. Ivimey’s anecdote. Nor will the short story itself conclude with a *point* in the form of a definitive interpretation of the story heard on the balcony; the entire scene remains nothing more than an interval, a period of waiting before the main representational event, to which the reader will not be allowed access: the play which Mrs. Ivimey’s party is to attend. ‘The Searchlight’ places itself ‘between the acts’, in a moment that cannot be recuperated for a theatrical performance but which remains nonetheless a spectacle and a performance: it is the performance, precisely, of a *movement* which takes place outside of the terms and constraints of a recognizably representative space, in a realm governed by an optical logic — a ‘logistics of perception’, as Paul Virilio would put it — which is in fact concerned not with space but with *the government of time*.⁷⁵ It is my contention here, then, that Woolf’s text presents once more the opposition we have already seen at work in the criticism of Arnold and Eliot, and

within the frame of a particular understanding of photographic representation: an opposition, that is, between a moment conceived of as the 'simple sterile difference' of which Lyotard writes, and a moment which has significance only insofar as it partakes of an immobile future instant : the instant of redemption.

The story begins in darkness, or rather in the movement from light into darkness:

The mansion of the eighteenth century Earl had been changed in the twentieth century into a Club. And it was pleasant, after dining in the great room with the pillars and the chandeliers under a glare of light to go out on to the balcony overlooking the Park. The trees were in full leaf, and had there been a moon, one could have seen the pink and cream coloured cockades on the chestnut trees. But it was a moonless night; very warm, after a fine summer's day.⁷⁶

Mr. and Mrs. Ivimey's party, having left the illuminated spectacle of the dining-room, emerge into the darkness of the balcony to find a comparable scene: the trees and their blossoms substituting for the pillars and chandeliers of the dining-room. The lighting, however, has been turned off: the 'fine summer's day' has come to an end. In this interval between the social scene and the theatrical one at which they are about to become spectators, the silent members of the party immediately assume the position of an audience:

As if to relieve them from the need of talking, to entertain them without any effort on their part, rods of light wheeled across the sky.⁷⁷

The group assembled on the balcony becomes at this moment a kind of cinematic audience, passively and communally entertained by the play of light taking place before

them on the blank screen of the night sky. That the passivity of this audience indicates on their part an inability to see precisely what it is that is offered to the gaze by this spectacle, is attested to by the next sentence:

It was peace then; the air force was practising; searching for enemy aircraft in the sky.⁷⁸

The audience that reacts to the rehearsal for war as to a cinematic spectacle will later reveal itself as blind to the movement of history in another way: assuming that the past event, as narrated by Mrs. Ivimey, will have an ultimate or definitive significance in the present. On the one hand, they are incapable of seeing the events whose ghostly prefiguration is presented in the beams of light above their heads, while, on the other, remaining blind to the shifting history of Mrs. Ivimey's story.

The mistake that Mrs. Ivimey's audience makes is in fact an error of vision: it is to assume that the scenes staged in front of them operate in the manner of a more or less static photographic representation; in this sense, the rapid movement of the beams of the searchlights is invisible: what is seen is merely the instantly illuminated scene, or rather a series of immobile images abstracted from the movement of light itself, the luminous movement reformulated instead as a succession of static snapshots organized around a stable axis:

After pausing to prod some suspected spot, the light wheeled, like the wings of a windmill, or again like the antennae of some prodigious insect and revealed here a cadaverous stone front; here a chestnut tree with all its blossoms riding; and then suddenly the light struck straight at the balcony, and for a second a bright disc shone — perhaps it was a mirror in a ladies' hand-bag.⁷⁹

The 'photographic' error (the way of seeing suggested by the passage above) becomes manifest in the audience's reaction to Mrs. Ivimey's question on seeing the reflection of the searchlight:

'Look!' Mrs. Ivimey exclaimed.

The light passed. They were in darkness again.

'You'll never guess what *that* made me see!' she added. Naturally, they guessed.⁸⁰

The literal vision of the audience is then corrected by Mrs. Ivimey: she has not in fact *seen* anything at all; rather, she has been reminded of the story (of her great-grandfather) which she proceeds to tell. The story, we are clearly informed, is told in a kind of interval: 'If they liked, she would try to tell it. There was still time before the play.'⁸¹

The separation of the anticipated theatrical event from what occurs in the interim is made clear once again at the end of the story when we are told 'it was time they went on to the play.'⁸² In the gap between these two reminders of the 'official' space of representation (we are reminded too, toward the end of the story, that the sky above London, now the scene of expectation, is soon to become a *theatre of war*), the members of Mrs. Ivimey's audience (she does not simply tell the story, but also *acts* certain parts: the boy focussing and discarding the telescope, for example) appear not to have noticed that they are witnessing a very different system of representation, one founded on an unbounded and continually moving illumination. Instead, the narrator makes us understand that the audience persistently 'frames' Mrs. Ivimey, placing her within a series of stabilizing scenographies, in an (ultimately unsuccessful) attempt to fix both her and the meaning of her anecdote. She is presented as a static image, constructed in terms of age, gender and class: 'And certainly she was sitting there now,

a well set-up, middle-aged woman, with something blue over her shoulders.⁸³ The counter to Mrs. Ivimey's suggestion of the fragility of her identity (of, in fact, her very existence, which depends, she says, on the existence of the telescope) is her construction as a visual field with definite boundaries and assured meanings. This becomes clearer after she has told her enigmatic tale, with her imaginary framing in a doorway; the uncertainty of her story, though, seems to have fractured the photographic frame, leaving her stranded in an ambiguous space and time, caught between the present and the time of her narrative. Random detail is all that remains of the apparent coherence of her previous image:

A shaft of light fell upon Mrs. Ivimey as if someone had focussed the lens of a telescope upon her. (It was the air force, looking for enemy aircraft.) She had risen. She had something blue on her head. She had raised her hand, as if she stood in a doorway, amazed.⁸⁴

The central narrative of the story is likewise itself structured around this opposition between focussed light as that which fixes and that which dissolves and shifts. The initial introduction of the telescope is in the context of the boy, Mrs. Ivimey's great-grandfather, looking at the stars. At that moment the stars are beginning to appear in the sky above Mrs. Ivimey and we are told that 'the searchlight seemed brighter, sweeping across the sky, pausing here and there to stare at the stars.'⁸⁵ The stars above her audience seem to them to be 'very permanent, very unchanging' and to link them to the scene described:

A hundred years seemed nothing. They felt that the boy was looking at the stars with them. They seemed to be with him, in the tower, looking out over the moors at the stars.⁸⁶

They are engaged, then, in obliterating the historical distance between themselves and the boy in the tower at the same time, and in the same manner, as they conceive of the stars as unchanging and simultaneous. In fact, of course, the stability of the stars depends upon the construction of a scene, on an act of *consideration*: literally, the transformation of a light which arrives simultaneously but from different times as if it were eternal, permanent and already arranged into *constellations*. This effacement of temporal difference and of the movement of light is counterpoised to the use to which the boy later puts the telescope; Mrs. Ivimey's description of the focussing of the telescope on the distant scene (the man and woman embracing) is striking first of all for the effect of its ellipses (and is worth quoting in its entirety to gauge the force of that effect):

'He focussed it,' she said. 'He focussed it upon the earth. He focussed it upon a dark mass of wood upon the horizon. He focussed it so that he could see ... each tree ... each separate tree ... and the birds ... rising and falling ... and a stem of smoke ... there ... in the midst of the trees ... And then ... lower ... lower ... (she lowered her eyes) ... there was a house ... a house among the trees ... a farm house ... every brick showed ... and the tubs on either side of the door ... with flowers in them blue, pink, hydrangeas, perhaps ...' She paused ... 'And then a girl came out of the house ... wearing something blue upon her head ... and stood there ... feeding birds ... pigeons ... they came fluttering round her ... And then ... look ... A man ... A man! He came round the corner. He seized her in his arms! They kissed ... they kissed.'⁸⁷

