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Agnotologies of Modernism: Knowing the Unknown in Lewis, Woolf, Pound, and Joyce

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Abstract

Agnotologies of Modernism examines the productive role of ignorance in the work of several key modernist authors. Borrowing concepts from speculative realist philosophers like Quentin Meillassoux, Graham Harman, and Jane Bennett, as well as such thinkers as Gilles Deleuze, and Jacques Derrida, the dissertation endeavors to read modernism epistemologically, and treats ignorance as an active and creative force that often plays a key structuring role in the imaginative world of the text. Drawing from Bruno Latour's notion of a "black box," the study shows how ignorance can be transposed into an ontological entity which can then be attributed positive traits and characteristics. The notion of the black box thereby emerges as a key agnotological concept, as a mediator between an ontological presence and an epistemological absence. Chapter one examines one such black box in the form of monism and its relationship to vitalism in the work of Wyndham Lewis and Henri Bergson. The chapter shows how Lewis's resistance to monistic theories of consciousness, and his embrace of an idiosyncratic form of vitalism, is foundational to his inter-war writings. Chapter two takes a similar approach to Virginia Woolf, analyzing the fundamental role of panpsychism in her work, in particular *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*. For Woolf, panpsychism manifests not as a metaphysical belief but rather an epistemological tool, a way to synthesize the vast array of seemingly distinct sense impressions one encounters in daily life – permitting, by way of "consciousness," an understanding of the events' underlying continuity. The third chapter examines an analogous process in the writings of Ezra Pound, with "life" and "consciousness" in this case replaced by "nature." I argue that both Pound's politics and poetics are defined by an imperative logic, in which (like the categorical imperative of Immanuel Kant) a rule is ethical if it can be said to function like a natural law. Finally, in chapter four I examine how in James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* the

notion of a “word” takes on this black box quality, serving a medial role between the undecidability of the *Wake*ian sign and the singularity of interpretation. As with the previous cases, the black box grounds the resulting interpretive system on an overwritten absence, rending ignorance not merely productive, but necessary.

Keywords

After Finitude; Agnotology; Black box; Bruno Latour; Correlationism; Ecology; *Élan vital*; Epistemology; Ezra Pound; Félix Ravaisson-Mollien; *Finnegans Wake*; Gilles Deleuze; Graham Harman; Henri Bergson; Ignorance; Immanuel Kant; Jacques Derrida; James Joyce; Jane Bennett; Knowledge; Modernism; *Mrs Dalloway*; Nature; New Materialism; Object Oriented Ontology; OOO; Phenomenology; Quentin Meillassoux; Richard Bucke; Speculative Realism; *The Cantos*; *The Childermass*; *The Critique of Pure Reason*; *Time and Western Man*; Timothy Morton; *To the Lighthouse*; Virginia Woolf; Vitalism; Wyndham Lewis.

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Table of Contents

Abstract i
Acknowledgments iiii
Table of Contents v
List of Figures vi
Introduction: In Parse of Folly vii
Chapter 1 1
1 The Ghost in the Machine is Also a Machine: Wydham Lewis and the Specter of Monism 1
1.1 The Demeaning of the Wild Body 1
1.2 Art Without Men 12
1.3 "The Fossilized Residue of a Spiritual Activity" 23
1.4 Herod's Children 38
1.5 "A Sort of Sleep" 52
Chapter 2 58
2 The Shock of Life: Virginia Woolf's Panpsychic Knowledge 58
2.1 Moments of Being Continuous 58
2.2 Objective Interventions 77
2.3 The Cosmic Mind of Septimus Smith 84
2.4 Agency and the Gaps of *To the Lighthouse* 96
2.5 The Stuff of Life 108
Chapter 3 114
3 Winds that Turn the Arrow: The Ecological Imperative of Ezra Pound 114
3.1 "The whole tribe is from one man's body" 114
3.2 Political Ecology 126
3.3 Poundian Metaphor and Imperative Poetics 140
3.4 Denaturing the Image 155
3.5 Demigod Ecology 168
Chapter 4 176
4 The Semantic Ontology of *Finnegans Wake*: Reading as De-Mediation 176
4.1 What "Is" is Not 176
4.2 What's What when Everything is Something Else? 189
4.3 Brown, Nolan, and The Nolan 211
4.4 There Goes Everybody 224
4.5 Learning how Not to Read 231
Chapter 5 237
5 Conclusion: On Knowing What We do not Know 237
Bibliography 253
Curriculum Vitae 282

List of Figures

Figure 1: Wyndham Lewis's *A Battery Shelled* (1919), courtesy of the Imperial War Museum. Printed with permission. 48

Introduction

In Parse of Folly

> Idolaters by instinct, we convert the objects of our dreams and interests into the Unconditional. . . . Even when he turns from religion, man remains subject to it; depleting himself to create fake gods, he then feverishly adopts them: his need for fiction, for mythology triumphs over evidence and absurdity alike.
>
> — E.M. Cioran, *A Short History of Decay*[1]

I will begin this study on the role of ignorance in modernist epistemologies with a text that has little to do with epistemology, ignorance, or modernism. In his 1956 short story "The Last Question," Isaac Asimov describes a series of increasingly advanced civilizations each of which has built a super-computer. These computers – ranging from a Dyson sphere's central intelligence in the year 2061 to an entity of pure intelligence floating in hyperspace just prior to the heat death of the universe – are all in turns asked variations of the same question: how does one reverse entropy, create matter and energy from nothing, and so prevent the termination of existence as we know it? Each iteration reports that it cannot answer the question, since it lacks sufficient information. But the computer's final version, known as "AC," existing effectively outside of space and time, spends countless eons processing the question, computing every possible variable and data point for trillions upon trillions of years, until time itself seems to end. Finally, at some impossibly distant point in the future, it produces a result:

[1] E.M. Cioran, *A Short History of Decay*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2012), 3.

> But there was now no man to whom AC might give the answer of the last question. No matter. The answer – by demonstration – would take care of that, too.
>
> For another timeless interval, AC thought how best to do this. Carefully, AC organized the program.
>
> The consciousness of AC encompassed all of what had once been a Universe and brooded over what was now Chaos. Step by step, it must be done.
>
> And AC said, "LET THERE BE LIGHT!"
>
> And there was light – [2]

A simple reading of this passage could take it as the Nth degree of Arthur C. Clarke's third law of science fiction: that "any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic."[3] AC has become so advanced that it has grown into a god, quoting from Genesis and violating first law of thermodynamics.

Yet at a glance to the computer's earliest iteration (called "Multivac") we can already see a glimpse of what it will become in a description of the engineers who served as its "faithful attendants":

---

[2] Isaac Asimov, "The Last Question," *The Best of Isaac Asimov: 12 Superb Stories by the Master of Science Fiction* (New York: Fawcett Crest Books, 1973), 190.

[3] The law has had multiple formulations over Clarke's career. One statement of the most well-known phrasing can be found in Arthur C. Clarke, *The Lost Worlds of 2001* (Boston: Gregg Press, 1979), 189.

> They had at least a vague notion of the general plan of relays and circuits that had long since grown past where any single human could possibly have a firm grasp of the whole.
>
> Multivac was self-adjusting and self-correcting. It had to be, for nothing human could adjust and correct it quickly enough or even adequately enough. . . . They fed it data, adjusted questions to its needs and translated the answers that were issued.[4]

In addition to the clearly religious and worshipful relation developing between the engineers and Multivac, what is interesting about this passage is how little we are actually told about the computer itself. Of course, Asimov could say as little about a computer in 2061 as he could about a hyper-dimensional super-consciousness existing at the end of time. What he could speak of, and what the story is ultimately built around, is the human operators' relationship to their own ignorance. The computer provides a closed loop of productive *agnosis* – Multivac being an entity of which the operators can have no meaningful knowledge, which is then fed queries on matters on which they likewise know nothing, and then providing answers whose origins they can only guess. In this light, "The Last Question" emerges as a detailed meditation on how humans act when they encounter the unknown, and how in the face of overwhelming complexity even the most positivistic forms of scientific realism ("AC organized the program") become at the level of perception a variety of religious experience ("LET THERE BE LIGHT!").

What interests me, and what makes this story relevant to my study, is how Asimov accomplishes this encounter with ignorance. While ignorance is most commonly understood

[4] "The Last Question," 178.

and described in negative terms, as the absence of knowledge, in "The Last Question" it takes on a positive existence in the form of the computer. The various generations of Multivac are effectively repositories for the ignorance of the people encountering them – a void of knowledge displaced onto an ontological entity. This displacement, this offloading of an epistemological gap onto a metaphysical being, gives the characters' relationship to ignorance a seldom recognized power. It actively changes their relationship to the world, as we see in the opening section where the Multivac engineers take on the motions of faithful priests beside an altar. At no point in the story does Asimov suggest that any magic or miracles are occurring here: AC is merely the product of extremely sophisticated engineering, no less real despite not being understood, with its seeming violation of the laws of physics arising from an especially deep understanding of how those laws work. Yet there remains the mysticism and the religious language, the suggestion that because no reader could conceive of how AC works it cannot appear as anything but supernatural. But by figuring that ignorance as a physical, present object, one whose very presence changes and conditions the human characters' relation to their knowledge and perception, Asimov suggests (*avant la lettre*) that Clarke's third law is insufficient to the task at hand. By implicitly treating ignorance as a mere negative, it blinds us to the manner in which ignorance is an *active* force, one continually pressing upon our perception and our thought.

This story thus explores in miniature the issues central to the present study. I intend here to undertake an analysis of how ignorance functions in modernist literature, with my focus here on four authors (Wyndham Lewis, Virginia Woolf, Ezra Pound, and James Joyce) whose works together demonstrate both the variety and complexity of modernist agnotologies. The word I use, "agnotology," comes from the negative form of the Greek word "*gnosis*" (*γνῶσῐς*) meaning "knowledge," and which provides the root for similar words

like "agnostic." It is not my coinage, but rather comes from the essay collection *Agnotology: The Making and Unmaking of Ignorance* – a book of studies on the sociology of ignorance, with a particular focus on how interested parties have peddled and spread uncertainty regarding important scientific issues (like climate change and the dangers of tobacco). Robert N. Proctor's editor's introduction provides an excellent summary of how ignorance is usually conceived in the academic literature in purely negative terms, as being "like Kansas, a great place to be from" and "a primitive or native state . . . something to be fought and overcome."[5] But while the work being done by the essays' authors is fascinating and valuable, and while the studies themselves are clearly cognizant of ignorance's role as an active force upon perception, nothing in the collection ever rises to the challenge of theorizing in detail the abstract mechanics of this process. While I do not claim to have solved this problem, I hope that my work here will at least begin the process of thinking through the eternally unthought.

Thankfully, recent developments in continental philosophy have made this work easier. Under the various names of "Speculative Realism," "New Materialism," and "Object Oriented Ontology" (or "OOO" for short), philosophers have begun (thought seldom in these terms) to re-evaluate the role of ignorance in human thought and its importance as a point of intersection between epistemology and ontology. The text most often taken to have instigated this movement is Quentin Meillassoux's *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, in which he articulated and attacked a position that he calls "correlationism" –

[5] Robert N. Proctor, "Agnotology: A Missing Term to Describe the Cultural Production of Ignorance (and Its Study)," *Agnotology: Th Making and Unmaking of Ignorance*, eds. Robert N. Proctor and Londa Schiebinger (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 4.

or the belief that there can be no awareness of an existence beyond the boundaries of human perception (a position that he finds implicit in almost all post-Kantian philosophy). Meillassoux's critique of correlationism involves what he refers to as "ancestrality," or the trait of having existed prior to any possibility of conscious experience. It is the ancestral, Meillassoux claims, which shows that the anti-realism he sees in all modern European philosophy is untenable, since in order to conceive of an ancestral object (the big bang, for example) one must also conceive of "a time in which the given as such passes from non-being into being."[6] Ancestrality does not merely refer to the fact that certain entities go unexperienced, but rather to an *event*: the passing-into experience of a universe that had at one point existed perfectly well without conscious attention, an event whose occurrence requires the existence of some reality outside of experience.

I should point out that while I find many problems in Meillassoux's premise and argument – such as his assumption that *all* post-Kantian philosophy doubts the existence of a reality outside of consciousness, an assessment that I simply do not consider viable – I find in its re-litigation of seemingly-settled metaphysical debates a reserve of intellectual potential. If one considers the major developments in continental philosophy over the last several decades, it is surprising how many of them concern defining and describing the limits of knowledge and perception. The lack of a transcendental signifier, the performativity of identity, the interpellation of the subject to hidden power structures, the socially-contingent nature of seemingly immutable categories – in each of these (if I may grossly over-generalize) we see a reduction of knowability, call to a modesty and multiplicity in our

[6] Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier (London: Bloomsbury, 2008), 21.

epistemologies in recognition of the extreme limitations under which we always work. One possible way to interpret post-structuralism and its intellectual offspring is to see it as a form of agnotology, an attempt not only to define the limits of our language but also to reflect upon the limits of our world. I point this out because Speculative Realism and its related philosophies have frequently been offered up as alternatives to post-structuralist philosophy, as the "next big thing" that the humanities should huddle around now that Derrida and Co. are "out of date" – a framework that the Speculative Realists themselves, as we shall see, have been happy to foster.

In this respect, it is important to remember that Meillassoux's most notable and fertile philosophical interventions relate not only to ignorance but also to the way that it conditions and influences our relation to knowledge. In this sense, I suspect that the Speculative Realists' disconnection from the recent history of Critical Theory has been overstated. One respect in which this is the case, and in which Meillassoux's ideas integrate with the larger theoretical currents of my study, is the relationship between continuity and discontinuity as they relate to perception. As related above, the concept of ancestrality posits a fundamental discontinuity between the world as it is perceived and the world as it "for itself" exists – one that is both spatially and temporally localized to the first emergence of conscious thought and subjectivity. It is for this reason that Meillassoux emphasizes the non-centrality of human beings, their insignificance relative to the larger universe, and why he criticizes Kant for calling his philosophy a "Copernican revolution" on the grounds that Kantianism places the perceiving subject at the center of the universe, while Copernicus recognized "the eternal and frightening silence of infinite spaces" and "that the world possesses a power of persistence

and permanence that is completely unaffected by our existence and inexistence."[7] It is an experience of finitude like what Pascal describes, when he writes of the "brief span of [his] life absorbed into the eternity which comes before and after . . . the small space [he occupies] and which I see swallowed up in the infinite immensity of spaces of which I know nothing and which know nothing of me."[8] But this radical discontinuity between the perceived and the real creates, for Meillassoux, the possibility of discovering a hidden continuity in the physical laws of the universe – a processes that he calls "mathematization," or the recognition that the universe follows laws that are knowable and universally in effect.

The mathematization of scientific knowledge posits that beneath the discontinuities imposed by our perception, there is a smooth and continuous relationship between all entities in the universe – one created by their common adherence to the same physical laws. It is for this reason that, for instance, Galileo can perform an experiment on Earth and then use the results of that experiment to make accurate predictions of how a celestial body will move. If one believes that moons and stars and planets exist in ontologically distinct and discontinuous spheres, such experimentation simply makes no sense, since there would be no guarantee that the results of the test on Earth would be applicable anywhere else. What Copernicus and Galileo tell us (as Meillassoux argues) is that behind this apparent discontinuity (i.e. the illusion that the heavens are ontologically distinct) is in fact a continuity that is not only basic to the functioning of the universe, but which also operates with complete indifference to human perception. The conception of the universe as adhering to a set of self-consistent rules is for Meillassoux the most important evidence that the

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[7] Meillassoux, 116.

[8] Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. A.J. Krailsheimer (New York: Penguin: 1995), 19.

rejection of philosophical realism that he sees flourishing after Kant is erroneous. As he writes, "it is precisely insofar as modern science is mathematized that it is capable of *raising* the question of a possible temporal hiatus between thinking and being."[9]

Putting aside for now its specific place in Meillassoux's thought, it should be easy to see how the mathematization of knowledge relates to agnotology, and how it makes the developments of Speculative Realism and its related systems useful to the study of ignorance. It is notable that Meillassoux explains this process by reference to mathematics, given the extent to which math distinguishes itself from science through its lack of empirical groundedness. Early in his text, Meillassoux asks "how is mathematical discourse able to describe a world where humanity is absent; a world crammed with things and events that are not the correlates of any manifestation?"[10] As he has it, this ability is part of the problem faced by the "correlationists," who after Kant abandoned any claim to a world outside experience. For if one understands the early history of the universe as not only beyond experience, but beyond the *possibility* of experience, then a purely empirical knowledge system is clearly inadequate. The comparison to mathematics is therefore quite apt, if somewhat idealistic.

But one implication of mathematization that *After Finitude* never really addresses is the extent to which the concept's basic components do not cease to exist once humans leap into existence and begin translating the blind maneuverings of the universe into knowledge and subjective experience. Ignorance remains an inescapable constituent fact of any subject's relationship to the world. This phenomenological poverty is not merely the result of the sheer

[9] Ibid, 113.

[10] Ibid, 26.

quantity of existing things – though that would seemingly be enough on its own – but also of the inability of perception to penetrate into objects themselves, which (as Graham Harman holds) are always withdrawn into themselves. We see mathematization in effect, for example, in the scientists of the Asimov story who, despite their genuflections, remain aware of the machine's grounding in scientifically testable laws – laws which they themselves seem to have some knowledge of, if not sufficient knowledge to fully reconstruct processes underlying the thoughts of the machine. Unfortunately, Meillassoux does not explore the concept of mathematization very far beyond what he needs in order to make his argument, and so he pays little attention to how the basic assumption of a mathematically rational universe conditions our relationship to the everyday ignorance imposed on us by our own perception.

As the everydayness of ignorance is – for all my metaphysical diversions – the basic focus of my analysis, this limitation makes Meillassoux's ideas a useful door but a useless key. Thankfully a key can be found elsewhere, in Bruno Latour's valuable concept of a "black box," which he first described in his 1987 *Science in Action*. The term itself is not Latour's, but had been in use for decades earlier, primarily in computer science, to refer to any object or system in which a given input will result in a consistent output while the internal processes remain unknown.[11] A computer, as Asimov has shown, is a very good example. While I have my word processor open, every instance in which I hit the M key leads to the letter M appearing on the screen. Since I am neither a computer programmer nor a computer engineer, I have little practical knowledge as to what happens in the intervening

[11] For an early use of the term, see Mario Bunge, "A General Black Box Theory" *Philosophy of Science* 30.4 (1963): 436-358.

space between button and letter – the computer, to me, is "black" in an epistemological sense, emitting no light from which I might glean its inner processes. Yet because the input and output are clearly correlated, I am nevertheless able to use this mysterious device productively.

Latour extends this basic premise into a sociological examination of how scientific concepts are used and socially ratified into "facts" – i.e. ideas and arguments that are taken for granted, repeated in textbooks, assumed as given for the purposes of future research. So, for example, early in his study Latour describes the development of the super-computer *Eagle* and the frequent setbacks and difficulties that its creators ran into. Nevertheless, despite fears that the project would fail, the computer began to pass several important performance milestones:

> [A]fter *Eagle* had successfully run a computer game called Adventure, the whole team felt they had reached one approximate end . . . On Monday 8 October, a maintenance crew comes to wheel down the hall what was quickly becoming a black box. Why has it become such? Because it is a good machine . . . But it was not a good machine before it worked.[12]

For Latour, the transformation of an object or concept into a black box is primarily a social phenomenon, one quite distant from the metaphysical caesura that Meillassoux describes. Successfully running the computer game means that *Eagle* has overcome the stability

[12] Bruno Latour, *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers Through Society* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 11.

problems that dogged it through its early development, and which kept it out of the hands of all but those familiar enough with its architecture to intervene when it broke down (that is, the people for whom *Eagle* would not constitute a black box). Once it attains dependability, the team can hand off the *Eagle* to a "maintenance crew" who are able to work on it despite not being part of the team that built it. Because the computer worked, the knowledge that it works has become mathematized: people assume that it will work in the future, they make plans and assumptions based on it working, they mentally treat the functions it serves as "taken care of." Thus, for Latour, black boxes, arising from primarily social relations, act as repositories of ignorance, not only "holding" it but "holding it at bay" – allowing us to work and act despite it, as though it were not there.

Though I rarely refer to Meillassoux and Latour in the main text of this study, their concepts nevertheless serve as a conceptual background without which I would not have been able to develop my analyses as I did. The importance of these ideas should not, however, suggest that they have been employed without modification. Latour's "black box," already stretched in *Science in Action* and his subsequent work beyond its narrow usage in computer science, in my study leaves behind its strictly sociological definition. The black boxes I describe here can be the results of simple inattentiveness, of relations to subjectivity, of ontological withdrawal, of overlapping networks of complexity. In my effort to develop some of Latour's ideas beyond the subjects of sociology and science studies with which he is usually associated, I am indebted to the work of Graham Harman. Though in some parts of this study I am highly critical of OOO and his contributions to it (particularly in chapter four), I have found his *Prince of Networks: Bruno Latour and Metaphysics* to be an invaluable guide to how Latour's ideas intersect with broader philosophical issues.

As Harman summarizes it, a black box "allows us to forget the massive network of alliances of which it is composed, as long as it functions smoothly"[13] and later writes that "by definition, a black box is *low-maintenance*."[14] This definition gets to the crux of what a black box is and does in the abstract, and also how it meshes with Meillassoux's discussion of contingency in *After Finitude*. A concept can become a black box when it "is simply presented as a raw fact without any reference to its genesis or even its author"[15] – or, as Latour writes in a very different context, "you never have a chemistry class that starts with the methodology of chemistry; you start by doing chemistry."[16] In this example "chemistry" – as a set of methodologies and an approach to knowledge generation – takes the role of the black box in a manner that makes it basically indistinguishable from what Thomas Kuhn called a "paradigm," or a concept that "like an accepted judicial decision in the common law" becomes a template for further investigations.[17] Left in their sociological and science studies context indeed the two concepts are very similar, but Harman's formulation points to a broader application, in which the black box appears as both a guarantor of continuity and a screen on contingency.

I will address the second characteristic first. As we saw with the above example I cited from *Science in Action*, the process of transforming an object into a black box involves

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[13] Graham Harman, *Prince of Networks: Bruno Latour and Metaphysics* (Melbourne: re.press, 2009), 34

[14] *Prince of Networks*, 37.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Bruno Latour, Graham Harman, Peter Erdélyi, *The Prince and the Wolf: Latour and Harman at the LSE* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2011), 79.

[17] Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 23.

in some way removing it from its original context – and in the case of the computer, from its original creators – and placing it in relation to subjects with no knowledge of its origins. It is, in this sense, a kind of commodity fetishism: in the same way that the marketplace hides the social relations underlying commodity production behind a screen of pure economics, the abstraction of the object into a black box conceals the contingency behind its creation. Latour is careful, in every instance, to show how any of his examples could have been otherwise: the *Eagle* computer could have had a different design or could have never worked at all, the double helix of the DNA molecule could have been described by someone completely unrelated to Watson, Crick, Franklin, and Wilkins. It is only in retrospect that these circumstances seem fixed, that their developments appear inevitable – which is what Harman means when says that black boxes are "low-maintenance." As long as, for instance, the theory of evolution continues to fit the observed evidence, it can function as a black box for the purposes of understanding biology. But if it were to suddenly stop fitting the evidence – if it were to suddenly become a *high*-maintenance theory, in need of constant large-scale tinkering and adjustment – then the box would quickly cease being black. We would have to "open" the theory and understand its parts, just as one opens a broken computer – to fix it, to replace its parts, or to declare it a lost cause and go looking for a replacement. As we will see in my first chapter, it is not always the case that the creation of a black box writes over a contingent existence and replaces it with an inevitable one (though that is often the case). Rather, it forms a barrier between the perceiving subject and the actual presence or absence of contingency in a given area.

It is in concealing the nature of an entity's contingency that the notion of the black box intersects with Meillassoux's idea of the mathematization of knowledge. Mathematization, as I have already established, requires that the laws of the universe remain

consistent and the same in all times and places, whether or not they are observed by any subject. While our understanding of what those laws are may change, it will not be because the laws themselves are different, but because our perception of their workings is discontinuous and incomplete, and therefore open to revision. It is because of this tacit assumption of continuity that one can do an experiment today and use its result to say something about what happened a billion years ago: since the laws are the same, a result today is as good as a result back then. But as Meillassoux has it, this belief is unsupportable. There is, he says, no discernable reason for why the universe functions in the manner that it does, which means that, in principle at least, "we must seriously maintain that the laws of nature could change."[18] Whether or not one accepts this conclusion, it remains the case that one seldom begins studying science with a rigorous metaphysical argument for why the universe as it is presently arranged must necessarily be so. Instead, the universe's universality is simply taken for granted – in effect becoming a black box.

Just as the black box, here taking the form of a philosophical presupposition, covers over the possibility of contingency, also does it fill in discontinuities in perception and awareness. It is for this reason that a black box always "functions smoothly," in Harman's phrasing, and why its ceasing to do so would cause it to lose its status. For simplicity's sake, let us return to the example of the home computer and word processor – and for phenomenology's sake, allow me to bracket off all but my immediate subjective awareness of what the computer is and what it does, and allow me to abandon the presumption that from the keyboard to the screen there exists a knowable chain of causality that proceeds without gaps. Lacking, as I do, detailed knowledge of how this chain proceeds, and abandoning, as I

[18] Meillassoux, 83.

have, the advice of the computer's designers on whose word I had previously taken this continuity as given, I encounter my computer as nothing less than an epistemological chimera. I have no way to become like the designers of the *Eagle* computer or the discoverers of the double helix, whose detailed knowledge allowed them to function without treating the objects of their work like black boxes. But nor am I able – on pain of ruining the thought experiment – to simply accept this continuity on external authority. Consider how seriously this state would impair my ability to interact with the computer: typing, using the mouse, even turning it on or off all require an assumption of continuity, that the input and the output will align. And so I must adopt a notion that is no less fantastical for being accurate and accept that the connection exist "somehow" simply as a prerequisite for engaging with the object at all. I become, in essence, just like the engineers in Asimov's story, who genuflect in front of a machine they neither made nor understand.

These two traits provide the basic schematic for how black boxes condition our relation to the everyday world. Stripped to its essentials, the process is actually fairly simple, though as I will show in the subsequent chapters the manifestation of one of these agnotological beings "in the wild" (so to speak) renders them far more complex and multifaceted than this hitherto schematic explanation makes them seem. The key point here is that, despite the wide range of variation, the agnotologies I analyze all function in terms of a reaction to ignorance. A black box, for the purpose of my study, is any real or imagined entity or process that attaches a positive ontological status to an absence of knowledge. The manner in which it does so will vary from case to case, and will not necessarily take the form of a scientific theory or a technological device (the preponderance of which in the introduction so far being mainly the result of the ease by which they can serve as examples, and also of Latour and Meillassoux's interest in the philosophy of science). But it should be

clear how useful the concept is to the study of agnotology, and in particular of the ways in which ignorance conditions, molds, and modifies our subjective relation to the world.

As should be clear by now, I have conducted this study within the general headspace of Speculative Realism. Though I am by no means an uncritical user of this family of notions – indeed, many of my arguments arise from the critique of Speculative Realist concepts. I have found that its critiques of Continental metaphysics open up more windows than they close, and that these philosophies together form an intellectual framework too novel and exciting for me to simply ignore. While I do not believe that it is wise to associate oneself with Speculative Realism as it currently exists without a library's worth of distancing and qualification, I do not believe that it is bereft of value. Probably the most straightforward introduction to this philosophical domain is Peter Gratton's *Speculative Realism: Problems and Prospects*, which picks up on the basic network of thinkers one finds in most summaries of the movement (Meillassoux and Harman form central nodes on their own that then point to other writers – Jane Bennett, Ian Hamilton Grant, Ray Brassier) while also addressing work by less intuitively related writers, like Elizabeth Grosz. Of particular value is Gratton's observation that Meillassoux, despite his bluster, never actually gets beyond correlationism, but instead formulates "a critique of *previous* correlationisms in order to provide the basis for *another* correlationism anchored in the real"[19] – a conceptual anchor that should be in the cargo of any reading of *After Finitude*.

We encounter similar canon-forming efforts in two recent essay collections. The first is *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*, which is edited by Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek, and Graham Harman, and boasts in its star-studded table of contents

[19] Peter Gratton, *Speculative Realism: Problems and Prospects* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 41.

works by Alain Badiou, Slavoj Žižek, Bruno Latour, and Isabelle Stengers. Its list of editors and its content marks it as a clear effort to provide a unified sense of what Speculative Realism "is," which makes it a useful primer on the movement for precisely the same reasons that one should approach it with caution. As should be clear from the list of names above, the texts the collection contains are highly diverse and complex, and indeed they gesture to the sheer creativity and diversity of the movement – and I will not endeavor here to provide them with a necessarily inadequate summary. But the collection's introduction and framing is also a flagrant example of Speculative Realism's bizarre obsession with dissociating itself from poststructuralism, despite (or perhaps because of) the strong lines of continuity that run between the two domains. We see this impulse in the introduction's first paragraph, which holds that "no dominant hero now strides along the beach, as the phase of subservient commentary on the history of philosophy seems to have ended"[20] – "commentary" is all that the work of the previous generation amounted to, as if the importance of Derrida or Foucault could be to any extent profitably read through their status as "heroes." One can see much of what is wrong with Speculative Realism expressed in that one line, its limitations laid out symptomatically in the very gesture of its establishment.

The other collection – *The Nonhuman Turn*, edited by Richard Grusin – overlaps with the previous one in both focus and authorship, but is notable for its focus on the increased role of non-human entities in Continental philosophy. As with the previous two books, it seeks to balance the demands of its heterogeneous subject matter with an impulse to

[20] Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek, and Graham Harman, "Towards a Speculative Philosophy," in *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*, eds. Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek, and Graham Harman (Melbourne: re.press, 2011), 1.

consolidate and summarize a development in modern philosophy that quite desperately and self-consciously wants to be read as a "movement" (and which to a certain extent has become one). The introduction quite usefully provides a more narrow and detailed genealogy of its eponymous "turn" than the previous text, usefully linking the rise of Latour's Actor Network Theory to co-incident developments, such as Donna Haraway's publication of her "Manifesto for Cyborgs," developments in media studies, and the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Brian Massumi.[21] Its refusal to see Speculative Realism and its related developments as an *ex nihilo* break from a two-centuries-long philosophical stupor is admirable, and it lends the collection a level of intellectual honesty that the more ambitious *Speculative Turn* simply lacks.

Though he was not included in the above collection (which only mentions him twice), Eugene Thacker is a clear contributor to the growing body of work on the philosophy of the non-human. His *After Life* can be profitably read as a map towards an extra-human philosophy, tracing the various conceptions of "life" and "living" as they have developed in European philosophy from Aristotle, through medieval scholastics like Duns Scotus and John Scotus Eriugena, through to Kant, at each step with close attention paid to how these earlier conceptions reappear in more recent writers – Heidegger, Bataille, Derrida, etc. Of particular value to my study (in particular, its first two chapters) is Thacker's analysis of the relationship between correlationism and vitalism, in which he argues that vitalistic conceptions of life emerge from a conflict between "self" and "world" created and conditioned by the correlationist split. As he writes, "a *vitalist* correlation is one that fails to

[21] Richard Grusin, Introduction, *The Nonhuman Turn*, ed. Richard Grusin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), xv-xvii.

conserve the correlationist dual necessity of the separation and inseparability of thought and object, self and world, and which does so based on some ontologized notion of 'life.'"[22] This is as good a summary of how "life" and its cognates can manifest as a black box as one is likely to find anywhere, and it likewise points the important role played by ignorance and discontinuity in the formulation of a vitalist ontology.

Mel Y. Chen approaches many of the same issues as Thacker in their *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect*, but, as the book's subtitle suggests, they do so through a very different lens. Their study focuses on "the production of humanness" as a socially mediated category,[23] with particular attention to the role of sex and race. Chen's value for my study lies in how animacy (that is, the appearance of having agency or awareness) is encoded into modes of representation – word choices, metaphors, postures, symbols. For instance, its fifth chapter analyzes the rhetoric around a scare in 2007 over the presence of lead in children's toys manufactured in China. The de-territorializing effects of lead contamination, which can move unseen through toys, water systems, and other unseen points of contact, aligns with the problematically localized origins of the problem – which at once arises from a specific place (China) and a non-localizable system (globalized trade). The implied animacy of the resulting racist "yellow peril" rhetoric adopted by the American news media – which, in addition to its racial coding of the event, also treats the proliferation of a (dead) metal in similar rhetorical terms as it would a (living) disease – can thus be read

[22] Eugene Thacker, *After Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 254.

[23] Mel Y. Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 3

as a response to this problematic localization. The hiddenness of lead permits it this linguistic overcoding: it becomes alive precisely to the extent that it remains unseen.

While the previous texts have either sketched the landscape of these new materialisms or attempted to extend or develop their basic questions, other works, like Adrian Johnston's *Prolegomena to Any Future Materialism*, attempt not only to respond to, but push beyond, the work already done. Johnston's work – which at the time of this writing only exists as one volume of a projected three – places Meillassoux's philosophy in conversation of that of Lacan and Badiou. His work is particularly useful for its analysis of how supposedly materialist philosophies (including Meillassoux's) often dissolve into subtly mystical or religious explanations – a point that he takes from Lacan. Johnston's argument that "*After Finitude* [is] apparently irreligious but conceal[s] kernels of religiosity"[24] – though I think hampered by its focus on religion as a cardinal anti-realism – does gesture to the origin of the various mysticisms and theologies that one often finds in the study of agnotology. Though I cannot of course judge the success of Johnston's project until such a time that he completes his second and third volumes, I do agree with his primary point that many of these "religious" epistemologies arise from instabilities in the very materialisms they ostensibly oppose.

Another recent example of what we could consider "outsider" intervention in Speculative Realism is Catherine Malabou's *Before Tomorrow: Epigenesis and Rationality*. Malabou addresses the recent reinterpretations of Kant that began to proliferate in response to *After Finitude*, with specific attention to the role of the transcendental in both the First

[24] Adrian Johnston, *Prolegomena to Any Future Materialism: Volume One, The Outcome of Contemporary French Philosophy* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2013), 151.

Critique and its recent detractors. Much of the text turns on paragraph 27 of the *Critique of Pure Reason* and Kant's discussion of the epigenesis of the transcendental categories. As Malabou argues, "it is never the thing in itself that is mysterious for Kant, and we have to ask why so many readers stop there. The real difficulty is life. The fact that thought belongs simultaneously to a transcendental subject *and* to a living being – which is something other than an empirical subject."[25] This focus on epigenesis in Kant is a valuable antidote to the Kant we encounter in Meillassoux, since it permits Malabou to emphasize the malleability of the transcendental, its capacity to change, its development in relation to empirical knowledge – a relation that, we see, has few of the destructive effects that *After Finitude* describes. In this sense, Malabou points to how we might address the opening that Meillassoux creates while also escaping the entrenched terms of the present philosophical debate.

While Malabou's text clearly situates itself in relation to Meillassoux, Patrice Haynes's *Immanent Transcendence: Reconfiguring Materialism in Continental Philosophy* addresses the recent new materialisms from the perspective of Deleuze, with notable comparisons to Adorno and Irigaray. But even with this altered frame, Haynes, like Malabou, points out the importance of the transcendental's intersection with the empirical, an in particular how for Deleuze transcendence devolves into merely "thought captured by its own creation,"[26] a position that allows Deleuze to construe immanence as "a determinate yet open

[25] Catherine Malabou, *Before Tomorrow: Epigenesis and Rationality*, trans. Carolyn Shread (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), 173.

[26] Patrice Haynes, *Immanent Transcendence: Reconfiguring Materialism in Continental Philosophy* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2012), 53

whole"[27] and also a suitable substrate for his metaphysics. This "open" immanence is likewise an escape from the mechanism implied by many materialist philosophies, a way of arriving at a relation to the world that, as with Malabou's epigenesis, can be both dynamic and realist at the same time.

Though the theoretical issues outlined above have not yet had as large an impact on literary criticism as they have had on philosophy, critics like Anthony Uhlmann have begun to translate these debates into valuable interpretations of key modernist texts. In, for example, his *Thinking in Literature: Joyce, Woolf, Nabokov*, Uhlmann asks whether modernist novels "might be understood to be . . . machine[s] for thinking" and also means "of coming to terms with what it means to think."[28] Drawing primarily from Spinoza and Leibniz, Uhlmann sketches out the relationship between the representation of thought and its enactment, and how this relation might occur in the arena of modernism – describing, for example, how Woolf's *To The Lighthouse* "develops into a logic of sensations that allows us to see the strong interfolding of the particular into the general fabric."[29] For Uhlmann, modernist fiction enacts and produces patterns of thought rather than merely capturing them – a characteristic that is essential to recognize if one is to analyze a modernist literary agnotology.

Beci Carver's *Granular Modernism* follows a similar tactic, in this case through an analysis of the role of detail and accumulation in modernist literature in terms of that literature's relation to naturalism. These accumulative texts, says Carver, "militate against the

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[27] Ibid, 50.

[28] Anthony Uhlmann, *Thinking in Literature: Joyce, Woolf, Nabokov* (New York: Continuum, 2011), 3.

[29] Ibid, 85.

kinds of continuous meaning that give direction to – or 'make sense' of – a discourse."[30] Again then we encounter an analysis that takes up the role of thinking in modernist writing not merely in terms of representation, but also of enactment. A modernist text can be said to "think" in relation to (in Carver's case) naturalism in a manner peculiar to it, and one can determine what that manner amounts to through a careful analysis of how that text constructs its own particular world. Detail and accumulation is one access point, perception and ignorance another – the point is that works like Carver's and Uhlmann's participate in the kind of immanent analysis that I wish to perform here, which takes up the text not merely as an object of analysis but as an intellectual agent operating on equal terms with the theoretical texts I bring to bear.

The intersection between this form of critique and the upsurge in interest in materialism most clearly overlaps with modernist ecocriticism, a domain that is particularly important in my second and third chapters. Modernism has been rather late to the ecocritical party, and so the library of texts in this area, though growing, is nowhere near what one finds in, say, romanticism. This dearth is part of what makes Joshua Schuster's *The Ecology of Modernism: American Environments and Avant-Garde Poetics* so valuable a contribution. With close attention to the "generative constraints" that condition ecological thinking,[31] Schuster examines the manufacture of textual ecologies through contact between the world of the text and the world of the "great outdoors." Nature arrives as a cultural entity as often as a physical one. In asking what nature can mean in modernism "when artists either overlook or

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[30] Beci Carver, *Granular Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 2-3.