The nature of the gaps between words, phrases and statements in this passage is most clearly indicated by the intervention of a single ellipsis which performs a very different

role; Mrs. Ivimey is interrupted by the narrator, who tells us: 'She paused...'. If the ellipsis here is the effect of the pause, of a hiatus in the quickening pace of the narrative, the ellipses which appear in Mrs. Ivimey's speech do not function as gaps or absences from her narrative, but rather as movements. The ellipsis here indicates movement in time, movement between the successive images which the boy focusses on, and is counterpoised to the abrupt paratactic 'and' and 'then' of the earlier (as I indicated above, photographic) apprehension, on the part of Mrs. Ivimey's hearers, of the objects illuminated by the searchlight. Mrs. Ivimey's mode of narrative, then, can be read as an attempt to include the movements ordinarily effaced by a representation which focuses on privileged instants (in Deleuze's sense) as static tableaux, at the expense of the temporal sliding of history. This also renders Mrs. Ivimey's narrative highly ambiguous, lacking as it does any stable conclusion. The role of movement in her story is highlighted at the end by an excess of rapid movement: she thrusts an imaginary telescope away from her and returns to the boy:

'So he ran down the stairs. He ran through the fields. He ran down lanes, out upon the high road, through woods. He ran for miles and miles, and just when the stars were showing above the trees he reached home ... covered with dust, streaming with sweat....'⁸⁸

It is at this point, as I indicated above, that the audience expects a stable concluding image. We are left, though, only with the information that the woman was Mrs. Ivimey's great-grandmother, and the cryptic statement, 'the light ... only falls here and there.'⁸⁹

Woolf's story, then, outlines a conception of visual representation as the static fixing of a recognizable tableau (which is supposed to take its place in a coherent narrative of biography or family history), but that conception is spectacularly invaded

by a representation founded on *the play of light in time*. 'The Searchlight' illuminates not simply an opposition between photography and cinema but between stasis and movement; it proposes as the basic element of representation, not the image, but the gesture.⁹⁰

We have seen, then, in the work of Woolf as in the philosophies of Lyotard and Deleuze, and in the aesthetic theory of de Duve, a conception of representation in terms of the interim, the movement which occurs between the static, *immobile sections* of an abstract chronology. This conception of the temporality of representation returns us to the gap which opens for Augustine between the theatrical performances described in *De Trinitate*, as well as to the allegorical temporality to which de Man opposes the spatial model of irony. What we have encountered here is essentially a conception of an *event* which is manifestly at odds with the 'abstract empty continuum' of which Benjamin wrote, and we can conclude, finally, with an exploration of the consequences for 'criticism of such a conception of the event.

Notes

¹ St. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. F.J. Sheed (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), pp. 26ff.

² St. Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will*, trans. Anna S. Benjamin & L.H. Hackstaff (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964), pp. 135-36.

³ For secular autobiographers, this phenomenon manifests itself at the beginning of the text rather than at its redemptive terminus. Cf., for example, the opening lines of Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*: Coleridge is at pains to insist that the Samuel Taylor Coleridge who has entered the public realm as author of poetry and criticism is not in fact the real Coleridge, who will form the subject of the work: 'It has been my lot to have had my name introduced, both in conversation and in print, more frequently than I find it easy to explain, whether I consider the fewness, unimportance and limited circulation of my writings, or the retirement and distance in which I have lived, both from the literary and political world.' Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (London: Dent, 1991), p. 1. This marking off of two distinct authors implies, of course, a third position, that of the 'Coleridge' writing the opening lines of the *Biographia*. This third authorial position would constitute a temporally anterior moment: it would not, in other words, coincide with either the public or the private Coleridge. As Philippe Lejeune would point out, the claim to authorship of the work is itself guaranteed by the assumed correspondence between the name on the title page and the prior attachment of that name to other texts. See Philippe Lejeune, *Le pacte autobiographique* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1975).

⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, p. 145. My emphasis.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

⁸ Matthew Arnold, 'On Translating Homer', in *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, ed. R.H. Super (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960), p. 140.

⁹ Matthew Arnold, 'The Study of Poetry', in *Essays in Criticism: Second Series* (London: Macmillan, 1925), pp. 16-17.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹¹ The single line, though, must relate to a larger whole, which, in these comments on Chaucer, is held — or ought to be held — in the memory and which gives significance to the isolated fragment. The touchstone, then, functions as a kind of Proustian *aide memoire*, calling to mind a whole in relation to which it operates as a privileged moment.

¹² Arnold's conception of literary history as a series of more or less static moments is in one respect confirmed, but in a more fundamental sense denied in the 1880s and 1890s by the critical and dramatic writings of Oscar Wilde (for whom, we should recall, the job of the critic, as expressed in 'The Critic as Artist', is to see the object *as in itself it really is not*). Where the instant in Arnold's conception is characterized by its permanence, universality and value as a model for the future, the constellation of Wilde's writing is made up of a multiplicity of brilliant points fashioned with a view to their transitoriness. For Wilde, this is as proper to criticism as to any other form of writing: 'each mode of criticism is, in its highest development, simply a mood [...]. When one has found expression for a mood, one has done with it.' *The Critic as Artist*, in *The Writings of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Isobel Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 282. In this respect, Wilde's paradoxes and aphorisms are both precursors of the modernist aesthetics of shock which Benjamin would identify specifically in photography and cinema, *and* the inheritors of an aesthetic of the 'point' advanced most clearly in the seventeenth century by the Polish Jesuit poet and aesthetician, Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski. The *acutum*, for Sarbiewski, is more than a witticism or *pointe*; in his *De arguto et acuto* he declares: 'An *acutum* is a saying in which something consistent is linked together with something inconsistent, in other

words, a compatible incompatibility, or an incompatible compatibility.’ Sarbiewski, *De arguto et acuto*, quoted in Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, Vol. III, ed. D. Petsch (The Hague: Mouton, 1974), p. 392. This mannerist aesthetic is revised — again, in a theory of photography — by Roland Barthes’s concept of the *punctum* in *Camera Lucida*. For Barthes, as we saw in Chapter 1, this point is traversed by a non-punctual temporality: that of death and absence.

The point or *acutum* theorized by the Jesuit aestheticians of the seventeenth century as the effect of a startling subtlety of thought — the *je ne sais quoi* identified by Dominique Bouhours, for example — becomes in post-romantic criticism the merely ineffable, the mysterious effect of an even vaguer instant of poetic creation: hence Arnold’s vision of the critic as one who simply points in the absence of history, philology and philosophy.

¹³ T.S. Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1933), p. 118.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹⁵ Georges Poulet, *Studies in Human Time*, trans. E. Coleman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1956), p. 354.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 356.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁸ There is an extent to which Poulet’s approach is that of a fairly conventional ‘history of ideas’; it should be borne in mind, though, that the work (begun while Poulet was at the University of Edinburgh) was first published in an Anglo-American context dominated by formalist and new-critical orthodoxies. At the same time, the method is close to the post-Annales concept of ‘*mentalités*’ advanced by such thinkers as Pierre Nora in the 1970s as support for the *nouveaux philosophes*’ attack on *la pensée soixante-huit*. It is hoped that my argument in this chapter goes some way toward

suggesting the conceptual similarities between an apparently ahistorical and pre-theoretical formalism and a currently dominant (and ostensibly philosophically informed) historicism which owes much to the works of such thinkers as Nora and Jacques Le Goff. For a brief commentary on the advent of the 'Nouveaux Philosophes', see Jean-François Lyotard, *Postmodern Fables*, trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 204-206.

¹⁹ See Georges Poulet, *L'espace proustien* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963).

²⁰ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. ix.

²¹ René Descartes, *Dioptrics*, in *Philosophical Writings*, ed. Elizabeth Anscombe & Peter Thomas Geach (London: Open University Press, 1970), p. 241.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 245.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 245-46.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 246.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 252-3.

²⁶ Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), p. 86.

²⁷ Denis Diderot, *Lettre sur les aveugles*, in *Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris: Garnier, 1875), pp. 283-84.

²⁸ Lacan, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

²⁹ Descartes, *Philosophical Writings*, p. 252.

³⁰ Lacan, *op. cit.*, p. 94

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, p. 96.

³³ Cf. Aron Scharf, *Art and Photography* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974).

³⁴ Ian Jeffrey, *Photography: A Concise History* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1981), p. 12.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 12-13.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

³⁷ Lacan, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

³⁸ Jean-François Lyotard, 'Acinema', in *The Lyotard Reader*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (Oxford Blackwell, 1989), p. 169.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

⁴² Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, p. 111.

⁴³ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Lyotard Reader*, p. 175.

⁴⁴ Paul Virilio, *The Aesthetics of Disappearance*, trans. Philip Beitchman (New York: Semiotext(e), 1991), p. 31.

⁴⁵ Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, p. 112.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* This would be, for example, the logic of Chapter XIV of Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975). For Locke, movement and duration can only properly be perceived in reflection on the succession of ideas which appear one after another in our own minds. At the beginning of his chapter on duration and its simple modes, Locke claims that duration is a kind of distance or length, the idea of which 'we get not from the permanent parts of Space, but from the fleeting and perpetually perishing parts of Succession.' [p. 181.] It soon, transpires, however, that the idea of duration is intimately connected, though by no means identical with, that of motion, both relying on a notion of succession which has its origin in space. Having already linked the idea of duration to that of spatial

extension in the fifth section of this chapter, Locke goes on to offer an explicit example of the way in which the succession of ideas out of which is produced the perception of movement, originates in a scene of spatial comparison of measurement: 'For a Man looking upon a Body really moving, perceives yet no motion at all, unless that Motion produces a constant train of *successive* Ideas. v.g. a Man becalmed at Sea, out of sight of Land, in a fair Day, may look on the Sun, or Sea, or Ship, a whole hour together, and perceive no Motion at all in either; though it be certain, that two, and perhaps all of them, have moved, during that time, a great way: But as soon as he perceives either of them to have changed distance with some other Body, as soon as this Motion produces any new *Idea* in him, then he perceives, that there has been Motion.' [pp. 183-84.] The idea of succession instituted here is composed of *instants*, an instant being a part of duration that passes us by so quickly as to leave no impression of succession: an instant is '*that which takes up the time of only one Idea in our Minds.*'

⁴⁸ Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, p. 1. Cf., in this regard, Deleuze's comments in *A Thousand Plateaus*: 'Movement has an essential relation to the imperceptible; it is by nature imperceptible. Perception can grasp movement only as the displacement of a moving body or the development of a form. Movements, becomings, in other words, pure relations of speed and slowness, pure affects, are below and above the threshold of perception. Doubtless, thresholds of perception are relative; there is always a threshold capable of grasping what eludes another: the eagle's eye.' Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Athlone Press, 1988), pp. 280-81.

⁴⁹ Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1975), p. 332.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, p. 2.

⁵² Ibid., p. 3.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 109.

⁵⁴ Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 1.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 10.

⁵⁷ Thierry de Duve, *Kant After Duchamp* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), Ch. 6, 'Do Whatever'.

⁵⁸ The translation is de Duve's own, retaining the literal sense of the French original and resisting the more usual colloquial senses of 'rubbish' or 'gibberish'. See de Duve, pp. 328-9, n. 1.

⁵⁹ This claim recalls the argument Baudrillard makes concerning *trompe l'oeil* painting, 'which would seem to place the advent of 'anything whatever' rather earlier: it should be remembered though, that for Baudrillard the 'whatever' that appears in *trompe l'oeil* separates it definitively from art.

⁶⁰ De Duve, *Kant After Duchamp*, p. 330.

⁶¹ Jean-François Lyotard, 'Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?', in *The Postmodern Condition*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), p. 81.

⁶² De Duve, *Kant After Duchamp*, p. 345.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 331.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 333.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 441.

⁶⁶ Virginia Woolf, *To The Lighthouse* (London: Grafton, 1977), pp. 90-91.

⁶⁷ Henry Taylor, *Autobiography* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1874), p. 153. In a curious reversal of the kind of authority that Cameron's photographs encourage the

modern viewer to attribute to their subjects (Henry Taylor, for example, appeared in the guise of King Arthur), the reaction of Taylor's wife Alice is to take the images not as evidence of the greatness of the sitter, but as somehow existing in a realm other than life and language, in some future moment, as *what will have been*: 'I like all except one of the little ones; and most of them I think very grand; decidedly grander than anything you have yet written or lived; so I begin to expect great things of you.' [p. 153]

⁶⁸ See J.W. Graham, 'The Drafts of Virginia Woolf's "The Searchlight"', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 22:4 (December 1976), 379-93.

⁶⁹ Taylor, *Autobiography*, p. 27.

⁷⁰ Graham, *op. cit.*, 383.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 384.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 387.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Something like the definitive image which fails to appear at the end of *To The Lighthouse*, in Lily Briscoe's painting. Her 'vision', instead of being a recognizable representation, is rather an unstable and 'blurred' image, precisely a reaction to the rigid geometrical thinking of Mr. Ramsay and the demands for realism of William Bankes. See Virginia Woolf, *To The Lighthouse* (London: Grafton, 1977), pp. 35, 52, 191-91 & *passim*.

⁷⁵ Paul Virilio, *Speed and Politics*, trans. Mark Polizzotti (New York: Semiotext(e), 1986), p. 141.

⁷⁶ Virginia Woolf, *A Haunted House and Other Short Stories* (London: Grafton, 1982), p. 117.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Ibid. Paul Virilio has pointed out the intimate connections between military technology and the aesthetics of light: 'As a prelude to the lightning war of 1940, here was a *lighting war*, with the use of the first tracer bullets, flames that lit up no-man's-land for nocturnal targets, powerful searchlights with a range of nine kilometres, and early anti-aircraft defence systems.' Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London: verso, 1989), p. 70. Furthermore, there is a whole architecture of illumination born with Leni Riefenstahl's film of the 1934 Nazi party congress in Nuremberg, *Triumph of the Will*: 'When Hitler asked [Albert Speer] to design a giant-scale vista for the Zeppelinfeld rally-stadium in Nuremberg, he laid aside his sketches of stone pillars and installed a hundred and fifty searchlight columns reaching up to the sky. Visitors to the stadium had the sense of being in a hypostyle theatre with a ceiling six thousand metres high, all of which would vanish into thin air at the first glimmer of 'daybreak.' p. 55.

⁷⁹ Woolf, *A Haunted House*, p. 117. The phenomenon indicated here has also been — as we saw in Chapter 1 — identified in the work of Proust; Marcel Brion provides just one instance: 'Marcel Proust's idea of time is extremely curious. In his books time is a character like the others — I might even say more than the others. Time is at the centre of his work like a sort of lighthouse with turning signals. The men who revolve around this luminous mass are suddenly illuminated by the beams of the projector in periodic flashes, and the moment the light abandons them they fall back into obscurity, nothingness.' Marcel Brion, 'The Idea of Time in the Work of James Joyce', in Samuel Beckett et al, *Our Exagmination Round his Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), p. 27.

⁸⁰ Woolf, *A Haunted House*, p. 117.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid., p. 122.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 119.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 121.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 119.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 120-21.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 121.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ A distinction outlined by Giorgio Agamben, who is here following Gilles Deleuze: 'Gesture rather than image is the cinematic element. [...] We need to extend Deleuze's analysis and show that it has a general bearing on the status of the image within modernity. But this means that the mythical fixity of the image has been broken, and we should not really speak of images here, but of gestures. In fact, every image is animated by an antinomial polarity: on the one hand this is the reification and effacement of a gesture (the *imago* either as symbol or as the wax mask of the corpse); on the other it maintains the *dynamis* (as in Muybridge's split-second photographs, or in any photograph of a sporting event).' Giorgio Agamben, 'Notes on Gesture', in *Infancy and History*, trans. Liz Heron (London: Verso, 1993), pp. 138-39.