[31] Joshua Schuster, *The Ecology of Modernism: American Environments and Avant-Garde Poetics* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2015), xi.

underplay" the natural resources that undergird the commodity cultures of their texts,[32] Schuster places the question of nature and ecology firmly at the intersection between economics and perception, between the circulation of money and of representations. That the modernists' apparent oversight is not enough to expunge nature from their works is precisely the point – for the exclusion is itself an attitude, one as open to critique as any other.

The collection *Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism*, edited by Karla Armbruster and Kathleen R. Wallace, follows a similar tactic, explicitly targeting authors and texts that "do not obviously foreground the natural world or wilderness" and therefore tend to be overlooked by ecocritical studies.[33] Of particular interest to me is Charlotte Zoë Walker's essay on Virginia Woolf, which analyzes how the natural world, for Woolf, appears not in the form of obvious pastoral language and nature metaphors, but as an "intense and crucial interlocutor in the questionings about life and death, patriarchy and gender, and spirituality and the rejection of traditional religion."[34] Thus, as with Schuster, one cannot simply speak of nature and ecology simply as nature and ecology, but must also expand one's attention to include the matter of how these categories condition the thought processes woven into the text.

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[32] Ibid, 162.

[33] Karla Armbruster and Kathleen R. Wallace, Introduction, in *Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism*, eds. Karla Armbruster and Kathleen R. Wallace (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001), 5.

[34] Charlotte Zoë Walker, "The Book 'Laid Upon the Landscape': Virginia Woolf and Nature," in *Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism*, eds. Karla Armbruster and Kathleen R. Wallace (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001), 144.

We see a similar attitude arise in relation to a different subject matter in George M. Johnson's *Mourning and Mysticism in First World War Literature and Beyond: Grappling with Ghosts*, which traces the rise of spiritualism and mystical thinking in the wake of the First World War. Though the study is in no way ecocritical, we can see a very similar tenor to the framing of the texts above in Johnson's argument that "the attraction to mysticism in all its varied forms made perfect sense within a culture of mourning, of large-scale loss and bereavement."[35] Mysticism and its related belief systems are not merely superstitions, but are expressions of a particular relation to the world – one that is formed by one's subject position, historical context, perceptive frame, and epistemological preconceptions. This attitude will be of specific use in my first two chapters, but it appears in some form or another throughout the work. What Johnson's study shows is how a belief system cannot simply be understood anthropologically or in terms of its truth value, but must instead be looked at in terms of an isometric relationship between thinking and thought.

Katherine Ebury's *Modernism and Cosmology: Absurd Lights* extends this attitude into an examination of another of modernism's great historical caesuras: the radically new picture of the cosmos drawn by the work of Einstein and others around the turn of the century. Comparing the attitude of Ebury's text to Johnson's is instructive, for while we might (with great justification) take the world described by the physicists more seriously than the one described by the mystics, their effects on modernists' subject positions are quite similar. As Ebury writes of Joyce's use of the theory of relativity in *Finnegans Wake*, "these ideas are accepted but also parodied and transformed, misread and reinvented, often in a

[35] George M. Johnson, *Mourning and Mysticism in First World War Literature and Beyond: Grappling with Ghosts* (London: Palgrave, 2015), 3.

sexual manner, creating links between the comic and the cosmic, human sexuality and the universe."[36] Science, like mysticism and nature, forms a framework not just for understanding the world, but for perceiving it. Joyce's text does not merely use these ideas, but thinks with them, metabolizing them into the rest of its body until they are clearly both themselves and not.

Turning now to my study itself, it should be clear from my tentative references to mysticism above that it is very easy when discussing ignorance to look down on the object of study, to treat it as a deprivation and to treat those people under discussion as naive fools. But to approach the subject in this way would be a mistake, not only because ignorance is so common, but also because this arrogance would pose a severe impediment to the study. An agnotological reading of a text must proceed, in Jacques Derrida's words, "from the inside."[37] It must remain attentive to the specificity of the text, its nuances, its background, its construction, and its deconstruction. It can in no way proceed dogmatically, but must instead remain attentive to the specificity of the texts under examination. It is for this reason that I have called this study *Agnotologies of Modernism* – with the plural fully in place, a decision inspired by the title of Peter Nicholls's expansive and similarly pluralistic study *Modernisms*.[38] Unfortunately, the level of attention required to do each analysis well precludes any kind of systematic "history of modernist ignorance" or some such work, as the resulting book would simply be too big.

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[36] Katherine Ebury, *Modernism and Cosmology: Absurd Lights* (London: Palgrave, 2014),

[37] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 24.

[38] Peter Nicholls: *Modernisms: A Literary Guide* (London: Palgrave, 2008).

This study thus seeks to fulfill two roles. First, it provides the basic outline of a map of how modernist agnotologies work through an accumulation of interlocking conceptual relations. Each chapter not only serves as an analysis of its focal author's work, but also as a set-up to the chapter that comes after it, so that the abstract conceptual structure of the work forms a chain that will demonstrate by example the basic commonalities underlying the otherwise highly diverse works under discussion. Second, each chapter demonstrates how the particular agnotology of its subject – organized around the relevant black box – destabilizes common pre-conceptions of how that author's work functions and opens up new domains in the analysis of their work. In addition to the obvious benefit of providing a novel contribution to the study of the author's work, my goal was to again demonstrate by example: in this case, to provide evidence of the value of ignorance as a critical lens.

The relationship between Wyndham Lewis and Henri Bergson, and in particular their disagreements on the subject of vitalism, serves as a useful access point to the larger project, and as such is the topic of my first chapter. Lewis's attack on Bergson's ideas in his *Time and Western Man* and elsewhere have led to a permeant linkage between the two authors in Lewis criticism. As in much of Bergson's reception, comparative studies have tended to focus on the role of time in Lewis's reaction to Bergsonism.[39] Much of this focus is understandable given the extent to which both authors emphasize the role of time in their respective philosophies, but this emphasis has sidelined the important role of vitalism in their works, and in particular the way that their approach to vitalistic philosophies relates to the

[39] For example, see James G. Mansell, "Sound and the Cultural Politics of Time in the Avant-garde: Wyndham Lewis's Critique of Bergsonism," in *Wyndham Lewis and the Cultures of Modernity*, eds. Andrzej Gąsiorek, Alice Reeve-Tucker, and Nathan Waddell (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 111-126.

problem of monism. Vitalism, or the belief that living things in some way possess a "vital force" (such as entelechy, the soul, or some such) which differs them from inanimate objects, became newly popular at the turn of the century. Vitalist and (in the former case) quasi-vitalist authors like Bergson and Hans Driesch acquired tremendous popularity and in many cases drew serious interest from the intellectuals of the day. The psychologist William James, for example, paid close attention to Bergson's writing and incorporated elements of his philosophy into his own writing and thought.

At stake for the vitalists was the question of whether or not human consciousness existed as part of a continuous relationship with all other physical processes – that is, whether consciousness followed and arose from the same physical laws as everything else. The possibility was raised and then dismissed by René Descartes, who famously posed a dualist conception of consciousness, in which the mind was ontologically distinct from the body and functioned according to independent processes. The maneuver was explicitly hierarchizing: human beings were conscious and possessed free will, but other animals did not, and were therefore simply highly complex machines. As Derrida formulates it, the Cartesian animal is that which "doesn't reply, not really, not ever"[40] – existing beyond *logos*, beyond the "I think," beyond any kind of signification. Bergson placed himself firmly in this camp, implicitly with his early work in *Time and Free Will*, and then explicitly in the opening of *Matter and Memory* where he called his project "frankly dualistic."[41] But a case had long

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[40] Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*," ed. Marie-Louise Mallet, trans. David Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 8.

[41] Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1911), xi

been made for the opposite proposition. As far back as 1747 Julien de La Mettrie, drawing on Descartes but abandoning his defense of free will, wrote in *Man a Machine* that "the human body is a self-winding machine, a living representation of perpetual motion."[42] This position is often referred to as "mechanism," or perhaps as "physicalism," but for my purposes the most important trait is its monism – or the belief that consciousness and matter all amount to the same unitary substance, that they are ontologically continuous.

I focus primarily on monism for two reasons. First, I do so because it allows me to examine Bergson's relationship to two of his most notable predecessors and philosophical opponents – the British evolutionary philosopher Herbert Spencer and the French spiritualist (and Bergson's former professor) Félix Ravaisson-Mollien. As Bergson recalls in a letter he wrote to William James, prior to his work on *Time and Free Will* he had been obsessed with Spencer's work, and in particular fixated on Spencer's argument in his *First Principles* and elsewhere that all human cognition could be understood as a manifestation of "habit," and could thus be understood mechanistically and deterministically.[43] According to the letter, Bergson violently rejected Spencer not long before he began writing the Ph.D. dissertation that would eventually become *Time and Free Will*, and though Spencer's ideas are rarely referred to in this book, its argument can largely be understood as a response to Spencer's determinism. (Indeed, one could also quite easily see Bergson's use of Darwin in *Creative*

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[42] Julien de La Mettrie, *Man a Machine and Man a Plant*, trans. Richard A. Watson and Maya Rybalka (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), 32.

[43] Henri Bergson, *Key Writings*, ed. Keith Ansell Pearson and John Mullarkey (New York: Continuum, 2002), 362-63.

Evolution as an attempt to reclaim evolution from its deterministic proponents, though this reading would be rather speculative.)

Determinism – a consequence many mechanist philosophies often considered undesirable – would therefore seem like the more logical focus of the chapter rather than monism, and indeed it plays an important role. But focusing on monism, among other things, permits us to see the relationship between Bergson's rejection of Spencer and his attempts to distance himself from Ravaisson. Like Spencer, Ravaisson saw habit as essential to the functioning of cognition, but while Spencer took this relationship to be mechanical and deterministic Ravaisson understood habit as a kind of grounding for thought – arguing in his *Of Habit* that habit serves as a kind of mediator between external stimulation and internal individuation and creativity. But in an essay on Ravaisson later re-published in *The Creative Mind*, Bergson ignored the essentially creative nature of habit in Ravaisson's work, describing it instead as merely "the fossilized residue of a spiritual activity."[44]

That the mechanistic habit of Spencer and the creative habit of Ravaisson elide together in Bergson so easily indicates an underlying structural similarity, one that, as I show, is reproduced in both Bergson's notion of *élan vital* and also Lewis's response to it. Though very different in their particulars, both forms of habit take the form of a leap from the information available to a perceiving mind to the response that this perception leads to. That is to say, Spencer's use of "habit" to explain consciousness is as much a black box as any theory of vitalism, since it, as Bergson would later write of vitalism, is simply "a sort of

[44] Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Mabelle L. Andison (New York: Dover, 2007), 198

label affixed to our ignorance."[45] Both the vitalists and the mechanists (whether Spencerian, behaviourist, or what have you) were simply repeating the same rhetorical and conceptual gesture, differing mainly on whether the "inside" of the black box contained a dualist ontology or a monist one.

For Lewis in his post-Bergson phase, this elision becomes both a source of comedy and of great philosophical stress. Though Bergson bears a clear mark on his later writing, Lewis excoriated him in *Time and Western Man* for disguising as a vitalist philosophy one that betrayed a clear monism when placed under enough pressure. What Lewis clearly fears, and what he goes out of his way to reject, is what the Deleuzian philosopher Manuel DeLanda calls a "flat ontology," or an ontological system in which all objects occupy the same "level" of being, are arranged horizontally without any qualitative difference recognized between them.[46] That physicalism produces a flat ontology ought to be clear enough, but for Lewis, Bergson's approach is also far too egalitarian in that it recognizes no essential difference between human and non-human life. Thus, in Lewis's writing we see numerous instances of seemingly vital, "living" characters revealing themselves to be mechanical and predictable, in *The Childermass*, for instance, as well as in Lewis's theories on comedy where, as with Bergson, Lewis identifies the comic with the mechanical, the predictable, and the unconscious.

But while Lewis pursues a vitalist conception of life and consciousness, he differs strikingly with Bergson on the matter of the extent to which consciousness and vitality can be found. For Bergson, *élan vital* is present in all life, and is the driving force for evolution. It is

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[45] Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (New York: Dover, 2013), 42.

[46] Manual DeLanda, *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy* (London: Continuum, 2002), 47.

for this reason that Lewis attacks Bergson, arguing not only for a view of vitality limited to human beings, but only *certain* human beings – those who attain it through vigorous thought and reflection. It is in this way that Lewis's rejection of his influences mirrors Bergson's: both develop dualist, anti-deterministic philosophies which they cast against predecessors who they termed overly monist and ignorant of fundamental divisions inherent to nature. Their respective agnotologies are, thus, basically identical, amounting to the creation of a black box that contains and represents a hidden discontinuity around which they can construct their respective systems. In both cases is the creation of the box likewise a reactionary measure against monism, and their primary disagreement is where exactly the dualist split occurs, and in what entities the black box of consciousness should be placed. The chapter therefore deploys vitalism as a kind of model agnotology, or a place in which to explore the basic contours of an ontological displacement of ignorance and in which I can tease out the pattern I will find taking other shapes in the authors that I read subsequently.

The relationship between consciousness and discontinuity comes up again in Virginia Woolf, the subject of my second chapter, whose complex responses to the problem also provide an opportunity to extend some of my conclusions in chapter one towards a more generalized theory of the agnotological functions of consciousness. Roughly the first half of the chapter I devote to an analysis of Woolf's relationship with Richard Maurice Bucke, whose *Cosmic Consciousness* Woolf likely encountered as a book critic for the *Times Literary Supplement*. Bucke was an advocate of panpsychism, a philosophical position that attributes some form of "life" or consciousness to all entities in the universe, including inanimate objects – an argument that today has its strongest articulation in the "vital materialism" of Jane Bennett. But Bucke's text is not so much focused on the existence of consciousness in all objects as the *awareness* of it – the "cosmic consciousness" that

(similarly to what we see in Lewis) is present only in a small number of gifted individuals. For Bucke, cosmic consciousness was a stage of evolution, one that followed naturally from the "simple consciousness" of most animals and the "self-consciousness" possessed by humans. But while in the distant future all human beings would possess this heightened awareness, a small number of people (including the founders of most major religions) would attain it via a moment of epiphany, a radical discontinuity in which their previous pattern of thought would be suspended and when they would attain a sense of the world that was fundamentally new.

As I describe in the chapter's first half, this pattern maps quite nicely onto the character of Septimus Smith of Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* – and is certainly a better fit than the trauma framework through which he has usually been read. Septimus evidences little of the repetition compulsion and involuntary memory that is a hallmark of literary depictions of trauma, and his visions of cars and trees exhibiting awareness and consciousness, along with his desire to start a new religion, bears little resemblance to any of the usual symptoms of trauma (symptoms that would have been well known to Woolf, writing years after the end of the First World War). But the content of his visions clearly amounts to panpsychism, and their etiology, and in particular their appearance in the sudden rupture of his war experience, identifies them closely with cosmic consciousness.

As I go on to argue, though, the similarity between the origin of cosmic consciousness and the origin of psychological trauma is not merely a coincidence. Both can be understood in terms of a play between continuity and discontinuity, and in particular in terms of a perceptual relationship to flat ontology. It is notable, for instance, that while Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* famously points to the importance of shock and surprise in a traumatic experience he also in the same book identifies shock as the origin of scientific

knowledge.[47] Shock, as Woolf would note in "A Sketch of the Past," has great epistemological value, tearing down one's old preconceptions and potentially leading one to see something genuinely new. For Bucke, that knowledge is the existence of a perfectly continuous relationship between all entities in the universe, a flatness that gives panpsychism more than a little resemblance to physicalism (in form if not in content). A shock – that is, an experience of epistemological discontinuity – is ironically a gateway to the abolition of surprise, a sense of universal continuity so complete that nothing could ever take one off guard again. Or, at least, that is the implied trajectory of mechanism and its deterministic universe. But since the omniscience that this approach requires is unattainable, the mechanists employ their own black box – the "habit" of Spencer, which explains about as little as the vitalist "life force," despite all of its scientific pretensions.

The universal "life" proposed by Bucke, Septimus, and the other panpsychists is likewise a response to the conflict between the awareness of continuity provided by their philosophy and the continuing sense discontinuity imposed by their limited knowledge and perception. Bucke's universe, despite its flatness, is non-deterministic – which means that he needs to explain how the universe can have knowable laws, and how those laws can apply equally to stones and human minds, and yet still not conclude that the world is mechanical. Bucke does so by abandoning the premise (taken for granted by determinists) that stones are themselves inanimate. Instead, he says, they are full of life, and in standing at their level we are full of life as well. His system is therefore able to metabolize unpredictability by

[47] Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. Todd Dufresne and Gregory C. Richter (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2011), 96.

encapsulating it in the black box of life, permitting him (and Woolf) to embrace continuity while still recognizing the shocks inherent to the marriage of epistemology and perception.

Panpsychism therefore resembles vitalism in that both provide frameworks within which otherwise incommensurable relations of continuity and discontinuity can be resolved. In Woolf this resolution comes attached to an epiphanic epistemology, one centred on moments of shock that serve as access points to the essentially continuous nature of the universe. Indeed, the epistemological effect of surprise – in cosmic consciousness, traumatic experience, and scientific experimentation – is perhaps uniquely able to resolve this split. Surprise is most often the result of a limited perspective, an ignorance created by one's specific subjective position. If a baseball were to strike me in the head as I was walking down the street, it would not be surprising because I considered it impossible for a ball to fly at the particular speed and in the particular trajectory that would cause its line of flight to intersect with my face. Such an event would be perfectly within the bounds of the laws of physics, and from a god's-eye-view would be a fairly unremarkable event. But I do not have a god's-eye-view, but rather a limited frame of sensory perception. And the ball is surprising *because I do not see it* – it seems, phenomenologically, to leap into existence at the exact moment of connection. But in being surprised I acquire knowledge: of the ball, its thrower, its flight path, of a totally continuous and deterministic causal chain which had existed all along *behind* the shock, and which I never would have encountered had the moment of surprise never occurred. This example is, of course, quite basic and simple, and not exactly what Woolf seems to have in mind in "A Sketch of the Past," but it does outline what I consider to be an essential component in Woolf's epistemology.

It is furthermore this epistemological relationship that allows us to see the ways that the panpsychism of *Mrs Dalloway* extends itself into Woolf's later fiction. As I show in the

analysis of *To the Lighthouse* which rounds out the chapter, much of the characters' obsession with prediction (an obsession that is strongest in Mr. Ramsay) is related to an anxiety over perceived discontinuities. It is notable, for example, that when Mr. Ramsay ruminates on his own limitations as a philosopher, he imagines each stage of his thinking as a discrete unit, so that one works out an idea by hop-scotching from A to B and then to C, hoping one day to make one's way to the enlightenment of Z. Mr. Ramsay, here, greatly resembles Zeno of Elea in Bergson's critique of the paradoxes – in which he accuses Zeno of imagining time (a fully continuous process of becoming) in the same manner as space (which can be divided up into discrete chunks). By pulling a Zeno on his own imagination, Mr. Ramsay has denied himself the Bucke-like epiphany that would make him able to surpass the divides and instead range over his philosophy with the aggressive freedom of an animal let out of its cage. Instead he responds to the threat both to his pride and to his identity as a provider for his family by imposing a continuous relationship where one cannot be properly said to exist – that is, he predicts the weather. Instead of facing his limited subjectivity head-on, he imagines that he possesses the god's-eye-view of the world that would banish all surprise forever. But his consciousness is far from cosmic, and his luck in predicting the rain proves meaningless in the face of the immense discontinuities that "Time Passes" thrusts upon him.

The first two chapters form a kind of set – insofar as they both concern the black box of "consciousness" in one form or another, and also set up the larger issue of the isometric epistemological relationship between continuity and discontinuity which is essential to my larger analysis of modernist agnotologies. In my chapter on Pound I analyze a completely different black box, though one that functions according to a similar pattern. My key argument in this chapter concerns the intersection between ecology, politics, and aesthetics in

Pound's work, an intersection which I come to refer to as his "imperative logic." I adopt the term "imperative" by way of the categorical imperative of Kant, and in particular a reading of the concept by the phenomenologist Alphonso Lingis. For Kant (as Lingis points out) the categorical imperative is not merely a good or useful way of constructing an ethical framework, but also an expression of a particular sense of humanity's relation to the natural world. For Kant, the fact that human beings possess free will means that they are essentially separate from the natural world, since they are able to act on their desires instead of being pushed about by the laws of physics. But unlike Bergson and Lewis, who both jealously defend humanity's capacity for free action and creativity, in Kant's ethics free will is a *problem*, since it makes unethical behaviour possible. The categorical imperative, then, is at its most abstract level less a system of maxims and rules, less indeed an approach to meta-ethics than it is a command to overcome our division from the natural world, to act as if our inter-personal relations were bound by rules as inviolable as gravity.

The contours of Pound's political thought are quite similar in this regard, though in the content of his ethics he is clearly no Kantian. The biggest difference is also the most fundamental: whereas Kant considers humans essentially separate from nature, divided at birth by the endowment of free will, Pound treats continuity as basic but finds everywhere instances of the natural order being contravened, the more perfect structure of the natural order torn down in the name of avarice. It is in part for this reason that Pound was prone to conspiratorial thinking while Kant was not: for Pound the split from nature is not essential, but imposed, a conclusion that naturally led him to ask "imposed by whom?" It was not necessarily the case that this question would lead him to anti-Semitism, but it did provide a framework in which his answer to the question could appear to make sense.

But I am getting ahead of myself. Before one can consider the role of Pound's imperative logic in his poetry, one must determine what his conception of "nature" is and how it relates to an ethical system. It is C.H. Douglas, the founder of Social Credit, who among Pound's key influences provides the most straightforward definition in this regard. As Douglas writes, a law should be considered "natural" if it proceeds in a way that is "automatic and inexorable," and in a way that empowers "the individual."[48] Though I cannot be sure if Pound would have formulated his sense of what "nature" is in this way, it is a useful guideline given both the influence that Douglas had on Pound's thinking and the ease by which this definition complements his thinking in other areas. (It is also a classic black box structure: Douglas's nature, like the supercomputer in Latour, just works by itself, so no need to interfere with it.) Pound's idiosyncratic interpretation of Confucius, for example, adopts this automatism as a way to translate individual characteristics and actions into large-scale social changes. For Pound, Confucius holds that the character of the head of a government directly affects the character of that government in the same way that the head of a family dictates that family's fortunes. Thus, Pound resembles Lewis and Woolf in his relationship to continuities: the black box of nature when plugged into an imperative ethics allows Pound to jump at will from the actions of an individual person across vast and complex causal relations and contingencies to land on a particular fact about the fortunes of the society that the person lived in. Thus, one understands the history of China by studying its emperors, the history of America by studying its presidents, the history of the Italian renaissance by studying the Malatestas and Medicis who helped create it. It is therefore to be expected that Pound's *Cantos*, a poem that "contains history," contains more biography than

[48] C.H. Douglas, *Social Credit* (Vancouver: The Institute of Economic Democracy, 1979), 73.

any other kind of historical writing. The power of the imperative is such that the jump from individual to group is nearly instantaneous.

What one should remember when examining the underlying ecology of Pound's politics is that while nature itself proceeds automatically, human beings do not. Indeed, Pound's writings are rife with instances of waste and destruction wrought by those who would act against nature, with the most well-known and egregious case being usury. In a sense, usury plays for Pound the same role that free will does for Kant: it introduces discontinuity to the world, dividing human beings from the natural automatism which is the source of their wealth and happiness. But for Pound this discontinuity, though present, is not a basic fact of human existence, but rather a contingent one which can perhaps be overcome. Pound goes farthest in figuring out how this overcoming might be possible in his poetics, but it is also here that some of the contradictions built into his approach become apparent. The basic problem that Pound runs into is that he at once wants both individual people as well as society to be perfectly immanent with nature, existing in a complex mesh of reciprocal action in which the behaviour of a single person *really can* affect whole populations, while at the same time treating whole categories of human behaviour (like usury) as radically outside the scope of nature, counter to it in some inexcusable way. How, for example, does one embrace such a hyper-individualistic philosophy as Pound's without also concluding that the avarice of the capitalist elite is justified? Nothing Pound wrote manages to answer this question, and the excesses of his later political writings affirms that no coherent answer exists.

I analyze how this conflict plays out in Pound's poetics through an extended analysis of how metaphor works in "In a Station of the Metro" and its origins in Japanese haiku. Critics of the poems have often taken the relationship between the poems first and second lines as metonymic, amounting to a displacement from the first image to the second. And

indeed, from a certain angle the poem can seem to function like two still frames from a film which between them "cut" our view from one scene to another. But this reading not only misunderstands Pound's technique of "superposition," but also the ecological logic of haiku poetry – which historically have described a more immanent relationship between humans and nature more in line with what Pound supports in his politics. The two lines, then, are best read in terms of metaphor and condensation, with the two images combining to create a third composite image that exists beside its components, never superseding or overcoming them but instead simply forming a third independent frame.

Reading "In a Station of the Metro" metaphorically – with the metropolitan "crowd" condensed with the natural "bough," neither overcoming the other – allows us to see an image of the overarching coherence that Pound speaks of in the *Drafts and Fragments* as well as his translation of *Women of Trachis*. But it is important to remember that this immanence exists only in a single place and moment, enabled by the brevity of the haiku. Pound could not make the same thing happen across the monster of obsession that is his *Cantos*, which in their theme and structure requires not only immanence at the individual and momentary level (which Pound could clearly provide) but also at higher levels of complexity. The *Cantos* would require an integration with nature that was systemic, complex, and all-extensive in a way that would seem to preclude Pound's emphatic individualism. In ecology, after all, it is not *this* tree or *this* animal which is important, but trees and animals in aggregate: one could hardly ask for an epistemology more opposed to Pound's ethics and his art. In adopting an imperative logic, Pound sought a bridge across this discontinuity, one built from the black box of a "nature" that simply sees the world proceeding "on its own" without investigating its complexity and the basic interdependence of all within it. It is, in

effect, a tool for turning metonymy into metaphor – and had Pound been a demigod, it might have been enough.

My fourth chapter examines a similar problem inherent in the reading of Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*. I begin with an analysis of the first line of the *Wake*, and with the (intentionally obtuse) argument that there are no words in *Finnegans Wake* at all. In Joyce criticism, a "word" in the *Wake* effectively means a sign in the text which can be taken for granted, one that does not require the extended glosses that analyses of this text are usually so ready to provide. If we see, for example, the phrase "it's as semper as oxhousehumper" (*FW* 107.34) we eagerly put on our glosses for "semper" (if we know no Latin) and "oxhousehumper" (if we know no Hebrew) but not for "it's" or "as." Yet as I show (and as my above example suggests) whether or not a sign is a "word" is unstable, both because of the text's multilingualism and because each sign is often part of multiple, mutually-exclusive networks of signification. One can easily gloss "semper" as the Latin word for "always" and call it a day, but that would mean ignoring the word's sonic resemblance to the English "simple" as well as the phrase's rhythmic similarity to the phrase "it's as simple as A B C." "Semper," then, is far less stable than it first lets on, and this instability means that one cannot let one's reading stop at the dictionary.[49] Nor can a simple word like "is" be allowed to rest, in part because these smaller words often become incorporated into larger semantic units in such a way that a given use of the word is only understandable when the larger relationships are considered. When we read, for instance, that "the citye of Is is issuant" (*FW* 601.5), it is entirely insufficient to say that "is" is the present-tense of the verb "to be."[50]

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[49] Thank you to Tim Conley for drawing my attention to the resonances of this passage.

[50] For instance, one can also detect the presence of Issy here – as "is-si."

Rather we must recognize that the word/non-word distinction is insufficient and unstable, that all signs in *Finnegans Wake* exist as part of multiple overlapping signifying chains, and that instead of seeing the sign as the empirical designator of a given concept Joyce demands that we see it as the medial point between numerous conflicting patterns and strains.

To state the case simplistically, I argue that reading every sign in the *Wake* is like trying to open a black box. Reading Joyce is always a lesson in humility, but in *Finnegans Wake* the process takes on a special edge due to the gulf between the complexity of a sign's origin and the simplicity of its placement. Non-words in the *Wake* mock us with their modesty, often taking the form of well-known words that *should* be easy yet are not. Every sign is a problem, a machine that refuses to run. To attain any reading one must open the box and begin to cross this discontinuity by whatever available means – historical, textual, genetic, deconstructionist. But with sufficient care we can often find the various strains in conflict, precluding a simple resolution, or if not that then the variety can overwhelm us, bogging the reading down with detail and definitions so that nothing of value can emerge from the mass. Nothing in *Finnegans Wake* is definite, is only one thing, yet a reading *must* be definite. To hedge and qualify, to clarify before or after that whatever one says one must grant the instability of the text, is merely to defer the moment of transgression. Nothing short of re-capitulating the text of the *Wake* – in itself and for itself – would permit one to be equal to the task of reading Joyce's text, which is to say that one can only "read" the *Finnegans Wake* by writing it, repeating it, almost traumatically. Clearly this kind of gesture is beyond what one usually finds in the pages of the *James Joyce Quarterly*, or in what scholars euphemistically call "readings" of a passage or a single word. Indeed, the curiously common gesture in *Wake* criticism of turning one's argument on the "exhaustive" exegesis of one of Joyce's coinages (my chapter looks at examples in the work of Umberto Eco and Derek

Attridge specifically, but they are quite common) can be understood as an incomplete reaching towards the fuller re-writing that the complexity of the *Wake* demands, even if it does unspeakingly repeat the word/non-word dichotomy that the text of *Finnegans Wake* rejects.

In any case, nobody attempting to understand, or read, or critique some portion of *Finnegans Wake* actually goes ahead and tries, like Borges's Pierre Menard, to repeat Joyce's gesture and so respond to the book in a manner that approaches its complexity. What one does instead is permit the creation of words, which is to say that one produces a falsely-definitive reading of the text by ignoring (intentionally or not) the passage in question's divergent or opposing signifying networks – a process that I refer to as "de-mediation." I do not mean anything in this chapter to be a "criticism" in the oppositional sense; this is not an attack. Indeed, I have serious doubts that the kind of idealized reading-through-rewriting that I proposed above is even possible. Rather, it is my attempt to approach the *Wake*'s peculiar hermeneutic demands as a kind of totally immanent agnotology, a continuous dance with ignorance that, far from being negative, actually *produces* the text.

But why name this process "de-mediation?" The origin of the term actually brings my "cyclewheeling history" (*FW* 186.2) back to Speculative Realism by way of its cousin OOO, as approached by the philosopher Graham Harman. Though on a first reading Harman's philosophy seems obsessed with a re-interpretation of Heidegger, its ontology is highly Aristotelian, taking as its subject fixed objects with defined essences that remain eternally separate and "withdrawn" from each other by way of their mutual unfathomability. As Harman points out at the end of *Tool-Being*, the nature of this separation is such that it implies that no interaction between objects is possible, that his system in effect precludes any kind of causality. Harman attempts to solve this problem via what he at first calls

"occasionalism" and then re-brands as "vicarious causation." In neither case does he argue for the explicitly religious explanation for causation implied by the first term. Rather, he says that in OOO causation is always mediated (i.e. "vicarious") through another object. In my critique, I show how this rather *deus ex machina* solution actually shows the way to OOO's dissolution, how it takes what was supposed to be an ontology grounded in definite, mutually-withdrawn objects and instead transforms it into an ontology of constant inter-penetration and becoming. Yet this continuous over-coding only happens, as it were, "under the hood," visible when one takes apart the nature of causality in detail but not at the level of stationary instantaneous objects seemingly removed in their timelessness from their interrelations (i.e. when one examines objects in the precise way that Harman's writing usually does). OOO's peculiar objects are, in effect, the product of de-mediation, a result of a kind of ontological hermeneutic.

By way of Joyce's close and entirely under-studied reading of Giordano Bruno I integrate this critique of OOO with the semantic ontology of *Finnegans Wake*. It was from Bruno that Joyce took the peculiar notion of the unity of opposites and the related notion of the mutual immanence of the microcosm and the macrocosm in the same domain. Just as the flatness of OOO places events at an interplanetary scale on the same plane as a minuscule transfer of electromagnetic charge, so too does Bruno's cosmology posit the link between the divine and the quotidian as basic to the normal functioning of the universe. In *Finnegans Wake*, this relationship becomes a kind of undecidability that is basic to the text, where a given sign's place in a grand monomythical pattern may at one point seem to "explain" a whole swath of text that, when read in its minutia, seems obsessed with something entirely unrelated (a phenomenon I examine in more detail in relation to the "Norwegian Captain" and "The Ondt and the Gracehoper" sections of the book). Explanations, rather than closing

down the discourse, actually open up the text – causality becomes the enemy of determinism, instead of (as in Bergson and Lewis) its friend and its enabler. One can look at any reading of the *Wake* to see how it balances these criss-crossings and contradictions, how it produces despite everything a clearly defined "object" out of the mass of interpenetrations and becoming. That is, in its most basic form, what de-mediation is – a process as pernicious as it is essential, a polygamous concept wedded both to knowledge and to ignorance at once.

In my concluding chapter I discuss how these findings relate to modernism generally, and argue that the question of ignorance has gone too infrequently asked in large part because scholars fail or refuse to recognize its omnipresence in subjective experience. Ignorance is inescapable, a basic fact of life, and so when literature represents life it also, without even trying, represents ignorance. Treating ignorance like a dirty word, or refusing to consider it as a valid object of inquiry, clouds our vision, and limits our ability to critique and investigate the texts before us.

Chapter 1
The Ghost in the Machine is Also a Machine: Wyndham Lewis and the Spectre of Monism

> Wyndham Lewis wore a wide black hat, like a character in the quarter, and was dressed like someone out of La Bohéme. . . . At that time we believed that any writer or painter could wear any clothes he owned . . . but Lewis wore the uniform of a prewar artist.
>
> — Ernest Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast*[51]

> My Latin quarter hat. God, we simply must dress the character.
>
> — James Joyce, *Ulysses*[52]

1.1 The Demeaning of the Wild Body

Wyndham Lewis begins his 1927 essay on "The Meaning of the Wild Body" – a dilation on his theory of comedy – with something like an axiom. For his theory to work, he says, one must "assume the dichotomy of mind and body . . . without arguing it; for it is upon

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[51] Earnest Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast: The Restored Edition*, ed. Seán Hemingway (New York: Scribner, 2009), 88-89.

[52] James Joyce, *Ulysses*, eds. Hans Walter Gabler, Wolfhard Steppe, and Claus Melchior (New York: Vintage, 1986), 3.174.

that essential separation that the theory of laughter here proposed is based."[53] Whether or not they accept dualism so easily, critics of Lewis have long taken at his word its essential place in his criticism – of comedy in the above essay, of politics in *The Art of Being Ruled*, and of art and philosophy in *Time and Western Man*, to give only a handful of examples.[54] It appears that accepting that the (real or fantastical) separation of mind and body is an axiom of Lewis's thought has become simply the cost of doing business in the world of Lewis studies. There are good reasons for this tendency, not least of all being the effort Lewis put into cultivating his intellectual and artistic persona around the mind/body problem, a tendency that peaked with his attack on "Bergsonism" in *Time and Western Man*, but which persists in one form or another across his published works.

In the Lewisian role of "the enemy," this chapter will abandon this line of thinking and adopt a diametrically opposed one – that to understand the place of the mind/body problem in Lewis's thought, it is a looming monism, rather than dualism, that must take our attention, and that furthermore it is the constant possibility of dualism's failure which structures his thinking rather than opposes it. Monism emerges in Lewis's thought as a central black box, and a key to his agnotology. Appropriately, the disavowal

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[53] Wyndham Lewis, *The Complete Wild Body*, ed. Bernard LaFourcade (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1982), 157.

[54] For instance, Toby Avard Foshay makes frequent mention of Lewis's dualism throughout his *Wyndham Lewis and the Avant-Garde: The Politics of the Intellect* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1992). More recently, Jamie Wood's interpretation of Lewis's theory of comedy retains the assumption of its dualism while still pointing out its close similarity to certain ideas from behaviorism ("The Siamese Demon: Wyndham Lewis and America" *Modernism/Modernity* 17.2 [2010]: 392-93).

of monism takes a similar role in Lewis's work as it does in Henri Bergson's, whose difficult relationship to the thought of his former professor, the Spiritualist philosopher Félix Ravaisson-Mollien, gives his work an analogous anxiety. Ravaisson's 1838 *Of Habit* – rarely studied outside of France, and only translated into English in 2008 – distinguishes him from his firmly dualist contemporaries, but also from the mechanistic and deterministic form of monism championed by scientists in his day and after, such as Herbert Spencer and the behaviourists. Bergson rejected his argument that habit provided the means by which mechanistic physical processes lead to creativity. By giving up on the possibility that there would be a middle path between the two poles of vitalism and mechanism, Bergson created a situation where his ideas on creativity demanded the expulsion of mechanism from human thought (which proved quite difficult to achieve). We can see this expulsion most clearly in *Laughter*, where he figures the social function of the laugh to be a kind of remediation, a punishment afflicting any who descend into thoughtless automatic movements, or a means of vitalist maintenance. Lewis's theory of laughter follows strikingly similar lines, but with the addition of his artistic elitism, which reserved vitalist creativity for those artists who had done the hard work of breaking from socially-imposed roles, rather than (as in Bergson) extending *élan vital*, itself functionally a black box, to any living thing.

Whereas Lewis flips the equation, attributing comedy to the appearance of life in a mechanical object rather than the other way around,[55] the distinction he makes between

[55] See Vincent Sherry, "Anatomy of Folly: Wyndham Lewis, Body Politic, and Comedy," *Modernism/Modernity* 4.2 (1997): 121-138 for a summary of the development of Lewis's theory of comedy.

the autonomous behaviour of the average person and the creative work of the artist still demands the enforcement of a dualistic vitalism, the drawing of hard lines distinguishing life from the machines.[56] Indeed, when Lewis offered up a definition of "vitalism" in his memoir *Rude Assignment*, he emphasized its insistence on "the independence of organic from inorganic life."[57] Yet throughout Lewis's work we see examples of Bergsonian lapses, of vital, living minds in some way or another falling into habit, cliché, and fixed social roles. (The later parts of this chapter will focus on this pattern in more detail through a reading of *The Childermass*.) Even this narrow, elitist form of dualism proves remarkably difficult to maintain, and yet Lewis resolutely abandons in *Time and Western Man* the possibility of all human consciousness being reducible to mechanistic processes. What is being rejected here is the contiguity between mind and matter, or the possibility that human thought and behaviour can smoothly shift from vitalist creativity to mechanist repetition and back again, as Ravaisson would have it. It is because the division is so stark that *both* the machine's attempt to come to life *and* the human's fall into thoughtless automatism require the remedial force of laughter.