Conclusion

‘Ce n’est pas tout de mourir: il faut mourir à temps.’ (Jean-Paul Sartre)

‘This prophecy Merlin shall make; for I live before his time.’ (*King Lear*)

In the Introduction, we saw at work in *Infancy and History*, a particular conception of the time in which Agamben claims that text is inserted: in common, according to Agamben, with all texts, the book stands in a certain relation to other, unwritten, works, of which it forms the preface or announcement. It is important here, in conclusion, to recall the precise nature of the temporality to which Agamben draws attention, and the manner in which the intervening chapters have elaborated upon the textual time which was announced at the outset. For Agamben, the book to which he writes the preface is itself nothing but the projection or annunciation of further texts which are destined to remain unwritten: the text, then, stands in a certain sense outside of its own time; it is ultimately untimely, at the same time that its preface attempts to fulfil an institutional demand that it justify the text, that is, that it proclaim its timeliness. The manner in which the work announces another (unwritten and impossible) work, with which it will fail to coincide, is homologous, for Agamben, with the relation of the present, the contemporary, to another time: the time of a lived experience which is thought in this text as precisely unwritten. Experience, for Agamben, is linked to *infancy*; experience is that which does not enter into language, but which is nonetheless given voice (the argument here depends, it will be recalled, upon a distinction between voice and language). The prefatory text, then, announces an experience of which it cannot itself partake.

This prefatory time, however, is more complex than the initial formulation reveals. At the same time that the text precedes and prefaces another, silent, work, it is also anterior to that work: as its ghostly remnant it once more fails to coincide with the time of the unwritten text, but appears instead as the spectral manifestation to the present of an entity which does not present itself (that is, does not make itself part of a present, does not occur *on time*, in *our time*). In other words, the prefatory text presents itself also, and at the same time, in relation to the conclusion or terminus of a process conceived in terms of past, present and future. While, on the one hand, it precedes the main event of the impossible work, it is also, as Agamben's preface has it, the 'death mask' of that work. It will be the task of my concluding remarks here to show how the temporality which has exercised my argument throughout, and which found its initial formulation in this opening conception of the time of the preface, is also bound up with a certain conception of the time and the space of death. While it is fitting that we conclude here with a reflection on the end, having begun with a meditation on the beginning, it will become clear in what follows that I intend no happy symmetry between introduction and conclusion, between the times of foretelling and remembering, between *arche* and *telos*. Rather, I wish to attend here, in recapitulation of my argument and projection of its implications and effects, to the ghostly, indistinct movement of thinking and representation which has been my focus throughout.

In the investigation of the ghostly temporality of photographic representation in Chapter One, we saw, in the works of Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer, a conception of the photograph as an allegorical form: that is, as a representation which presents its object as essentially irretrievable, inhabiting a past which cannot be recovered or recuperated for the present. Following Benjamin's conception of allegory in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, and the manner in which that formulation intersects with his later texts on photography, the photograph was understood as

corresponding to the allegorical *ruin*, the spectral remnant of a lost object. At the same time, that loss is nonetheless the object of a certain representation in the present: the photographic object is that which traverses time in the manner of the spectre (as understood by Derrida). The photograph presents now, in the present, that which properly belongs to another time; it is thus, in the formulation offered by Roland Barthes, a form of *apophrades*, the return of the dead. In this sense, the photograph is assuredly a spectre, a revenant, in Derrida's terms: what returns, according to Derrida, demands to be thought *now*, as that which traverses our time and which demands of us, its spectators, a certain ethical response. To respond to the spectre, for the Derrida of *Specters of Marx*, means to enter into a certain structure of inheritance, of *passing on*.¹ What is in question here, then, is a matter of transition, of movement, at the same time that it is also a question of loss. Photography yields in this instance a conception of the object of representation, the object which returns, not as that which is fixed in a moment (either its own, proper, time or *our* time) but as that which is *in passing*. The melancholy gaze of the allegorist, as described by Benjamin, Kristeva and Baudrillard, is thus revealed not as the fixing of, or adherence to, an object, but rather as its setting into motion, its release into a time which cannot be detained under the laws of past, present and future.

The nature of the temporality of melancholy and of loss was further elaborated in the second chapter, with reference first to certain texts by John Ruskin and secondly to the treatise of Longinus: that is, in relation to a certain conception of the aesthetics of the sublime. In the case of Ruskin, it was demonstrated first of all that the concept of the pathetic fallacy denotes in Ruskin's thought a weakened or attenuated version of the experience which is thought in a stronger fashion by the aesthetics of the eighteenth century, the latter exemplified here by Edmund Burke. The understanding of grief presented in Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry*, the maintenance before the gaze of the subject of an object conceived as lost to the past (and the particular pleasure or *delight*

which this occasions for Burke), becomes for Ruskin's belated version of the sublime, a pathological or perverted imputation of subjectivity to the object, while the grieving subject is rendered weak, vaporous and ghostly. In Ruskin's writings, this ghostliness is strikingly allegorized in the form of the 'Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century', a fantasized object which presents the impossibility of an adequate representation: the storm-cloud appears to Ruskin's diseased imagination as everywhere and nowhere at one and the same time. The text proposes, then, an understanding of representation (specifically, of *modern* representation) as vague, spectral, evanescent. For Ruskin, this hazy vision is bound up with a conception of the present as traversed by the ghostly presence of an unrecognizable and unstable history: in the violent and chaotic movement of the storm-cloud, the critic strives and fails to orient himself in relation to the past and future (the times, it will be recalled, of the recent Franco-Prussian war, and the uncertain future of a Europe haunted — for Ruskin, as for Marx — by spectres).

In part, the dissolving or vaporizing of the subject concerns Ruskin precisely because it disrupts a tradition (artistic, poetic and meteorological) which had hitherto been lucid and recognizable, all tradition becoming what Ruskin calls a 'tradition of air'. In the treatise of Longinus, we saw again a text which is exercised by a certain question concerning the status of the present in relation to past and future: Longinus is concerned with the place of the literary text (not least of his own treatise) in relation to its antecedents (exemplified by the influence of Homer) and its future reception. This problem, formulated initially in this text in relation to the temporality of education, is fully expressed in the conception of sublimity as a movement out of the self: that is, as *ekstasis*. The violence of this ecstatic movement, however, is foreclosed in Paul de Man's reading of Longinus in the context of a Hegelian sublime which is thought by de Man as the inevitable reassertion of the power of the subject over its own ecstatic dissolution. In other words, for de Man, the temporal movement or *sliding* (as Neil

Hertz puts it) of the sublime is reduced to a spatial conception of intersubjectivity: the *dissolving* of the subject at work in Longinus and Ruskin reconfigured merely as its *splitting*.

In Chapter Three this tendency in de Man's criticism toward the foreclosure of the complex and paradoxical temporality so far conceived in relation to the concepts of allegory and the sublime was elaborated. For de Man, in 'The Rhetoric of Temporality', the concept of allegory denotes a 'temporal predicament': allegory presents the absolute anteriority of the object of representation. Initially, de Man's essay is attentive to the historical locatedness of this predicament; indeed, the problem is first of all, claims de Man, one of historical awareness: the first task of the text is to break through the calcified layers of a literary history which no longer allows us to see the true nature of the history of allegory. Accordingly, de Man carefully overturns the traditional (that is, post-romantic) denigration of the concept of allegory at the hands of a theory of the symbol. It quickly becomes clear, however, that de Man opens up the time of allegory only in order to enclose it within another opposition: the more authentic (because, it transpires, less historical) mode of representing the temporal situation of the subject is in fact *irony*, which is conceived here by de Man as universal. In his reading of Baudelaire's 'De l'essence du rire', de Man rejects the melancholic time of allegory in favour of an irony understood as the splitting of the subject (for Baudelaire, its *dédoublement* at the moment of laughter) and the reassertion of the subject's control over its own dissolution or 'fall'. What is at stake here is a temporality that has to do with the elision of the moment or instant of death. In de Man's readings of Wordsworth, the poet who speaks 'from beyond the grave', death is figured precisely as that which must be elided, as that which must be 'spoken over' (as in the form of the epitaph). Death becomes, in fact, for de Man, a 'linguistic predicament'. In the figure of Paul de Man, then, we encountered a critic who, on the one hand, is as apparently open to the ghostly, deathlike time of representation as the

thinkers examined in the first two chapters. For de Man, however, the movement of this time is repeatedly arrested, fixed with reference to a stable, if endlessly self-conscious, subject, the untimeliness of allegory persistently detained within an ironic instantaneity.

In the fourth chapter, this question of the instant was directly addressed in an exploration of the philosophy of time elaborated in the writings of St. Augustine. In Book XI of the *Confessions*, Augustine is engaged in an elaborate effort to delimit the present. This present is first presented in this text as manifesting itself in language: in our everyday discourse, says Augustine, we speak unproblematically of past, present and future. Under the pressure of Augustine's speculation, however, the present seems to vanish into the adjacent fields of the past and the future: it is always both too late and too early; as soon as one claims to be *in* the present, one is already referring to a moment that has passed, or to a time to come. For Augustine, as was demonstrated here, the present is ultimately conceived as a moment *in passing*; the apprehension of that moment is guaranteed by a process of reading (that is, of allowing oneself to be traversed by the word of God). In the context of the Augustinian meditation on time, it was demonstrated that the conception of time in terms of the stable categories of past, present and future is intimately connected to the time of capital, itself figured in Augustine in terms of representation (the actor's promise and its oblique fulfilment).

For Giorgio Agamben and Jean-François Lyotard, Augustine provides the means to conceive of the founding and dominant understanding of time in the West: the time of capital (and, for Agamben, the time of a Marxism which has so far failed to produce and alternative, a *counter-time*) is precisely the quantification of temporality in terms of static instants or points. What occurs between these points is relegated to the status of a mere passage or gap. In opposition to this abstract time, these thinkers propose a conception of the *now*, of the event which occurs in just such an interim, in

the 'between-ness' of a time which will not be fixed or frozen in relation to the stable quanta of the dominant temporality.

In the final chapter, this opposition between movement and stasis was found to be central to a conception of the temporality of literary tradition at work in the criticism of Matthew Arnold and T.S. Eliot. In Arnold's understanding of literary history in terms of 'touchstones', the movement of history is in fact effaced in favour of the mapping of a spatial field. Tradition is thought of here as a series of stable coordinates or points. For Eliot, these points are periodically set in motion by the work of a great critic (such as Arnold). This process of 'readjustment', though, takes the form of a periodic reassertion of the privileged perspective of the present over the past: the process is explicitly figured in Eliot's criticism in terms of a spatial arrangement. In both Eliot and Arnold, then, the time of literary history is reduced to a spatial configuration; its time is conceived as a series of static tableaux, an arrangement of privileged scenes or moments abstracted from the flux of time. A similar conception of literary time informs a much later critic: Georges Poulet.

This manner of conceiving of time was linked here to a certain way of thinking about photography as the product of a 'geometrical' thinking. In opposition to the arrangement of points in space and time, the writings of Lyotard and Deleuze on cinematic representation provide a model of the temporality of representation which attends to movement. Lyotard envisions a cinema which would resist the movement of return which he claims dominates cinematic representation; as with Deleuze's version of the time of cinema as 'any-instant-whatever', what is in question here is a time in passing, a moment conceived not in its timely conjunction or relation with other such moments, but as the disruption of abstract chronology. This notion of the time of cinematic representation was related here to Thierry de Duve's reading of the history of modern art as the history of 'whatever', and to Virginia Woolf's presentation in 'The Searchlight' of a ghostly illumination which disrupts chronology and refuses an easy

conjunction of the event and its spectral 'return'. What is proposed ultimately here is an aesthetics of the 'between' or of the interim.

Endings

In elaborating a series of arguments concerning the temporalities of representation and of criticism — summarized above with regard to an opposition between the spatialization of time and the effort to conceive of the *now* as a moment in passing, in movement — we have been concerned also, at key moments, with the relation of the texts discussed to certain conceptions of *death*. In the first chapter, the photographic temporality which was our object here was thought of (most emphatically by Roland Barthes) as the return of the dead. In Chapter Two, the aesthetics of the sublime was figured in terms of a certain conception of grief or mourning. In the discussion of de Man in Chapter Three, we saw the opposition between the temporalities of allegory and irony construed in terms of a poetic voice which appeared to emanate from beyond the grave. For Augustine, in the fourth chapter, the effort to fix or identify the present is analogous with the struggle to delimit the moment of death itself, while in the final chapter we saw once more a certain ghostly return in the play of photographic and cinematic illumination. Death, then, is variously offered in these texts as (a) a moment or instant, a *now* which nonetheless cannot be inhabited as a present; (b) an event or an object in the past, to which representation affords no access; (c) a limit or a border which is subject to certain *crossings*; (d) a *future*, the ultimate object or end of a chronological orientation; (e) the undoing of all chronologies and teleologies, a time which disrupts *our time* and is radically discontinuous with it. The first formulation here could be said to contain the other four: we are addressing here under the name of 'death', an essential anachrony, the impossibility of the present coinciding with itself in

time (and of all that follows from this in terms of the placing of a stable present in relation to other such moments). If, then, a notion of the untimeliness of death has ghosted the argument throughout, the time has come, in approaching the end, to address explicitly this question of finitude, of finishing. In conclusion, it will be necessary to suggest what kinds of ends our argument might have: that is, both how one might conceive of the end, the *telos*, at the end of the times we have explored, and how those ends will themselves form the origins of new movements, new projects or projections. The argument here will be formulated in relation to a certain understanding of autobiography (and its ends) and to the problematics of death proposed in two texts by Jacques Derrida.

To return briefly to our starting-point, the time of the preface which was also a kind of ending: we saw in Agamben an annunciatory text which took as its subject the temporal structure of annunciation itself. I wish here to suggest a connection between the logic of the preface in Agamben (the text as both beginning and end of an unwritten text) and a particular temporal aspect of autobiography. Towards the end of Roland Barthes's autobiographical text, which is also, among other things, a reflection on autobiography and on pedagogy, Barthes describes what he calls '*la compulsion de programme*': the tendency in his writing to announce further texts which, however, remain resolutely unwritten. The production of programmes, projects, *prospectuses* is related initially by Barthes to the action of *prolepsis* in the narratology of Gérard Genette: the annunciation or introduction is simply that which projects itself forward to another, future, moment (thus constituting the second moment as a repetition; the first, of course, cannot truly be said to occur for the first time either).² But something more complex is at work here: the proposed texts, says Barthes, take on a kind of life, and (partly) fulfil themselves in more modest works than those originally announced. The imagined or projected book, though, remains impossible; its hallucinated perfection places it precisely in the realm of *utopia*:

L'Annonciation du Livre (le *Prospectus*) est l'une de ces manoeuvres dilatoires qui règlent notre utopie interne. J'imagine, je fantasme, je colorie et je lustre le grand livre dont je suis capable: c'est un livre de savoir et d'écriture, à la fois système parfait et dérision de tout système, une somme d'intelligence et de plaisir, un livre vengeur et tendre, corrosif et plaisible, etc. (ici, déferlement d'adjectifs, bouffée d'imaginaire); bref, il a toutes les qualités d'un héros de roman: il est celui qui vient (l'aventure), et ce livre, me faisant le Jean-Baptiste de moi-même, je l'annonce.³