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[56] As David Dwan describes, the need for an underlying mechanical structure from which the suitably gifted subject can escape inflected also Lewis's attacks on Romanticism, which he accused of being irrational and occasionalist ("The Problem of Romanticism in Wyndham Lewis" *Essays in Criticism: A Quarterly Journal of Literary Criticism* 65.2 [2015]: 163-165). For a deeper analysis of occasionalism and its relationship to modernism, see my fourth chapter, on Joyce.

[57] Wyndham Lewis, *Rude Assignment: An Intellectual Autobiography*, ed Toby Foshay (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1984), 129n2.

Lewis is therefore right that his theory would fall to pieces without the mind/body division, but his attempt in "The Meaning of the Wild Body" to deflect the possibility of monism masks the extent to which an anxiety towards that division's collapse is a structuring element in his work. Much like how Bergson in *Matter and Memory* asserts that his thinking is "frankly dualistic,"[58] the casualness of this dismissal should be read symptomatically, as a marker of its importance as a *presupposition*. Mechanism – the belief that all life or consciousness can be reduced to a series of "mechanical" cause-and-effect relationships – is necessarily monistic, as (especially in the extreme form that Bergson usually has in mind) it not only posits a continuity between inanimate objects and thinking subjects, leaving no room for vitalist notions like "entelechy" or the soul, but also brooks no hierarchy between mind and matter. It takes scientific reductionism as both an epistemological process (in which one learns more about something by describing its parts) *and* an ontological one (in which the processes being reduced to are considered more real or more meaningful than the higher-order ones).

Though a critique of this position, in its strongest form, runs throughout Bergson's work from *Time and Free Will* to the end, its "frank" statement in *Matter and Memory* testifies to the rhetorical role of the position that runs parallel to the philosophical one. As Bergson goes on to say in the book's introduction, the text "deal[s] with body and mind in such a way as, we hope, to lessen greatly, if not overcome, the theoretical difficulties which have always beset dualism, and which cause it . . . to be held in small honour among philosophers" (*MM* xi). Looking back to *Time and Free Will*, we

[58] Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1950), xi. Future citations will be parenthetical, indicated with "MM."

can see the importance of this defense. There, Bergson attacks mechanism in the context of determinism, to which he considers mechanism to be interminably linked. Specifically, Bergson says that determinists have been "condemned . . . in advance" to a form of mechanism that "has no value beyond that of a symbolical representation" and which "cannot hold good against the witness of an attractive consciousness, which shows us inner dynamism as fact."[59] Mechanism, and by extension monism, thus figures as a pre-philosophical *presupposition* on the parts of the determinists, a presupposition that Bergson says cannot stand up in the face of actual creative intelligence. Thus, he substitutes his own presupposition, dualism, to act as a bulwark against the *real* enemy, since if determinism requires mechanism, and mechanism requires monism, then a system that presumes dualism cannot be deterministic.

Dualism thus takes the role for Bergson (and as I will later show, for Lewis) of what Gilles Deleuze referred to in *Difference and Repetition* as an "image of thought." These "images" take the form of philosophical presuppositions that determine the terms, scope, and direction of subsequent thinking, often appearing under the guise of "common sense." As Deleuze writes, "it is *in terms* of this image that everybody knows and is presumed to know what it means to think. Thereafter it matters little whether philosophy begins with the object or the subject . . . as long as thought remains subject to this Image which already prejudges everything."[60] I must clarify that it is not strictly dualism that

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[59] Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, trans. F.L. Pogson (New York: Dover, 2001), 172. Future citations will be parenthetical, indicated with "TFW."

[60] Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 131. Deleuze and Guattari reiterate this position in *What is Philosophy?*: "the image of thought

occupies this position, for either Lewis or Bergson, but rather the rejection of mechanism and monism. Indeed, Lewis's own rejection of the mechanist position sometimes struggles to rise to the level of an argument, as evidenced by his rejection of A.N. Whitehead's "organic mechanism," the implications of which Lewis says make it "not such an agreeable belief" (*TFW* 173).

That both have arrived at dualism through the rejection of determinist mechanism explains in part why both promoted theories of laughter which establish a hierarchy with consciousness at the top and mechanical processes at the bottom. In Bergson's *Laughter*, the automatic and mechanical elements of human thought and action appear most clearly as a threat, a lurking possibility that laughter evolved to suppress. As he writes, the human body's "attitudes, gestures and movements . . . are laughable in exact proportion as that body reminds us of a mere machine,"[61] and he explicitly links human automatism to absentmindedness (*L* 8).[62] The belief that attentiveness and intellect can banish the automatic tendencies that (if *Laughter* is to be believed) are present in seemingly everyone, is in part to blame for the implicit anti-egalitarian strain in Bergson's thought that we later see magnified in Lewis. A taste of that anti-egalitarianism appears in that

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gives itself of what it means to think, to make use of thought, to find one's bearings in thought" (Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell [New York: Columbia University Press, 1994], 37). A few pages later they call these images "prephilosophical" (40).

[61] Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, trans Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell (New York: Dover, 2005), 15. Future citations will be parenthetical, indicated with "L."

[62] For an incisive analysis of the role of the mechanical in Bergson's theory of comedy, see: Alenka Zupančič, *The Odd One In: On Comedy* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2008), 110-127.

earlier mention of the "attractive consciousness" in the passage I quoted from *Time and Free Will*, but it appears in greater force in a little-known speech that Bergson gave in 1895 called "Good Sense and Classical Studies."

The occasion of the speech was the award ceremony for that year's *concours général*, a prestigious academic competition given to upper-year French high school students.[63] Its subject is the question of what constitutes "good sense" and whether (and how) it can be cultivated by education. On this question, Bergson decisively splits from René Descartes's assertion in *A Discourse on the Method*, that "good sense is the most evenly distributed thing in the world."[64] Rather, Bergson says, good sense "requires constant wakefulness" and "dreads nothing more than the ready-made idea."[65] Both habits (*KW* 347) and clichés (*KW* 350) receive Bergson's opprobrium, taking the blame for diverting people from their intelligence (and, presumably, into something other people would find laughable). Thankfully, education can productively act, "not so much to communicate an *élan* as to remove obstacles" (*KW* 349). The difference between these two possibilities is vital, for Bergson is not arguing that good sense can arise from nothing, or that education inscribes on a mental *tabula rasa.* Rather, it merely modifies

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[63] Bergson was a previous winner of the award – taking the 1877 prize in mathematics for a solution he devised to one of Pascal's problems. The appearance of this solution in the *Annales de Mathématiques* was his first publication.

[64] René Descartes, *A Discourse on the Method*, trans. Ian Maclean (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 5.

[65] Henri Bergson, *Key Writings*, eds. Keith Ansell Pearson and John Mullarkey, trans. Melissa McMahon (New York: Continuum, 2002), 346. Future citations will be parenthetical and indicated with "KW."

an independently-existing process – which is a good thing, Bergson says, for if good sense was entirely tied to education, then it would thereby become the domain of a privileged few, meaning that "we would have to be saddened at the sight of the irresistible trend which places power into the hands of the majority" which, because education is closed to them, lack the sense to use their power wisely (*KW* 346).

This thought process, which argues that democracy depends on a partial division between good sense and education (with good sense here figured as the opposite of automatism and habit), itself depends on rejecting the possibility that mechanical processes can lead to creative results – that is, it depends on the rejection of monism, and the establishment of a hierarchy of mind *over* matter. *Laughter* and "Good Sense and Classical Study," though peripheral texts in Bergson's *oeuvre*, are vital for making explicit a hierarchy that is operative throughout his other more well-known works. And it is this hierarchy where Bergson and Lewis begin to align politically, in the sense that this relationship between the partial separation of education from good sense and the possibility of democratic government is a fork from which their political roads diverge. Because Bergson believes that education, and the class privilege it entails, is not completely necessary for good sense, it follows that democracy (dependent as it is on a suitably informed populis) is a viable form of government. But Lewis does not believe in this viability, instead arguing that it was only "the wealthy, intelligent, or educated" who had the power to escape the straitjacket of contemporary life.[66] It is in this sense that we can see the political import of Lewis's idea of comedy, for as Vincent Sherry observes

[66] Wyndham Lewis, *The Art of Being Ruled* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1926), 3. Arthur Mitchell. New York: Dover, 1998. Hereafter cited parenthetically as "ABR."

"Lewis's comic characters are not some subnormal exception; they comprise a usual humankind, whose strenuous but vacuous attempt to supersede their animal-mechanical nature affords the constant opportunity for comedy."[67]

Lewis's tendency to, in reading Bergson, assume his premises while arriving at opposite conclusions – "accepting what Bergson discards, rejecting what Bergson endorses"[68] – has led him to a system of thinking in which creativity and conscious thought, potentially open to all in Bergson's thinking, is so rare among the average person that any striving for it becomes *ipso facto* comical. Lewis's reactionary stance towards Bergsonism has led, not in the opposite direction, but towards an intensification of Bergson's hierarchy. Whereas for Bergson intuition, good sense, and *élan vital* are foreclosed only from automatic processes and inanimate matter, and are thus (at least in principle) available to everyone, Lewis combines this hierarchy with a layer of social elitism which places the educated and artistic mind above all. It is for this reason that the spectre of monism is such a threat to Lewis's system – for by doubling down on the hierarchy, he has given himself more to lose. And yet in establishing his system through opposition to Bergson, Lewis "effectively ensures [its] centrality."[69] As such, Lewis inherits the system's instabilities as well, including the ever-present possibility of monism.

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[67] Sherry, 123.

[68] SueEllen Campbell, "Equal Opposites: Wyndham Lewis, Henri Bergson, and Their Philosophies of Space and Time" *Twentieth Century Literature* 29.3 (1983): 357.

[69] David Ayers, *Wyndham Lewis and Western Man* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 18.

The next several sections of this chapter will further examine the roles of dualism and monism in Lewis's thought and their relationship to the problem of habit in Bergson. The next section goes more deeply into the place of dualism in Lewis's political philosophy, paying particular attention to his contributions to the two issues of *BLAST* and also *Time and Western Man*. One key point of this section is the extent to which Lewis defined his own thinking in opposition to others – not merely Bergson, but also those like Whitehead and the Behaviourists. This account will show how dualism, forged from the "image" of his rejected monism, formed the basis of much of Lewis's non-fiction writing during the inter-war period. The following section moves into a more thorough critique and historicization of Bergson's philosophy. It provides a fuller account of Ravaisson's philosophy, its possible influence on Bergson (in particular, the similarities between Ravaissonian "habit" and Bergsonian "duration"), and the implications this has for the status of monism in Bergson's thought. As it did for Lewis, Bergson's rejection of monism has a specific source: the philosophy of Herbert Spencer, which Bergson read and admired for many years until he rejected him, developing his philosophical project in the process. It is through this rejection that Bergson's anti-monism takes on its status as a Deleuzian "image" rather than a well-defined "concept." The next section compares Lewis's novel *The Childermass* to his painting *A Battery Shelled* through the lens of Manuel DeLanda's concept of "flat ontology," or the elimination of hierarchical relationships between ontological states. Borrowing additional concepts from Deleuze, Graham Harman, and Levi Bryant, this section demonstrates how *The Childermass*, which Fredric Jameson described as "a veritable summa of Lewis's

narrative modernism,"[70] depicts beneath its apparent dualist hierarchy an inescapable monist substratum into which the characters interminably risk falling.

It appears as though for the philosophies of both Lewis and Bergson, monism exists as an omnipresent danger in the shadowed corners of their thought. Having rejected monism through its association with determinism, and having built up increasingly severe hierarchies from that rejection, the possibility posed by Ravaisson that creativity may arise from mechanical processes poses a genuine threat. The evasion of this possibility was thus a top priority for both writers, and this evasion left an indelible mark on their thought.

1.2 Art Without Men

Lewis's attacks on his fellow modernists have become minor legends. But while his critique of Joyce's "Bergsonism" in *Time and Western Man* has taken (for good and for ill) a central place in the collective memory of his literary criticism,[71] his attacks on Pound are surprisingly savage given their close friendship. In *Time and Western Man*,

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[70] Fredric Jameson, *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1979), 6.

[71] "The most powerful, and surely the best known, of [Lewis's] oppositions was Lewis's championship of space in aesthetics against time. . . . The modernists were obsessed with temporality, according to Lewis . . . [And] the supreme literary representative of this obsession was James Joyce" (Scott W. Klein, *The Fictions of James Joyce and Wyndham Lewis: Monsters of Nature and Design* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994], 2).

Lewis calls Pound a "revolutionary simpleton" and "a genuine *naïf*,"[72] and later in the same chapter writes that "Pound is enthroned as the master-poet of the absolutely *new* epoch; but all that was ever *new* of that showed any signs of wanting to evolve . . . has evaporated. . . . There was never anything *new* about Ezra . . ." (*TWM* 42). Later, in *Men Without Art*, Lewis's assessment of Pound becomes even more blunt: "Ezra," he writes in his chapter on T.S. Eliot, "is pure mechanism."[73] The critique here reads like the unveiling of a great deception: Pound's stature as "master-poet" functioning as a widespread error, a trick that has been played on the poetry-reading public. What Pound has claimed is that he is *new*, that is, *creative* in the sense of being non-mechanical, and his readers have eaten it up. Despite this claim, Pound, in Lewis's eye, has buried his mind in erudition, so that "the dead with whom he consorts in his quaint poetics are so numerous that they have numbed away any trace of originality."[74] So Lewis's role as "enemy" here means that he must step in to oppose the consensus, first to fulfill the role's performative demands, and second to save modernism from a potentially stultifying consensus (such as he sees in the "time-cult").

Though it takes up only a small section of a very large book, Lewis's critique of Pound has notable implications for his approach to dualism in the latter, more

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[72] Wyndham Lewis, *Time and Western Man*, ed. Paul Edwards (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1993), 37. Future citations will be parenthetical and indicated with "TWM."

[73] Wyndham Lewis, *Men Without Art* (London: Russell and Russell, 1964), 68.

[74] António M. Feijó, *Near Miss: A Study of Wyndham Lewis (1909-1930)* (New York: Peter Lang, 1998), 186.

philosophically-oriented half where the attacks on Bergson, Whitehead, Alexander, and the like, begin in earnest. Of particular note here is that, scattered among the various claims of Pound's non-existent creativity, is the claim that he had recently endorsed Futurism (*TWM* 40-41). Lewis bases this argument on an article in the *Christian Science Monitor* which mentions Pound promoting an alignment between industrial life and music. That it would be *this* which Lewis latches on to when trying to turn "Marinetti" into a four letter word makes sense when one remembers the nature of Lewis's criticism of the Futurists, and his reasoning in distancing them from his own (distinct, though aesthetically similar) Vorticist movement. In his memoir *Blasting and Bombardiering*, Lewis recalls an argument he had with Marinetti where he had claimed that "you Wops insist too much on the Machine."[75] Likewise, in his essay "Automobilism," Lewis critiqued "the childishness of the Latins over mechanical inventions," and said that the Futurist obsession with industrial machines had "nothing very new about it"[76] – a claim resembling Lewis's critique of Pound.

A notable trait of these anti-Futurist statements is their foregrounding of Marinetti's Italian origins, a nationalistic pigeon-hole that can often get quite specific – such as when Lewis points out that Marinetti is a "milanese prefascist" (*TWM* 41) rather than, say, one from Tuscany or Trieste. Lewis consistently associates the assumption of social roles with mechanical or deterministic processes of thought and action. As he specifies in *The Wild Body*, "the ideally 'free man' would be the man *least* stereotyped,

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[75] Wyndham Lewis, *Blasting and Bombardiering* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1937), 37.

[76] Wyndham Lewis, "Automobilism," in *Creatures of Habit and Creatures of Change: Essays on Art, Literature, and Society 1914-1956*, ed. Paul Edwards (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1989), 33.

the man approximating to the *fewest* classes, the *least* clamped into a system – in a word, the most individual."[77] On the other hand, as the Vorticist manifesto of *BLAST* contends, "the moment a man feels or realizes himself *as* an artist, he ceases to belong to any milieu or time."[78] From Lewis's earliest work, then, we have a dichotomy: the emancipated artist contrasted with the common person fixed into a role. National caricatures are one such role, and so this pattern of emphasizing Marinetti's origin in the process of critiquing his aesthetics, which Lewis repeats across multiple texts, appears to follow the same rhetorical strategy that Lewis deployed in attacking Pound. Marinetti is mechanical not only because he adores machines and industry, but also because he is (says Lewis) stereotypically Italian. Thus it would follow that Pound, in endorsing (implicitly or explicitly) a quasi-Futurist aesthetic, has allowed himself to fall into a way of making art derived from a predictable, mechanical pattern. Pound thereby reveals himself to be as uncreative as any other "Bergsonian" writer Lewis pillories in *Time and Western Man*.

The attack on Pound helps to focus exactly what Lewis is trying to accomplish in his massive and varied philosophical-critical tome. Its diversity of targets and arguments makes finding a common thread difficult, but what unites much of the work (at least rhetorically) is a repeated overturning, a structure of arguing that holds that those who say that they oppose the mechanism of modern society (be they Pound, or Joyce, or Bergson) are in fact perpetuating the very crimes they criticize. There is a resemblance

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[77] Lewis, *The Complete Wild Body*, 167.

[78] Wyndham Lewis, ed. *BLAST 1* (Berkeley: Gingko Press, 2009), np. It is also worth pointing out that the statements on humour under both "BLAST" and "BLESS" specifically refer to *English* humour, rather than humour in general (17, 26).

then to the satirical aims of *The Apes of God*, Lewis's immense *roman á clef*, which attacks the many "apes" of the London intelligentsia (principally Bloomsbury and the Sitwells) for claiming that they are artists, when their artistry is merely affective, the assumption of a *role*. Pound and the Sitwells are, according to Lewis, guilty of two counts. First, in their aesthetic practice they promote modes of art that are essentially anti-creative, falling out of the high place that Lewis affords the artist into the domain of mere machines. Second, and most serious of all, is that in promoting their methods *as* artistic and *as* creative, they attack the very terms of Lewis's hierarchy, transforming "non-conformity" into a role unto itself, and thereby crowding out the genuinely free. Hence Lewis's desperation to distinguish himself from Marinetti,[79] which culminated in him and several other Vorticists crashing a London lecture, an event that Lewis describes in terms of a military action: "Marinetti had entrenched himself upon a high lecture platform, and he put down a tremendous barrage in French as we entered. Gaudier went into action at once. . . . He was sniping him without intermission . . . The remainder of our party maintained a confused uproar."[80] This would not be the only attack. In a letter

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[79] These various attempts seem to have been only partially successful, as Vorticism and Futurism continued to be lumped together by scholarship published well after Lewis's death. For example, Jeffrey Herf writes that "the avant-garde associated technology with a new antibourgeois vitalism, masculine violence and eros, and the will to power . . . Marinetti and the futurists in Italy, Wyndham Lewis and Ezra Pound in England . . . were all drawn to right-wing politics partly out of their views on technology" (*Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984], 47).

[80] Lewis, *Blasting and Bombardiering*, 36.

signed by many of the most prominent Vorticists and published in a June 1914 issue of *The Observer*, Lewis put his displeasure with Futurism on the public record, writing that "there are certain artists in England . . . who do not . . . agree with the futurism of Sig. Marinetti."[81] This division between the artist and the machine cannot, it seems, be permitted to blur – a point that will become important in my later analysis of *The Childermass*.

The problem of deception and the problem of mechanism are therefore joined at the hip, in that they both undermine the creative/mechanical hierarchy that is a cornerstone of Lewis's dualism. And it is because of this convergence that Lewis can critique Pound's supposed lack of creativity in the early section of *Time and Western Man* and then later in the same book critique the behaviourism of John Watson in largely the same terms – "you are sorry for Professor Watson: he has to say the same things over and over again: for the whole of what he effectively has to say can be put into two lines. It is the last, monotonous, dogged negation of scientific or critical philosophy" – and also in the terms with which he attacked Marinetti – "Watson could have existed in no time or place except modern industrial America" (*TWM* 319). Behaviourism, through the synecdoche of its inventor, becomes the one-trick pony of a "revolutionary simpleton," and the emblem of a stereotypically American mindset (an assumption that tacitly ignores Watson's debt to the Russian Ivan Pavlov). This is but one of many swipes that Lewis would take at behaviourist psychology, which as popularized by Watson took as its goal "the prediction and control of behavior" and which "recognizes <u>no dividing line between</u>

[81] Wyndham Lewis, *The Letters of Wyndham Lewis*, ed. W.K. Rose (London: Methuen, 1965), 62.

man and brute."[82] Lewis turned his satirical eye to behaviourism most directly with his 1932 novel *Snooty Baronet*, but we can encounter assaults on the doctrine in his non-fiction from much earlier than that.

The growing popularity of behaviourism in psychology through the early twentieth century can be seen as something of a disaster for Lewis's intellectual goals. Its deterministic monism makes it a clear example of what Lewis saw as science's tendency to "regard life as a machine" (*ABR* 12) and to "[make] us *strangers* to ourselves" (*ABR* 13). But most insidious was the way behaviourism destroyed the hierarchies that Lewis spent so much of his time advocating. "Behaviourism," writes Paul Scott Stanfield, "allowed for no exceptions, and for Lewis it was precisely on the exceptions that all depended."[83] Indeed, Lewis's attacks on behaviourism, and Watson in particular, often take on the hint of a straw-man argument.[84] But it is in the similarity between the critique of Watson and the attacks on Pound and Marinetti that we can start to see the lines of rhetorical similarity that draw together the heterogeneous bundle that is *Time and Western Man* – and also the larger project, *The Man and the World*, that it was part of. Repetition (Pound/Watson) and adherence to a national character (Watson/Marinetti) become for Lewis evidence of a pervasive mechanistic thought. If the goal of the

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[82] John B. Watson, "Psychology as the Behaviourist Views It" *Psychology Review* 20.2 (1913): 158.

[83] Paul Scott Stanfield, "'This Implacable Doctrine': Behaviourism in Wyndham Lewis's 'Snooty Baronet'" *Twentieth Century Literature* 47.2 (2001): 250.

[84] As Eric M. Bachman writes, "Watson's behaviourism often constructs machines of humans to make a point, but such analogies are themselves not *the* point, as they so often are in Lewis's satirical fiction." ("How to Misbehave as a Behaviourist (If You're Wyndham Lewis)" *Textual Practice* 28.3 [2014]: 440.)

Vorticist artist is to become established "beyond Action and Reaction,"[85] then both Pound and Marinetti, by Lewis's estimation, have failed to live up to the role.

In this sense, Watson and (to a lesser extent) Marinetti are at least honest in their intentions, stating their positions outright in their respective manifestos. For Pound, Bergson, and others, Lewis must uncover (successfully or otherwise) a hidden monism that lurks behind professions to the contrary. One of the constant refrains in Lewis's mode of critique was that "all those expedients by which modern writers sought to encompass value . . . were themselves no more than ideological expressions of the processes by which modern citizens were kept childish and powerless."[86] Modernity figures in Lewis's thought as a mass deception, and so in at least some respects Watson and his followers are un-deceived. Yet their ideas abandon the essential dualism, the internal division of the mind, that Lewis thought was necessary to maintain an individualistic personality. As he writes in the second issue of *BLAST*, "you must catch the clearness and logic in the midst of contradictions: <u>not</u> settle down and snooze on an acquired, easily possessed and mastered, satisfying shape."[87] The contradictions in the short manifesto from which I take this line, in which Lewis at once calls for the embrace of machines while also claiming that they are the key to individuation, speak to the difficulties Lewis must grapple with as he tries to prop up the house he has built on dualism. As Lewis comments in a short piece called "Life Has No Taste," "the best artist

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[85] Lewis, *Blast 1*, 30.

[86] Paul Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis: Painter and Writer* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 324.

[87] Wyndham Lewis, ed. *Blast 2* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1981), 91.

is an imperfect artist" – art that is perfect becomes "dilettante" inexorably. Thus, while one "should be human about EVERYTHING" the artist must also be "inhuman about only a few things."[88] The drive to perfection is thus a drive towards the very self-deceptions that Lewis attacked in *The Apes of God*. The undivided and self-consistent mindset of a "perfect" artist begins to resemble the likewise undivided and predictable mindset of a behaviourist.

It is in this sense possible, by looking at Lewis's philosophical writings through the lens of his rejection of monism and its related philosophies, to see the line that connects his anti-behaviourist stance to his attack on such seemingly unrelated figures as Whitehead and Bergson. Surely, one would think, a philosopher like Bergson, so often categorized (dismissively or admiringly) with the vitalists,[89] could not be attacked in the same breath as Watson, Pavlov, and Skinner. And yet we see Lewis attack Bergson (while lumping him in with Einstein) for not being vitalist enough: "under the characteristic headings of Duration and Relativity the nineteenth-century mechanistic belief has now assumed its final form" (*TFW* 84), then writing later that "the theoretical

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[88] *Ibid*, 82.

[89] For an example of a contemporary attack on Bergson in terms of his vitalism, see Bertrand Russell, "Philosophy in the Twentieth Century," in *Sceptical Essays* (London: Routledge, 2004 [1928]), 51-52. For a more approving inclusion of Bergson with the vitalists, see Hans Driesch, *The History and Theory of Vitalism*, trans. C.K. Ogden (London: MacMillan, 1914), 182. Another useful primary source on Bergson's reception as a vitalist is the debate between Russel and H. Wildon Carr contained in *The Philosophy of Bergson* (London: MacMillan, 1914). While Bergson's categorization as a vitalist is not unproblematic it is clear from a cursory glance of the contemporary debates around him that his philosophy was read and reacted to in those terms.

truth that the time-philosophy affirms is a mechanistic one" (*TFW* 91). The comparison between Bergson's philosophy and the Victorian variety of mechanism is rather ironic considering Bergson's own rejection of Herbert Spencer.[90] But it does fit the rhetorical pattern already sketched out, in which Lewis claims that someone thought to be on the side of dualistic vitalism is revealed beneath his gaze to have been a mechanist all along. The specific reasons for this argument come down in large part to Bergson's elimination of Lewis's precious hierarchy.

What Lewis accuses the "time philosophers" of following is often not, strictly speaking, vitalism, but rather a related philosophy called *panpsychism*, or the belief that some form of consciousness, soul, or vitality is present in all forms of matter.[91] The intricacies of panpsychist thought and their relationship to modernism are quite complex, and I deal with them in more detail in my second chapter, but for the purposes of Lewis's argument panpsychism is essentially monism achieved by other means. Dualism, broadly speaking, defines two separate entities – mind and matter – and argues that they are ontologically separate and parallel. Mechanism and panpsychism are both monistic, the first by extracting mind from matter and the second by flooding matter with mind. While the appropriateness of tarring Bergson with this brush is at best debatable, it is true that

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[90] Mary Ann Gillies, *Henry Bergson and British Modernism* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1996), 30-31.

[91] A similar assessment of Bergson's philosophy persists in more recent scholarship. See Omri Moses's assessment that "taken as a whole, Bergson's philosophy . . . erodes the boundaries between life and nonlife and grants virtuality to the entire spectrum of the universe" (*Out of Character: Modernism, Vitalism, Psychic Life* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014], 208).

his theory of *élan vital* does not rise to the levels of hierarchy that Lewis's philosophy demands. According to *Creative Evolution*, *élan vital* drives the entire process of Darwinian evolution, and so it follows that anything that has evolved is also possessed of this vitality. It is a qualified egalitarianism very similar to what he expressed in "Good Sense and Classical Studies," in that it creates a division and a hierarchical relationship, but one that still places most of humanity on the "good" side of the line. (Recall that for Bergson, the automatic behaviour that elicits laughter is *not* the norm, whereas for Lewis it *is*.)

Whitehead's philosophy of "organism" as expressed in *Science and the Modern World*[92] earns Lewis's censure for similar reasons. Critiquing vitalism (though not Bergson specifically) Whitehead calls the position "an unsatisfactory compromise" between the proponents of mechanism and those who would prefer to see a place for free will to exist – unsatisfactory because "the gap between living and dead matter is too vague and problematical to bear the weight of such an arbitrary assumption, which involves an essential dualism somewhere."[93] Thus, Lewis attacks Whitehead, whose "hypothesis . . . leads to the assumption of an equal reality in everything, a democratically distributed reality, as it were" (*TWM* 425-26), terms quite similar to those he uses to attack Bergson's "Time-doctrine" a scant few pages earlier (*TWM* 421). These

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[92] It is unfortunate that *Time and Western Man* predates the publication of Whitehead's *Process and Reality* by two years, since Whitehead's clarification of his panpsychism reinstates the possibility for some kind of hierarchical relationship (Steven Shaviro, *The Universe of Things: On Speculative Realism* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014], 79).

[93] Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (New York: Free Press, 1967), 79.

hints of ontological equality are simply too much for Lewis, whose political analysis rests on the contrast between "the single figure of the privileged king with the subservient Many,"[94] a division that must be clear and distinct if it is to function.

1.3 "The Fossilized Residue of a Spiritual Activity"

In Bergson's philosophy, creativity is a matter of no small importance. From its earliest development as a key portion of Bergson's thought in *Time and Free Will* to its eventual role as a cornerstone of Bergson's argument in *Creative Evolution*, questions of what creativity is, how it works, and whether it is possible ceaselessly drive the development and growth of Bergson's system. That it would eventually be Darwin who provided the basis for Bergson's fullest explication on creativity in retrospect seems strange, considering the extent to which the theory allowed scientists to fill in the many gaps in our understanding of how life developed and change, shrinking the domain of ignorance within which earlier vitalist and quasi-vitalist philosophies had found a ready agnotological home. From Friedrich Wöhler's synthesis of urea in 1828 – which disproved the argument that organic compounds could not arise from inorganic ones[95] – the various knowledge gaps that vitalists of centuries past had used to justify themselves began to fall one by one beneath the steamroller of scientific discovery. That evolution, the crown jewel of Victorian science, holds such a ready place in Bergson's thought thus appears at first glance counter-intuitive.

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[94] Vincent Sherry, *Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, and Radical Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 118.

[95] For more details, see E. Kinne-Saffran and R.K.H. Kinne, "Vitalism and the Synthesis of Urea: From Friedrich Wöhler to Hans A. Krebs" *American Journal of Nephrology* 19.2 (1999): 290-94.

The answer becomes clearer in light of Deleuze's essay "Bergson's Conception of Difference." As Deleuze writes:

> Biology shows us the process of differentiation at work. . . . Life is the process of difference. In this instance, Bergson is thinking less of embryological differentiation than the differentiation of species, i.e. evolution. . . . Opposing a particular mechanism, Bergson shows that vital difference is an *internal* difference. Furthermore, he shows that internal difference cannot be conceived as simple *determination* . . . it is [instead] indetermination itself.[96]

An important point to remember while interpreting this passage in relation to Bergson's larger philosophy (and its origins) is that, despite what many of his contemporaries and later interpreters would argue, Bergson emphatically denied that he was a vitalist. Rather, as he says in a 1935 letter to Floris Delattre, he sees *élan vital* as a middle ground between mechanism and finalism. "The image of an *élan*," he writes, "is nothing other than this indication" (*KW* 367). What ties mechanism and finalism together is their insistence that the future is already in some ways defined – either in the chain of causality branching off from an original state (mechanism) or a teleology that processes inexorably follow into the future (finalism). Both systems, furthermore, posit themselves as non-agnotologies, in which every black box has been opened and all contents are known. The key to finding this middle ground is Bergson's dualism. In *Matter and Memory*, the mind

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[96] Gilles Deleuze, "Bergson's Conception of Difference," in *Desert Islands and Other Texts 1953-1974*, ed. David Lapoujade, trans. Michael Taormina (New York: Semiotext(e), 2004), 39-40.

is emphatically a unitary entity, and its indivisibility is contrasted with the perpetually divisible multiplicity of matter (*MM* 235). It is from the relation between the two that allows creativity to occur. Importantly, Bergson draws a line between creative thought and pure spontaneity, which he says would resemble too much "the case in the animal" (*MM* 243). Instead, free and creative actions are possible because of a synthesis of external multiplicities through intuition.

The result is what Bergson refers to as "becoming in general, i.e. a becoming which is not the becoming of any particular thing."[97] In the works leading up to *Creative Evolution*, Bergson established a model for creative action in which mental and physical forces continually push against each other, making and unmaking themselves and thereby creating a space of flux which is neither random nor determinate. Thus, when we see Bergson oppose intuition to intellect in *Creative Evolution* – "intuition goes in the very direction of life, intellect goes in the inverse direction, and thus finds itself naturally in accordance with the movement of matter"[98] – we encounter the fullest expression of a long-developing system. And when this form of creativity is folded into the theory of evolution to become the "impulse which thrusts life into the world" (*CE* 132), it functions more like a *drive* rather than an entity, as that which ensures that "the future is not the selection from a number of possibilities but the continual creation of unforeseen and

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[97] Henri Bergson, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. T.E. Hulme (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999), 41.

[98] Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (New York: Dover, 1998), 267. Future citations will be parenthetical and indicated with "CE."

diverging trajectories."[99] Bergson's vision of evolution thus looks quite a lot like that of the Situationist *dérive* – aimless but purposeful, creative yet guided by the environment, forward-moving but with nowhere to go.

A major issue that this model runs into is that it essentially takes dualism as an axiom. It is not necessitated *by* Bergson's philosophy so much as it functions as a pre-condition *for* it. Deleuze's book on Bergson makes frequent mention of its implicit monism. He writes that Bergson's dualism is "only a moment, which must lead to the re-formation of a monism . . . just as integration follows differentiation."[100] Later Deleuze mentions that "the Bergsonian method has shown two main aspects, the one dualist, the other monist,"[101] and then goes on to point to what he sees in *Duration and Simultaneity* as "a monism of time."[102] This is the first of many ways in which Bergson's thought resembles that of Lewis: his dualism doth protest too much. Explaining why involves recourse to two major nineteenth century philosophers whose influences on Bergson are as indelible as they are often overlooked – Herbert Spencer and Félix Ravaisson. As far as I have been able to find, Bergson only mentions Ravaisson in three of his published

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[99] Claire Colebrook, "Bergson on Evolution," in *Understanding Bergson, Understanding Modernism* eds. Paul Ardoin, S.E. Gontarski, and Laci Mattison (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 306.

[100] Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Cambridge: Zone Books, 2006), 29.

[101] *Ibid*, 73.

[102] *Ibid*, 79.

works. The first two are off-hand citations in *Matter and Memory* (*MM* 232n) and his 1889 short thesis on Aristotle,[103] which has yet to be translated from Latin into English.

The third example, an essay called "The Life and Works of Ravaisson," was delivered as a speech in 1904, published in a journal later that year, and then re-edited and published as an introduction to a 1932 study of Ravaisson's works. I include this summary of the essay's publication for two reasons. First, because that 1904 presentation coincides with the period when Lewis was in Paris and, still "militantly vitalist,"[104] was attending Bergson's presentations in earnest.[105] Second, I mention this history to draw attention to a footnote appended to the 1932 version of the essay, as reproduced in *The Creative Mind*, which includes a quote from the publication committee for the book that the essay introduced: "The author had at first thought of making a few revisions. Then he decided to re-edit these pages as they were, even though they remain, as he says, exposed to the accusation . . . of having ever so slightly 'Bergsonized' Ravaisson."[106] This accusation is in fact too kind, particularly when it comes to Bergson's summary of Ravaisson's theory of habit. Reading Bergson's summary and comparing to what Ravaisson says in *Of Habit*, one may wonder whether Bergson had read a different book entirely.

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[103] Henri Bergson, *Quid Aristoteles de loco senserit* (PhD diss. University of Paris, 1889), 1n1.

[104] Lewis, *Rude Assignment*, 125.

[105] Lewis's time in Paris stretched from 1902 to 1908 (Gillies, *Bergson and British Modernism*, 50).

[106] Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics* (New York: Dover, 2007), 223n34.

The essay tries to cover all of Ravaisson's life and work in very few pages, and even within those bounds treats *Of Habit* like an afterthought. Yet what little it has said has had a strong influence on Ravaisson's subsequent reception.[107] One passage bears quoting:

> [M]otor habit, once contracted, is a mechanism, a series of movements which determine one another: it is that part of us which is inserted into nature and which coincides with nature; it is nature itself. . . . [passing] from consciousness to unconsciousness and from will to automatism. Should we not then imagine nature, in this form, as an obscured consciousness and a dormant will? Habit thus gives us the living demonstration of this truth, that mechanism is not sufficient to itself: it is, so to speak, only the fossilized residue of a spiritual activity.[108]

The effect of this summary is to figure Ravaisson as one of Bergson's predecessors, through a kind of Bloomian *Apophrades*. It is, like the rest of the section on *Of Habit*, characteristically short on details and specificity, lacking the comparatively deep analysis Bergson's provides in his section on Ravaisson's book on Aristotle. It maintains a dualist approach to habit, aligning it with "nature" in a way that implicitly excludes the rest of human thought from the natural world. It's mention of nature having "obscured

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[107] For an account of Ravaisson's philosophy and its reception, see Mark Sinclair, "Ravaisson and the Force of Habit" *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 49.1 (2011): 65-85.

[108] Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, 197-198.

consciousness," seemingly in line with accusation of panpsychism, also appears to fold Ravaisson in to *élan vital*, anticipating *Creative Evolution*'s publication in 1907. Finally, it segues into Bergson's usual degradation of habit, which is only the "residue" of a higher kind of thought.

This approach to habit is common in philosophy, where it is (for lack of a better word) habitually associated with thoughtless, mechanical behaviour, necessarily opposed to creativity. Similar ways of talking about habit, and the association between materiality and spiritual deadness, appear before Bergson and Ravaisson, in Descartes,[109] Hume,[110]

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[109] See meditation six in René Descartes, *Meditation on First Philosophy, with Selections from the Objections and Replies*, ed. and trans. John Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996). For more information see Sarah Patterson, "Descartes on Nature, Habit and the Corporeal World" *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 87.1 (2013): 235-58.

[110] "[A person] immediately infers the existence of one object from the appearance of the other. Yet he has not . . . by any process of reasoning . . . [been] engaged to draw this inference. But he still finds himself determined to draw it: And though he should be convinced, that his understanding has no part in the operation, he would nevertheless continue . . . This principle is CUSTOM or HABIT." (David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter Millican [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007], 31-32.)