The precise locations and dates of the announcements are given in the passage of *Roland Barthes* entitled 'Plus tard' (though not, it turns out, in the English translation of the book, which simply omits Barthes's parenthetical references to his earlier works): the time of the annunciation is thus precisely located, while the unwritten projections themselves remain in an uncertain time to come.⁴ As we saw in Agamben, this provisionality of the preface is in fact extended to all works, which now take on the status of the *abstract* or the *rehearsal*:

Renversons maintenant tout ceci: ces manoeuvres dilatoires, ces redans du projet, c'est peut-être l'écriture elle-même. D'abord, l'oeuvre n'est jamais que le méta-livre (le commentaire prévisonnel) d'une oeuvre à venir, qui, *ne se faisant pas*, devient cette oeuvre-ci: Proust, Fourier n'ont écrit que des 'Prospectus'. Ensuite, l'oeuvre n'est jamais monumentale: c'est une *proposition* que chacun viendra saturer comme il voudra, comme il pourra: je vous passe une matière sémantique à courir, comme le furet.⁵

In common with this vision of the text as provisional prologue to an uncertain future, the autobiographical text is oriented also toward a future, toward the 'adventure' of what is to come, the final fragment of *Roland Barthes* asking 'Et après?' The autobiographical text, of course, is unfinished; it has as its ultimate future, its terminally absent referent, the demise of the author. The autobiographer's death is both demanded by the project (as its ultimate fulfilment or closure) and that which must be forestalled or deferred (a definition, in the passage quoted above, of writing itself). The autobiography can never come to an end: if it did, it would then take the form of a voice from beyond the grave and would therefore have denied the end itself. Death thus constitutes the uncertain future and the impossible end of autobiography (at the same time that it is the only certain conclusion of the autobiographical narrative). As we have already seen, Paul de Man's reading of *The Prelude* (and other Wordsworth texts) suggests an autobiographical writing that would attempt to deny the moment of this ultimate termination by situating itself already beyond it. It is not merely, then, that autobiographical texts seem susceptible to endless revision (as, for example, in the cases of Wordsworth, De Quincey and Proust), but rather that death, the definitive end, produces a constitutive problem for autobiographical writing itself, as de Man has noted:

The interest of autobiography, then, is not that it reveals reliable self-knowledge — it does not — but that it demonstrates in a striking way the impossibility of closure and of totalization (that is the impossibility of coming into being) of all textual systems made up of tropological substitutions.⁶

The temporality of autobiography, then, opens up a problematic of the end, of a teleology which is not simply the limit, the terminus, but is thought as a border that is continually approached or as that which has in a certain sense already happened. The

autobiographical text projects, as does the 'programme' or prolepsis for Barthes, a future which is both certain (as the instant of death) and uncertain (as approaching, crossing or passing). What is in question, then, once more, is a distinction between the moment *in situ* and the moment in motion, a philosophical problem that we have already broached, and seen Augustine address precisely in terms of the temporal location of death itself.

Crossings

Two texts by Derrida allow us to recast this question of time and death and to show how the question is crucial to the temporalities of criticism and representation with which we have been concerned so far. In *Aporias*, Derrida begins with a reflection on the untimeliness of death; in a reading of Seneca's *De brevitae vitae*, Derrida shows how, for Seneca, death never occurs on time. According to Seneca, one always dies too soon, in a state of unreadiness and immaturity:

And so I should like to lay hold upon someone from the company of older men and say: 'I see that you have reached the farthest limit of human life, you are pressing hard upon your hundredth year, or are even beyond it. Come now, recall your life and make a reckoning [...], look back in memory and consider [...] how little of yourself was left to you: you will perceive that you are dying before your season.'⁷

Death is thought of here, then, in terms of a 'to-come' which is also a limit, an ultimate instant. For Derrida, the limit is also at the same time a border: in rereading Seneca, he claims:

Well, we would discover that this discourse on death also contains, among so many other things, a *rhetoric of borders*, a lesson in wisdom concerning the lines that delimit the right of absolute property, the right of property to our own life, the proper of our own existence, in sum, a treatise about the tracing of traits as the borderly edges of what in sum *belongs to us*, belonging as much to us as we properly belong to it.⁸

The border or limit of death is construed here by Derrida as both end, terminus or extremity and as a moment of crossing or passing over. It is a question of the *ownership* of one's death (and of the stockpiling of time), of 'absolute property', as it is for Seneca:

The space you have, which reason can prolong, although it naturally hurries away, of necessity escapes from you quickly; for you do not seize it, you neither hold it back, nor impose delay upon the swiftest thing in the world, but you allow it to slip away as if it were something superfluous and that could be replaced. [...] Of all men they alone are at leisure who take time for philosophy, they alone really live; for they are not content to be good guardians of their own lifetime only. They annex every age to their own; all the years that have gone before them are an addition to their store.⁹

The border itself is both the limit or point and the division which this point institutes between life and death, or between past and future; as Derrida points out, 'the now is and is not what it is. [...] insofar as it has been, it no longer is. But insofar as it will be, as future to come or as death [...] it is not yet.'¹⁰ The moment of death here, then, opens up the question of a 'coming-to-pass' — something arrives, at a moment which

cannot be isolated as the end, but which is rather in passing, moving; the end is conceived of by Derrida as the *arrivant*:

As disarmed as a newly born child, it no more commands than is commanded by the memory of some originary event where the archaic is bound up with the *final* extremity, with the finality par excellence of the *telos* or of the *eskhaton*.¹¹

The perspective on time which the Senecan philosopher possesses is a vantage-point, the present, from which both past and future would exist for a subject: the philosopher inhabits time in the sense in which we speak of 'our time'. In the Introduction, we saw Agamben questioning 'our time'; to speak of one's timeliness, one's insertion in the *right* time, is to have already placed oneself outside of that time. This is the paradox addressed by Derrida in *Specters of Marx*:

'The time is out of joint': the formula speaks of time, it also says *the* time, but it refers singularly to *this* time, to an 'in these times', the time of these times, the time of this world which was for Hamlet an 'our time', only a 'this world', this age and no other. This predicate *says* something of time and says it in the present of the verb *to be* ('The time is out of joint'), but if it says it *then*, in that other time, in the past perfect, one time in the past, how would it be valid for all times? In other words, how can it come back and present itself again, anew, as the new? How can it be there, again, when its time is no longer there? How can it be valid for all the times in which one attempts to say 'our time'?¹²

According to this line of argument, it would be impossible to claim, in the present, in the *now*, one's timeliness — to claim, in other words, that the time is *our time*. We cannot claim to have arrived at such a privileged position in time, a point from which

the past and the future would exist *for us*. This is even, or perhaps especially, true if one is claiming that the moment one inhabits is untimely or 'out of joint'. The claim to have reached such a privileged instant (to use Deleuze's terminology) is, for Derrida, bound up with a teleological conception of time in which the instant from which one speaks is the *end* of a chronological process. It is to claim, in other words, to speak from the moment of death, the frontier or border which would allow a perspective on the territories of the past and future. As we have seen in several contexts in earlier chapters, however, such a position is in fact in perpetual motion, subject to a movement which does not admit of this elevated perspectival vision. The problem, for Derrida, is how to approach the end without conceiving of it as *telos*, how to remain open to the *kairos* without construing it as an ultimate point from which the 'out-of-jointness' of time could be rectified in a moment of fulfilment or redemption.

Openings

The discourse on the end is also a discourse on the future. As we saw in the Introduction, and in a more detailed fashion in the discussion of Augustine and his commentators, the temporal logic of capitalism consists in the reduction of temporal difference to the abstract equivalence of instants. This is the temporality described in Éric Alliez's important work, *Capital Times*; capital is the abstraction from a concrete, lived time and the recasting of duration in the empty form of equivalence: that is, of money:

If money bears within itself an ineffaceable debit, it is because time, converted into the money form, is discovered as an empty *form*, a pure order of time, quantitative and differential, measurable and coinable, which nothing can come

to fill. The time without qualities of a future-oriented humanity that cuts time into segments of linear duration that are put to profit in order to realize investments and 'accumulation'. And so time itself is 'invested': there is no advance but in time, no payment due that is not temporal.¹³

The stockpiling of time, says Alliez, is the *metaphysical figure of capitalism*. The chrematistics of time is oriented toward the control of the future; it is also the institution of a time that gives the possibility of a future: for Alliez, the founding temporality of capital is in fact a time 'out of joint' or, as he puts it, 'off its rocker', unhinged [*dévergondé*].¹⁴ Capital, then, both founds and depends upon a notion of the moment as untimely: as we have seen, though, this setting into motion of the instant occurs only in order that that movement be once more arrested at a moment of return, profit and redemption. As Lyotard puts it, the movement from one instant or point to the other is in fact the reduction of both points, both moments, to one time. The gap itself does not escape this reduction: between the two points an interim opens which cannot be entirely controlled or fixed. Capital has a ready response to this temporal chasm: it is interested in this gap, as Lyotard puts it, in that it commands interest:

The more the temporal gap increases, the more the chance increases of something unexpected happening — the greater the risk. The growth of risk can itself be calculated in terms of probability and in turn translated into monetary terms. Money here appears as what it really is, time stored in view of forestalling what comes about.¹⁵

The arguments advanced in this thesis have attempted to attend to this gap, to the movement that occurs in the interim between instants and that undoes the timely self-presence of those moments, while resisting its reinsertion into a structure of past and

future (as, simply, what escapes the system and needs to be recaptured). In concluding, I wish to suggest some of the ways in which the arguments presented here would open themselves to further reflection. Briefly, the ways in which our concerns here may be opened to a future (that is, as we shall see, to a number of distinct futures) may be placed under the following headings: 1) the question of the time and the space of identity, of the several identities which form the object of a criticism broadly designated as 'post-colonial'; 2) a certain question concerning the temporality of technology in general and, specifically, of contemporary information technologies; 3) a philosophical question which has in part already been broached here: the question of the event, that is of an occurrence which would be a future without becoming, in Agamben's phrase, *a monument to the present*. The following short summary of possibilities will perhaps be nothing more than a *programme* or *prospectus* in Barthes's sense; it will certainly fail to do justice to the texts and fields introduced here. In that failure, though, is also the hope that these gaps will be kept open for another time.

1) In her essay 'Women's Time', Julia Kristeva proposes a distinction between linear, 'cursive' time and a monumental or universal time. The latter is linked, for Kristeva, to a certain 'feminine' time which is in turn figured (partly, in this text, for polemical reasons) in terms of the experience of pregnancy and childbirth:

As for time, female subjectivity would seem to provide a specific measure that essentially retains *repetition* and *eternity* from among the multiple modalities of time known throughout the history of civilizations. On the one hand, there are cycles, gestation, the eternal recurrence of a biological rhythm which conforms to that of nature and imposes a temporality whose stereotyping may shock, but whose regularity and unison with what is experienced as extra-subjective time, cosmic time, occasions vertiginous visions and unnameable *jouissance*.¹⁶

While Kristeva is clearly aware of the difficulties (stereotyping is only one) inherent in situating women in this archaic cyclical time (of which universal time appears to be a consequence), the essay, in the story it tells of three generations of feminism, is itself organized around a temporal recurrence (of generations) which has as its ultimate goal an apparently static and privileged moment. For Kristeva, it is a question of a certain timeliness, of a now which occurs at an end: a moment at which the multiplicity of times will coincide and cohabit. Indeed, the text seems at certain moments to propose *itself* as this teleological terminus, as an *end-time* at which or out of which a new time will emerge: 'the time has perhaps come to emphasize the multiplicity of female expressions and preoccupations so that from the intersection of these differences there might arise, more precisely, less commercially and more truthfully, the real *fundamental difference* between the two sexes.'¹⁷ Kristeva's argument is subject to a temporal paradox which besets any attempt to conceive of temporal transgression; the now is at one and the same time that which occurs at the correct or appointed moment and the apparent disruption of such an expectant or teleological temporality. The notion expectancy here drawing attention to the fact that the dominant mode of linear temporality itself relies upon ideas of timeliness, of the *right* time: in other words, on metaphors of pregnancy and childbirth).

While the opposition between monumental time and the localized static abstraction of the linear continuum may be said to be strategically or polemically deployed in Kristeva's text, it is also in danger of simply setting up another governing temporality, this time conceived as cyclical and somehow 'natural'. The border *between* these times is precisely what remains unthought in 'Women's Time'. This lack is particularly striking in a text which is in part concerned with the relations of gender, nation and a certain idea of Europe. A productive appropriation of Kristeva's argument can be found, however, in Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture*:

The concurrent circulation of linear, cursive and monumental time, in the same cultural space, constitutes a new historical temporality that Kristeva identifies with psychoanalytically informed, feminist strategies of political identification. What is remarkable is her insistence that the gendered sign can hold together such exorbitant historical times.¹⁸

Bhabha's use of Kristeva here seems itself a strategic inclusion of a feminist temporal perspective: his own conception of what he calls 'the cultural time-lag of modernity' offers a more complex vision of the cohabiting of different temporal structures. The precise difference at this point, however, would be more accurately situated with regard to Kristeva's comments on time and the nation: specifically, her situating of a non-European temporality as somehow closer to an authentic universal experience of time.

In sum, my argument here would have to engage with such feminist and postcolonial conceptions of time and representation and to attend to the ways in which these fields have conceived of the relations between time and space. While the reduction of time to space has been throughout the thesis a central way of describing the foreclosure or elision of the event, it would have to be acknowledged that such a reduction would have certain strategic justifications. Our reading of Derrida's discourse on death and on borders, though, ought to show that spatial and temporal borders tend to become confused, and it is to this conjunction, of a discourse of the end and a discourse of frontiers, that the arguments above would need to be redirected.

2) As we saw earlier, the work of Paul Virilio provides a means of conceiving of the reduction of an unpredictable temporality to a uniform space. In Virilio's early work, this is thought in terms of the temporal advantage gained in the construction of the vantage-point. The logic at work here repeats in the realm of technology — specifically, as we saw, of military techniques and strategies — the kind of reduction that was also at work in the temporality of capital. In the work of Debord, we saw the

concrete lived time of human experience reduced to the quantified time of the working day. For Debord, though, there was a more generalized form of this reduction: the *spectacle*, which took the form, in the 'Time and History' chapter of *The Society of the Spectacle*, of the supposed instantaneity or 'real time' of the global marketplace:

With the development of capitalism, irreversible time is *unified on a world scale*. Universal history becomes a reality because the entire world is gathered under the development of this time. But this history, which is everywhere simultaneously the same, is still only the refusal within history of history itself. What appears the world over as *the same day* is the time of economic production cut up into equal abstract fragments. Unified irreversible time is the time of the *world market* and, as a corollary, of the world spectacle.¹⁹

It is to this global instantaneity that Virilio has turned his attention in his recent work. In the technologies of mass communication, Virilio sees the end of all possibilities for an authentic experience of space and time: society no longer has a past or a future, but inhabits a kind of perpetual present.²⁰ What is lost in this state of affairs is precisely the experience of a state of being-between, conceived by Virilio in terms of a tendency toward stasis and the obliteration of the journey, of the path, of movement itself:

On a constricted planet that is becoming just one vast floor, the lack of collective resentment over dromospheric pollution stems from our forgetting *the essence of the path, the journey*. In spite of recent studies and debates on seclusion and its hardships affecting this or that group of people deprived of their freedom of movement — totalitarian or penal regimes, blockades, states of siege and so on — it seems we are still incapable of seriously entertaining this

question of the path, except in the realms of mechanics, ballistics or astronomy.²¹

This analysis has profound implications for the arguments I have presented here. Far from being the isolated preserve of discrete modes of representation or of abstruse philosophical and critical arguments, the abolition of temporal movement in favour of privileged instants and spatial stasis appears in Virilio's writings as the central political question of 'our time'. The globalization of information technology and its tendency toward instantaneity is not merely the universalizing of a certain *class* (those who own or have access to the technology); it is for Virilio the destruction of all other modes of temporalization, beginning, as in the example above, with those who are precisely denied movement. To continue the investigation begun here would mean, in the light of the work of Virilio, making explicit a politics of time that has been the more or less ghostly referent of my arguments so far.