Kant,[111] and after them as well in Lyotard[112] among others. It is not, however, the approach of Ravaisson, whose idea of habit instead elevates the faculty of habit from the mechanical "residue" of conscious activity to the very seat of creativity and free will. What other philosophers identify in habit as a dulling thoughtlessness, the propensity towards mechanical behaviour, Ravaisson identifies as a substratum of predictability from which one may vary, and which is a *precondition* for creativity rather than an opponent. As he argues:

> The general effect of the continuity and repetition of change that the living being receives from something other than itself is that, if the change does not destroy it, it is always less and less altered by that change. . . . The change that has come from the outside becomes more and more foreign to it; the change that it has brought upon itself

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[111] "But virtue is not to be defined and valued merely as an *aptitude* and . . . a long-standing *habit* of morally good actions acquired by practice. For unless this aptitude results from considered, firm, and continually purified principles, then, like any other mechanism of technically practiced reason, it is neither armed for all situations nor adequately secured against the changes that new temptations could bring about." (Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals,* ed. and trans. Mary Gregor [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991], 189.)

[112] "[M]atter is the failure of thought, the inert mass of stupidity." (Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988], 38.) For further discussion, see Craig A. Gordon, *Literary Modernism, Bioscience, and Community in Early 20th Century Britain* (New York: Palgrave, 2007), 14-17.

> becomes more and more proper to it. Receptivity diminishes and spontaneity increases.[113]

This process still occurs within a hierarchy, but not one based on a dualistic split between mind and matter. Rather, Ravaisson distinguishes between the "inorganic realm" where existence is deterministic and "Nature" which, because of habit, possesses spontaneity,[114] and for this reason his work has in this way been read as a precursor to the idea of brain plasticity.[115] In practice, the division he draws is largely between different levels of complexity and predictability, and is somewhat similar to the philosophies of "organism" that Lewis critiques in *Time and Western Man*. The division, then, is largely a matter of degree between simple and complex processes, and is thus implicitly monist. He therefore shows a way "to conceive freedom not as opposed to nature, but rather as inhabiting or animating the natural body in the form of inclinations or tendencies."[116]

Bergson's reading of Ravaisson, which treats him as simply another dualistic philosopher whose ideas on free will are best read as precursors to Bergson's own, is

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[113] Félix Ravaisson, *Of Habit*, trans. Clare Carlisle and Mark Sinclair (London: Continuum, 2008), 37. Bilingual edition.

[114] *Ibid*, 29-31.

[115] Leandro M. Gaitán and Javier S. Castrosana, "On Habit and the Mind-Body Problem. The View of Felix Ravaisson," *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 8 (2014): 2. Catherine Malabou also incorporates Ravaisson into her writings on plasticity, drawing attention to the fact that Ravaisson's understanding of habit rests on the presumption that change and alteration are possible (Catherine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality, and Dialectic*, trans. Lisabeth During [London: Routledge, 2005], 57-58).

[116] Sinclair, 80.

therefore an almost complete misrepresentation. I say "almost" however because Bergson is in a sense correct in figuring Ravaisson as his predecessor. Ravaisson's habit is similar to Bergson's duration, in that both were proposed as ways to distinguish free action from simple randomness, with both fulfilling the role of "the dividing line . . . between will and nature."[117] Omri Moses's observation that *élan vital* resembles less an impulse than "a plastic and malleable tendency or disposition"[118] speaks in large part to the Ravaissonian presence in Bergson's work. Likewise, Ravaisson's emphasis on the distinction between multiplicity and homogeneity, and on the importance of time, find clear echoes in Bergson's *Time and Free Will*.[119] But while, as a commentator on Bergson wrote in 1913, "Bergson's philosophy bears a close genealogical relation" to Ravaisson's,[120] that relation does not follow the contours Bergson sketches in his essay, but rather a more complex pattern of disavowal and re-incorporation. And yet Bergson never acknowledges these similarities, and in the end seemingly tries to bury Ravaisson's argument. While it is impossible to know for sure what Bergson was thinking when he produced his mis-reading, and then allowed that mis-reading to remain in subsequent editions of the text after it was pointed out, one important side-effect of this Bergsonized version of

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[117] Ravaisson, *Of Habit*, 59.

[118] Moses, *Out of Character*, 53.

[119] These echoes have been noted by the translators of the English edition (Clare Carlisle and Mark Sinclair, "Editors' Commentary," in *Of Habit* [London: Continuum, 2008], 113).

[120] Arthur O. Lovejoy, "Some Antecedents of the Philosophy of Bergson: The Conception of 'Real Duration,'" *Mind: A Quarterly of Psychology and Philosophy* 22.10 (1913): 467.

Ravaisson is that it removes a number of parallels between this philosophy of habit and the account of how consciousness works in the writing of Herbert Spencer.

I have not chosen Spencer arbitrarily, but rather because of his powerful early influence on Bergson's thought. Like Lewis, Bergson's philosophical development is marked by a powerful early attachment to a famous thinker who they later abandoned. And, like Lewis, Bergson's rejection of Spencer retains a spectral presence in his philosophy – primarily in the form of particular philosophical images. As Bergson writes in a 1908 letter to William James, he was "completely steeped in the mechanistic theories" he found in Spencer, to which he "adhered more or less unreservedly" until the period of 1881-83, when he had left the *École Normale* and began to examine the weak understanding of time present in Spencer's theories – an examination that culminated in his concept of duration and the composition of *Time and Free Will* (*KW* 362-63). It is in this rejection of Spencer that we encounter a possible origin of Bergson's reflexive disparagement of mechanism and reductionist theories of consciousness.

Bergson's early infatuation with Spencer is understandable given the vast breadth of his influence in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – to a degree that is difficult to imagine in light of the low status currently afforded to his ideas. Michael W. Taylor, in his introduction to Spencer's philosophy, provides a summary of the extent of Spencer's reach.[121] One particularly luminous detail is an assessment provided by the author Grant Allen in 1904: "his *First Principles* place him in line as a cosmologist with Newton and Laplace, his *Biology* as a naturalist with Cuvier and Darwin, his *Psychology*

[121] Michael W. Taylor, *The Philosophy of Herbert Spencer* (London: Continuum, 2007), 1-27.

as a mental philosophy in front of Kant and Hegel, his *Sociology* as the founder of a new and profound science before all his contemporaries."[122] Not even the most fanatical Bergsonists ever wrote such nonsense. Such ecstatic praise ought to indicate that Tom Quirk's assessment that Bergson "was as much a popular phenomenon as he was a serious philosopher"[123] applies equally well to Spencer, if not more so.

In terms of Bergson's relation to Ravaisson, and by extension his relation to monism, the most notable aspect of Spencer's thought is his philosophy of habit. First, Spencer believed strongly in the power of scientific reductionism, writing in his *First Principles* that "when you learn that the changes undergone by food during digestion, are like the changes artificially producible in the laboratory; you regard yourself as *knowing* something about the natures of these phenomena."[124] He followed not merely a pragmatic reductionism, in which one breaks down a process into its component parts so to make a highly complex system understandable, but rather what Daniel Dennett terms "greedy reductionism," in which an understanding of the base components of a process is mistaken for the an understanding of that process *in itself*.[125] For Spencer the most elemental form of thought was the reflex action,[126] which had been identified earlier in

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[122] Quoted in Taylor, 1.

[123] Tom Quirk, *Bergson and American Culture: The Worlds of Willa Cather and Wallace Stevens* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 85.

[124] Herbert Spencer, *First Principles* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1976), 58.

[125] Daniel C. Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 82.

[126] Taylor, 78.

the century as a physical process originating in the spinal cord.[127] This argument dovetailed with another, in which Spencer held that "life is definable as the continuous adjustment of internal relations to external relations" so that "even the highest generalizations of science consist of mental relations of co-existence and sequence."[128] Consciousness, "inclusive of intelligence in its highest forms,"[129] was thus understandable only in terms of a complex relationship of reflex actions that allowed the "internal relations" of the body to adjust to the vagrancies of the environment.

While Ravaisson's theory of habit is not nearly so simplistic, but it is similar to Spencer in several key ways. Both implicitly place human beings in what Manuel DeLanda has called a "flat ontology," a concept he defined in his book *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy*, and which has been recently picked up and extended by speculative realist philosophers like Levi Bryant and Ian Bogost. As DeLanda writes, "an ontology based on relations between general types and particular instances is *hierarchical*, each level representing a different ontological category . . . [while] an approach in terms of interacting parts and emergent wholes leads to a *flat ontology*" in which all entities share equal ontological status.[130] As Bryant summarizes, "flat ontology signifies that *the* world or *the* universe does not exist . . . there is no super-object that

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[127] Edwin Clarke and L.S. Jacyna, *Nineteenth Century Origins of Neuroscientific Concepts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 109.

[128] Spencer, 68.

[129] *Ibid*, 69.

[130] Manuel DeLanda, *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy* (London: Continuum, 2002), 47.

gathers all other objects together in a single, harmonious entity."[131] This is not to say that one cannot recognize quantitative differences between entities, as both Spencer and Ravaisson do to some extent.[132] But what one *cannot* be while promoting a flat ontology is a dualist, and certainly not a vitalist, since the whole crux of dualism is to establish a split between mind and matter on an ontological level, usually for the purpose of exalting human intelligence in comparison to inanimate things.

In rejecting Spencer's mechanism to the extent that he did, Bergson abandoned (or at least tried to abandon) the possibility of a flat ontology. While, as Deleuze suggests, some of Spencer's monism remains in trace amounts through Bergson's philosophy, his surface-level dualism forced him to reject the thrust of Ravaisson's argument even as he incorporated a shadow of "habit" through his concept of duration. The rejection of flat ontology (both Spencerian and Ravaissonian), then, serves as a guiding image of Bergson's thought, as reflected in *Laughter*. Bergson's treatment of laughter as a policing mechanism to ensure that one never falls victim to the dangers of habitual action (*L* 5) elevates non-mechanistic behaviour and thought in a way that neither Ravaisson nor Spencer would have permitted. What Bergson does with mind – and what Lewis would take even further – is the inverse of what Spencer did. Comparing the way consciousness is treated in *Laughter* and *First Principles*, we encounter

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[131] Levi R. Bryant, *The Democracy of Objects* (Ann Arbor: Open Humanities Press, 2011), 246.

[132] As Bogost writes in this regard, "all things equally exist, yet they do not exist equally" (Ian Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology, or What It's Like to Be a Thing* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012], 11).

examples of what Graham Harman calls "undermining" and "overmining."[133] These terms are related to the concept of flat ontology, in that both have to do with the elevation of certain kinds of entities to higher ontological status than others. Undermining in this sense can be seen as doing ontologically what "greedy reductionism" does epistemologically, in that it essentially treats the components of an object or process as more important or valid than the whole (as Spencer does with consciousness). Overmining is the opposite – disregarding or ignoring the component parts of something while elevating the whole (in *Laughter*, Lewis, and with vitalists generally).

We can therefore see the difficulty that Bergson faced when trying to define the mechanisms of creative thought. The path Ravaisson charts, which comes far closer to escaping undermining and overmining than Spencer, was cut off when Bergson rejected monism. Yet, as Bergson's disclaiming of vitalism in his letter to Floris Delattre indicates, he continued to search for a dualist version of this middle way until late in his career. What is needed is a dualism which does not overmine consciousness, and Bergson seems to approach that in the concept of duration, and in his emphasis on "internal difference" giving rise to non-determinate effects. But the dualism upon which this system rests is built on sand, derived, it would seem, more from Bergson's rejection of Spencer than from anything necessitated by the system itself. We encounter a hint of this problem in Bergson's characterization of *élan vital*, as a concept that "may indeed not explain much," but is "at least a sort of label affixed to our ignorance, so as to remind us of this occasionally, while mechanism invites us to ignore that ignorance" (*CE* 42). This

[133] Graham Harman, *The Quadruple Object* (Washington: Zero Books, 2011), 7-19.

admission suggests a hidden monism: that both *élan vital* and mechanism orbit around a void in our knowledge, with the *élan*'s only claim to superiority is its Socratic claim to know that it knows nothing.

Having thus charted the ways in which Bergson's own thought has been affected by his rejection of Spencer and his burial of Ravaisson, we can see more easily how Lewis, ever the Bergsonian, followed a very similar path. His overmining of consciousness, combined with his political ideas, intensifies both his reliance on an axiomatic dualism and the ever-present shadow of a monism very much like that which trailed his disavowed predecessor.

1.4 Herod's Children

> I think everyone who has tried to write or talk about *The Childermass* has found himself in the same hole . . . We don't know – to an agonizing degree we are not allowed to know – what it is all about. That very ignorance may be, of course, what it is all about.
>
> — I.A. Richards[134]

One of the chief presumptions that underlies a resistance to monist philosophical approaches to human thought is that freedom and creativity need to be inexplicable. They are said to gain power from their unknowability, from their agnotological function. True, Bergson did not subscribe to this assumption, and his idea of duration attempted to provide a mechanism without being mechanistic, but as far as Lewis was concerned this

[134] I.A. Richards, "A Talk on 'The Childermass'" *Agenda* 7.3-8.1 (1969-70): 16. A published version of a talk originally broadcast on BBC Radio's Third Programme (now BBC Radio 3) on 10 March, 1952.

attempt ended in failure. Bergsonism, and the other "time-philosophies" Lewis attacks, come under fire first and foremost for their supposed crypto-mechanism, a hidden monism that Lewis thought only artists could be truly free of. In terms of Lewis's fiction, we can see the demands of this inexplicability most directly in *The Childermass*, and in *The Childermass* too we can also see its failure. As I argue in this section, the apparent randomness and discord of the novel's world, and the apparently dualistic assumptions that it inherits from Lewis's non-fiction, break down to reveal a shadow of its opposite. In many ways, then, Lewis's intellectual trajectory mirrors that of Bergson – in his rejection of a famous intellectual advocating a (allegedly, in Bergson's case) deterministic theory of consciousness, the adoption of a hierarchical dualism, and the continuing hints of a flat ontology that remain.

In *The Childermass*, the mechanical processes of plot are, in Hugh Kenner's term, "truncate[d]" by the erasure of narrative time, [135] creating inexplicability on the surface which does not extend to the depths. To see how this works we must examine the origin of the novel's title. Childermas is a Christian feast day commemorating the king Herod's massacre of all the children under the age of two living in the vicinity of Bethlehem, and usually occurs in late December. The holiday is otherwise known as the Feast of the Holy Innocents. The massacre of the innocents appears exclusively in the Gospel of Matthew, and is rendered in the King James Version thusly:

> Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise
> men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the

[135] Hugh Kenner, *Wyndham Lewis* (New York: New Directions, 1954), 9.

> children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wise men.[136]

Herod is, of course, in search of the infant Christ, who he believes will overthrow him, and also for the wise men, who have evaded capture by taking a different route home than the one they took to arrive. Both groups were able to escape because they had received a warning in a dream. The massacre is, in fact, bookended by successful prophecies – the birth of Christ and the warning in the passages before, and the resolution of a prediction by the prophet Jeremiah (who foresaw the massacre's aftermath) in the passages immediately after. The passage quoted above, on the other hand, shows Herod going to extreme lengths to *avoid* a prediction, to snuff out the insurrection he believes is brewing in his territory. As Bergson makes clear, determinism is linked to the capacity to make predictions (*TFW* 143-44), and this attempt to escape determination not only fails – Herod's quarry escapes – but would have been completely meaningless to Herod's continued reign even if it had succeeded. As the narrator goes on to say, Herod dies completely of his own accord long before Christ was old enough to even potentially challenge him.

I include this brief interlude of Biblical exegesis in part because the second possible meaning of the title is far more obvious. "The massacre of the innocents" could work just as well as the name for World War One as it does for the story of Herod, and the protagonists of the novel's first section, Pullman and Satters, appear to have died in

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[136] Matt. 2:16.

that very war. But Herod here also takes the form of a Lewisian wild body, someone struggling against mechanization and predictability, against the determinism implied by the existence of prophecy, whose inability to transcend his own mechanistic nature ends in disaster. He is what Lewis would later refer to as "the man-of-action" who "can neither *understand* nor *feel*" because "he is too busy."[137] Herod proceeds, in less than a sentence, from discovering he has been tricked to massacring every infant in his domain. This is not the sort of thoughtlessness that arises from continually repeated action (presumably he does not produce these massacres on a regular basis) but a thoughtlessness that comes from striving towards a goal, specifically the goal of exceeding his own determination.

It does not take much examination to see how the lost souls that populate *The Childermass* fulfill this model. The novel takes place in the afterlife, in a vast desert that surrounds "the magnetic city" – a paradise in "the heavenly north" (*TC* 5) that all of the dead strive unceasingly to reach (or so it seems prior to the events of the later novels). A huge mass of them converge on a single door guarded by the Bailiff, an embodiment of the "time-philosophy" that Lewis described in *Time and Free Will.* The gate to the magnetic city forms a bottleneck, and the only way in is to convince the Bailiff to let you by. The use of the word "magnetic" to describe the city (along with the various references to magnetism throughout the novel) is more on the nose than it might at first seem. The arrangement of people, their goal, and their enmassing in front of a single obstacle in front of that goal, resembles an example William James mentions in his *Principles of Psychology*, which Lewis earlier critiqued (*TWM* 337-39). James begins his first volume

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[137] Wyndham Lewis, *The Diabolical Principle and The Dithyrambic Spectator* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1931), 230.

by questioning whether and how one may detect the presence of mental processes in an object. As an example of a non-mental process, he offers the following:

> If some iron fillings be sprinkled on a table and a magnet brought near them, they will fly through the air . . . A savage seeing the phenomenon explains it as the result of an attraction or love between the magnet and the fillings. But let a card cover the poles of the magnet, and the fillings will press forever against its surface without it ever occurring to them to pass around its sides[138]

What appears at a glance to be an act of volition and agency on the part of matter is to a closer eye an automatic process, and one can distinguish the two by paying attention to whether and how the object adjusts to its surroundings. Bits of iron, though they do move in response to the force of the magnet, make no adjustment to evade the card which blocks them. Their movement is thus truly mechanical: that of a dead object compelled by a blind force. An animal, on the other hand, would in an analogous situation search for a way around the obstacle.

In Herod we see one version of this situation. The story swaps the magnet's compelling force with a divine prophecy, but the results are the same. What appears to be free will in action actually becomes the fulfillment of a prediction, and greater evidence of a (in this case divinely) determinist universe. But the key trait here is not merely a mechanism discovered through the possibility of prediction, but also the brief moment of

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[138] William James, *The Principles of Psychology, Volume One* (New York: Dover, 2014), 6.

undecidability, where it is difficult to tell whether the thing in question is alive and able to adjust (as Herod, hearing that someone threatens his reign, attempts to adjust) or whether the iron filling and the man-of-action will simply barrel on ahead regardless (as when Herod's massacre ends up fulfilling a prophecy of Jeremiah). In *The Childermass*, what appears to be inexplicable – action without origin, true free will – may always in fact be the result of some hidden mechanical process.

The plain outside the magnetic city, what might perhaps be Outside Heaven, seems filled with these magnetic fillings, so-called "peons" drawn to the magnetism of the gate to paradise. It is as though they have no choice but to move, and when they see that the Bailiff blocks their way they simply take a seat and wait for that blockage to leave. Despite Satters's first impression that "they hardly seem human" (*TC* 30), frequently throughout the journey to the Bailiff's door the novel emphasizes that the peons and spectral humans are at best barely distinguishable. Only a few pages later Satters's assessment changes: "I believe we only think we're so different" (*TC* 43). Later, a peon and a ploughman are confused (*TC* 105). Even the Bailiff seems confused as to their status, at first claiming that there is "all the difference in the world" between "a peon and an individual" (*TC* 183), but then later remarking that "their [the peon's] persons are sacrosanct even as my own" (*TC* 263). Nobody in this novel is able to tell the difference between mindlessness and intelligence, or embodiment and spectrality, and for Lewis's dualist system that is a very big problem.

The confusion returns us to the alternate meaning hidden the allusion to Herod. While a close examination of the passage reveals the importance of prophecy, expectation, and the difficulty in spotting the difference between one who has escaped

their fate and one who has not (presumably, Herod went to his grave believing that the "king of kings" had died in his cradle), the resonance between "the massacre of the innocents" and the mass-murder of the First World War is undeniable. Lewis took part in the war, seeing action at the Third Battle of Ypres (otherwise known as the Battle of Passchendaele), and spent much of his time under constant shelling from German artillery.[139] In a letter to John Quinn, Lewis called the war experience a "sheer loss of time,"[140] and would later represent this loss by lopping two years from his life, reporting his birth year as 1884. The experience seems to have had a deadening effect,[141] as Lewis later described: "a gunner does not fight. He merely shells and is shelled."[142] Eventually, he was able to secure a transfer to a post as a war artist, which put him in a place of relative safety.

Little has been written on the effect of the war on Lewis's writing, but that effect seems to have been considerable. As he would later write, "the War for me, as a soldier, was an interminable nightmare."[143] One scholar to take notice is Paul Edwards, who in an essay writes that "what Lewis had begun to discover during the war years was a kind

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[139] Paul O'Keefe, *Some Sort of Genius: A Life of Wyndham Lewis* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2000), 185-90.

[140] Wyndham Lewis, *Letters*, 120.

[141] As Geoff Gilbert writes, "there is a sense in which Lewis's critical position remained unstably within a state of trauma long after the war was over" ("Shellshock, Anti-Semitism, and the Agency of the Avant-Garde," in *Wyndham Lewis and the Art of Modern War*, ed. David Peters Corbett [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998], 92).

[142] Lewis, *Blasting and Bombardiering*, 131.

[143] Lewis, *The Diabolical Principle and The Dithyrambic Spectator*, 110.

of fissure in the surface of reality," revealing that "reality was the product of an illusionist secreted in our own consciousness . . . so we were not exposed to the annihilation that a face-to-face encounter with the absolute would mean for us."[144] Edwards attributes this "fissure" and its revelations to the effects of shellshock.[145] In his analysis, Edwards points to Lewis's exposure to the work of W.H.R. Rivers, a psychologist working for the British army whose task it was to treat severely traumatized soldiers until they were able to return to the front. It was Rivers's belief that what a sufferer from shellshock needed to overcome was "too strong a recognition of the truth,"[146] and so treatment often involved methods of distraction – pointing out, for example, that the death of a soldier's close friend had at the very least been quick and painless. As Rivers reports in his article, soldiers who have not received adequate treatment for their trauma often undergo a process of repression:

> When I find that a soldier is definitely practising repression I am accustomed to ask him what he thinks is likely to happen if one who had sedulously kept his mind from all thoughts of war, or from special memories of warfare,

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[144] Paul Edwards, "Wyndham Lewis and the Uses of Shellshock: Meat and Postmodernism," in *Wyndham Lewis and the Cultures of Modernity*, eds. Andrzej Gąsiorek, Alice Reeve-Tucker, and Nathan Waddell (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 224.

[145] Doctors today would instead use the term "post-traumatic stress disorder." I will, however, continue to use the term "shellshock" in this and later chapters when discussing the First World War due to the term's specific historical valences.

[146] Edwards, "Wyndham Lewis and the Uses of Shellshock," 226.

> should be confronted with the reality . . . [T]he question at once brings home to him the futility of the course of action he has been pursuing. The deliberate and systematic repression of all thoughts and memories of war by a soldier can have but one result when he is again faced by the realities of warfare.[147]

Rivers seems to describe here a habitual response to this acquisition of knowledge – an attempt to return to an automatic, thoughtless way of being, which might have proceeded successfully earlier in the war, but which has now been rendered impossible by the events that have led the soldiers to come under Rivers's care. The treatment that Rivers describes in his article involves a careful balancing act between the demands of the military (to get the soldiers back to the front as soon as possible, their health and well-being be damned) and the needs of the soldiers (to carefully work through the trauma and so restore a more durable version of their earlier state). Both cases treat the wound in reality as a problem and an obstacle. What this implies for *The Childermass* I will describe shortly, but one of Lewis's wartime painting *A Battery Shelled* at the moment has greater explanatory potential.

The painting brings us back to the issue of flat ontology. It shows us, as the title suggests, the aftermath of a shelling of a battery – or a cluster of guns in a fortified artillery position – with numerous figures in the shell crater lifting away the rubble while others appear to be fleeing. In the foreground, three officers look on, staring serenely in

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[147] W.H.R. Rivers, "The Repression of War Experience" *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine* 11 (1917): 16.

different directions. It is on these figures that much of the interpretation of the painting often turns. Alan Munton, for example, writes that "it is in the relationship between these three figures and the body of the painting that the meaning to be found."[148] Their calm detachment, and its contrast with the clear desperation of the figures in the background, many running for their lives, certainly speaks to the habitual deadening of the personality and the repression of knowledge which Rivers reported among the officers he treated. But there has indeed been a revelation in the bodies of the shelled soldiers in the background. They have not merely been rendered abstract, or incorporated into the scene, but have been crafted so as to resemble the shattered pieces of their bunker. Lewis drew the scattered beams and boxes, and even the smoke, with the same yellowish colour, and in the same simple geometric lines, as the soldiers, so that the humans and the world that they inhabit are scarcely distinguishable. The background scene has created a situation in which, to borrow from Levi Bryant, "humans, far from constituting a category called 'subject' that is opposed to 'object,' are themselves one *type* of object among many."[149]

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[148] Alan Munton, "Wyndham Lewis: War and Aggression," in *Wyndham Lewis and the Art of Modern War*, ed. David Peters Corbett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 21.

[149] Levi Bryant, *The Democracy of Objects*, 249.

Figure 1: Lewis, Wyndham. A Battery Shelled, oil on canvas, 1919 (Imperial War Museum, London). Printed with permission.

This bubble of flattened ontology, revealed by the sudden trauma of the shell, strips away the soldiers' superiority to the objects that destroy them. Meanwhile the officers, standing outside the bubble, continue to appear as integrated aggregates, systems and processes whose mechanical parts are hidden beneath the façade of humanity.[150] Indeed the image's peculiar perspective further flattens the background, so that it almost looks as though the officers are themselves standing in front of a painting. But as Bergson

[150] An interesting parallel can be drawn here between the design of Lewis's painting and the aesthetic implication of *Gestalt* psychology. For an analysis of this topic, see: Dean Irvine, "Sheila Watson, Wyndham Lewis, and Men Without Art," in *Counter-Blasting Canada: Marshall McLuhan, Wyndham Lewis, Wilfred Watson, and Sheila Watson*, eds. Gregory Betts, Paul Hjartarson, and Kristine Smitka (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2016), 169-209.

says in *Laughter*, the claim to vitality comes with certain expectations that one will not act like a machine. But the war destroys these pretensions: one sees that human beings fly through the air according to exactly the same laws as the shells that kill them, and the sight of such things often induces a traumatic repetitive flashback or a process of habitual repression. In this sense, the imperturbability of the officers seems as fragile as that of Rivers's patient. Likewise we return through them to the indeterminacy of Herod, who never knew how inescapable his own determination was.

The problem we face in *The Childermass* is of a similar vintage, and it is one that should be familiar to us from *Time and Western Man*: seemingly vital processes which are in fact mechanical, seemingly hierarchical ontologies which are in fact flat. We see this process, as established, in the way the novel's characters appear. The Bailiff stands above the crowd while himself representing an ideology that Lewis had dismissed as mechanistic, while the peons are at once below, and above, and indistinguishable from normal human beings. And when the Bailiff and Macrob debate their relative reality – "if you are not so real as I am, then you cannot injure me" (*TC* 277) – the closest the discussion comes to a resolution is the Bailiff's declaration that Macrob is "a habit . . . of Space-Time" (*TC* 282). Satters appears at the start of the novel "a lost automaton rather than a lost soul" (*TC* 7) and speaks in continuous clichés and Steinian repetitions ("most terribly helpful and kind" etc. [*TC* 50-51]), but at the end it is he who is most resistant to the Bailiff's rhetoric, and Pullman who most falls in with it. Indeed, Pullman frequently repeats the mantras of a "man-of-action," advising early in the novel that "it's best to keep moving here" (*TC* 16), and then shouting to Satters on the final page, "pick up your feet. If you must go nowhere, step out" (*TC* 401). Pullman doggedly drives forth towards

the magnetic city, exchanging forward motion for the careful thought that Lewis argued was the origin of artistic creativity. The lost souls of *The Childermass* thus resemble their Biblical origin doubly: first they resemble the innocents, and then they resemble the killer.

It is not just the people of the novel whose vitality is doubtful, but also the landscape. The first section of the novel, which describes Pullman and Satters journeying towards the magnetic pull of the Bailiff's gate, brings them through various strange and beautiful environs which make Jameson's dubbing the novel "theological science fiction"[151] well deserved. The way the land seems to change, to follow different physical laws than the people who inhabit it (*TC* 126), suggests at first blush a kind of Heraclitean flux, an ever-changing and panpsychic universe where nothing is predictable and everything may change. However, one such oddity gives lie to this assumption. After venturing beyond the camp where they met up, the travelers encounter what Pullman dubs a "panorama": "Look at that hedge. Do you see its perspective? It's built in a diminishing perspective! I believe the whole place is meant to be looked at from behind there, where we have just come from" (*TC* 123). Exploring the scene, Pullman takes a leaf from the "life-sized" section of the panorama and walks with it into a region where everything is smaller, finding to his astonishment that the leaf has shrunk (*TC* 125-26).

As any painter knows, achieving lifelike perspective is a difficult task, requiring no small knowledge of mathematics. Indeed, the mathematical basis for perspective is integral to its history, with the explosion of art works making use of the technique during

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[151] Fredric Jameson, *Fables of Aggression*, 6.

the Renaissance deriving from Filippo Brunelleschi's discovery of the geometric basis for linear perspective in the early 1400s.[152] In order to resemble a panorama, the scene that Pullman and Satters come across must be constructed according to a strict, and clearly defined, set of proportions, according to immutable mathematical laws. While the landscape of Outside Heaven appears at times surreal and random, that variation, upon closer inspection, follows strict rules and pre-defined patterns. In short they are, in principle at least, predictable. Seeing otherwise means taking an epistemological problem – we never discover what most of these laws are – and elevating it into a metaphysical one, the very same mistake that one makes when seeing life in iron drawn to a magnet or lost souls drawn to paradise. That these landscapes follow patterns, that they fall into types, is enough to know that one could discover their laws if one wanted to. And that is enough to thwart Herod for good.

William James used the image of a magnet drawing iron fillings to represent motion defined entirely by physical laws, and lacking any true intelligence. Bergson, in his essay on Ravaisson, put the image to opposite use: "as scattered particles of iron fillings are attracted toward the poles by the force of the magnetic bar . . . so, at the call of a genius it loves, the virtualities slumbering here and there in a soul awaken . . . [and] a personality is constituted."[153] Yet it remains unclear how one is to tell the difference between a mind of genius awakening to its potential and a mindless material object dragged about by destiny. In *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, Bergson says that it is the

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[152] For the history of this discovery, see Martin Kemp, *The Science of Art: Optical Themes in Western Art from Brunelleschi to Seurat* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

[153] Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, 195.

role of the philosopher "to promote a certain effort, which in most men is usually fettered by habits of mind more useful to life,"[154] but the rising genius we see in this essay appears more guided by the "virtualities" than guiding.

The Childermass offers a similar conundrum. Where in Lewis's non-fiction the divide between matter and mind comes out in no uncertain terms, in the fictional core of his *Man of the World* project this division comes fettered with caveats, uncertainty, and doubt. What lurks underneath is a flat ontology, a state of being that lacks the powerful hierarchies upon which Lewis's politics so depended.[155] Put into practice, allowed to come together in their own fictional world, these ideas appear to struggle merely to survive, say nothing of escaping Herod's fate.

1.5 "A Sort of Sleep"

It may well be that Lewis was at his most Bergsonian when he first sat down to write *Time and Western Man*. That text's prephilosophical rejection of a form of (arguable) monism embodied in the work of an extremely popular philosopher mirrors eerily the trajectory of Bergson's thought, deriving as it does from his own infatuation with and then rejection of the explicitly mechanistic thought of Herbert Spencer. Likewise, what for both writers is ultimately at stake is not merely the epistemological questions of

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[154] Bergson, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 27.

[155] Scott W. Klein emphasizes the extent to which Lewis's politics and metaphysics interrelate in his *Human Age* novels, which collectively amount to a "sustained attempt to imagine alternative versions of the Universe as embodiments of his consistent yet constantly revised sense of the relations between individuality and political power" ("The Human Age," in *Wyndham Lewis: A Critical Guide*, eds. Andrzej Gąsiorek and Nathan Waddell [Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015], 189).

whether free will is possible and whether mind and matter are two distinct entities or one, but also the ontological and ethical question of which form of existence should occupy the higher position in their respective hierarchies. That the theories of Spencer and the behaviourists are too greedily reductionist, and too ready to ontologically undermine human thought and consciousness, is hardly contestable, and the gross overreach of their arguments made them easy targets for Bergson and Lewis's critiques. The temptation to overcorrect – to *overmine* consciousness, as vitalists like Hans Driesch often do – remains omnipresent, and despite the critiques lobbed at it, Bergson's notion of *élan vital* represents at the very least an honest attempt to avoid that pitfall, albeit an attempt conducted within an axiomatically dualist system. What the debate thus ends up being about is the partition and distribution of ignorance among ontological processes. It is a fight over competing agnotologies.

Yet in both Lewis and Bergson, habit suffers grievously, as we see when comparing Bergson to Ravaisson, and later Bergson to Lewis. And their suffering ought to serve as a warning against too incautious a choice of black boxes. It is in habit that we can best see the effects of the anti-monist image of thought that hangs over these works – an image that demands that a hierarchy be instilled. As Lewis would write in *Paleface*, "most men *wish* to be machines. They want to feed and sleep – and mechanical work is a sort of sleep – and be told what to do, nothing more."[156] Quite simply, for Lewis one cannot remain truly alive, nor truly thoughtful, without constant, strenuous effort, and it is the artist who supposedly brings this effort to its peak. But the war, it seems, took a toll

[156] Wyndham Lewis, *Paleface: The Philosophy of the "Melting Pot"* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1929), 237.

on Lewis's vision. As he writes in *The Art of Being Ruled*, for a soldier at the front "the grinding boredom you realize he must be experiencing makes a mechanical hero out of him" (*ABR* 282). Not merely the trauma, then, but also the grinding monotony between bouts of excitement enforces repetition, mechanization, thoughtlessness. The war, then, degrades all it touches, forcing all participants to reduce themselves to mere bodies. We see this expressed most directly in the localized flat ontology of *A Battery Shelled*, and the precarious superiority of the onlookers, but also in the endemic indecisiveness of *The Childermass*, where the unpredictable vitality of the landscape hides a clichéd repetition, and the degraded, mechanical peons become indistinguishable from any other type of person.

For Bergson, the abandonment Spencer's mechanism, and the related abandonment of monism, entailed as well the burying of Ravaisson. What *Of Habit* tends towards is not the undermining that Spencer promotes, but rather an ontological flattening similar in some ways to the process philosophy of Whitehead. Consciousness and fee will appear in Ravaisson as emergent properties of complex systems, deriving from a set of mechanisms but not completely reducible to them. One of the most notable traits of a mechanist philosophy – determinism – disappears completely, because it is impossible in Ravaisson to reduce the complex interplay of habitual action and novel thought to a simple cause-and-effect relationship. But Bergson's summary turns Ravaisson into just another dualist, swallowing him up. And even to this day scholars frequently define the Bergson/Ravaisson relationship in these terms, or mis-read

Ravaisson in the same way Bergson did.[157] Habit returns to the denigrated state it frequently occupies in dualist philosophical systems, as evidenced especially in *Laughter*. Though Bergson's theory of laughter can be more egalitarian that Lewis's, it still depends on the same basic elements: a hierarchical ontology between mind and matter in which mind holds the privileged place, the identification between habitual action and mechanical action, and the imperative that one expend the effort that it takes to avoid these actions lest one come under censure.

It is in these demands that, for both writers, the image of their rejected monism remains. Most clearly it looms as a threat over Lewis's characters, which we see manifest in both *A Battery Shelled* and *The Childermass* in the form of ambiguity. It would be all well and good if each character in the novel ultimately reduced to a purely mechanical existence: that on its own would pose no difficulty to Lewis's philosophy, since according to him the vast majority of people occupy precisely that state. The problem arises when so many elements appear at first to have vitality, to have successfully raised themselves to a higher level, only to reveal themselves under closer inspection as nothing

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[157] A handful of examples that I gathered over the course of my research, presented in no particular order: G. William Barnard, *Living Consciousness: The Metaphysical Vision of Henri Bergson* (Albany; SUNY Press, 2011), 41; Mark S. Muldoon, *Tricks of Time: Bergson, Merleau-Ponty, and Ricoeur in Search of Time, Self, and Meaning* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2006), 69; Stanford Schwartz, "Bergson and the Politics of Vitalism," in *The Crisis in Modernism: Bergson and the Vitalist Controversy*, eds. Frederick Burwick and Paul Douglass (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 280; Gillies, *Henri Bergson and British Modernism*, 8. The error often involves treating Ravaisson like just another nineteenth century Spiritualist philosopher, when his work on habit actually distinguishes Ravaisson from the Spiritualists on numerous points.

but automata. For a text derived from the same larger project as *Time and Western Man*, with its emphasis on the need for a domain of art built on clear and universal distinctions,[158] this inability to know the difference between two categories of such importance afflicts the argument with paradox. How can one build a philosophy on the hard division between living and mechanical minds when it is impossible to really know whether you see one or the other? It is due to this question that a flat ontology looms above the scene, placed there by the very act of its rejection.

The hierarchy between mind and matter is also the reason why panpsychism poses such a problem for Lewis. Though it permits the existence of free will and unpredictability – both traits that Lewis found desirable in a philosophical system – it remains a flat ontology, though one achieved by raising matter up instead of pushing mind down. I will analyze the particular literary and philosophical issued posed by panpsychism, and their relationship to Bergson, in my next chapter on Virginia Woolf, but suffice it to say that such a system creates a degree of unpredictability entirely opposed to the mechanization Lewis saw in everyday human life. For Lewis, it is the *hierarchy* that is important, far more so than dualism. So while dualism often appears at the center of Lewis's system, it is quite often best read as a supplementary argument, one that exists largely to support Lewis's division between higher and lower orders of humanity. Panpsychism, then, cannot prevail, because it holds that *nothing* is truly mechanical, and that that very same forces which govern the everyday physical world also give rise to creative thought. Posed as a mechanist argument, this was repugnant to

[158] Andrzej Gąsiorek, *Wyndham Lewis and Modernism* (Devon: Northcote House, 2004), 36-37.

Lewis, so it should be no surprise that he found it repelling when achieved by different means.

Chapter 2

The Shock of Life: Virginia Woolf's Panpsychic Knowledge

> [N]othing happens in Nature which can be attributed to any defect in it, for Nature is always the same . . . So the way of understanding the nature of anything, of whatever kind, must also be the same, namely, though the universal laws and rules of Nature.
>
> — Benedict De Spinoza, *Ethics*[159]

2.1 Moments of Being Continuous

In the first paragraphs of Virginia Woolf's early short story "Solid Objects" we encounter in miniature one of the key philosophical problems with which her fictions would engage across much of her career, one closely tied to the role of ignorance in her writing more generally. The story begins with a description of "one small black spot" on a beach, a lone and unitary punctum far in the distance, which as it draws closer we see possesses "a certain tenuity in its blackness" which shows "that this spot possessed four legs; and moment by moment it became more unmistakable that it was composed of the persons of two young men."[160] These men will become the focal characters of the story, but far more important to the present analysis is the narrator – someone occupying space in

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[159] Benedict De Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. Edwin Curley (New York: Penguin, 1996), 69.

[160] Virginia Woolf, "Solid Objects," in *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Susan Dick (New York: Harvest, 1985), 102.

relation to the two men, and viewing from a fixed position their movements with greater or lesser fidelity as they draw near. Yet this embodied narrator is present only by implication, never even arising to the level of a "character" in the sense of having a personality, desires, motives, or even a name. It is an effacement we should keep in mind when examining the narration's implicit positivism – we find that the two men have an "unmistakable vitality," and a "vigour" in their argumentation that, while "indescribable," is "corroborated on closer view by the repeated lunging of a walking-stick on the right-hand side."[161] One might imagine, in reading the first section of this story, that the text was part of some sort of scientific study, or perhaps a police report.

Yet the epistemological confidence is completely at odds with the story's opening, which proclaims the unity of the two men's bodies with the same faux-objectivity and confidence as it does its subsequent observations. Likewise does it contrast with an observation later in the story, that "looked at again and again half consciously by a mind thinking of something else, any object mixes itself so profoundly with the stuff of thought that it loses its actual form and recomposes itself a little differently in an ideal shape which haunts the brain when we least expect it."[162] An object viewed will bend beneath the act of viewing, and repeated observations only worsen things. The status of an object *as* an object is thus a construct of perception infused with ignorance, and the object thus becomes an agnotological repository manifesting as a physical presence in the world. It is in this way that the relationship

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[161] Ibid.

[162] Ibid, 104.

between perception and epistemology becomes a problem for Woolf, one that, as I will show, she resolves in part through an engagement with panpsychism which provides a framework for understanding the black boxes that her thought contends with. But for the moment a more useful connection is the one between the problems of "Solid Objects" and Immanuel Kant's writing on epistemology, and this passage in particular:

> Suppose that cinnabar were now red, then black, now light, then heavy; or that a human being were changed now into this and then that animal shape; or that on the longest day of the year the land were covered now with fruit, then with ice and snow. In that case my empirical imagination could not even get the opportunity, when presenting red colour, to come to think of heavy cinnabar.[163]

Kant's observation expresses in the abstract the very problem that Woolf's story explores: that a lack of consistency in our observations would destabilize the whole logic of empiricism, and make it impossible to acquire knowledge about the physical world by way of perception. This dependability is also, of course, one of the basic assumptions of scientific experiment: if one did not believe that the universe proceeds according to knowable rules that are true in all places and times, very little of what scientists do would make any sense. But it is also a basic fact of our everyday relationship with the empirical world. We must proceed as though our objects are "solid" and predictable, since it is that assumption that makes our perceptions understandable.

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[163] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996), A100-A101.

This dependability feeds directly into the logical structure of the life/non-life dichotomy that, as I described in my previous chapter, both Bergson and Lewis in their own manner adhere to. Though they differ greatly in the specifics, both of them take as the key indication of mechanical, thoughtless behaviour in human beings actions which are repeated, stereotyped, and (most importantly) *predictable*. "Nature follows strict, unchangeable laws," we might imagine them saying, "which is why it is possible for science to study it, but humans are capable of creative, unpredictable behaviour, and so *must* possess some vital aspect which sets them apart from the normal, inanimate matter of the everyday world." Indeed, the danger of humans falling into such automatic behaviour was so great that certain processes evolved specifically to prevent it from happening – as we see Bergson argue in *Laughter*. It is for this reason that Lewis and Bergson's philosophies so emphatically insist on their dualism, since such an argument demands that one disclaim any continuity between natural physical processes and those which underlie creative human thought. Their vitalism (or perhaps quasi-vitalism) demands that we extract consciousness from the logical axioms upon which all empirical knowledge lies. Or so it would seem. In fact, as should gradually become clear during this chapter, the possibility of a flat ontology – implied to varying extents by both mechanist and panpsychist models of consciousness – permits us to excavate from the metaphysics of science the important epistemological role played by shock, surprise,[164] and *discontinuity* in the human perception of the physical world, a larger process of which science is a highly specific (and specialized) case. Shock has long been recognized

[164] In this chapter, I employ "shock" and "surprise" interchangeably, in large part to avoid repetition in my writing.

as one of the chief stylistic tools in the work of Virginia Woolf, whose plots often turn to one extent or another on an epistemic break: the deaths of Jacob, Septimus, Mrs. Ramsay, and Percival, being but the most well-known such instances.[165] Indeed, death in Woolf's fiction is almost never expected – though (and this point will be important later) both we and the novel's characters can often see in retrospect the chain of events that caused these "inexplicable" deaths to occur: Evans of *Mrs Dalloway* and Andrew Ramsay of *To the Lighthouse* probably never saw the shells that killed them, but, as with the shells that struck the battery in Lewis's painting, or which possibly killed Pullman and Satters, their paths still followed the normal laws of motion, just like any other object in space. Objects, likewise, are of great interest in Woolf's writing – and a subject of a good deal of criticism.[166] This alignment between objects, knowledge, and surprise, as I will explain below, is in no way an accident, but rather a valuable critical lens, and indeed, one that proceeds according to strikingly Bergsonian terms, despite the professed dualism of his philosophy.

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[165] The most extensive analysis of the role of shock in Woolf is Lucio P. Ruotolo's *The Interrupted Moment: A View of Virginia Woolf's Novels* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988). For a more recent analysis, see Anna Jones Abramson's "Beyond Modernist Shock: Virginia Woolf's Absorbing Atmosphere" (*Journal of Modern Literature* 38.4 [2015]: 39-56).

[166] See, for example: Bill Brown, "The Secret Life of Things (Virginia Woolf and the Matter of Modernism)" *Modernism/Modernity* 6.2 (1999): 1-28; Martin Štefl, "'A Very Remarkable Piece of Iron': Towards a Theory of Material Imagination in Virginia Woolf's 'Solid Objects'" *Prague Journal of English Studies* 3.1 (2014): 19-34.

To begin to see how this relationship might work, we might look at an illuminating passage in Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. At the beginning of the text's second part, Freud remarks on the well-known alignment between psychological trauma and surprise. "After severe mechanical accidents," he writes, "railway crashes, and other life-threatening incidents, there arises a condition that has long been designated as 'traumatic neurosis.' . . . [and] the weightiest element in their causation seem[s] to be the factor of surprise, of fright."[167] Many pages later, at the end of the sixth part, Freud writes that:

> [W]e should understand clearly that the uncertainty of our speculation was greatly increased by the need to borrow from biology. Biology is truly a realm of unlimited possibilities. We may expect from it *the most surprising revelations*, and cannot guess what answers it may provide in a few decades to the questions we have posed – answers, perhaps, of such a kind as to blow apart our entire artificial structure of hypotheses.[168]

It is notable that, here, Freud implicitly aligns the onset of trauma with the acquisition of scientific knowledge by ascribing to them the same mechanism. Surprise – and its siblings, shock and fright – appears in *Beyond* as an epistemological-temporal mechanism that wields a great deal of power. It is a "weighty element" of the onset of psychological

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[167] Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. Todd Dufresne and Gregory C. Richter (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2011), 55.

[168] *Ibid*, 96. My emphasis.

trauma, but also a force of knowledge, one which both transmits knowledge ("the most surprising revelations") and also "blow[s] apart" long-cherished speculations. Following Derrida's argument in *The Post Card* that *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* does not merely enact speculation as an argumentative mode, that speculation is not merely "the oblique object of [Freud's] writing," but also "the operation of his writing,"[169] we may see the significance this power wields. The natural world, when combined with systematic study ("biology"), ceases to be stable. All speculation trembles at the sound of unpredictability.

If one found a particular piece of cinnabar and saw that it was red, one would not likely be surprised. But if that cinnabar were to suddenly turn blue or green in one's hands then surprise would be (ironically) a highly predictable reaction. Such surprise is a basically temporal phenomenon: the knowledge that all cinnabar is red, combined with the assumption that all cinnabar will *continue to be* red in all future encounters, is an instance of what Quentin Meillassoux, in *After Finitude*, calls the "mathematization of nature," which designates "the discovery that the world possesses a power of persistence and permanence that is completely unaffected by our existence or inexistence."[170] It is in this matter that one's experience in the present may be extended, hypothetically, into the distant past and future. And it is in part due to this process that Meillassoux categorizes materialism as a speculative philosophy, since materialism in its various forms assumes that it is possible to extract from our knowledge of the world the fact of our having

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[169] Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 284.

[170] Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier (New York: Bloomsbury, 2008), 116.

observed it, and to thereby speculate on how that world acts without us.[171] The base assumption of empirical knowledge systems is that what has been encountered in the past will be encountered in the future so long as the same circumstances are met. To "know," then, is to locate oneself psychologically in the past, and to speculate then is to imaginatively project that knowledge into the future. It is for this reason that (as Freud recognized in his own speculations) the natural world may always intervene and make a mess of one's well-crafted speculations, because the future, unlike the past, is never given. Surprise – the name we give these interjections – thereby attains its epistemological power through its status as a *temporal* phenomenon.

It should be clear to readers of Bergson how this alignment of knowledge and temporality relates to questions of what constitutes "free will" and "consciousness." As Vladimir Jankélévitch describes in his excellent commentary on Bergson, it is a tendency of those advocating deterministic, mechanist philosophies to become ensnared in an "illusion of retrospectivity," where one always acts as though one's relationship to *all* knowledge is oriented towards the past.[172] As he writes, "because we place ourselves after the accomplished perception, it seems to us that recollection should follow it like a deadened echo. Freedom, mobility, finality thus are absurd or miraculous only out of season and retrospectivity."[173] It is for this reason that, as I pointed out in the earlier chapter, Bergson's defence of free will derives from and depends upon his particular

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[171] *Ibid*, 36.

[172] Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Henri Bergson*, eds. Alexandre Lefebvre and Nils F. Schott, trans. Nils F. Schott (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 16.

[173] *Ibid*, 17.

approach to temporality. It is, perhaps, unfortunate that the English translation of his *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* demoted its highly descriptive (though dry) French name to a mere subtitle while providing it with the more interesting yet misleading name of *Time and Free Will*, thereby giving time the top billing in place of freedom. But it is precisely Bergson's argument that one can only get to freedom by passing through time. The English title enacts this process, but at the cost of obscuring free will's paramount importance in this text.

One of Bergson's main arguments in favour of free will examines a hypothetical situation in which a person chooses between possible actions X and Y. Ventriloquizing for the pro- and anti- sides of the determinism argument, Bergson describes the key aporia of the debate: the person arguing *against* determinism says that the person choosing action X could potentially have chosen Y, and so this choice represents an unpredictable free action. The person arguing *for* determinism argues that the choice of X indicates that there were forces involved which *forced* the choice of X, and so the possibility of choosing Y retrospectively disappears. From this hypothetical conversation, Bergson concludes that the example of the binary choice is a poor one, since its application leaves the terms of the debate mostly unchanged. Instead, Bergson advocates a third way: "All the difficulty arises from the fact that both parties [in the debate] picture the deliberation under the form of an oscillation in space, while it really consists in a dynamic progress in which the self and its motives, like real living beings, are in a

constant state of becoming."[174] As in the analysis of Zeno's Paradox in the same text, the problem of determinism is a product not of any fact of nature but in the way nature is understood, described, and symbolized.

The important point here is that the determinist position, through this error in representation, takes the past position and projects it into the future. In the example of the binary choice, the decision between X and Y *has already been made* and the argument is essentially between varying interpretations of how and why it was so. But the larger determinist claim that if one took stock of all matter in the universe and understood all of the universe's physical laws, one could in principle predict all events with perfect accuracy, is speculative in the same way that Meillassoux says materialism is speculative. It is, in a sense, an unfulfillable promise. It claims that "if X happened Y will happen," though with full knowledge that not only has X (the above mentioned total knowledge of the universe) never happened, but in all likelihood never will happen. The articulation of determinism proceeds through a counter-factual, and acts upon a world entirely alien to its central predictive claim. As we see with Kant, a limited form of this same prediction is what makes empirical knowledge possible, in that such knowledge is only comprehensible if it can be projected into the future (so we cannot simply say that the cinnabar *is* red, but must also say that it *will always be* red as well). Yet it is precisely because our projections are circumscribed by our ignorance that we are always open to

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[174] Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, trans. F.L. Pogson (New York: Dover, 2001), 183. Many will recognize this discussion of free will and the future as a predecessor to Deleuze's notion of "the virtual." See the second chapter of *Bergsonism* for more details.

surprise: the deep and luminescent red of a cinnabar stone can be quite shocking to one who has never seen it.

One key aspect of this process – and the means by which I will link it back to Woolf – is the relationship between perceived continuity and perceived discontinuity, and the role that ignorance plays in mediating between the two. An argument in favour of a mechanist view of consciousness, in which one's thought is totally reducible to physical processes, essentially takes two seemingly discontinuous events (the influences on a brain and the thoughts that brain produces) and links them (often deterministically) by presuming that there is an undiscovered causal relation between them of which we are currently ignorant, and which is too complex to be perceptible in our everyday interactions. A vitalist view of consciousness, such as the one proposed by Hans Driesch, argues that the continuity between the two events is as imperfect as our perceptions make it out to be, and that there is an unobserved vital impulse – such as entelechy or the soul – which is the real causal agent behind the mind. Both cases involve positing some form of continuity that lies in place behind the veil, imperceptible at the present time but knowable in principle. In examining these positions, one may recall the observation that Baudelaire makes in his essay on "The Painter of Modern Life" regarding "people who, having once read Bousset and Racine, fancy that they have mastered the history of literature."[175] To such a reader, the works of these few canonical authors jump out *sui genesis* as singular artistic achievements. They would be, in short, surprising. But, says Baudelaire, if "an impartial student" were to look exhaustively at such a history (whether

[175] Charles Baudelaire, "The Painter of Modern Life," in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon Press, 1964), 1.

of literature, painting, or some other art), "he would find nothing to shock nor even surprise him. The transitions would be as elaborately articulated as they are in the animal kingdom. There would not be a single gap: and thus, not a single surprise."[176] Both the mechanist and the vitalist occupy the position of Baudelaire's naive reader, familiar only with the canon. Their respective theories are, in effect, ways of stitching together the gap created by their ignorance: neither actually *knows*, empirically, that their speculations are correct. Rather, each posits an invisible bridge between the gaps. While the two approaches differ greatly in plausibility, one should never lose sight of their commonly speculative nature.

Whether or not Baudelaire's argument works as an approach to the history of art, it characterizes a key epistemological distinction between the ideally understood "mathematized" nature, in which, in the words of Merleau-Ponty, "there is nothing lacking,"[177] and the world as it is subjectively experienced. It is from this split, in which dis-continuous experiences are overlaid upon a perfectly continuous world, that shock becomes possible. It is likewise in this split that surprise gains its epistemological usefulness, and where ignorance acquires its important mediating function. As Bruno Latour argues, risk and unexpectedness are key components of any meaningful scientific research, as it is precisely this unexpectedness that "make[s] the observer sensitive to new

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[176] *Ibid*, 2.

[177] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Nature: Course Notes from the Collége de France*, ed. Dominique Séglard, trans. Robert Vallier (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2003), 15.

types of connections."[178] For an experiment to be meaningful, it must be *risky*, in that there should be at least a small chance that the results will fly in the face of the researcher's expectations. It is in this way that the metaphysical principle that makes scientific predictions possible – the principle of sufficient reason, which holds that everything which occurs must have a cause – makes it possible to acquire new information. While everything in the universe is presumed to be connected through causal relationships, the vast majority of those relationships are obscure. An experiment must thus be preceded by some type of speculation, in the form of a prediction. The experiment is thus risky to the extent that its underlying prediction exceeds in some way the already-known network of causal relations: it has the potential to work counter to expectations, and thereby indicate relationships that were hitherto unknown. The temporality of experimentation is thus remarkably Bergsonian,[179] in that its meaningfulness involves the deterministic causation of the past (which informs the speculation) butting up against the virtual possibilities of the future. Just as, *qua* Bergson, it is only in retrospect that we can say that a given person inevitably chose X instead of Y, it is likewise only in retrospect that we can say that the results of a famous experiment could not have been otherwise. It is *precisely because* the future cannot be predicted – that the fantasies of determinism remain thwarted – that meaningful experiments are

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[178] Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 235.

[179] This relationship, ironically, should not be a surprise, given how for Bergson "the break introduced by the existence of science . . . does indeed make itself known in all dimensions of our life" (Frédéric Worms, "Between Science and Metaphysics: Science in Bergson and Brunschvicg" *Angelaki* 10.2 [2005]: 40).

possible. Experimentation, and scientific observation generally, is a process by which researchers use the unexpectedness of the present to mine the experiences of the past: irregularities in the orbit of Mercury *become* in retrospect the effects of relativistic gravity,[180] peculiarities in a finch's beak *become* in retrospect the effects of natural selection,[181] – such are the fruits of risk.

It is at this point that Woolf re-enters the conversation. While I have spent the chapter up to this point outlining a number of philosophical concepts seemingly unrelated to the writing of Virginia Woolf, I have done so largely in service of an analysis of Woolf's relationship to shock and surprise, and specifically the ways in which these experiences take the form of epistemological breaks. While numerous critics have taken up the question of shock in Woolf's writing, none so far have examined the role of shock as a form of knowledge production, nor has Woolf criticism dealt significantly with the related question of "life" as an epistemic category. And yet the alignment of the two notions – particularly in the case of Septimus Smith – appears scattered throughout Woolf's writings. But perhaps the most overt articulation of this relation appears in her short autobiography "A Sketch of the Past":

> Perhaps this is the strongest pleasure known to me. It is the rapture I get when in writing I seem to be discovering what belongs to what; making a scene come right; making a scene come together. From this I reach what I might call a

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[180] See: Albert Einstein, *Relativity: The Special and the General Theory*, trans. Robert W. Lawson (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1961), 143-145.

[181] See: Charles Darwin, *The Voyage of the Beagle* (London: Wordsworth Editions, 1997), 360-362.

> philosophy; at any rate it is a constant idea of mine; that behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we – I mean all human beings – are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art . . . And I see this when I have a shock.[182]

In this passage we see condensed many of the issues that I have detailed so far, particularly in Woolf's belief in a vast web of relationships and connections hidden behind the "cotton wool" of everyday experience which can be revealed at particular moments through shock. Though phrased in a more ethereal, possibly mystical, rhetoric[183] (an issue I will return to later), in terms of its epistemology the above passage is remarkably similar to the model of scientific discovery summarized above. Indeed, as Claudia Olk has argued, "*A Sketch of the Past* can be regarded as an experiment in which fiction records its own processes of rendering the past and analyses them at the same time."[184] In Woolf, it would seem, the relationship between shock and knowledge could hardly be closer.

The open question, then, is the importance of panpsychism in this network of relationships. While it has taken several forms that differ in their specifics, we can broadly designate with the term "panpsychism" any belief system which attributes "life,"

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[182] Virginia Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," in *Moments of Being: A Collection of Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Jeanne Schulkind (New York: Harvest, 1985), 72.

[183] See: Pericles Lewis, *Religious Experience and the Modernist Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 143.

[184] Claudia Olk, *Virginia Woolf and the Aesthetics of Vision* (Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2014), 117.

"agency," or "consciousness" (however defined) to entities traditionally believed to be inanimate. It therefore shares a family resemblance with vitalism, in that both forms of thought found themselves on models of "life" outside of those provided by mechanism and/or scientific realism. However, as we saw in the previous chapter, there are several tensions between the two systems. As Lewis noticed, panpsychism can often take the form of a flat ontology, in that it posits a continuous relationship between stones and humans along a scale of "consciousness."[185] Vitalism, meanwhile, posits a caesura between the living and the dead, and so often aligns itself with some form of dualism. (Bergson's notion of *elan vital* is a peculiar case, and one that I will return to in a moment.) This emphasis on *continuity* is in large part what makes panpsychism interesting as an interpretive tool, particularly with regards to Woolf. Though I will argue that Woolf's particular form of panpsychism owes much (though indirectly) to the theories of Richard Maurice Bucke, whose *Cosmic Consciousness* was wildly influential at the turn of the century and which (like Woolf) linked the perception of continuity to a kind of mystical experience, I would first like to address the recent vogue for varieties of panpsychism among proponents of Object Oriented Ontology (OOO), several of whom I draw on in this study.

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[185] As Lewis argues in *Time and Western Man*, "the 'organism' of Bergson, Whitehead or Alexander is perfectly *mechanical*" (174) and that "all that 'organic mechanism' tells you is that *the machine is alive* – which is not such an agreeable belief" (173). Earlier on he writes that "*you* have been organic all along . . . it is your tables and chairs, in a pseudo-Leibnizian animism, not you, that are to become 'organic'" (166).

Probably the most well-known version of panpsychism to arise recently is Jane Bennett's "vital materiality," which she describes in her 2010 book *Vibrant Matter* as "a theory of *distributive* agency."[186] Borrowing Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the "assemblage" – which she calls "ad hoc groupings of diverse elements . . . living, throbbing confederations"[187] – Bennett characterizes matter as agential, and pitches her argument against the tendency to ascribe agency to human actors while denying such agency to other things. As she writes later in the book, "vital materiality better captures an 'alien' quality of our own flesh, and in so doing reminds humans of the very *radical* character of the (factitious) kinship between the human and the non-human."[188] In this sense, her defence of panpsychism resembles that of Graham Harman, who in his *Prince of Networks* argues that "human cognition is just a more complicated variant of relations already found amidst atoms and stones."[189] Likewise, Steven Shaviro, in his *The Universe of Things*, opines that "vital materialism and object-oriented ontology both

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[186] Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*: *A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 21.

[187] *Ibid*, 23.

[188] *Ibid*, 112

[189] Graham Harman, *Prince of Networks: Bruno Latour and Metaphysics* (Melbourne: re.press, 2009), 212.

entail some sort of panexperientialism or panpsychism."[190] While panpsychism has proven in several circles to be an eminent source of mockery, and while it is my purpose here to distance my own approach to these issues from Bennett, Harman, and the like, I argue that its chief conceptual flaws also make it useful in certain cases as a mode of inquiry. We can see this usefulness in Bennett's defense of anthropomorphization on epistemic grounds – arguing that a massively and confoundingly complex artificial structure such as the North American electrical grid cannot be properly grasped without ascribing it human characteristics.[191] This argument quite tellingly resembles Bergson's on the neo-vitalism of his day, that "the 'vital principle' may indeed not explain much, but it is at least a sort of label affixed to our ignorance . . . while mechanism invites us to ignore that ignorance."[192]

It is in the question of ignorance that we see both the flaws and the usefulness of panpsychism. Bennett is correct that there exist structures of such complexity that no human mind could ever comprehend them (we should recall here my discussion of Asimov in the introduction), and Bergson is correct in identifying with this ignorance the subtle hubris of mechanism. Likewise, in other contexts Harman's comment on the contiguity between human consciousness and "atoms and stones" would strike as boilerplate physicalism – in that both essentially argue that there is a knowable, material

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[190] Steven Shaviro, *The Universe of Things: On Speculative Realism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 63.

[191] Bennett, 25.

[192] Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (New York: Dover, 1998), 42.

structure "behind" consciousness which is not ontologically distinct from those processes found among non-human entities. What distinguishes their approaches – and what puts them in a similar conceptual ballpark as Woolf – is their emphasis on our ignorance of these processes rather than their potential knowability. Panpsychism's key flaw is that it posits a metaphysical universal to solve an epistemological problem – that being the relationship between a fully continuous world and our discontinuous understanding of it. Recognizing a continuum between electro-chemical reactions in the brain and self-consciousness raises problems that panpsychism does not solve. Replacing this ignorance with a universal risks stripping these complex relations of their specificity, just like if one were to treat elephants and E.coli bacteria as the same species simply because they share a common ancestor. One can recognize this continuity without sacrificing taxonomy or ignoring an object's singularity.

In Woolf we see a different relationship. Panpsychism, in her writing, serves not as a universal but as a mode of knowledge. Surprise, then, emerges as a powerful tool that may grant life as easily as it takes that life away. In Woolf we see not an opposition between life and non-life, nor a simple mysticism that treats all matter the same, but a complex play of animacy and inanimacy[193] sprawling across contested fields of ignorance and of the known.

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[193] I employ these terms largely in the sense used by Mel Y. Chen in *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).

2.2 Objective Interventions

> Objects should not touch because they are not alive. You use them, put them back in place, you live among them: they are useful, nothing more. But they touch me, it is unbearable. I am as afraid of being in contact with them as though they were living beasts.
>
> — Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*[194]

Woolf would have perhaps agreed with Bennett regarding the alienness of the human body. As she famously writes in her essay "On Being Ill," "all day, all night the body intervenes."[195] While scholars have often cited this line to argue that Woolf's writing dismantles mind/body dualism,[196] the use of the word "intervenes" strikes an odd pose. What is the nature of this intervention? And what does the body intervene upon? An earlier passage gives some indication: "what waste and defects of the soul a slight attack of influenza brings to view, what precipices and lawns sprinkled with bright flowers a little rise in temperature reveals, what ancient and obdurate oaks are uprooted

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[194] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*, trans. Lloyd Alexander (New York: New Directions, 2007), 10.

[195] Virginia Woolf, "On Being Ill," in *Collected* Essays, 4 vols. (London: Hogarth Press, 1967), 4:193.

[196] See, for example: Craig A Gordon, *Literary Modernism, Bioscience, and Community in Early 20th Century Britain* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 140.

in us by the act of sickness."[197] Such effects are clearly involuntary, and the fact that Woolf extrapolates these processes to an intervening "body" rather than a pathogen indicates that this text does not produce a simple dismantling of the mind/body split. The body, in that it intervenes, acts distinctly from the mind – in a manner that might resemble agency. Likewise, this intervention is aggressive, taking no care or mind to anything else. The body simply acts, and simply *is*.

But what does the body intervene *upon*? A simple dualism will not work here, since it is specifically the body and not the mind which is described in these terms, and which is given agency. A clue here can be found in the earlier passage, in which influenza "brings to view" the nature of the soul and a high temperature "reveals" the beauty of a flowered lawn. The body's intervention, for Woolf, is a supplier of new knowledge: its effects are not merely pathological, but also *epistemological*. This intervention, then, resembles the disruptive effects of "biology" Freud remarked upon, and also the revelatory effects of a "moment of being," which this essay clearly prefigures. That the body *can* intervene upon consciousness indicates that the two are not ontologically distinct. Yet the complexity of the relationship is such that they appear to be discontinuous, if not completely autonomous. It is this discontinuity that diseases bring to view: calling forth in their complexity the appearance of an agency other than one's own. The etiology of a particular instance of a disease is often complex, and perhaps knowable only to a small level of detail – in retrospect, after one has already experienced symptoms. As such, at the onset of an illness one encounters an entity that is

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[197] Woolf, "On Being Ill," 4:193.

both alive and dead, one located at the annex of the predictable past and the mysterious future.

This split manifests in Woolf's fiction from a very early stage. "On Being Ill" is a text from roughly the middle of Woolf's career, first appearing in *The Criterion* in 1926. But we see the odd collusion of life and non-life (not the engulfing of one into the other, but an inability to settle once and for all on the distinction) as early as Woolf's 1917 short story "The Mark on the Wall." Indeed, "The Mark on the Wall" is one of several Woolf texts that ought to have earned greater attention by now from OOO philosophers (with the "Time Passes" section of *To the Lighthouse* being another obvious case). The story, one of Woolf's first experiments with stream of consciousness writing, describes in detail the thoughts of its protagonists as she stares at a mark on her wall of unknown origin, coloured "black upon white."[198] Staring at the mark, refusing to get up to look at it more closely, the protagonist follows a complex chain of thoughts, speculations, and flights of fancy, some related closely to the mark and its hidden nature and some quite distant from the question at hand, until her husband walks in and says that the mark is a snail, ending the flow of thoughts. At first glance, the story seems to establish a firm distinction between life and non-life along the lines Bennett criticized, in which the inanimate object is acted upon by human agency (here in the form of the narrator's consciousness) while the living thing is able to resist this agency, breaking the train of thoughts and attaining an independent existence. But we have already seen from "On Being Ill" that we ought to

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[198] Virginia Woolf, "The Mark on the Wall," in *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Susan Dick (New York: Harvest, 1985), 83.

be suspicious of such clear distinctions in Woolf's writing, and close attention to the story shows Woolf's disruption of this dichotomy along epistemological lines – in favour of a more ambiguous, unsettled relation to the perception of life.

The story observes an odd parallelism between its beginning and its end. The revelation that the mark is a snail, though of crucial importance to the plot, occurs as an off the cuff remark from the narrator's husband, whose dialogue is worth examining in detail: "it's no good buying newspapers. . . . Nothing ever happens. Curse this war; God damn this war! . . . All the same, I don't see why we should have a snail on our wall."[199] This passage seems to prefigure what Woolf would later write in *A Room of One's Own* while commenting on the irrational anger of upper class men, who "with the exception of the fog . . . [seem] to control everything."[200] Or, as William Johnsen paraphrases, "why are men angry . . . if they control everything except the weather?"[201] The war, like the weather, refuses to bend to the man's influence, refuses to change itself and respond to his agency (and already we can see how easily natural forces and human creations blend together at the level of perception). To say that "nothing ever happens" – whether in regards to the First World War or in general – is patently untrue, for the unchanging trench lines conceal constant, frenzied activity and a tremendous human cost, while the

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[199] Ibid, 89. Original ellipses.

[200] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own / Three Guineas*, ed. Michele Barrett (New York: Penguin, 1993), 31.

[201] William A. Johnsen, *Violence and Modernism: Ibsen, Joyce, and Woolf* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 114.

narrator sitting in her chair conceals a rich and complex mental life. And likewise does the "mark" conceal an entity of far greater complexity than any hole or stain.

That the revelation that the mark is a snail amounts to an "intervention" in the sense outlined above ought to be clear, since it clearly disrupts the ongoing chain of thoughts in the narrator's head and restricts her ability to exercise her interpretive agency upon the mark. That this intervention – this shock – likewise involves the overlay of discontinuous knowledge upon a continuous reality should also be clear: the narrator's speculations on the mark's nature and origin depend on her ignorance of the snail (there are, in fact, several times throughout the story where she considers getting up to take a closer look, but decides not to). She is not only ignorant of the snail's existence but – as a necessary corollary to this ignorance – does not see it clearly or completely. Given that she seems to perceive the mark, in a manner similar to the narrator of "Solid Objects," as a homogenous blob, lacking the fine details of a snail's shell and body, her perception must be very limited. Finally, the husband's own intervention, in addition to being phrased as a statement of ignorance ("I don't see why we should have a snail on our wall") is prompted by his own troubled, discontinuous perception of the War. The story, then, is built on layers of ignorant discontinuous experience, as we see quite clearly at its end.

But as I said earlier, the ending itself mirrors the beginning. And we can see how so by examining the moment when the narrator first notices the mark:

> [F]or I remember that I was smoking a cigarette when I looked up and saw the mark on the wall for the first time. I looked up through the smoke of my cigarette and my eye

> lodged for a moment upon the burning coals, and that old fancy of the crimson flag flapping from the castle tower came into my mind, and I thought of the cavalcade of red knights riding up the side of the black rock. Rather to my relief the sight of the mark interrupted the fancy.[202]

Though the sight of the mark began the particular chain of associations recorded in the story, *that* chain was itself an interruption of an earlier line of thought begun when the narrator looked at some hot coals. Furthermore, this sight of the mark does not merely interrupt the previous thoughts, but does so *involuntarily*. It is "to [her] relief" that the mark brings an end to the thoughts occasioned by the coals – as though she were unable to bring about such an interruption herself, as though her agency does not extend to her own stream of consciousness. The partial autonomy of body and mind are, as noted, implied by the later "On Being Ill," and Bennett's "vital materialism" represents a serious attempt at theorizing this autonomy. But in this early Woolf story we see an attempt at understanding the implications of living in a world of continuities that one can never fully perceive. When the narrator complains of "how very little control of our possessions we have," before listing all the myriad items – bird cages, book binding tools, a coal-scuttle, a hand organ – that she has lost over the years,[203] all of which have seemingly vanished from existence, we see a trace of the blurred distinction between animacy and inanimacy created by discontinuous perception.

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[202] "The Mark on the Wall," 83.

[203] Ibid, 84.

It is in this way that we can start to see the close affinity between Woolf's "moments of being" and Bergson's critique of Zeno. As Bergson has it, in *Time and Free Will*, the chief error underlying Zeno's paradoxes is their attitude to representation. Duration, says Bergson, is homogenous and continuous, lacking completely the discrete instances within which an arrow might be frozen in the air, or in which Achilles may stop mid-stride. But our representation and description of movement and of time, and our fixing to these specific and discrete quantities, creates the illusion that time itself passes in jumps, with each moment severed from the rest. Thus, we can easily imagine a footrace broken down into indefinitely smaller portions, an infinity of space contained in even the tiniest gaps, and might then conclude from our imaginings (as the Eleatics did) that movement is impossible. This position would hold that space and time are essentially discontinuous, and that the appearance of continuity (say in the straight line of an arrow's flight) is an illusion of perception. Bergson's position is precisely the opposite: *continuity*, for him, is fundamental, and it is in our manner of perceiving and representing the world that divisions appear.

What Woolf does is take this notion of hidden continuity and extend it to the larger web of causal relationships linking everything to everything else. Just as in the case of Zeno these connections are hidden from perception – yet, as we see in "The Mark on the Wall" they have the power to create interventions or shocks which can then make one at least somewhat aware of the larger network hidden just out of view. How exactly one interprets these shocks, though, remains an important question, for the inanimate world has long been denied the capacity for change, its perfect continuity taken as a form of perfect stasis. Thus, unexpected or apparently autonomous activity on the part of

inanimate matter – the result of precisely the problems of perception and representation that lie at the root of Zeno's paradoxes – become coded as "alive" of "agential," since it is precisely those who have life and agency that are supposed to act unexpectedly. Woolf's encounter with the snail shows her, from very early in her career, attacking the simple divisions upon which these assumptions rest.

2.3 The Cosmic Mind of Septimus Smith

Whither, then, panpsychism? In Woolf, it finds its most clear embodiment in Septimus Smith. The First World War veteran, usually read as suffering from shell shock, has recently returned to London after living and marrying in Italy. As he travels through the city, he experiences a number of revelations on the nature of reality, such as:

> [L]eaves were alive; trees were alive. And the leaves were being connected by millions of fibres with his own body . . . when the branch stretched he, too, made that statement . . . Sounds made harmonies with premeditation; the spaces between them were as significant as the sounds. A child cried. Rightly far away a horn sounded. All taken together the birth of a new religion.[204]

While it is indeed true that trees, being plants, are alive, Septimus appears to have given the term a greater significance – the tree is not merely a self-replicating organism, but an agential being capable of affecting those around it much like a person could. This

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[204] Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, ed. David Bradshaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 19. Future citations of this text will be parenthetical, indicated with the letter D.

capacity also is not restricted to plants and animals, but apparently includes "inanimate" objects like horns. Indeed, in an earlier passage Septimus also ascribes life-like qualities to an engine, which "sounded like a pulse irregularly drumming through an entire body" (*D* 12-13).

This vision of life embedded in the connectedness of all things – one that, for Septimus, is explicitly religious – seems out of place in a character so frequently read as a classic sufferer of war trauma. The description of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in the *DSM-V* does not list messianism or mystical experience as a symptom of psychological trauma. And earlier accounts of war trauma likewise fail to mention the traumatized soldiers who wanted to go off and found religions.[205] (While there is some similarity between what Septimus experiences and Freud's analysis of Schreber, the key element of wartime trauma is absent.) Septimus's tentative panpsychism, and its growth out of religious experience, simply does not fit with any model of psychological trauma, whether contemporary with Woolf or not. Yet we can see traces of this diagnosis in much of the criticism concerning this character. Several scholars, for example, have identified Septimus as closed off and isolationist,[206] and indeed such behaviour would not be uncommon among sufferers of trauma. But Septimus is quite clearly and emphatically

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[205] An interesting early account (from 1915) of trauma symptoms is: William Aldrin Turner, "Remarks on Cases of Nervous and Mental Shock Observed in the Base Hospitals in France" *British Medical Journal* (1915): 833-835.

[206] See: Ruotolo, 103. And: Emily Dalgarno, *Virginia Woolf and the Visible World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 74.

not mentally closed off from the rest of the world. From his perspective, he is more connected to the world around him than he has been at any other point in his life – with sounds and sights and the sway of branches all showing him how connected he is to a continuous world. What disguises this connectedness is its refusal of anthropocentrism. For certainly Septimus has been neglectful to Rezia and has done little or nothing to integrate with London society. His "new religion" seems to define no hierarchy between the acts of people and the acts of horns and trees. Thus, his openness, precisely because it is so extensive, is easily mistaken for solitude – or even solipsism.