3) The beginnings of a politics of temporal movement suggested above would of necessity entail an engagement with a philosophy of the *event*, which, again, my earlier chapters have gone some way toward elaborating. Specifically, though, it would be necessary to encounter here, in a more careful fashion, the philosophy of Jean-François Lyotard, specifically his formulation of a concept of the event in *The Differend*. The interest here would not be so much in engaging in commentary upon Lyotard's writings but in setting into motion a certain understanding of the politics of time which we have seen at work in 'Time Today'. For Lyotard, as for Alliez, the logic of capital consists in the stockpiling of time. What is obliterated in that process is an event, which is conceived of in that text in terms of knowledge and of reflection. Knowledge, according to Lyotard, takes time. Time is precisely what we lack today: our time must be hoarded, saved, invested and accounted for. For Lyotard, as for Seneca, the philosopher is one who is in an important sense, 'at leisure': the time of reflection, the

event of knowledge, is not amenable to the quantification of time; it is what escapes measurement, escapes the frantic desire to account for time before the end is in sight. In other words, knowledge has the form of an event, of an occurrence which cannot be predicted or controlled in advance (which, in other terms, is never going to coincide with the *prospectus* of which Barthes wrote).

The event, in the thought of Lyotard and of Badiou, is the eruption of a certain *happening* within the chronological continuum: for both thinkers, the truth of the event is *that it happens*; it does not consist in what it *means* (for meaning can only be formulated after the event), but rather in the manner in which it institutes a gap, break or interim in linear time. In this sense, the aesthetics of the interim or of the gap in which movement occurs, which was formulated in Chapter Five with regard to the fiction of Virginia Woolf, would require recasting in terms of the philosophy of time which it suggests: precisely, a philosophy of the event.²² More importantly, though, the time in which we began, the time of the preface as elaborated by Agamben, and the time of the 'review' which would announce its revolutionary timeliness, would require reshaping in the terms offered by Lyotard and Badiou, a manoeuvre which would in turn demand that the contemporary discourse on the event be set in productive relation to the thought of Benjamin concerning that other entity whose advent is anticipated as revolutionary coming to pass: the messiah.

Notes

¹ It would be possible (indeed, necessary) to recast this notion of ‘passing on’ in a manner that would do justice to the euphemistic sense of the phrase: *dying*. One productive way to follow this line of thought would be to attend to the double sense of transferring and betraying at work in the concept of *tradition*. As Howard Caygill has noted, the continuity of tradition is rendered questionable by its etymological origin: ‘Originating in Roman law, *traditio* was a legal term denoting “delivery”, “conveyance” or “surrender”. Its use was extended to religion by Tertullian in the second century CE as part of his wholesale translation of Christian religious experience into the language of Roman law. At this stage tradition was an extremely equivocal term, with the familiar sense of the “handing down” of an oral doctrine coexisting with the less familiar one of “surrender” and “betrayal”. Theologians, for example, described Christ’s betrayal by Judas as the “tradition” which initiated the events of his “passion”. “Tradition” was further defined as the ecclesiastical crime of surrendering sacred texts in a time of persecution — delivering them over to destruction by unbelievers. One guilty of the crime of “tradition” was a “traditor” or, in later usage, a “traitor”.’ Howard Caygill, ‘Benjamin, Heidegger and the Destruction of Tradition’, in Andrew Benjamin & Peter Osborne, eds., *Walter Benjamin’s Philosophy: Destruction and Experience* (London: Verso, 1994), p. 12.

² Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes* (Paris, Seuil, 1975), p. 175.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

⁴ The English edition also omits, from the biographical chronology at the end of the book, two events: Barthes’s status as Professor at the Collège de France (1976) and his death (1980), both added in later French editions. Where the French text (that is, in its editions published after 1980) states ‘Roland Barthes meurt à Paris le 26 Mars 1980’, it both fulfills the pedagogical requirements of the series of which it is part (‘Écrivains de toujours’) and includes the death of the author in his autobiography. The English

edition thus comes to predate the French, while preserving its status as autobiography (and thus, as my argument below has it, its unfinished state, which has to do with the place of death in autobiographical writing).

⁵ Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, p. 177.

⁶ Paul de Man, 'Autobiography as De-Facement', in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 71.

⁷ Seneca, Lucius Annaeus, *De brevitae vitae*, in *Moral Essays*, trans. J.W. Basore (London: Heinemann, 1958), p. 295.

⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Aporias*, trans. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 3.

⁹ Seneca, *De brevitae vitae*, pp. 303, 333.

¹⁰ Derrida, *Aporias*, p. 14.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

¹² Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 49. Cf. Gilles Deleuze on final, last and natural ends in Kant: 'A natural end is a foundation for possibility; a last end is a reason for existence; a final end is a being which possesses the reason for existence in itself. But which one is the final end?' Gilles Deleuze, *Kant's Critical Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson & Barbara Habberjam (London: Athlone, 1984), p. 71. See also pp. 45, 69ff.

¹³ Éric Alliez, *Capital Times: Tales from the Conquest of Time*, trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 13.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* As Derrida notes, Yves Bonnefoy translates Hamlet's 'The time is out of joint' as 'Le temps est hors de ses gonds': time is off its hinges. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 19.

¹⁵ Jean-François Lyotard, 'Time Today', in *The Inhuman*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Cambridge: Polity, 1993), p. 66.

¹⁶ Julia Kristeva, 'Women's Time', trans. Alice Jardine and Harry Blake, in Toril Moi, ed., *The Kristeva Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p. 191.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

¹⁸ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 153.

¹⁹ Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black & Red, 1983), ¶ 145. [unpaginated]

²⁰ The same phenomenon is thought in very different — that is, Hegelian and Heideggerian — terms by Gianni Vattimo, who sees information technologies as contributing to a certain 'contemporaneity' of the contemporary world: 'According to the view we have put forward, the latter is called this not on the basis of banal criteria of 'chronological' proximity (that which is temporally closest to us is contemporary), but rather because it is a world in which a potential reduction of history to the level of simultaneity, via technology such as live television news bulletins, is becoming ever more real.' Gianni Vattimo, *The Transparent Society*, trans. David Webb (Cambridge: Polity, 1992), pp. 16-17. For Vattimo, the utopia of 'self-transparency' implied here can only be fully understood by analogy with the Hegelian programme of the self-fulfilment of Absolute Spirit.

²¹ Paul Virilio, *Open Sky*, trans. Julie Rose (London: Verso, 1997), pp. 23-24.

²² See Alain Badiou, *L'être et l'événement* (Paris: Seuil, 1988), p. 193-289 & passim. Particularly pertinent for the development of the argument I have advanced here, would be Badiou's concept of the 'intervention': 'L'intervention est ce qui présente un événement pur l'advenue d'un autre. Elle est un entre-deux événementiel. [...] L'essentielle historicité de l'intervention ne renvoie pas au temps comme à un milieu mesurable.' p. 232.

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