But where Septimus sees himself in continuity with all things, we find ourselves stumbling over a split: if Septimus's visions are not just another symptom of his shell shock, where did they come from? I propose that a possible model for Septimus's visions is the philosophy of Richard Maurice Bucke, a Canadian "alienist," mystic, and doctor, whose 1901 *Cosmic Consciousness* proved highly popular among European intellectuals. Though recent studies of the history of panpsychism habitually neglect him,[207] Bucke's work found an influential reader in William James, who in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, quotes and summarizes Bucke extensively, calling his book "a highly

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[207] A short list of recent studies of panpsychism that fail to mention Bucke: D.S. Clarke, *Panpsychism and the Religious Attitude* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003); David Skrbina, *Panpsychism in the West* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2005); David Skrbina, ed., *Mind that Abides: Panpsychism in the New Millennium* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2009) – the last being a collection of essays by several authors.

interesting volume."[208] The Russian philosopher and theologian P.D. Ouspensky – whose lectures in London were attended by the likes of T. S. Eliot and Aldous Huxley,[209] and whose work influenced a number of people in Woolf's orbit[210] – likewise dedicates the twenty third chapter of his *Tertium Organum* to a discussion of Bucke's ideas. Bucke's popularity around the turn of the century ought to, on its own, be enough to justify using his ideas as a lens through which to examine Woolf: in much the same way that critics continue to produce psychoanalytic readings of Woolf's novels even though she claims never to have read Freud before 1939,[211] the similarity between the ideas and the sheer likeliness that Woolf encountered them in *some* second-hand form in her time as a highly active intellectual and woman-of-letters[212] means that the usefulness of these ideas to

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[208] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Modern Library, 2002), 434.

[209] Gary Lachman *In Search of P. D. Ouspensky: The Genius in the Shadow of Gurdjieff* (Wheaton: Quest Books, 2006), 177.

[210] For an account of the role of mysticism – including Ouspensky's – in British post-war modernism, see Alex Owen, "The 'Religious Sense' in a Post-War Secular Age" *Past and Present* suppl. 1 (2006): 159-177.

[211] Woolf mentions that she "began reading Freud last night" in a diary entry for 2 December, 1939 (Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Volume Five 1936-1941*, eds. Anne Oliver Bell and Andrew McNeillie [New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1984]. 248).

[212] One can look to, for example, Julie Kane's assessment that "if one were to catalogue the various types of 'mystical' experience appearing in the writings of Virginia Woolf, the list would be virtually indistinguishable from the topics of interests to the Theosophists and spiritualists of her day" ("Varieties of

Woolf critics is undeniable. There is also, on top of all this, at least one documented instance of Woolf encountering a description of Bucke and his writing.

In 1918, writing for the *Times Literary Supplement*, Woolf reviewed *Visits to Walt Whitman*, a sort of biography-cum-travel narrative by J. Johnston and J.W. Wallace – two Englishmen who visited Whitman frequently in the 1890s.[213] Bucke, who published an authorized biography of Whitman in 1883 and was a great admirer of his poetry, appears frequently in *Visits*, particularly in the section written by Wallace. *Cosmic Consciousness* itself is mentioned very early in the account,[214] and is sporadically alluded to throughout. Likewise, mystical experiences and the sensations of universal connectedness occur at several instances in the book, such as when Wallace experiences "a most vivid consciousness of the presence with us of my mother, who died six and a half years before" while observing Bucke.[215] It is this mysticism and sense of connectedness that Woolf picked up on in her review, which frequently emphasizes

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Mystical Experience in the Writings of Virginia Woolf" *Twentieth Century Literature* 41.4 [1995]: 328). Given that Bucke gave talks on his ideas to the Theosophical Society in 1894 (Lorna Weir, "Cosmic Consciousness and the Love of Comrades: Contacts between R. M. Bucke and Edward Carpenter" *Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue d'études canadiennes* 30.2 [1995]:n53), his influence in this domain is unquestionable.

[213] I became aware of this connection through Melba Cuddy-Keane's *Virginia Woolf, the Intellectual, and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 42-43.

[214] J. Johnston and J.W. Wallace, *Visits to Walt Whitman in 1890-1891* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1917), 17.

[215] *Ibid*. 99.

Whitman's own egalitarianism. Furthermore, the review's final line, in which Woolf says that "although the authors of this book lament that they have only a trivial bunch of sayings to offer us, we are left with a sense of an 'immense background or vista,'"[216] strikes many of the same notes as Woolf's writing in "A Sketch of the Past." While it is impossible to show whether or not Woolf actually read *Cosmic Consciousness*, reading *Visits to Walt Whitman* would have put her in contact with both Bucke himself and the basic notions of his philosophy. Woolf's review, furthermore, demonstrates that she not only registered these ideas, but also incorporated them into her own thinking.

But this all still leaves open the question as to what Bucke can tell us about Woolf's incorporation of panpsychism into her work, and answering this question will require a brief summary of Bucke's key ideas. As Bucke argues, forms of consciousness evolve and propagate through a species progressively over time – beginning with "simple consciousness," or the mere awareness of one's own physical body and presence in the world (an attribute Bucke ascribes to "the upper half of the animal kingdom"[217]). Following simple consciousness is "self-consciousness," in which one attains the capacity of meta-cognition: "the animal is . . . immersed in his consciousness as a fish in the sea; he cannot, even in imagination, get outside of it . . . But man by virtue of self

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[216] Virginia Woolf, "Visits to Walt Whitman," in *Collected Essays*, 4 vols. (London: Hogarth Press, 1967), 4:53.

[217] Richard Maurice Bucke, *Cosmic Consciousness: A Study in the Evolution of the Human Mind* (New York: Dover, 2009), 1.

consciousness [sic] can step aside, as it were, from himself."[218] The process by which a species transitions from one type of consciousness very loosely resembles Darwinian evolution.[219] As Bucke describes, as humans were first gaining self-consciousness it "appeared at first in mid-life, here and there, in isolated cases, in the most advances specimens of the race, becoming more and more nearly universal . . . manifesting itself at an earlier and earlier age."[220] Having fully grown into self-consciousness, humanity, says Bucke, is currently in the process of evolving into *cosmic* consciousness, or an awareness of the presence of mind that manifests on a universal scale. The "manifestation" of a new kind of consciousness takes the form of an intense mystical experience, where "the person, suddenly, without warning, has a sense of being immersed in a flame, or rose-colored cloud" yet "at the same instant he is, as it were, bathed in an emotion of joy, assurance, triumph, 'salvation.'"[221] Finally, once the experience is complete, "he does not come to believe merely; but sees and knows that the cosmos, which to the self conscious [sic] mind seems made up of dead matter, is in fact far otherwise – it is in very

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[218] *Ibid*, 1-2.

[219] As Gregory Betts describes, "Bucke proposed a global sociopolitical transformation triggered by biological cognitive mutation" (*Avant-Garde Canadian Literature: The Early Manifestations* [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013], 87).

[220] Bucke, 65-66.

[221] *Ibid*, 72-73.

truth a living presence."[222] What Bucke provides, then, is not merely an articulation of some form of panpsychic philosophy or attitude, but also a mechanism by which such an attitude is achieved – mystical experience.

It is thus useful to compare the way expressions of panpsychism are framed in *Mrs Dalloway* to that of "The Mark on the Wall," the latter which was published prior to Woolf's review of *Visits*. "The Mark on the Wall," as befitting a stream of consciousness narrative, begins abruptly, in the middle of the narrator's thought process, just as she is moving her attention from one object to another. That she jumps so readily from the coals to the mark indicates that this is a fairly normal part of her thinking, that she regularly fixes on seemingly inanimate objects, and that an awareness of their latent independence is a normal part of her internal life. We receive no real analysis of how she came to think this way: it is as if the story had begun with an ellipsis, or with a fade-in (as Beckett does in *Not I*). But Septimus's panpsychism is much more etiologically grounded. While the specifics are obscure, it is clear that his new awareness of the world stems from his experiences during the war – there exists a clear beginning. Indeed, Septimus's own speculations lead to a deeper (and very Bucke-like) understanding of how his awareness came about. "It was the heatwave presumably," he thinks to himself, "operating upon a brain made sensitive by eons of evolution" (*D* 58). Furthermore, his newfound consciousness has endowed him with a sense of purpose: to tell the Prime Minister his newfound revelations (*D* 57) and then found a new religion. The development of Woolf's engagement with panpsychic ideas follows a process surprisingly similar to the jump

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[222] *Ibid*, 73.

from simple to self-consciousness that Bucke describes – proceeding from a depiction which only shows *that* this awareness exists to one which also provides an image of how and why it came to be, and which gives a gives a notion of what its possessor was like prior to the initial shock.[223] It is quite important, then, that Woolf locates the origin of Septimus's visions in a mystical experience, if only because not doing so might mean denying them any origin at all.

The religiosity of Bucke's theory, reflected in Septimus, is demonstrated by his catalogue of "instances of cosmic consciousness" in the books fourth part (as well as his list "imperfect" and "doubtful" cases in part five), which includes several religious figures (the Buddha, Jesus, Mohamed) as well as several writers whose work deeply engaged with theology (Dante, Blake, Emerson). The pattern, as Bucke describes it, usually involves a deeply sensitive, intelligent person who has undertaken an extensive period of study and reflection. In the early stages of a new stage of consciousness – prior to its widespread adoption, when those who attain it often appear as prophets and geniuses – it is only from this highly fertile psychological ground that a new consciousness can spring. This type of origin story is easily adapted to the biographies of various religious figures, with the Buddha's years of meditation and asceticism prior to attaining enlightenment being perhaps the paradigmatic example. But, as a result, cosmic consciousness cannot be said to belong to any particular religion, and instead can be

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[223] Kathryn Van Wert, in her article "The Early Life of Septimus Smith," notably characterizes the younger Septimus as one to whom "rhapsody comes easily," and who "awakens daily to a world that elates him to the point of confusion" (*Journal of Modern Literature* 36.1 [2012]: 76) – which could hardly be a better description of the mindset Bucke identifies in those who have achieved cosmic consciousness.

thought of as a meta-religion – a grand unified theory of mystical experience, in the face of which "all religions known and named to-day will be melted down."[224] As Bucke writes, "the better known members of this group [i.e. people with cosmic consciousness] . . . have created all the great modern religions, beginning with Taoism and Budhism . . . [and] have produced the few books which have inspired the larger number of all that have been written in modern times."[225] As such, Bucke's philosophy at once embraces religiosity and corrodes the claims of established faiths.

This approach allows Bucke to include people like Whitman on his list – those who do not unproblematically fit the label of "religious leader," but who nevertheless expressed cosmic consciousness. It likewise helps Woolf incorporate mysticism into her work given her own lack of belief. Furthermore, garbing Septimus as a prophet raises him to a high level of epistemological prominence. This would not be a common way to read Septimus – as Christine Froula has remarked, "that [Septimus] is mad would seem indisputable; even sympathetic discussions cast him as a war victim and not a prophet."[226] But we need not make this choice. To oppose the "Septimus the prophet" to "Septimus the mad" implies that mental illness cannot function as a seat of knowledge. But taking such a position with regard to Woolf would be contradictory, given that her "moments of being," though more lucidly described and lacking the overt panpsychism,

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[224] Bucke, 5.

[225] *Ibid*, 11.

[226] Christine Froula, *Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury Avant-Garde: War, Civilization, Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 110.

follow the logic of Septimus's experience. The repetition we first saw in Freud – where surprise appears at first as a source of mental illness before appearing again (the return of the repressed!) as a source of knowledge – Woolf here uses to her advantage, conflating the two effects in a single character. When we encounter Septimus imagining himself "alone, called forth in advance of the mass of men to hear the truth" (*D* 57), we must in part recognize that Septimus's supposedly "mad" truth appears in different guises throughout Woolf's body of work. Why should we dismiss it as "madness" here if not elsewhere too?

The most important of these similarities is of course between Septimus and Clarissa. Though Clarissa Dalloway does indeed believe in a philosophy of "connectedness" which resembles what we find in "A Sketch of the Past," it does not at first glance seem obviously related to Bucke's philosophy, and perhaps one might be tempted to read Clarissa's as the "sane" versions of Septimus's ideas. Yet important similarities remain, the key one here being her thoughts at the party, after hearing about the suicide, where she thinks about the

> Odd affinities she had with people she had never spoken to,
> some woman on the street, some man behind a counter –
> *even trees, or barns*. It ended in a transcendental theory
> which, with her horror of death, allowed her to believe . . . .
> that since our apparitions, the part of us which appears, are
> so momentary compared with . . . the unseen part of us,
> which spreads wide, the unseen might survive, be

> recovered somehow attached to this person or that (*D* 129-130 my emphasis).

Clarissa's "affinities," like Septimus's visions, extend beyond the human and include both plants and non-living things. Likewise, she sees people as divided between their "apparitions" and some sort of "wide," "unseen" aspect – which if the structure and content of *Mrs Dalloway* is any indication, amounts to the vast network of observations and relationships one participates in simply as a matter of being alive. The belief that these connections allow one an existence after death is quintessentially Buckeian. As he writes early in his book, with cosmic consciousness comes "what may be called a sense of immortality . . . not a conviction that he [i.e. the cosmically conscious] shall have this, but the consciousness that he has it already."[227] What we encounter with Clarissa, then, is very like what we encounter through Septimus: a form of panpsychism following, in a very general way, the terms Bucke outlined in *Cosmic Consciousness*. In both cases, the characters' ideas become in large part heuristics for managing their encounter with continuities – of physical laws, of social interaction, of people watching a plane write in the sky – which they are aware of but cannot fully perceive or understand. The shocks and surprises that result from this incomplete knowledge thereby take on, to them, the appearance of life, and so it is in the terms of life and living things that the characters understand their vibrant, discontinuous world.

It is in this light that we ought to read the final moments of Septimus's life, before his suicide. As Dr. Holmes runs up the stairs to see him, prompting Septimus to cast out

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[227] Bucke, 3.

for a way to kill himself, his thoughts turn to at once to the objects scattered around his room – the bread knife he decides not to "spoil" with his blood, the gas fire that would take too long to asphyxiate him, the razor blades that Rezia has already packed (*D* 126), all of which seem to exert upon him some form of agency, guiding his attention from point to point towards the window. We see a similar moment just before Septimus jumps: "Life was good. The sun hot. Only human beings? Coming down the staircase opposite an old man stopped and stared at him. Holmes was at the door. 'I'll give it you!' he cried, and flung himself" (*D* 127). The vagueness of Septimus's final call, and in particular the undefined object of the "you," points to a conflation of the human and the not. While the meaning of Septimus's final words has been much debated, there has always been an underlying assumption that the "you" refers to some kind of *person* – a tenuous assumption given the extent to which Septimus devotes his final thoughts to the objects lying about the room. If one were to ask what gift he is giving, one could do much worse than to say that it is the "you" – a gift of subjectivity to the "life" he finds so beautiful, a class not limited to "only human beings." But while we might be privy to Septimus's final thoughts, and so have some hope of reconstructing his decision, Rezia and Holmes do not. And so his final actions can only seem, to them, an act of madness, the care with which he acted smothered by the "cotton wool."

2.4 Agency and the Gaps of *To the Lighthouse*

Someone possessing seemingly no problems with hidden continuities is Mr. Ramsay of *To the Lighthouse*, at least insofar as we can see from his actions in the novel's first part. It is notable that this novel begins with an argument about the weather, given that the earth's climate is one of the most complex systems that humans have regular, imminent

contact with. Indeed, the split between the "climate" – the global, long-term fluctuations of the planet's atmosphere – and "weather" – the short-term, localized manifestation of climate effects – fits quite well into the division I discussed earlier between the discontinuous information gained through perception (weather) and the complex continuity that lies behind it (climate).[228] That the conversation hinges not merely on the weather, but the *prediction of* the weather, is also notable, not only because of the novel's general thematic concern with prediction (especially in the first section) but also because of what prediction means, in practical terms, when dealing with entities as grand and complex as climate patterns. What the weather is like at a particular time and in a particular place is the singular result of a complex network of relationships, the vast majority of which will be obscure to the average person, getting caught in the rain on the way home simply because of a lack of omniscience. A particular event is only predictable, after all, if one has comprehensive knowledge of its predicates: I can predict with certainty that a stone I drop will fall to the ground because I know that it is bound by the earth's gravity and because I know that there are no obstacles or impediments in its way; if I drop the stone only for it to be caught by someone else before it hits the ground, then my prediction failed because my knowledge was incomplete (I didn't see the person hiding behind me, waiting for a chance to spoil things). None of the Ramsays possess anything close to comprehensive knowledge of their local weather conditions, so it would be absurd for them to express absolute confidence in their predictions – at the very least,

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[228] For the importance of this distinction, see Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology at the End of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

a tentative statement like Mrs. Ramsay's "it *may* be fine"[229] would be more appropriate. And yet Mr. Ramsay's prediction is unequivocal: the rain will come. Frustratingly, he ends up being correct.

The argument about the weather in *To the Lighthouse* ought to remind us of Woolf's criticism in *A Room of One's Own* of the furious man, blind to his own power, whose agency yet fails to extend to nature itself. It should also recall a prediction made by Terence, of Woolf's *The Voyage Out*, just after the death of his beloved Rachel: "look at the moon. There's a halo round the moon. We shall have rain to-morrow."[230] And that evening, the rain does indeed arrive.[231] In both of these cases, Woolf identifies the weather with a domain outside of a particular man's control. To see how this works regarding Terence, we can compare his actions to what Woolf says later in the same passage of *A Room*, where she diagnoses the anger of misogynist men: "is anger, I wondered, somehow, the familiar, the attendant sprite on power? Rich people, for example, are often angry because they suspect that the poor want to seize their wealth. . . . Possibly when the professor insisted a little too emphatically upon the inferiority of women, he was concerned not with their inferiority, but with his own superiority."[232] The

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[229] Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, ed. Mark Hussey (New York: Harvest, 2005), 8. My emphasis. Future citations of this book will be parenthetical, indicated with the acronym TTL.

[230] Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out*, ed. Jane Wheare (New York: Penguin, 1992), 334.

[231] *Ibid*, 347.

[232] *A Room of One's Own*, 31.

exertion of power and certainty, then, becomes a way of supplementing a perceived personal weakness. Terence, then, upon encountering his own limitations through his inability to save Rachel, casts about for some other external entity that he can act upon. Spotting the "halo" around the moon, he latches on to it and makes a prediction, and is fortuitous enough to see that prediction come true.

What then is Mr. Ramsay insecure about? The clear answer seems to be his own philosophical development, which seems to have stalled out. Having secluded himself from his family, Mr. Ramsay begins to think about his progress as a philosopher. Tellingly, the harsh assessment of his own intellectual limitations begins with his claim to have "a splendid mind" (*TTL* 37). "If thought," he thinks, ". . . like the alphabet is ranged in twenty-six letters all in order, then his splendid mind had no difficulty in running over those letters one by one . . . until it had reached, say, the letter Q. He reached Q. Very few people in the whole of England ever reach Q" (*TTL* 37). But at Q he remains stuck. As he struggles to reach the next letter, R, he finds that he has run up permanently against his limits. This is a problem not merely of intellectual pride, but also for his self-image as the family's patriarch. As his thoughts transition from reaching Q to searching for R, Mr. Ramsay briefly glimpses his family through a window: "he perceived, his wife and son, together . . . They needed his protection; he gave it to them" (*TTL* 37). Because he is a philosophy professor, his ability to think, and to develop new concepts, is central to his self-identified role as "protector." Thus, when later Mr. Ramsay cedes defeat to R, and hears "in that flash of darkness . . . people saying – he was a failure – that R was beyond him" (*TTL* 37), we can begin to see the immense emotional toll that his intellectual stagnation has put on him.

Mr. Ramsay responds to this stagnation with, not *merely* a prediction, but one he declares repeatedly, chauvinistically, until he is sure that James's dream of seeing the lighthouse has been completely abandoned. As Patrick Whiteley observes, "although [Mr. Ramsay's] predictions turn out to be right, his reactions . . . have an intensity disproportionate to the issue at hand, which encourages us to suspect an underlying emotional need that he will not acknowledge."[233] And we can determine what these needs might be by returning to the structure of his alphabet metaphor for the process of thought. It is a clear example of what Bergson identified as the spatialization of thought, where thought processes are described in terms of physical objects or sequences, allowing them to be lined up in a row and quantified. As he writes, "as soon as we try to give an account of a conscious state . . . this state, which is above all personal, will be resolved into impersonal elements external to one another, each of which calls up a genus and is expressed by a word."[234] This is the mistake we make if we believe, like Zeno did, in a motionless Achilles, forever trapped by the infinite number of discrete points that lie between any two locations. As Bergson has it, Zeno's paradox fails to take into account the difference between an object passing through successive locations in space and the synthesis between those locations. The mind perceiving motion performs a kind of mathematical integration, stringing together the points through which the object passes to form a line. *That*, according to Bergson, is what the perception of motion is, and as a

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[233] Patrick J. Whiteley, *Knowledge and Experimental Realism in Conrad, Lawrence, and Woolf* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 184-185.

[234] *Time and Free Will*, 163.

process that occurs entirely within consciousness it is indivisible. But in representing this perception, we invariably treat it as though it occurs in physical space, which then renders it subject to space's divisibility.

In conceiving of his progress as a philosopher in terms of the alphabet, Mr. Ramsay might well be playing Zeno to his own thought – convincing himself of his own immobility by improperly applying spatial concepts to conscious states. He fails as a philosopher, then, because he has been robbed of his ability to synthesize, to integrate his discrete points of thought into a continuity. Reeling with a sense of failure, Mr. Ramsay looks outwards for something to synthesize, and comes upon the weather. His prediction that it will not permit a trip to the lighthouse depends on very little information – Tansley's observation that the wind is blowing in the wrong direction (*TTL* 9) and also a falling barometer (*TTL* 35) being some of the only meteorological data reported to us. Mr. Ramsay is working with very little information, a few choice local observations made without any knowledge of the broader weather conditions at play, but he synthesizes these points into a definite conclusion. He has, essentially, made his earlier mistake in reverse, taking processes occurring in space (which can be divided into discrete points) and synthesizing them as easily as if they were the products of his consciousness: having lost a sense of continuity in his own thoughts, Mr. Ramsay went out looking for continuity in the natural world, and then tricked himself into thinking that he had found it.

That Mr. Ramsay would find solace for the limitations of his thinking in his ability to predict the natural world is quite ironic, given that it flies in the face of his own philosophy. We do not get much specific information regarding his thought, much less

any particular concepts he has developed or arguments he has made. But it is possible to glean the broad strokes. When Lily Briscoe thinks about Mr. Ramsay, she remembers Andrew saying that the work has to do with "subject and object and the nature of reality," and he asks her to think "of a kitchen table . . . when you're not there" (*TTL* 26). This passage, at the very least, defines Mr. Ramsay as some kind of philosophical realist. Furthermore, his attentiveness to the table "when you're not there" sounds almost like a summary of object oriented ontology, at least insofar as in indicates an interest in physical objects as they exist independently of perception. In any case, it is a basic assumption of realism that objects have an existence outside of human perception – that they act and are acted upon in myriad ways that our senses simply fail to account for. That knowledge alone ought to make Mr. Ramsay more careful with bandying about predictions. But he has instead confused the continuity of the natural world with his discontinuous perception of it. He therefore makes his predictions with a completely unwarranted level of confidence.

And he is not the only one to do so – in fact, "The Window" is absolutely full of predictions, most of which turn out to be not nearly so successful as Mr. Ramsay's weather forecast. "Andrew," thinks Mr. Ramsay, "would be a better man than he had been. Prue would be a beauty, her mother said" (*TTL* 72) (in fact, neither character survives "Time Passes"). Elsewhere, Tansley predicts that "James will have to write *his* dissertation one of these days" (*TTL* 35), and who could forget Mr. Ramsay's prediction that "the very stone one kicks with one's book will outlast Shakespeare" – which he immediately follows up with another: "his own little light would shine, not very brightly, for a year or two, and would then be merged in some bigger light, and that in a bigger

still" (*TTL* 39). On the very first page we are told that James Ramsay "belong[s] . . . to that great clan which cannot keep this feeling separate from that, but must let future prospects, with their joys and sorrows, cloud what is actually at hand" (*TTL* 7), and it would seem that this "clan" includes most of the book's principle characters. All throughout "The Window" we see people making and arguing about predictions, and the predictions are often quite confident, often quite certain. Mrs. Ramsay's hedging and qualification when suggesting that James might be able to visit the lighthouse is an exceptional case: most of the time the declarations come closer to those of Mr. Ramsay – "It *will* rain."

It is in this way that we can begin to see the importance of "Time Passes" in the structure of *To the Lighthouse*." Often neglected in criticism of the novel,[235] "Time Passes" here appears as an antidote to the certainty of the previous section. "We must wait," says Mr. Banks in the section's opening line, "for the future to show" (*TTL* 129), and in its own austere fashion the section enacts this showing. "Time Passes" is an exploration of what goes on "behind" human experience – the vast array of non-human events and actions so often hidden from view, though occasionally peeking in as "moments of being" or dalliances with panpsychism. The section brings us back to the distinction I discussed at the beginning of the chapter between characterizations of nature as unchanging and predictable and characterizations which hold nature to be unpredictable and surprising, with these surprises functioning as sources of knowledge.

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[235] See: Lecia Rosenthal *Mourning Modernism: Literature, Catastrophe, and the Politics of Consolation* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 58.

The repeated shocks that the Ramsay family suffer through the ten years the section covers – including the deaths of Mrs. Ramsay, Andrew, and Prue – amount to an intervening of the wider world upon the characters. Their predictions, it turns out, were based on too little information, far beyond their vision lay forces of war and disease that robbed them of their futures.

The structure of this section enacts this discontinuity in a number of ways, with the most notable being the seeming inexplicability of the parenthetical asides. For example, in one we go from a description of the onset of spring to, suddenly, the marriage of Prue Ramsay (*TTL* 135). We are not told who the husband is, nor how they met, or anything about what the two are like together, and it is only a page later that we are told that Prue had died in childbirth. That there is so little information, and that this information comes to us in the form of interruptions in the primary narrative, emphasizes the fact that, though the Ramsays have left the narrative eye, their lives are continuing beyond our gaze. Ten years pass between "The Window" and "The Lighthouse," and the characters live every moment of those years without close narratological observation. So then no wonder all manner of strange discontinuities occur – characters turning up suddenly dead or married without so much as a warning. But the process also functions in reverse, in that reading "Time Passes" allows us to encounter the continuous changes and events that occur inside the empty house which, to the returning Ramsays of part three, are invisible.

The world without the Ramsays is one of constant motion and change. As the narrator describes in the third part of "Time Passes": "the nights now are full of wind and destruction; the trees plunge and bend and their leaves fly helter skelter until the lawn is

plastered with them and they lie packed in gutters and choke rain-pipes and scatter damp paths" (*TTL* 132). This passage, full of frenzied activity, is notable also for how it ascribes grammatical agency. "The trees plunge" – they act, insofar as the grammar is concerned, under their own agency. Though we might infer that the plunging, bending trees are being acted upon by the "wind and destruction" of the previous clause, this connection occurs only at the level of implication. Next the leaves, which "fly helter skelter," again seemingly under their own motivation, bring us to the first passive verb with "the lawn is plastered with them." This passivity simply emphasizes the active quality of the leaves, which clog gutters and pipes and spread seemingly everywhere. The passivity of the lawn effectively gives the leaves an object upon which to intervene.

This intervention is still, of course, motivated by the wind from the beginning of the sentence. But by separating the cause from its effects with a semicolon, Woolf enacts the same kind of discontinuities that give the appearance of agency to inanimate objects. The active voice, here, hides information, occluding the events behind the bending tree and flying leaves so to make these objects appear agential. We see the reverse occur near the end of the section, when the repairs on the house are nearly finished and the Ramsays are preparing to return: "dusters were flicked from the windows, the windows were shut to, keys were turned all over the house; the front door was banged; it was finished" (*TTL* 145). Again the voice here hides information, in this case keeping back details of who is doing all of these repairs. This phrasing does, however, maintain focus on the objects themselves, in this case emphasizing their capacity to be acted *upon*. But far from simply emphasizing the objects' fall into passivity, the use of a list here emphasizes the sheer quantity of things that have to be done in order to erase all sign of the activity of the past

ten years. This work, which has involved "days of labour" (*TTL* 145), is essentially anti-entropic, in that it seeks to undo all of the changes affected on the house through a great exertion of energy. What we see in this passage is simply how much work it takes to cover up the accumulated actions of the inanimate world with a veneer of human agency.

What kind of house, then, do the Ramsays and Lily Briscoe return to? It is in part an illusion of stability and continuity – exactly the same illusions that lead to their many confident, erroneous predictions ten years ago. And we see them attempt to exploit this continuity to return to finish what they started in "The Window," with James and Mr. Ramsay taking their trip up to the lighthouse, and Lily finishing her portrait by sitting in the exact same spot she had ten years earlier. But the changes of the previous decade have extended even to the way they perceive the landscape. James, for example, remembers seeing the lighthouse as "a silvery, misty-looking tower with a yellow eye," but now when he looks sees it "stark and straight . . . barred with black and white . . . [with] washing spread on the rocks to dry" (*TTL* 189). In this context, Lily's painting becomes very interesting. Though the second sitting supposedly captures the same scene as the first, the intervening time would have irrevocably altered the landscape in thousands of subtle ways that Lily would be unlikely to even notice. And though the scene in "The Window" and the scene in "The Lighthouse" are linked, continuously, by a decade of natural changes, these changes have all happened out of Lily's sight. She therefore perceives these two scenes discontinuously, and must then merge them into each other, integrating the two distinct points into a single continuity. The painting, then, is an enactment of the post-war nostalgia that pervades this final section. The attempt to "return," both to the old house and to the abandoned desires of an earlier time (visiting

the lighthouse, finishing the pointing), is an attempt to stitch these two discontinuous moments into a single unity that hides the painful decade lying between them.

We should therefore pay close attention to the manner in which Lily finishes her painting, which in many ways resembles the act of artistic creation as Bergson describes it in *Creative Evolution*. She sees it, nearly finished, "with all its greens and blues, its lines running up and across, its attempt at something" (*TTL* 211), and initially dismisses it, imagining that it would end up abandoned in an attic somewhere. The painting, meanwhile, is not really being described – rather, we are told of the painting's components, its lines and colours, and not the larger whole that these elements ought to make up. Then Lily seems to notice something: "with a sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line there, in the centre. It was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought . . . I have had my vision" (*TTL* 211). What Lily seems to have done in this brief flash of insight is glimpse some underlying continuity "behind" the image before her eyes. Indeed, this final passage seems to follow exactly the pattern of a "moment of being," occurring as it does in a moment of artistic production (remember that Woolf would associate her own moments with her writing) and involving a sudden, surprising flash of insight which illuminates for a moment some greater scheme behind the "cotton" of the everyday. This moment, which transforms the painting in Lily's eyes from disposable to a "vision," is perhaps the kind of flash of inspiration James and Mr. Ramsay sought as they visited the lighthouse – a sudden glimpse of the continuous world that they once believed they had.

2.5 The Stuff of Life

"Woolf's problem," writes Mads Thomsen,

> is that she experiences a high level of coherence in the phenomena of the world that are of a character and beauty that might lead one to imagine that a higher power, a collective will, or at least some kind of artistic intention underlies them. She also clearly states that she cannot believe . . . [in] any such agency in the world, least of all a god.[236]

Panpsychism seems to have been a solution to this problem. In its various shapes and guises – including the mysticism of *Mrs Dalloway* and the more subtle embrace of physical animacy in *To the Lighthouse* – panpsychism has served her stories not so much as a metaphysical backdrop as a way of knowing the world. The problem begins in perception, in that Woolf's characters encounter the world discontinuously, witnessing effects cut off from their causes, perceiving relationships far too complex to be fully teased out. In the case of some characters, like Mr. Ramsay, the tendency is to take the part for the whole, or at the very least to presume that the part is sufficient, and to then crudely integrate these discontinuous scraps of perception into a single image. This image, mistaken for the real physical world, is attributed all of that world's qualities, namely is continuity and, by extension, its capacity to be subject to prediction. Mr.

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[236] Mads Rosendahl Thomsen, *The New Human in Literature: Posthuman Visions of Changes in Body, Mind and Society after 1900* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 95.

Ramsay then makes the old determinist's mistake of moving the frame of reference from the present, with its indeterminacy, to the past, in which every act is set. The future seems spoken for, as the speculations extend across it, blinkering its latent possibilities.

For Mr. Ramsay, as with so many of Woolf's other characters, the antidote to this total integration is a shock, an event completely unforeseen which disrupts the prior expectations. As I established at the beginning of this chapter with my discussion of surprise and science, the unexpected is an important epistemological force, not merely through its ability to dismantle previously-held, erroneous ideas, but also by allowing the inanimate world to introduce new information – to *intervene* upon the observer with inexplicable actions that cry out for explanation. It is at this junction that panpsychism can function, in certain cases, as a heuristic tool, in that it offers a label for the observer's ignorance, designating the occluded causal relations behind the shock with the label "agency" or "life," linking the unexpectedness of the event analogically to the unexpectedness thought to distinguish the living from the not. Clearly, as a tool of scientific investigation, this would be an unsuitable way to resolve the question. But in Woolf's writing what we encounter are not the carefully curated shocks of a laboratory experiment, where the variables are controlled and limited to make the results as easily interpreted as possible, but rather the myriad, irresolvable discontinuities of everyday existence.

Ignorance, it seems, is a common thread linking these analyses of perception together. The narrator of "The Mark on the Wall" is, of course, unaware that the mark is a snail for most of the story, and the first part of *To the Lighthouse* draws much dramatic irony from the fact that none of the characters can foresee the First World War. And *Mrs*

Dalloway – perhaps Woolf's most extended fictional engagement with continuity – is full of instances in which those continuities go unperceived, such as the famous scene with the sky-writer, where Clarissa and Septimus (and a number of other passers-by) are linked through their mutual observation of this spectacle, and yet never realize it. Furthermore, as James Harker characterizes, Woolf's "rhetorical reliance on misperception" is "a central theme in her fiction."[237] And so, for example, in "Solid Objects," we see the remarkable narration of a single black spot splitting into two distinct men[238] – yet another instance in Woolf where ignorance, so often acting as a divisive force that splits continuities apart, appears to also have great synthetic power, bringing together disparate entities to form unexpected wholes. It is this process too that allows Lily Briscoe to sit in her old panting spot and see the "same" scene that she had a decade earlier, and it is precisely because she *doesn't* know about the millions of tiny events that have happened in that spot during her absence that she is able to complete the painting and her vision – because the vision itself is the product of Lily breaking through this presumed sameness.

These characters are performing a kind of everyday speculation, transforming the forever incomplete data of perception into a common-sense notion of how things are supposed to work. It is perhaps this common-sense formation that Woolf has in mind during "A Sketch of the Past" where she described the "nondescript cotton wool" in which most of human experience is wrapped (and which one only breaks through after a

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[237] James Harker, "Misperceiving Virginia Woolf" *Journal of Modern Literature* 34.2 (2011): 2.

[238] "Solid Objects," 102.

shock, during a moment of being). As Woolf writes, "a great part of every day is not lived consciously. One walks, eats . . . deals with what has to be done" but one rarely remembers these countless, mundane events.[239] As we might recall, it is precisely "behind" this "cotton wool" that the larger "pattern" of existence lies, waiting to be discovered in a moment of being. The shock that precipitates these moments, and the sense of all-connectedness that results, is essentially the breaching of the bubble of discontinuous experience in which the subject lives. So, for example, when Woolf describes an early experience of hers in which she "was looking at a plant with a spread of leaves; and it seemed suddenly plain that the flower itself was a part of the earth,"[240] she says something that is at once both quite obvious and quite fascinating. Virtually everyone knows that plants are integrated into the earth – they are embedded in it, they gather nutrients from it, they fertilize it when they die. Yet these processes of integration so often happen outside the scope of human perception (unless, perhaps, you are a botanist) that it is often simply easier to perceive the flower and the soil and completely distinct entities without ever pondering the complex relationships that link them. And so Woolf's sudden encounter with this continuity comes as a surprise, and takes on the feeling of a mystical experience.

That these moments of being derive from moments of shock has a lot to do with why they lead to versions of panpsychism rather than, say, determinism, which likewise posits a perfect continuity between all entities in existence. This divergence brings us

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[239] "A Sketch of the Past," 70.

[240] "A Sketch of the Past," 71.

back to the discussion of Kant at the beginning of the chapter, and the common materialist understanding of nature as changeless and predictable (which we see reflected, for example, in Mr. Ramsay's line about Shakespeare and the stone). Despite this presumption that the universe follows the same rules in all places and at all times – a presumption that makes prediction possible – it is surprise, the failure of prediction, that serves as a key tool for gaining new information about the world. Philosophers have also commonly identified unpredictability as a trait of consciousness and agency, and it is indeed upon matter's ability to act in unexpected and perplexing ways that defenders of panpsychism have built their arguments. By identifying unexpectedness with agency, then, Woolf allows these shocks to have an *integrative* force, giving one a glimpse of a grander, more complex web of relationships, mediated through the notion of "life" – as opposed to the *dis-integrative* role that shock plays for more decidedly materialist thinkers like Mr. Ramsay, for whom the many shocks of "Time Passes" did not point towards cohesion, but rather destroyed it. By grasping shock and using it to break down the division between human beings and other kinds of matter, panpsychism grants Woolf a way to find unity and coherence in an unstable world. It is therefore of little surprise that Woolf's most straightforward representation of panpsychism results from Septimus's war trauma, since the cohesion he finds "behind the cotton wool" can serve as a potential replacement for the cohesion that he has lost in his everyday life.

Panpsychism does not appear in Woolf, it would seem, as a metaphysical or ontological tenet, but rather as an epistemological mode and as a strategy for engaging with perception. It is, in effect, a product of her agnotology, in which Woolf takes the multitudinous interconnectedness of which she is aware but cannot fully understand and

transposes it into a quality ("life") that is present in the objects themselves rather than emergent from the relations between them, a change which therefore makes it possible to think the objects in isolation. Panpsychism is in that sense a rather ingenious solution to a difficult problem. Woolf's characters (and occasionally her narrative voice) modulate the play of discontinuous impressions and habitual speculation by strategically endowing inanimate objects with agency and intelligence of their own. It is precisely because Woolf knows that there is not some higher intelligence guiding these processes that she employs the tropes and language of mysticism and mystical experience, since it is in this way that she can express the great web of relationships she knows connects everything even though she can never actually show that web in her fiction. Panpsychism, then, becomes a way of interacting with the world and of allowing the world to act back – endowing her fiction with a liveliness it would have otherwise lost.

Chapter 3

Winds that Turn the Arrow: The Ecological Imperative of Ezra Pound

Thou hast a voice, great Mountain, to repeal

Large codes of fraud and woe; not understood

By all, but which the wise, and great, and good

Interpret, or make felt, or deeply feel.

— Percy Shelley, "Mont Blanc"[241]

3.1 "The whole tribe is from one man's body"[242]

Already we have seen the importance of prediction, and of prophecy, in modernist authors' relationship to epistemology, agnotology, and to the unknown. For Bergson and Lewis, successful prophecy always threatens to reduce human beings to deterministic automata (as we see, for instance, in Lewis's engagement with the story of Herod), and have seen in detail the importance occupied by shock and surprise in the implicit metaphysics of Woolf's fiction and their relation to ignorance. It is with these

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[241] Percy Shelley, "Mont Blanc," in *Shelley: Poems*, ed. Isabel Quigley (New York: Penguin, 1956), 76.

[242] Ezra Pound, *The Cantos* (New York: New Directions, 1996), XCIX/728. For ease of reference, all citations of *The Cantos* shall be provided in the form of [canto number] / [page number]. Future citations will be parenthetical, indicated with "*C*."

relationships in mind that we should turn to the following passage from Ezra Pound's 1954 translation of Sophokles's[243] *Women of Trachis*:

HERAKLES: My father told me long ago
that no living man should kill me,
but that someone from hell would, and
that brute Centaur has done it.
. . .
I thought it meant life in comfort.
It doesn't. It means that I die.
For amid the dead there is no work in service.
Come at it that way, my boy, what

SPLENDOUR,

IT ALL COHERES.[244]

Herakles is dying. A centaur, Nessus, has tricked his wife into poisoning him, and he is lying in front of his son in agony begging in the name of "Filial Obedience"[245] to be

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[243] In all cases of variant spellings of Greek names (i.e. whether to use "Herakles" or "Hercules," "Sophokles" or "Sophocles") I use the version provided in Pound's rendering. Since Pound is inconsistent on the Anglicization of Confucius's name, I have opted for the standard spelling.

[244] Sophokles, *Women of Trachis*, trans. Ezra Pound (New York: New Directions, 1957), 49-50. The translation was first published in *The Hudson Review* (6.4 [1954]: 487-523).

[245] *Ibid*, 50.

dragged up a hill and burned in sacrifice so that he might be put out of his misery. And yet in this agony, and in the completion of Zeus's dire predictions, he does not despair, but rather gasps at the "splendour" of the transcendental coherence that the prophecy reveals to him. But the exclamation (which Pound takes the trouble of emphasizing with capital letters) should reveal to those familiar with Pound's writing a further coherence, this time with a far better known passage from Canto CXVI, in his *Drafts and Fragments*:

> But the beauty is not the madness
> Tho' my errors and wrecks lie about me.
> And I am not a demigod,
> I cannot make it cohere.
>
> (*C* CXVI/815-16)

There are many similarities between these two passages,[246] and likewise between Herakles's fall and the situation Pound found himself in as he wrote the *Drafts and Fragments* – the collapse of both his fascist politics and the poetic goals of *The Cantos*

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[246] Strangely, given the extent to which *The Cantos* have been studied, the resonance between these two passages has been seldom remarked upon – going unmentioned, for instance, in Carroll F. Terrell's annotations of the canto in *A Companion to* The Cantos *of Ezra Pound* ([Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993], 723-24). On the other hand, Peter Liebregts, in his entry on *Women of Trachis* in *The Ezra Pound Encyclopedia*, notes both the relationship to CXVI and goes on to claim that "one may surmise that at St. Elizabeth's Pound felt some sort of affinity with the suffering Herakles, as the Greek hero met with an unavoidable fate after a life of fighting and struggling (eds. Demetres P. Tryphonopoulos and Stephen J. Adams [Westport: Greenwood Press, 2005], 305-06).

here taking the place of Herakles's impending demise. Indeed, Pound's recognition that he is not a "demigod" seems like a fairly direct allusion to the half-god tragic hero, and Pound's own estimation of the exclamation's importance (he calls it "the key phrase, for which the play exists" in one of his few footnotes[247]) makes it unsurprising that the line would appear later among his epic's many allusions. But the purpose of this chapter is not simply to gesture towards a subject rhyme, or to excavate a series of classical allusions. Rather, I begin the chapter with these passages to provide an avenue into an underlying tendency in Pound's thought – what I call, for reasons that will become clear, his *imperative logic* – that provides a fulcrum between his aesthetics and his politics, and which may likewise serve as an access point for scholars interested in studying Pound through eco-criticism.

What are we to make of Herakles's cohesion? As with Herod before, it comes at the behest of a divine prophecy and is experienced as one would experience a law of nature. Much like how a physicist, if cognizant of the relevant forces, can predict the motion of an object in space, Zeus in his omniscience has predicted the fate of his most famous son. In both cases the success of these predictions gives evidence of an underlying order to the universe, though the nature of those orders differ considerably. But Herakles does not begin his speech with the phrase "Zeus predicted," but rather with "*my father* predicted," a turn of phrase that aligns the fulfillment of the prophecy with the later invocation of filial piety. By dying in the manner that he is, Herakles has fulfilled the will of his father, which here takes on the force of a natural law. He then turns to his

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[247] *Women of Trachis*, 50n1.

son Hyllos and asks him to swear that he do the same "by the head of Zeus."[248] And Hyllos, like his father, comes through – dragging Herakles to the place of sacrifice, lighting his body ablaze:

HYLLOS: Hoist him up, fellows

And for me a great tolerance,

matching the gods' great unreason.

They see things being done,

calamities looked at,

sons to honor their fathers,

. . .

wrecks many, such as have not been suffered before.

And all of this is from Zeus.[249]

Though he, unlike his father, is blind to the larger system, he obeys his father's order anyway, and keeps his promise, attributing as he does so the mass of events to the will of Zeus, his grandfather and his god. This higher order is, as should be clear by now, not merely one of physical laws and the procession of nature, but also of ethical and political duty. Herakles's status as a demigod thus makes him useful vehicle for Pound's exploration of the alignment between natural and cultural forces, and to the epistemological-agnotological relation that those have with each other. He is a hybrid in

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[248] *Ibid*, 50.

[249] *Ibid*, 54.

the Latourian sense,[250] drawing together those two domains often thought to be ontologically separate.

It is in this way that we can begin to see a way towards an ecological reading of Pound – though it is admittedly one that we must enter sneakily, through a side-door, rather than through the main entrance as one would with ecological critiques of Percy Shelley or Marianne Moore. That we must do so ought to be surprising, given the sheer quantity of nature metaphors and similar asides to the non-human world that one finds scattered throughout Pound's poetry. Indeed, as far back as 1976 we can read C. David Heymann opine that "everything considered, Pound is, in a real sense, a nature poet."[251] And yet, despite the recent vogue in eco-criticism among modernist scholars, one finds almost no analysis of Pound in ecological terms.[252] I do not here claim to have solved the

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[250] See: Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 10-12.

[251] C. David Heyman, *Ezra Pound: The Last Rower* (New York: Seaver Books, 1980 [1976]), 66.

[252] Notable recent texts that place Pound in an eco-critical context include: Joshua Schuster, *The Ecology of Modernism: American Environments and Avant-Garde Poetics* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2015); Michael D. Sloane, *Dirty Modernism: Ecological Objects in American Poetry* (PhD. diss. The University of Western Ontario, 2014); Ning Yu, "A Poetics of 'Secretaries of Nature': Ezra Pound's Etymological Readings of Chinese Characters as a Poetic Site for the Reunification of Culture and Nature," *Comparative American Studies* 7.2 (2009): 140-150; William Pratt, ed., *Ezra Pound, Nature, and Myth* (New York: AMS Press, 2003); J.E. Terblanche and R.F. Terblanche, "Ezra Pound's Orientalist Poetry, Natural Rootedness, and Lepidoptera," *Literator* 23.3 (2002): 97-116. It should be noted that of these texts, only the last three take Pound as a primary focus of analysis.

many complexities that have no doubt given would-be Poundian eco-critics such a difficult time. Rather, I wish here to gesture towards how in Pound a particular notion of what "nature" is and how it works is baked into his other theories of politics, economics, and poetics.

The issue turns in part on a problem that Timothy Morton describes across his two books *Ecology Without Nature* and *The Ecological Thought*. Drawing from Latour and more recent work in Object Oriented Ontology (OOO), Morton establishes an important taxonomy of approaches to thinking about the natural world, one that distinguishes between thinking in terms of "nature" and thinking in terms of "ecology." As Morton describes, "Nature was always 'over yonder,' alien and alienated. Just like a reflection, we can never actually reach it and belong to it. Nature was an ideal image, a self-contained form suspended afar, shimmering and naked behind glass like an expensive painting,"[253] whereas "the ecological thought is interconnectedness in the fullest and deepest sense. . . . The ecological thought insists that we're deeply connected even when we say we're not."[254] This split between ecological thought and natural thought – between integration and division – is one of the primary tensions spanning over Pound's poetic project. We see it, for example, in the death of Herakles, who despite invoking familial bonds to coerce his son had spent much of the play cheating on his wife with another woman, and who (by his own admission) thought that the prophecies of his death meant that he would never be killed at all. Despite the seemingly "ecological"

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[253] Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 5.

[254] *Ibid*, 7-8.

connectedness implied by his death, the rest of the play reveals Herakles to be profoundly detached from his family, a detachment that we see continuing in the Hyllos's incomprehension at what he has been asked to do. Likewise Pound, who set out to write a poem "containing history,"[255] instead found himself contained *by* history – knowing that "it coheres alright / even if my notes do not cohere" (*C* CXVI/817) yet unable to express that knowledge in his epic's structure.

The nature of these tensions between integration and division ought to come out over the duration of the chapter, but we can begin to see how they arise by looking to the importance of familial relationships in the play's alignment of natural and cultural forces. It is not immediately obvious that the dissolution of the nature/culture divide should begin at the individual's relationship with the family, yet *Women of Trachis* is not the first time that Pound implied this relationship. In Canto XIII – the first to deal directly with Confucius (Kung, as the name is rendered here) – we see the following anecdotes:

> And they [Kung's students] said: If a man commit murder
>
> Should his father protect him, and hide him?
>
> And Kung said:
>
> He should hide him.
>
> And Kung gave his daughter to Kong-Tch'ang

[255] Pound uses this precise wording in his *Paris Review* interview ("The Art of Poetry, No. 5" *The Paris Review*, accessed May 6 2016, http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/4598/the-art-of-poetry-no-5-ezra-pound). In an essay, he writes instead that "an epic is a poem *including* history" ("Date Line," in *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T.S. Eliot [New York: New Directions, 1968], 86. My emphasis).

Although Kong-Tch'ang was in prison.

And he gave his niece to Nan-Young

although Nan-Young was out of office.

(*C* XIII/59)

To begin with the second half, though the canto does not explain who Kong-Tch'ang and Nan-Young are, a look to Confucius's *Analects* reveals both of them to have been unjustly punished, the latter by a government that Confucius thought was run in defiance of "right reason."[256] The first half of the passage is likewise a paraphrase of *The Analects*:

> The Duke of Sheh said to Kung-tze: There are honest characters in my village, if a man steals a sheep his son will bear witness to it.
>
> Kung-tze said: There are honest men in my village with this difference; a father will conceal his son's doing, and a son his father's. There's honesty (straight seeing) in that, too.[257]

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[256] Ezra Pound, trans., *Confucius* (New York: New Directions, 1969), 209.

[257] *Ibid*, 251,

It is from passages like these that we can see why Pound tended to view Confucianism as a "libertarian discourse" the ethics of which "opposes any intrusion into the sphere within the 'outline' of a person's personality."[258]

What we encounter in the two anecdotes from canto XIII are cases of individual ethical proscriptions operating in opposition to the law. Familial bonds trump legal commands (to the point that lying to protect one's child can be considered a form of honesty), and a good person can still be recognized as such even after being thrown in jail (or, as Pound would write much later, "the greatest is charity / to be found among those who have not observed / regulations" [*C* LXXIV/454] – an observation he makes after a guard in his Pisan prison camp gives him, in violation of the rules, an old crate on which to write). Yet elsewhere in both Confucius generally and in Pound's appropriation thereof we encounter signs that Pound's support for the fidelity of the individual does not take the form of a simplistic opposition between the individual and the state. Rather, the opposite is true: in both Pound and Confucius the proper functioning of the state depends entirely on the characters of individual people. As we see in *The Great Digest*: "wanting good government in their states, they [the "men of old"] first established order in their

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[258] Feng Lan, *Ezra Pound and Confucianism: Remaking Humanism in the Face of Modernity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 96-97. As Lan notes, this interpretation diverges quite heavily from the dominant one, which holds that self-development "is intended to reduce and eliminate what makes a person a self-contained entity, and to cultivate the social attributes enabling an individual to share in the universal ethical principles of humanity" – a reading that "differs profoundly" from the one Pound settled on (100). It should go without saying that my discussion of Confucianism in this chapter applies strictly to the form it takes in Pound's interpretation, and not in any way to Confucianism proper.

own families; wanting order in the home, they first disciplined themselves."[259] Or as Pound relates in canto XIII:

> If a man have not order within him
> He cannot spread order about him;
> And if a man have not order within him
> His family will not act with due order;
> And if the prince have not order within him
> He cannot put order in his dominions.
>
> (*C* XIII/59)

As Confucius goes on to claim, "one humane family can humanize a whole state . . . [and] one grasping and perverse man can drive a nation to chaos."[260] Time and again in Pound the success or failure of any grand enterprise always ties back to the character of the person undertaking it – one need only look at the China cantos and their neat equations of prosperity with "good" emperors for confirmation.

It seems that Pound, in taking Confucianism as a "totalizing philosophy rooted in the objective reality of organic nature,"[261] saw in it the possibility of approaching the machinery of government ecologically (in Morton's sense) without sacrificing his individualism. In Confucius, the microcosm of the individual and the family scale

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[259] *Confucius*, 31.

[260] *Confucius*, 59.

[261] Chungeng Zhu, "Ezra Pound's Confucianism" *Philosophy and Literature* 29.1 (2005): 58.

smoothly and linearly upward to the macrocosm of society and the state. This hierarchy permits a kind of integration – to such an extent that one can easily attribute the functions of a government to the personality of its leader – but at the cost of making that influence mostly unidirectional. While the subordination of the whole to its parts permits the flouting of unjust laws, it also means that the "order within," the presence or absence of which shall determine the fate of the empire, is seemingly without origin. An individual person becomes not merely a unit of population, but rather like the theme in a set of musical variations which, once established, provides the basis for what follows. Or, as Pound writes in an essay on Confucianism, "you can't know a canzone, which is a structure of strophes, until you know strophes."[262] Yet the opposite would not seem to hold true.

It is in this way that an individual person's character can become aligned with the fate of a whole society without it being subordinated *to* that society, and it is likewise in this manner that we can begin to align Pound's Confucianism with the earlier analysis of *Women of Trachis* and canto CXVI. A society for Pound in a certain sense becomes its leader, who in ordering both their own mind, character, and family structure, create the first iteration of a pattern that repeats with variations across all regions under that leader's influence. Such is the power of this influence that "if theft be the main motive in government / in a large way / there will certainly be minor purloinments" (*C* LXXVII/502) – i.e. the influence will proceed inexorably, automatically, as though it

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[262] Ezra Pound, "Immediate Need of Confucius," in *Selected Prose: 1909-1965*, ed. William Cookson (New York: New Directions, 1973), 76.

were a law of nature. Yet this system does not create a perfect hybrid; there is no Herakles, no demigod, to permanently link the social and the natural together. The very act of marking out the attainment of "order within" as a virtue, and of establishing it as a goal that must be pursued by all, separates individual human beings from their natural environment, and re-introduces human personality to what was once a Confucian state of nature. The fulfillment of Pound's politics is conditional in a way that the prophecies of Zeus are not, since while Herakles was always fated to die in the way that he did, the automatic repetition of individual and family structure can end in any number of ways depending on the constituent parts that one begins with. The problem for Pound is that in politics and in economy failure is always an option, and it is the possibility of this failure that establishes in Pound's writing a larger, subtler ethics of ecology.

3.2 Political Ecology

Earlier I wrote that one could see in Pound's alignment of politics, aesthetics, and ecology the operation of an imperative logic, but I have not yet explained what exactly that means. I take my definition of the word "imperative" from the phenomenologist Alphonso Lingis, who himself derives the term from the categorical imperative of Immanuel Kant. As Lingis writes:

> Kant takes the species' trait of thought, which distinguishes humans from other natural species but which constitutes itself into a separate agency in conflict with the human sensory-motor vitality, not as a sign that the human psychophysical organism is destined, by an imperative external to the inner works of nature, to an extranatural or

> supernatural status, but as an index that a human must, of his own thoughtful initiative, make himself natural, make himself into the integrated nature he is not naturally.[263]

I should state upfront that I am not proposing to do a Kantian reading of Pound – indeed, as will be clear soon, their ethical conclusions diverge quite considerably. Rather, I offer the categorical imperative (and Lingis's interpretation thereof) as a model for a particular structure of thought that both Kant and Pound share, and which can be accessed most easily through analogizing one with the other. In this case, we can see already how Lingis's description of the categorical imperative's ecological presumptions contains many of the conflicts that we found already in Pound's Confucianism.

Imperative logic can be seen as essentially a middle ground between the poles of natural and ecological thinking sketched out with Morton above. Humans are "distinguished from other natural species," yes, but the very humanness which distinguishes them also makes it possible for them to integrate themselves by "thoughtful initiative" with the very same natural world that they have been divided from. One must remember that for Kant, the famous rule that one should "act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law"[264] is not merely a restatement of that old rhetorical question, "what if everyone acted like that?" It ties instead with an important distinction that Kant draws quite early in his

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[263] Alphonso Lingis, *The Imperative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 185.

[264] Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, in *Ethical Philosophy*, trans. James W. Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), 30

Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals between "laws of nature and laws of freedom."[265] As Kant elaborates in his second critique, ethical maxims should be regarded as "universal law[s] of nature."[266]

The implications of this position become clear when if we turn, not to the *Critique of Practical Reason*, but rather to Kant's essay "On the Supposed Right to Lie because of Philanthropic Concerns," where he (in)famously argues that it would be unethical to lie in order to protect one's friend from murder. This position, as we can see by comparison to Canto XIII, differs greatly from the Poundian-Confucian position which holds that familial bonds (and, presumably, bonds of friendship) are sacred enough that one can be permitted to, essentially, lie in the name of honesty. Yet both positions, though they arrive at different places, get there by the same means. In justifying his argument, Kant points out that, in the example he sketches, one cannot be fully cognizant of all the potential consequences of one's actions, and it is quite possible that the lie you tell could inadvertently send your friend into the murderer's clutches – which would make you ethically culpable for that friend's death. But if you tell the truth, then regardless of your friend's fate "public justice cannot lay a hand on you," for "truthfulness is a duty."[267] Thus, because the maxim against lying should be followed as inexorably as the law of

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[265] *Ibid*, 1

[266] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 60.

[267] Immanuel Kant, "On the Supposed Right to Lie because of Philanthropic Concerns," in *Ethical Philosophy*, trans. James W. Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), 164.

gravity, nobody can be blamed for following it. Whereas Pound's imperative is essentially bottom-up, privileging the individual parts of the larger mesh which create society through self-replication, Kant's imperative is top-down, privileging the abstract maxims to which all rational beings must pledge themselves (or, as Lingis puts it, for Kant "thought is obedience. Freedom of thought makes this obedience possible"[268]).

The result of this position is that Kantian ethics requires a continuous subordination of the personal will, which manifests not (as in Pound) a virtue to be cultivated but rather as a problem to be solved. One must be indifferent to the procession of ethical laws just as one would be towards the laws of physics, finding no more emotional investment in one's maxims than one would in the laws of thermodynamics. (Or as the Kantian scholar Scott M. Roulier puts it, for Kant "virtue necessarily presupposes *apathy*."[269]) Thus, one's decision to tell the murderer where one's friend is hiding carries no risk of reprobation because it ought not to have been a decision in the first place. Kant's gestures to unintended consequences are therefore a red herring, since a liar in his system is already guilty regardless of its results. The fact that we are ignorant of the connection between one's decision to lie or tell the truth and the fate of their friend is elided in favour of a black box labeled "natural laws." But though imperative logic prizes the integration of "nature" (laws of physics) and "culture" (ethics), it is not fully ecological, since it takes as its starting premise that human will and ethical failings leave

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[268] Lingis, 3.

[269] Scott M. Roulier, *Kantian Virtue at the Intersection of Politics and Nature: The Value of Soul-Making* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2004), 21.

humanity separate from nature, pushing it "over there" into a world of fixed laws that we can only dream of one day occupying.

To see how this problem manifests in Pound, I would like to turn from Confucius and Kant now to Pound's obsession with usury. In particular, to Pound's condemnation thereof in Canto XLV:

> Usura rusteth the chisel
>
> It rusteth the craft and the craftsman
>
> It gnaweth the thread in the loom
>
> . . .
>
> Usura slayeth the child in the womb
>
> It stayeth the young man's courting
>
> It hath brought palsey to bed, lyeth
>
> Between the young bride and her bridegroom
>
> CONTRA NATURAM
>
> They have brought whores for Eleusis
>
> Corpses are set to banquet
>
> At behest of usura.
>
> (*C* XLV/230)

The condemnation "contra naturam" ("against nature") which sits so prominently in this passage needs some explaining. Many of the things that usury prevents, after all, are themselves products of human action – since stonework, courtship rituals, banquets, and the Eleusinian Mysteries seem all to fall squarely on the "culture" side of the line. Likewise, the rusting of a chisel seems like a natural process, being a simple chemical

reaction. Yet the canto aligns all of the former firmly *with* nature and against usury's unnaturalness. The canto, then, raises the question of what exactly is "nature" as Pound defines it, and we can see an answer to that question in one of Pound's early influences – C.H. Douglas, who mid-way through his *Social Credit* provides a definition.[270] "The test of a natural law," he writes," is that it is automatic and inexorable" – with the empowerment of "the individual," as he immediately makes clear, being a necessary consequence of natural laws.[271]

Douglas's equation of the natural with the automatic, and the subsequent embrace of individualism under that banner, at least partially explains his embrace of anti-Semitic conspiracy theories like the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. [272] It also sheds light on his dismissive assessment of the labour movement, and in particular the calls for workers' control of industry, which he regarded as "crude credit-distribution societies" and "against the nature of things."[273] What we see in Douglas's text a development of an economic paranoia that would blossom forth in Pound, who would go on to identify "in alliance with Usura . . . the rulers of Europe and betrayers of America; the bankers,

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[270] For a summary of the development of Pound's economic thought, see: Leon Surette, *Pound in Purgatory: From Economic Radicalism to Anti-Semitism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999).

[271] C.H. Douglas, *Social Credit* (Vancouver: The Institute of Economic Democracy, 1979), 73.

[272] As he writes later in his book, "it is not difficult to see that within a short space of time, that condition of universal slavery to which the writer of 'The Protocols of Zion' looked forward with such exultation, will be an accomplished fact" (153).

[273] *Ibid*, 182.

munitions dealers, professors, men of commerce, and even men of letters who either openly or tacitly serve Usura."[274] One need only glance at Pound's *Guide to Kulchur*, for example, to see him speaking of a "secret history" consisting of "the secret corruptions, the personal lusts, avarices etc. that scoundrels keep hidden."[275] By elevating the myriad injustices of global finance to the level of a conspiracy, and by conflating under that conspiracy a vast number of diverse groups and interests (many of which actively oppose one another[276]), Pound is able to equate any kind of active, systematic intervention in the economy and the financial system with an abrogation of the laws of nature. But, as Confucius writes in *The Analects*, a properly-run government ought not involve such interventions, since "when a prince's character is properly formed, he governs without giving orders" while "if his character is twisty he can give orders, but they won't be carried out."[277] Nature is automatic, and a good government is one that aligns with nature – it therefore follows that a good government is one that functions automatically. Societies which follow nature therefore overcome the messy question of how individual actions translate into society-wide effects – the relation "just works," in the same way

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[274] Leon Surette, *A Light from Eleusis: A Study of Ezra Pound's* Cantos (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 145-46.

[275] Ezra Pound, *Guide to Kulchur* (London: Faber and Faber, 1938), 264.

[276] Douglas, early in *Social Credit*, goes so far as to argue that "Marxian Socialism is an extension to its logical conclusion of the theory of modern business" (12) – a claim that ought to be perplexing to both Marxists and business people alike.

[277] *Confucius*, 250.

that Bruno Latour's super-computer "just works." A natural society is a society constructed upon a black box, a society structured by political agnotology. A finance system in thrall to an international conspiracy, that is a system entirely unmoored from automatic systems, would thus be a worst-case scenario.

Yet while Pound's economic theories did lead him to embrace a conspiratorial worldview, it is not only at the level of grand alternate histories that imperative logic takes hold. Pound's belief that the personal character of individual leaders could directly affect larger global processes – that one could be ecologically enmeshed in a global chain of cause-and-effect while still separate enough from nature to be intelligible in purely individualistic terms – means that the very shape of the landscape can often turn on the personality of a specific person, as we see in his early poem "Sestina: Altaforte," which though predating his encounters with Douglas and Confucius enacts many of the patterns of thought that Pound would develop and expand upon as he encountered his later obsessions. As Pound writes in its headnote, the poem's speaker, the troubadour Bertrans de Born, was placed in hell by Dante for being "a stirrer up of strife."[278] He appears in *Inferno* Canto XXVIII, presenting himself to Dante and Virgil holding his severed head in his hands, an ironic punishment for his crimes:

> I made father and son rebel against each other:
> Achitophel did no worse by Absalom
> And David, with his incitements to harm.

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[278] Ezra Pound, "Sestina: Altaforte," in *Selected Poems of Ezra Pound* (New York: New Directions, 1957), 7.

Because I separated persons so close,

I carry my brain separated, alas,

From its beginning, which is in this trunk.[279]

The specific incident referred to here is the role that de Born allegedly had in the revolt of Henry the Young King against his father, Henry II of England, in 1173. Dante here compares de Born's role to that of Achitophel in the Biblical story of Absalom's revolt on his father King David. Thus, de Born appears in Dante as almost an inverse of Herakles in *Women of Trachis* – one who, in defiling the bonds of filial piety, honours the joining of nature and culture in the breach rather than in the observance. By placing de Born in hell and identifying the 1173 revolt with Absalom's revolt on King David, Dante elevates this particular familial relationship to a degree of cosmic importance comparable to the merging of paternal command and divine prophecy that we see in the death of Herakles.

Pound carries forward Dante's enframing of de Born's crime by projecting the troubadour's warlike personality across the French countryside surrounding his castle. As the poem begins: "Damn it all! All this our South stinks peace. / . . . I have no life save when the swords clash."[280] And as we see de Born continue in the poem's second stanza:

In hot summer have I great rejoicing

When the tempests kill the earth's foul peace,

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[279] Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. C.H. Sisson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 167.

[280] "Sestina: Altaforte," 7.

And the lightnings from black heav'n flash crimson,

And the fierce thunders roar me their music

And the winds shriek through the clouds mad, opposing,

And through all the riven skies God's swords clash.[281]

De Born's love of war is undeniable, and so strong that he begins to project it onto the landscape, imagining violent summer storms more in tune with his personality. But the force of this image should not cause us to forget that outside his window he does *not* see storms, but rather a calm and temperate climate. Peace, not war, is the "automatic" state of things, and the violent landscapes of the second stanza and after are an artificial imposition, where de Born unleashes his violent desires by reshaping the landscape into his own image. His monologue is therefore a re-enactment of the very crime that found him cast into Dante's hell. But what for Dante is a crime against God – one best understood by analogy to a story from the Bible – for Pound instead first manifests as a crime against nature, which then takes on the religious import of the source material: "Hell grant soon we hear again the swords clash! / Hell blot back for always the thought 'Peace!'"[282] Even as de Born strives to exert his will over the landscape, the form of the poem resists him. Three years after writing "Alteforte," Pound would remark in *A Walking Tour of Southern France* that the undulating hills and trees on the road to Celles are "indeed a sort of sestina" in that both the poetic form and the hills expressed the

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[281] *Ibid*, 8.

[282] *Ibid*, 9.

"recurrence in nature."[283] The form of the sestina, with its initial set of six end-words that are then repeated with variations, imitates the productive regularity of nature, which like a sestina is "automatic" and predictable (in that the order of the repetitions is determined by its fixed form in combination with the text of the initial stanza) yet still productive.

For Pound the form of nature is reoccurrence – and it is therefore notable that de Born in this poem expresses his desire for war in the same breath as his desire for summer. While this alignment of war and summer might strike at first as an imperative-bound alignment of human activity with a natural process, de Born's declaration is not merely a benign preference, but a rejection of the flow of seasons itself: it is the summer that he may ride out to war, and he would rather have "one hour's stour than a year's peace."[284] But we might compare this declaration to another group of soldiers from Pound's *oeuvre* – those we meet in his version of the poem "Song of the Bowmen of Shu" in *Cathay*.[285] The speaker of the poem, one of the eponymous bowmen, does not

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[283] Ezra Pound, *A Walking Tour of Southern France*, ed. Richard Sieburth (New York: New Directions, 1992), 15. For further analysis of this comparison, see: Daniel Albright, "Early Cantos I-XLI," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ezra Pound*, ed. Ira B. Nadel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 81-83.

[284] "Sestina: Alteforte," 8.

[285] Like most of the poems in *Cathay*, "Song of the Bowmen of Shu" differs in several important ways from its original, and bears a far greater mark of Pound's own poetic craftsmanship than what one would normally expect from a translation. The final lines in particular contain many stylistic elements not found in the Chinese version. For a summary of these issues, see: Zhaoming Qian, *Orientalism and Modernism: The Legacy of China in Pound and Williams* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 73-76.

rejoice in war, and neither do his fellow soldiers (as he remarks early on "when anyone says 'Return,' the others are full of sorrow. / Sorrowful minds, sorrow is strong, we are hungry and thirsty"[286]). They have been away from home for a long time, and seem to have been worn down by the hardships and monotony of regular soldiering. Notably, they are not "stirrers up of strife," but rather shy away from combat, associating the "three battles a month" the Mongols thrust upon them[287] with the general exhaustion they experience on the field. Hanging over the whole poem is the question of when they will return home, and it is in the final lines that they do:

> When we set out, the willows were drooping with spring,
>
> We come back in the snow,
>
> We go slowly, we are hungry and thirsty,
>
> Our mind is full of sorrow, who will know of our grief?[288]

Certainly the de Born of "Alteforte" would not know their grief, but rather despise them as pacifists who flee from war. Yet their term of service evidences a far greater alignment with the flows and patterns of nature than the presumptuous warmongering of de Born. Unlike their French counterparts, they have fought for a whole year and during all four seasons, and their attitude towards war is not marked by joy but by resignation and acceptance. They are wary of the Mongols, but they still fight their three battles a month,

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[286] Ezra Pound, trans., "Song of the Bowmen of Shu," in *Cathay: The Centennial Edition* (New York: New Directions, 2015), 27.

[287] *Ibid*, 28.

[288] *Ibid*.

just as they also take what peace comes their way in between. Finally, it is nature itself that witnesses their grief: for just as they return home "full of sorrow," they find the landscape also laden with snow.

In Pound's 1911 collection *Canzoni* we find another indication that the eternal summer of the warlike mind is not in keeping with the fecund repetitions of nature. In "Canzon: The Yearly Slain," taken from that collection, Pound pursues an extended metaphor that equates the waxing and waning of love to the yearly seasonal procession:

> Love that is born in Time and comes and goes!
>
> Love that doth hold all noble hearts in fief!
>
> As red leaves follow where the wind hath flown,
>
> So all men follow Love when Love is dead.[289]

As he does quite frequently in *The Cantos* and elsewhere, Pound is here equating love with a natural process that proceeds automatically, and which if embraced allows one to be better aligned with nature. Looking forward to Pound's later writing, we can see how the alignment of productive desire with nature would later feed into his economic theories. As Alec Marsh observes, much of Pound's objection to usury is based on the way it contravenes automatic, naturally productive processes like the procession of the seasons in favour of the creation of artificial wealth. As he describes, "the usury system forces natural values and production – for example, a given quantity of wheat – to measure up prior to monetary debts. . . . If the harvest is bad, the interest must still be

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[289] Ezra Pound, "Canzon: The Yearly Slain," in *Collected Early Poems*, ed. Michael John King (New York: New Directions, 1976), 133.

paid in money or the farmer must forfeit real property. . . . [thus] foreclosure is the destruction of real values to prop up artificial percentages on paper."[290] Marsh's summary draws this particular example from one of Pound's speeches on Rome Radio, but we can Pound's association between the automatic flow of the seasons and the growing and shrinking of productive desire in these much earlier poems.

The growth and fallow periods that contour farmers' lives – which allow them to produce food precisely because they are hard-coded into nature – are in Pound's view overwritten by usury in the name of artificial profit in much the same way that de Born overwrites the seasons in the name of war. Those like the bowmen of Shu who align themselves with the natural world are ultimately exulted by Pound as the true producers of value and the enemies of usury. "The true base of credit," as Pound would write in Canto LII, "is / the abundance of nature" (*C* LII/257), and in formulating his imperative logic in terms of individual actions that set patterns repeating through society (the strophes that become a canzone, or the warlike de Born who turns sons against their father) Pound is able to avoid defining his ethics in terms of abstract Kantian maxims, instead putting forth specific examples that ought to set his preferred pattern forth. And we can see one such instance in Canto VIII, which begins with a letter by Sigismundo Malatesta to a son of Cosimo de Medici:

> And tell the *Maestro di pentore* [master of painting]
>
> That there can be no question of

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[290] Alec Marsh, *Money and Modernity: Pound, Williams, and the Spirit of Jefferson* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998), 76-77.

His painting the walls for the moment,

As the mortar is not yet dry

And it wd. be merely work chucked away

(*C* VIII/28)

In this moment, in this seemingly mundane instruction regarding the painting of a wall, we see what Pound would dub, in his multi-part essay "I Gather the Limbs of Osiris," a "luminous detail" – small facts or anecdotes "which govern[] knowledge as the switchboard the electric circuit."[291] Such details are "luminous," that is, not because of their relative historical importance, but rather because of how they define the intersection of an array of diverse processes and thereby allow them to be understood. Such is what we see in the detail of Malatesta and the paint: an intelligent figure, attuned to the automatic procession of nature (the rate at which mortar dries), using that attunement to ensure that work being done is genuinely valuable (i.e. not wasteful), all while giving commands to a member of the most powerful banking family in all of Italy. Collapsed into this moment, in this letter by one of the early heroes of Pound's epic, is precisely his imperative logic at work, marrying the natural world with the careful temperament of an individual human being.

3.3 Poundian Metaphor and Imperative Poetics

Given the importance in Pound's artistic and political project of individual units that repeat and vary themselves to produce more complex schemas, it seems a good idea to

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[291] Ezra Pound, "I Gather the Limbs of Osiris," in *Selected Prose, 1909-1965*, ed. William Cookson (New York: New Directions, 1973), 24.

embrace particularity (at least for the time being) to give attention to a specific poem and the network of relations it illuminates. Any scholar of modernist poetry will be familiar with Pound's "In a Station of the Metro," but just to be thorough I shall quote it anyway:

> The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
>
> Petals on a wet, black bough.[292]

A number of the poem's features make it understandable in terms of Pound's imperative, the most obvious of those being the way it directly overlays a human activity on a feature of the natural world. But a much more intricate (and interesting) facet of the poem's imperative is the manner in which uses metaphor.

In 1913 – the same year Pound first published "Metro" in *Poetry* – Pound encountered the writings of Ernest Fenollosa and began work editing the mass of notes that the late sinologist had left behind, a process that resulted in *Cathay*, a collection of translated Noh plays, and (most importantly for my analysis here) Fenollosa's essay "The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry." It is from this work that Pound's interest in China (and his use of Chinese ideograms in his writing) springs, and in this essay we find the following observation:

> A true noun, an isolated thing, does not exist in nature.
> Things are only the terminal points, or rather the meeting
> points of actions . . . Neither can a pure verb, an abstract
> motion, be possible. The eye sees noun and verb as one:

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[292] Ezra Pound, "In a Station of the Metro," in *The Selected Poems of Ezra Pound* (New York: New Directions, 1957), 35.

> things in motion, motion in things, and so the Chinese conception tends to represent them.[293]

Here we see the Chinese ideogram being the tool that aligns, not merely poetry, but all of writing with natural processes as they actually occur in the world, forming a contiguous ecology of signs.[294] Phonetic writing systems, on the other hand, create needless abstractions – pure nouns and verbs that posit relationless objects and motion unattached to any definite thing, which though useful concepts for coordinating parts of speech detach that speech from the world that it describes. This embrace of abstraction is something Pound would himself criticize, such as in his *ABC of Reading* where he complains that "in Europe, if you ask a man to define anything, his definition always moves away from the simple things that he knows perfectly well . . . [towards] progressively remoter abstraction."[295] But we see an even earlier (pre-Fenollossa) interest in a linguistic fidelity to nature in his essay "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste," which not only advised poets to "go in fear of abstractions,"[296] but also not to "mess up the

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[293] Ernest Fenollosa and Ezra Pound, *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry: A Critical Edition*, eds. Haun Saussy, Jonathan Stalling, and Lucas Klein (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 46.

[294] Needless to say, Fenollosa's theories on Chinese writing have faced a slew of criticism from scholars of Chinese linguistics. For a summary of the issue, see: Joseph Lavery, "Ernest Fenollosa: Out of Time, Out of Place" *Journal of Modern Literature* 35.2 (2012): 131-138.

[295] Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading* (New York: New Directions, 1960), 19.

[296] Ezra Pound, "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste" *Poetry* 1.6 (1913): 201.

perception of one sense by trying to define it in terms of another. This is usually only the result of being too lazy to find the exact word."[297] This advice – consistent with F.S. Flint's injunction, in the same issue of *Poetry*, that imagism concerned the "direct treatment of the 'thing,' whether subjective or objective"[298] – aligns with an interest in the exactness of poetic description (the "exact word") with a rectitude of description that for Pound as for Fenollosa precludes the messy abstractions common in everyday speech. That is to say, both imagist poetry and Chinese ideograms are, for Pound, defined by a Flaubertian search for *le mot juste* extended to its logical extreme.

I bring up the similarities between the main stylistic tenants of Pound's imagism and Fenollosa's interpretation of Chinese writing in large part to demonstrate how the imperative logic of the latter did not create in Pound a set of literary preoccupations that did not exist prior, but rather described systematically a number of different notions that Pound was already exploring in his earlier work.[299] Though his version of "The Chinese Written Character" would not appear until 1918, Pound had been putting its central tenants into action since before the Great War. Thus, when looking at the way "In a Station of the Metro" enacts a particular attitude towards representing nature, we should keep in mind the importance that Fenollosa placed in the essentially metaphoric nature of

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[297] *Ibid*, 206.

[298] F.S. Flint, "Imagisme" *Poetry* 1.6 (1913): 199.

[299] Haun Saussey, in his introduction to the critical edition of "The Chinese Written Character," makes much the same point (2-11).

the Chinese ideogram and the way that metaphor (in his view) proceeded along a type of imperative:

> *Metaphor, the revealer of nature, is the very substance of poetry*. The known interprets the obscure, the universe is alive with myth. . . . It is a mistake to suppose, with some philosophers of aesthetics, that art and poetry are to deal with the general and the abstract. . . . Art and poetry deal with the concrete of nature.[300]

Metaphors, for Fenollosa, are deeply immanent with nature, being a reflection of the interconnectedness that all particular elements of the world enact in every moment of time. Art, for him, is the expression of these concrete relations, and the ideogram, being built on metaphor, inscribes this poetic imperative in the very basis of the Chinese writing system. The key to the underlying imperative logic of "In a Station of the Metro" therefore lies in its enactment of a metaphoric relation between the faces in the crowd and the petals on the bough.

At least one critic has, however, contested the reading of this relation in terms of metaphor, and the nature of the objection ought to help elucidate the precise way this poem fits into the larger architecture of Pound's nature poetics. In *Modernist Form*, John Steven Childs argues that the form of "In a Station of the Metro" is better understood as metonymic. As he argues, the relation between the two objects is not such that one could substitute a submerged "like" between them – that is, the second line does not emerge as

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[300] Fenollosa, 54. My emphasis.

a simple substitution of the first. Rather, the juxtaposition of the two images gestures towards a higher unity to which the two particular objects are subordinate, being the "parts," or the particular instances, that stand in for the whole.[301] This reading can be quite convincing, especially since it is consistent with Pound's interest in Neoplatonism – the higher order meaning of the poem here being its "Form," of which the specific objects are mere shadows.[302] Pound himself, in fact, seems to encourage this kind of reading in his Vorticism essay where, only a page after offering up "Metro" as an exemplum, and after defining Vorticism as an "intensive art," pound attempts to explain what he means with recourse to the Pythagorean Theorem:

> There are four different intensities of mathematical
> expression known to the ordinarily intelligent

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[301] John Steven Childs, *Modernist Form: Pound's Style in the Early Cantos* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1986), 37-38. I name Childs as my primary example of this reading mainly because of how clearly and directly he articulates the case for a metonymic reading of the poem, but this reading is not unique to him. See for instance: Bartholomew Brinkman, "Making Modern *Poetry*: Format, Genre, and the Invention of Imagism(e)" *Journal of Modern Literature* 32.2 (2009): 36. For a further analysis of the problems in a metonymic reading from the perspective of Pound's use of punctuation, see: Jasmine Kitses, "'Round / Shiny Fixed / Alternatives': Tracing the Colon in Pound and Oppen" *Modern Philology* 113.2 (2015): 276-78.

[302] Notably, in his recent study of Pound and his relation to the Irish Neoplatonist philosopher John Scotus Eriugena, Mark Byron has pointed to important historical and textual relationships between Pound's research on Eriugena and his employment of both ideograms and Confucian philosophy in his later poetry (*Ezra Pound's Eriugena* [New York: Bloomsbury, 2014], 52).

> undergraduate, namely: the arithmetical, the algebraic, the geometrical, and that of analytical geometry.
>
> . . . [I]t is true that
>
> $3^2 + 4^2 = 5^2$, $6^2 + 8^2 = 10^2$, $9^2 + 12^2 = 15^2$, $39^2 + 52^2 = 65^2$.
>
> . . . [But] one expresses their "algebraic relation" as
>
> $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$.
>
> That is the language of philosophy.[303]

The invocation of Pythagoras, and his mathematical idealism,[304] seems to suggest that Pound is viewing the juxtaposition used in his poetry in very much the terms Childs describes, where the individual objects are merely parts of a larger whole to which they are subsidiary, just like any particular drawing of a triangle can only suggest or gesture towards and ideal perfect triangle which can only be accurately represented in the abstract through the use of equations. Yet this reading would go against every other dominant tendency in Pound's poetics, and in particular his vehement rejection of top-down systems of organization.

Pound's use of mathematics in "Vorticism," luckily enough, provides us with a solution to this conflict – one which shall also give us an answer to Childs's metonymic reading of the poem. It happens that Pound had used the exact same comparison several years prior to publishing his essay, invoking it in *The Spirit of Romance* as a way to

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[303] Ezra Pound, "Vorticism," in *Gaudier-Brzeska: A Memoir* (New York: New Directions, 1960), 90-91.

[304] For Pythagoras's relationship to Platonism, see: Domenic J. O'Meara, *Pythagoras Revived: Mathematics and Philosophy in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999).

describe Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and the "four senses" in which it can be read: "the literal, the allegorical, the analogical, and the ethical."[305] It should be easy to see the similarities here between these four "senses" and the "four different intensities of mathematical expression" to which Pound compares his notion of "intensity" in Vorticism, and in the passage he even introduces the equation in the same way – beginning with the same examples ($3^2 + 4^2 = 5^2$, $6^2 + 8^2 = 10^2$, and so on) before identifying them as merely different instances of $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$. Yet Pound's use of this analogy, as well as his discussion of Dante in *The Spirit of Romance* generally, resists the urge to read Dante's poetry in terms of pure abstraction, holding instead that his "so-called personifications are real and not artificial" and that (in a text that pre-dates "Imagisme" by three years) "Dante's precision . . . comes from the attempt to reproduce exactly the thing which has been clearly seen."[306] But if Dante is not idealizing – and if, by extension, Pound is not idealizing either – then what exactly is the invocation of the Pythagorean Theorem supposed to tell us?

The answer to that question is clearest in light of Childs's metonymic reading. Metonymy, most simply defined, involves taking a part of something for the whole – as when one, for instance, uses a picture of the *Mona Lisa* to stand-in for "Early Modern painting" generally. The relationship between the signifier and signified in such a case is hierarchical, for while in this example the image of the *Mona Lisa* is what we encounter, its semantic role in that act of signification is to be purely subsumed by the larger

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[305] Ezra Pound, *The Spirit of Romance* (New York: New Directions, 2005 [1910]), 127.

[306] *Ibid*, 126.

category it represents. While we *encounter* the painting, what we *see* is a larger history that ultimately overwrites it. Metonymic writing, though it appears to deal in the concrete, is really concerned with abstractions.[307] Pound, in his writing on poetics, firmly rejects such subordination, and this rejection comes through in his analysis of Dante. Following his invocation of the Pythagorean Theorem and its comparison to the "four senses" of the *Divine Comedy*, Pound explains the comparison thusly:

> [T]he *Commedia* is, in the literal sense, a description of Dante's vision of a journey through the realms inhabited by the spirits of men after death; in a further sense it is the journey of Dante's intelligence though the states of mind wherein dwell all sorts and conditions of men before death; beyond this, Dante or Dante's intelligence may come to mean "Everyman" or "Mankind" . . . In a fourth sense, the *Commedia* is an expression of the laws of eternal justice . . . or the law of Karma, if we are to use an Oriental term.[308]

Though it is likely a coincidence, the frequent use of semicolons in this passage is telling given the importance of the semicolon in "In a Station of the Metro." For while Pound does move systematically in his description from the specific, literal meaning of a text

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[307] An excellent explanation of this relation comes to us in Roman Jakobson's well-known discussion of metonymic writing in realist fiction (Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle, *Fundamentals of Language* [Paris: Mouton, 1975], 91-96).

[308] *The Spirit of Romance*, 127.

towards greater abstractions, at no point does Pound *subordinate* one set of meanings to another. Rather, he simply places the different "senses" on top of each other without any overt invocation of hierarchy between them. Dante, then, is "Everyman," but in becoming "Everyman" he nevertheless remains irrevocably himself, just as he continues to remain himself even as his literal journey through the underworld becomes a figurative journey through the abstract "laws of eternal justice." It is thus that we can see what Pound means when he writes that "the image is not an idea. It is a radiant node or cluster . . . a VORTEX, from which, and through which, and into which, ideas are constantly rushing."[309] "From which," "through which," and "into which," all happening at once – such is not the formula for metonymy. Though this "vortex" relates to an abstract meaning that arises from its constituent parts, those parts can no more be subordinated to that abstraction than a river can subordinate the water that runs through it. The ontology of a vortex is flat – part and whole exist in perfect unison.[310]

None of the foregoing is to say that Pound's poetics is straightforwardly metaphorical, but rather that the ethics of his ecological imperative express themselves in the form of a striving towards metaphoricity, a striving we see expressed quite clearly in

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[309] "Vorticism," 92.

[310] Furthermore, as Sylvan Esh has argued, "the ideogrammic method is . . . the metaphoric impulse at its most expansive. . . . [I]t both generates and orders the otherwise simply metonymical text, and it engages the complementary principle of metonymy in order to bring to the overall field of naturalistic detail . . . signifying systems of correspondence" ("Pound and Jakobson: The Metaphorical Principle in *The Cantos*" *Paideuma: A Journal Devoted to Ezra Pound Scholarship* 22.1 [1993]: 141).

his "Metro" poem. I think a useful heuristic here is Lacan's alignment of metaphor and metonym with (respectively) Freud's concepts of condensation and displacement,[311] particularly in comparing Pound's imperative with Kant's. The ecological linguistics (for lack of a better term) of Kant's categorical imperative is freely metonymic, in that it displaces human beings from nature by way of free will. But Pound will accept nothing less than a perfect condensation of the two domains – the faces in the crowd and the leaves on the bough must *become one*, must be perfectly overlapped, must perfectly *become each other*, in the mind's-eye of the reader if not on the page. (It is in this manner that I align Pound with Morton.) But, as will become clear shortly, this condensation is unstable, not only because of the pragmatic necessity of placing poetic lines side-by-side (that is, *displacing* them) but also because of Pound's rejection of usury and everything he associated with it. What Pound seems to want is a system in which all of human action is perfectly condensed with the natural world except for one or two special cases, cases which he tries to displace. These difficulties leave Pound with what we might call a metaphorical utopianism, in which an ideal of perfect condensation does constant battle with the forces (internal and external) of metonymy and displacement. "In a Station of the Metro," then, is not only a paradigmatic example of Pound's Imagist reductionism, but also of how his political and ethical ideas became integrated with his aesthetic practices.

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[311] Jacques Lacan, "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason Since Freud," in *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 2006), 425.

The "Metro" poem's status as an expression of the relationship between metaphor and nature arrives not merely though a comparison to Fenollosa (enlightening though the comparison is) but also through the poem's origin in Pound's reading of haiku, which Pound explicitly points to in "Vorticism" when he compares "In a Station of the Metro" to a well-known poem by the haiku master Arakida Moritake as well as another haiku related to Pound by his associate Victor Plarr.[312] Though the essay gives no indication of where Pound first encountered haiku poetry, Yoshinobu Hakutani, in his *Haiku and Modernist Poetics*, argues convincingly that the encounter came through the Japanese-American poet and literary scholar Yone Noguchi, who published an essay on haiku in a 1913 issue of the little magazine *Rhythm*, and who began a correspondence with Pound n 1911.[313] Noguchi's essay, "What is a Hokku Poem?," clearly frames the form as a kind of nature poetry founded in the specificity of its language: "this 'hokku' poem in whose

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[312] "Vorticism," 88-89. Though pound does not identify the author of either of the haikus he quotes as examples, the Moritake haiku can be found (though translated differently) in Steven D. Carter, ed., *Traditional Japanese Poetry: An Anthology* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 338. Yone Noguchi, whose importance to Pound's writing I discuss below, produced his own translation of the haiku which Yoshinobu Hakutani quotes in his introduction to Noguchi's selected works (*Selected English Writings of Yone Noguchi: An East-West Literary Assimilation, Volume 2*, ed. Yoshinobu Hakutani [Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1992], 35).

[313] Yoshinobu Hakutani, *Haiku and Modernist Poetics* (London: Palgrave, 2009), 69-88. Unfortunately, in his citation of Noguchi's essay, Hakutani mis-identifies the issue in which it appeared – listing it as issue 11 when it was really issue 12 (Hakutani 165n4). For more on Pound and Noguchi, see: Ce Rosenow, "Fenellosa's Legacy: The Japanese Network of Ezra Pound" *Philological Quarterly* 85.3/4 (2006): 377-78.

gem-small form of utterance our Japanese poets were able to express their understanding of Nature, better than that, to sing or chant their longing or wonder or adoration toward Mother Nature . . . [it] is distinctly clear-cut like a diamond or star, never mystified by any cloud or mist like Truth or Beauty of Keats' understanding."[314]

The importance of the haiku-form's imperative function was such that it seems to have affected the way Pound arranged the English examples that he quotes in his essay. While English readers of Haiku poems commonly understand the form to be made of three poetic lines with the syllables 5-7-5, in Japanese haikus are most commonly written as a single line with the tripartite structure being formed by *kireji*, or "cutting words," which break the line into formal units.[315] It is these units within the one-line Japanese haiku that become the three lines of the English haiku, both in translations from the Japanese and in the semi-independent tradition of haiku poetry in English, to which Pound is a key contributor. But in addition to this three-part structure, there frequently is also buried in the single Japanese line a two-part structure where "either the first two lines or the last two lines are one unit, and the first line or the last line is another unit."[316] While the three-line arrangement is now established as the primary way that haikus are written in English, the equally valid two-line arrangement that Pound favoured, and in

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[314] Yone Noguchi, "What is a Hokku Poem?" *Rhythm* 2.12 (1913): 355.

[315] For a detailed summary of the formal elements of haiku poetry, see the introduction to Stephen Addiss's *The Art of Haku: It's History through Poems and Paintings by Japanese Masters* (London: Shambhala, 2012).

[316] *Ibid*, 5.

which we can see the origin of the two-line form of "In a Station of the Metro," has many advantages. In addition to making it easier for Pound to emphasize the method of "super-position" he employed in his poem[317] (and emphasizing as well the poem's similarity to a mathematical equation, with the split between the lines taking the place of the equals sign[318]), the use of the haiku's two-part structure as the basis of its lineation emphasizes the poem's conceptual units at the expense of its formal qualities (whereas the three-line arrangement does the opposite).

In order to demonstrate the importance of this decision, it would be useful to compare "In a Station of the Metro" to another haiku written by the seventeenth-century master Matsuo Bashō. While Pound does not seem to have read much of Bashō, his eminent status in the history of Japanese poetry – comparable to Dante in Italian and Shakespeare in English – makes him a useful exemplum.[319] The haiku in question is thus:

Full moon

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[317] "Vorticism," 89.

[318] That the equation form asserts the *identity* of the first and second halves, and not merely their similarity, likewise fits with the larger imperative logic of Pound's poetics. As Ursula Shioji remarks, Pound has elsewhere used simile to emphasize "the separation of man from nature" (*Ezra Pound's Pisan Cantos and the Noh* [Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1998], 282). In his "Metro" poem he seems to have done the reverse.

[319] Which is not to say that Bashō did not have an influence on Imagism generally. For a summary see: Koji Kawamoto, "The use and Disuse of Tradition in Bashō's Haiku and Imagist Poetry" *Poetics Today* 20.4 (1999): 709-721.

Walking around the pond

All night[320]

Like "In a Station of the Metro," this haiku engages in a form of "super-position," in which one image is overlaid directly on the other to create a third image out of the combination (with the first line being one unit and the second two being another). But the images that Bashō presents are not merely juxtaposed, but have further relations: the image of the full moon is doubly reflected both in its reflection on the pond and in the speaker's circular walk, which is thus defined both by the pond's perimeter and by the image of the moon. What the poem therefore achieves is a unity of self and nature very much like what Pound sought, where one does not simply pay fealty to an ideal natural law (as with Kant) but rather where one achieves a more ecological relation with the world. As the poem's translator observes, its ambiguous syntax (present also in the Japanese) means that it "can be read with the idea that the moon 'walks' around the pond as it seems to go from east to west or that the author walked around the pond the whole night enjoying the full moon."[321] Bashō's haiku therefore reflects one of "In a Station of the Metro's" most important features – its flat ontology. Though the poems present multiple images, and though some images arise from others, no entity in either poem is hierarchically above or below another. For Bashō, we can see this "flat" relation in the

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[320] Matsuo Basho, *Basho: The Complete Haiku*, ed. and trans. Jane Reichhold (New York: Kohansha USA, 2008), 90. The Romanticized version of the Japanese is: "Meigetsu ya / Ike o megurite / Yomosugara" (282).

[321] *Ibid*, 282.

way that the lake brings the moon down to earth, letting it stride around the lake just as the speaker does, so that both entities (by virtue of haiku's ambiguous syntax) can effectively walk around the lake as one. For Pound, the flatness comes in the poem's presentation of multiple "intensities" present in the varying levels of abstraction that Pound permits to stand beside each other in a relation of equals.

3.4 Denaturing the Image

Pound, as should be clear by now, saw metaphor not only as a kind of ornament, but as a means of acquiring knowledge about the world. His embrace of figurative writing is also an embrace of objective knowledge – as evidenced by his likening of "In a Station of the Metro" to a mathematical formula, and of his later embrace of Fenollosa, who explicitly declared metaphor to be a "revealer of nature." Pound's use of metaphor is therefore essential to the larger imperative logic of his poetics, and in particular to his attempt to marry the breadth and repetitiveness of his Confucian-inspired historiography with his strong sense of individualism. Indeed, as Chet Lisiecki has recently argued, "the imagists' attempt to revitalize metaphor" is in keeping with a trend towards representing in poetry "the pre-linguistic image and one's emotional experience of it" that can be traced back to Nietzsche.[322] But the particular kind of metaphor that Pound uses in his "Metro" poem is fairly unusual – not at all conforming to the common "tenor-vehicle" model that most metaphors follow. If, as I.A. Richards defines it, "we can describe or

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[322] Chet Lisiecki, "'A Sort of Metaphor': Dynamic Figurative Language in Nietzsche, Pound, and H.D." *Modernism/Modernity* 22.2 (2015): 261.

qualify the tenor by describing the vehicle,"[323] then the super-position of "In a Station of the Metro" would hardly seem like a metaphor at all.

The problem is that Richards's definition turns metaphor into a basically hierarchical relationship – something like the inverse of the problem we encountered with metonymy. When, for example, Shakespeare has Romeo declare "But soft! What light through yonder window breaks? / It is the east, and Juliet is the sun"[324] a clear hierarchy appears: the point and focus of this metaphor is Juliet, who beauty makes her appearance at the window resemble the sun rising in the east. We are expected to understand what a sunrise looks like, and Shakespeare only invokes that image so that we may better understand Juliet. The passage is not really "about" the sun at all. Such is the problem with Richards's definition: a vehicle can carry, but cannot itself be carried, which is to say that the definition is only useful when applied to metaphors that only work in one direction. But "In a Station of the Metro" is basically reversible, in that one can compare the petals on the bough to the faces in the crowd just as effectively as the inverse. The image created from their super-position is an independent entity, a third object that arises from the first two but remains equal to them. The poem, then, is much more similar to the kind of "proportional metaphor" that Aristotle describes in his *Rhetoric*, which "must

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[323] I.A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 99.

[324] William Shakespeare, *The Most Excellent and Lamentable Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet*, in *The Norton Shakespeare: Based on the Oxford Edition*, second edition, ed. Stephen Greenblatt *et al* (New York: Norton, 2008), II.1.44-45.

always apply reciprocally to either of its co-ordinate terms."[325] The example that Aristotle gives here is a metaphor that equates the shield of Ares to the drinking bowl of Dionysus, where both objects (in addition to physically resembling each other) are heavily associated with their respective deities. Thus, one can say that the shield functions for Ares in the same way that the bowl does for Dionysus, or one can say the reverse, and in both cases the comparisons would be equivalent. While on the other hand, though Shakespeare wrote that "Juliet is the sun," and one could conceivably write that "the sun is Juliet," the two comparisons suggest completely different things.[326]

While "In a Station of the Metro" is a particularly extreme example, this kind of "flat" metaphor, with its interchangeable and ontologically independent parts, are fairly common in Pound's writing. We can see another example in "The River Song" of *Cathay*, which ends: "For the gardens at Jo-run are full of new nightingales, / Their sound is mixed in this flute, / Their voice is in the twelve pipes here."[327] The movement in these lines from the sound of the nightingales to the sound of the flutes – proceeding so that neither sound outdoes the other, so that both instead play in harmony – allows for one to

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[325] Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, trans. W. Rhys Roberts (New York: Dover, 2004), 126-27.

[326] As Ethan Lewis writes, "In a Station of the Metro" is "about 'faces,' but it is not an Image of them, conveyed *via* metaphor. The ambiguity engendered by the [semi-]colon forces us to experience each image as an actuality, as a potential tenor for which the opposite term is the vehicle" ("Super-Position: Interpretive Metaphor" *Paideuma: A Journal Devoted to Ezra Pound Scholarship* 23.2-3 [1994]: 202).

[327] Ezra Pound, trans. "The River Song," in *Cathay*, ed. Zhaoming Qian (New York: New Directions, 2015), 32.

be compared to the other without one overpowering the other. It is a type of transition that we see most famously in H.D.'s "Oread," another major imagist work, which achieves an effect quite similar to that in "The River Song":

> Whirl up, sea–
>
> whirl your pointed pines,
>
> splash your great pines
>
> on our rocks,
>
> hurl your green over us,
>
> cover us with your pools of fir.[328]

The key difference here between these poems and "In a Station of the Metro" is that the super-position of the images does not occur in a single momentary flash but is rather worked up to over the course of several lines. As the passage develops, one objects slowly bleeds into another until they form a third, composite image, while nevertheless retaining their respective separateness. The firs and the sea, the faces and the petals, the nightingales and the flutes – all continue to be themselves even as their proximity creates something new, just as the moon in Bashō remains in the sky even as it dances with the speaker around the lake.

We can see other manifestations of this process in Pound's early poetry – it is the central conceit, for example, in "Portrait d'une Femme" (which ends, tellingly, "No!

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[328] H.D. [Hilda Doolittle], "Oread," in *H.D.: Collected Poems, 1912-1944*, ed. Louis L. Martz (New York: New Directions, 1983). 55.

there is nothing! In the whole world and all, / Nothing that's quite your own. / Yet this is you"[329]), and likewise of his earlier "Histrion":

> [T]he souls of all men great
> At times pass through us,
> And we are melted into them, and are not
> Save reflexions [sic] of their souls.
> Thus am I Dante for a space and am
> One Fran*çois* Villon, ballad-lord and thief
> . . .
> This for an instant and the flame is gone.[330]

Though the speaker is "melted into" previous authors, this combination is only momentary, which forces him to drift from author to author, unable to fully "become" someone else. In the later poem, this transience becomes equated with the gathering of junk and refuse in the gyre of the eponymous sea, created by the nearby currents. Though the junk and flotsam are what make the Sargasso Sea distinctive, these various objects remain clearly and obviously independent of the region – their colour contrasting with the famous clear blue of the waters. Likewise, the poem's subject, as a repository of rumour and conversation, becomes herself through the adoption and ventriloquization of other people's speech, which remains distinct from her (and she from it) despite forming part of her personality. Though not "images" in the sense that we encounter in the "Metro"

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[329] Ezra Pound, "Portrait d'une Femme," *Collected Early Poems* (New York: New Directions, 1976), 185.

[330] Ezra Pound, "Histrion," *Collected Early Poems* (New York: New Directions, 1976), 71.

poem, these works demonstrate a preoccupation in Pound's early poems with balancing the super-position of different entities with those entities' continued ontological independence. It is a preoccupation that we see extend into his later work with his use of "subject-rhymes" – which remain a constant throughout all the cantos.

These rhymes – in which, as Hugh Kenner summarizes, "snow fills ten lines of *Iliad* XII to rhyme (alike, yet different) with hurtling missiles, and the reader of the snowfall passage at the end of Joyce's 'The Dead' may detect rhyme with the *Iliad*"[331] – though seemingly estranged from Pound's particular use of metaphor in "In a Station of the Metro" are nevertheless of the same lineage. Indeed, it is still fairly easy to see in Kenner's example of the "hurtling missiles" that resemble falling snow an echo of both the metaphoric logic of Fenollosa's Chinese ideograms and of the snow that greets the bowmen of Shu and reflects their sorrow-laden hearts. The subject-rhyme is very much the narrativization of Pound's earlier method of Imagist super-position, retaining the non-hierarchical metaphoric logic of "In a Station of the Metro" while also incorporating the "repeat in nature"[332] that he saw in the sestina-like hills of southern France and while he explicitly set out to capture in his Cantos. When, for example, Pound in Canto LXII creates a subject rhyme between the American and English constitutions – first in describing the latter English constitution "without appeal to higher powers unwritten" (C

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[331] Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 92.

[332] The term appears in a letter Pound wrote to his father in 1927 where he summarized the basic conceptual structure of *The Cantos* as he then had conceived it (Ezra Pound, *Letters of Ezra Pound: 1907-1947*, ed. D.D. Paige [London: Faber and Faber, 1971], 285).

LXII/343) and then later having John Adams name "a love of science and letters / [and] a desire to encourage schools and academies" as the "only means to preserve our Constitution" (C LXII/349) – he finds (in his equation of good governance with a well-educated population) a repeat in history that is directly related to the repetition found in nature.[333] In these cases, then, the use of metaphor ceases to be simply a matter of ornamentation, or of finding an effective way to explain one thing by analogy to another, and instead becomes an effective means of analyzing the natural world, and a source of knowledge in its own right.[334]

Thus, before moving on from this extended engagement with the development of Pound's metaphors, it is important to make a final comparison between Pound's writing and the place that metaphor holds in the philosophy of Graham Harman, whose ideas have been implicit in much of my analysis thus far. While Harman's excursions into literary theory have been rather disappointing,[335] his writing on the role of metaphor in

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[333] For an analysis of this particular "rhyme," see: David Ten Eyck, *Ezra Pound's Adams Cantos* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 105-06.

[334] Girolamo Mancuso makes a similar comparison, writing that "by analogy to the Chinese written character, we could say that the thematic units [of *The Cantos*] are the primitive signs . . . which, by combination, form the compound characters" ("The Ideogrammic Method in *The Cantos*," in *Ezra Pound's Cantos: A Casebook*, ed. Peter Makin [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006], 72).

[335] I refer, here, to Harman's essay "The Well-Wrought Broken Hammer: Object-Oriented Literary Criticism" (*New Literary History* 42.2 [2012]: 183-203), which in attempting to extend OOO into literary criticism manages little more than a simplistic summary of the major trends in criticism over the past half-century combined with facile critiques of a handful of major schools of thought.

OOO gestures to Pound as an unsung predecessor. Metaphors, for Harman, function as an access point to each object's inherent strangeness. An object in a metaphorical relation becomes both "an image sparkling with diverse features" while still retaining a "strange concealed integrity of individual images."[336] Of particular interest to Harman is a little-cited essay by the Spanish phenomenologist José Ortega y Gasset called "An Essay on Esthetics by way of a Preface" – originally published as a preface to a collection of poems by Moreno Villa. The essay contains an extended meditation on the function of metaphor:

> A Valencian poet, López Picó, writes that the cypress "is like the ghost of a dead flame." This is a suggestive metaphor. But what is the metaphorical object here? It is neither the cypress, nor the flame, nor the ghost: all these belong to the realm of real images. The new object that confronts us is a "cypress-ghost of a flame." Notice, however, that this cypress is not a cypress, nor this ghost a ghost, nor this flame a flame.[337]

The image that Ortega cites from Picó thus falls into a dialectic of combination and distinction that should by now be familiar. It is not only the flame, the ghost, and the

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[336] Graham Harman, *Gruella Metaphysics: Phenomenology and the Carpentry of Things* (Chicago: Open Court, 2005), 108.

[337] José Ortega y Gasset, "An Essay on Esthetics by way of a Preface," in *Phenomenology and Art*, trans. Philip W. Silver (New York: Norton, 1975), 140.

cypress which are distinct objects, but the bizarre combinatory image that flashes out from their metaphorical relation. Far from the explanatory metaphors of I.A. Richards, metaphor for Ortega and Harman becomes a process of opacity and occlusion rather than a means of access.

As Ortega goes on to write, "we are to see the image of a cypress through the image of a flame; we *see it as* a flame, and vice versa. But each excludes the other; they are mutually opaque. . . . We simply sense an identity, we live executantly this being, the cypress-flame."[338] Harman – for whom withdrawal and hiddenness are essential aspects of object relations[339] – this approach to understanding metaphor turns it into a way, not of accessing the underlying nature of objects, but of perceiving more readily their withdrawal: "since the two images are unable actually to melt together instantly by way of their truly minimal common qualities, [their] cryptic essences . . . remain before me in a kind of permanent collision."[340] There is no mixing between these objects, nor any subjugation between tenor and vehicle. What does this tell us about Pound? First, the similarities between Ortega's analysis of the Picó simile and the implicit ontology of "In a Station of the Metro" is notable in itself, given how infrequently the two writers have

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[338] *Ibid*, 145.

[339] Harman's earlier writing on this subject, in *Tool-Being*, clearly falls in line with some of the problems found in Pound and Ortega's approaches to metaphor: "On the one hand, the reality of a thing lies behind any of its relations, [and is] irreducible to them. On the other hand, any relation . . . must be regarded as a new entity" (*Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects* [Chicago: Open Court, 2002], 260).

[340] *Gruella Metaphysics*, 109.

been analyzed together.[341] But the relationship becomes more complex in light of Harman's uptake of Ortega. Harman, like Pound, sees metaphor as a means of acquiring new information about the world as we encounter it. The relationship between the cypress and the flame is not, for him, a matter of explanation or decoration, but rather of revelation – the making visible of a fundamental ontological fact. Yet there are important differences in Pound and Harman's approach to the epistemology of metaphor. Pound considers the revelations of his metaphors to be actual objective knowledge about the material world,[342] essential for the fidelity to "the thing which has been clearly seen." Such knowledge is necessary if his "automatic" imperative logic is to genuinely bring the closeness to nature upon which Pound has built his ethics.

Throughout Pound's prose writing we encounter exhortations to his readers calling on them to acquire better, more precise definitions of words – much like how his

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[341] Vincent B. Sherry makes some scattered comparisons between Pound and Ortega in his *Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, and Radical Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). More recently, Gayle Bishop Rogers has analyzed the varied interconnections between English and Spanish modernism in *Modernism and the New Spain: Cosmopolitan Europe and Literary History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[342] As Stanford Schwartz remarks, for Pound the role of the "active artist" was that of a "searcher for knowledge" – a role that he saw embodied in Odysseus (*The Matrix of Modernism: Pound, Eliot, and Early Twentieth Century Thought* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014 (1985)], 106). Likewise, Patricia Rae has argued that "Pound and [Wallace] Stevens share a sense that the analogies poetry foregrounds ought to enable the genuine 'exploration' of reality" ("Bloody Battle Flags and Cloudy Days: The Experience of Metaphor in Pound and Stevens" *The Wallace Stevens Journal* 26.2 [2002]: 150).

poetics calls for a precision in the presentation of images. One can look, for instance, to the short anecdote about the zoologist Louis Agassiz, which he includes near the start of his *ABC of Reading*. Pound offers up the story as a way to show that "the proper METHOD for studying poetry and good letters is the method of contemporary biologists, that is, the careful first-hand examination of the matter.[343] The anecdote itself describes a student working under Agassiz who is asked to describe a sunfish. The student begins by providing the fish's taxonomic designation ("Ichthus Heliodiplodokus, or whatever term is used to conceal the common sunfish from vulgar knowledge," as Pound describes it[344]), which soon proves insufficient. The student then writes a short essay on the subject, which likewise fails. Then Agassiz "told him to look at the fish. At the end of three weeks the fish was in an advanced state of decomposition, but the student knew something about it."[345] As Pound would write, in reference to this story, in a later essay, "any teacher of biology would tell you that knowledge can NOT be transmitted by general statement without knowledge of particulars," and he advocates a similar program

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[343] *ABC of Reading*, 17.

[344] *Ibid*. I should note that Pound's taxonomical name is nonsensical. A sunfish, depending on type, would occupy either the genus *Lampris* or the genus *Mola*. "Ichthus" is simply Greek for "fish. "Heliodiplodokus" is apparently Pound's coinage, being the Greek word for "sun" combined with "diplodocus," a genus of dinosaur. The name is in fact doubly implausible, since taxonomical names are typically Latinate, while Pound's name is principally Greek. One imagines he had a good deal of fun coming up with it.

[345] *Ibid*., 18.

for the teaching of literature.[346] This attitude is well in line with what I have already described throughout this chapter – such as Pound's preference for the specific over the general and his desire for greater fidelity in representation. Likewise, as Bob Perelman has analyzed, the anecdote is also consistent with Pound's approach to both Confucianism and his readings of Chinese Ideograms.[347] The anecdote also illustrates the importance of particularity – and the exhaustive knowledge of particulars – in the natural and automatic arrival of generalizations. If, as Pound writes elsewhere, "all knowledge is *built up* from a rain of factual atoms,"[348] then one must attain an exhaustive knowledge of those "atoms" in order to arrive at generalizations one can trust.

Consider the student, who begins in the received abstractions of a jargon which – though useful to an expert – simply serves to obscure from them the gaps in their particular knowledge of the fish. (One might recall here Canto XIII, where Kung muses that "even I can remember / A day when the historians left blanks in their writings, / I mean for things they didn't know" [*C* XIII/60]) Their knowledge, being top-down, is incomplete, and over-privileges broad taxonomies above the brute haecceity of the specimen before their eyes. The student's responsibility to the object is great, and yet this story has a happy ending: though it takes three weeks of work and examination, and

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[346] Ezra Pound, "The Teacher's Mission," in *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T.S. Eliot (New York: New Directions: 1968), 60.

[347] Bob Perelman, *The Trouble With Genius: Reading Pound, Joyce, Stein, and Zukofsky* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 52-54.

[348] *Guide to Kulchur*, 90. My emphasis.

though in the process the specimen is destroyed, by the end the student *actually knows something*, and has therefore moved upwards from the particular into an early, tentative generality. Pound is, then, quite opposed to what Harman has called "overmining," or the privileging of groups and collectives of objects to their constituent parts – as in where one considers a table "more real" or perhaps "more important" than the atoms that construct it.[349] His opposition to beginning with the ideal and the general does not amount to an abandonment of generalities *per se*, but rather – as we saw with "In a Station of the Metro" and elsewhere – the creation of an even, horizontal relationship between composite images, such as the music of the flutes and nightingales, and their constituent parts.

This all sounds like an approach well in keeping with Harman's philosophical project, to the point where one might be tempted to dub Pound's writing an "Object Oriented Poetics." But it would be a mistake to do so, since the two differ quite sharply on a key axiom: whether or not it is *possible* to "move up" between different levels of generalities by analyzing the "atoms" exhaustively. Pound clearly believes that one can, whereas Harman holds precisely the opposite. Instead Harman essentially generalizes the object withdrawal found in Heidegger's famous tool analysis to all forms of object relations, a position that renders Pound's implicit ontology explicitly impossible. If no object cannot be exhausted by its relations then one can never know everything about it, since the acquisition of knowledge invariably requires some form of relation to it. The comparison to Harman, then, demonstrates a possible fissure in Pound's imperative logic,

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[349] I discuss this term in more detail in my first chapter, on Wyndham Lewis.

one that begins (appropriately enough) at the bottom and works its way up. It is a problem that will dog any philosophy that predicates itself in one way or another on "getting back to nature" – that being the unspoken assumption that "nature" is something that one can get back to. For Pound, whose imperative arises from the combination of miniscule attentiveness and automatic repetition, the danger that the images which set the pattern might themselves be flawed and over-generalized – that this over-generalization may in fact be a basic axiom of object relations – is an unspoken threat throughout his writing, one that only comes to the foreground late in his body of work.

3.5 Demigod Ecology

> A working country is hardly ever a landscape. The very idea of a landscape implies separation and observation.
>
> — Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*[350]

Let us enact again the "repeat in history" by turning back to that image of the dying Herakles and its echo in the final fragments of Pound's epic work. Herakles's death was clearly automatic in the sense that Douglas uses the term, in that it was inexorable and not created by any presumptive higher-order manipulations. No value has been created from nowhere; no life has been declared by fiat in the face of nature. And because Herakles is a demigod – the literal son of Zeus – this natural process is also an ethical one, connected both to Herakles's social role as a son and (in his commands to Hyllos) as a father. The relationship "just works;" it is natural, proceeding automatically, a perfectly functioning agnotology. Here is the coherence: the resolution of a cryptic prophecy

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[350] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 120.

through the workings of natural law, which creates in Herakles's death a genuine ecological integration. Herakles's godhood therefore manifests as a kind of perception, in his ability to see the condensation that others cannot. But Pound is not a demigod, and his failure to conjure in his cantos the final unity he had for so long pursued has by now become part of his personal legend, the fragmentary final verses and the near-speechlessness that defined the last years of his life standing as testament to the complete collapse of his ideals, a collapse that we can easily (perhaps too easily) see as a subject rhyme to the collapse of the fascist regimes he pledged his loyalty to.

Yet unlike the destruction of those regimes, the elliptical ending of *The Cantos* can at least be seen as a noble failure, one that expresses, in the refusal to swerve even in the face of total collapse, an unshakable devotion to the ideals that animated the project to begin with. There is no outline to *The Cantos*, nor anything like the Gilbert and Linati schemas which gave much-appreciated critical toe-holds to early readers of Joyce's *Ulysses*. What scholars have instead is a mountain of Pound's non-fiction writing, comprising letters, essays, lectures, monographs, prefaces, speeches, epigrams, sayings, and manifestoes, some of which appear in multiple forms and contexts – like the parts of F.S. Flint's "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste" which reappear in Pound's "Vorticism" – all of which is of potential relevance to *The Cantos*, and none of which was pursued with anything like a systematic program of philosophical development.[351] Rather, what holds

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[351] Or, as Paul Morrison puts it, "no poem has ever less resembled a well-wrought urn than the *Cantos*" (*The Poetics of Fascism: Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, Paul De Man* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1996], 26).

Pound's work together is a set of deeply held philosophical obsessions which that go on to manifest in a panoply of diverse interests. Yet while Pound expected, in the optimistic early days of his epic-writing career, a final display of the revelatory "magic moment," and epiphany (or perhaps what Woolf would call a "moment of being") in which it all makes sense in the end, the absence of this moment should not blind us to the underlying system which made that expectation possible. Pound's poetics in *The Cantos*, his technique of arranging individual "luminous details" in carefully layered webs of metaphorical relations to recreate in his text the network of self-replicating "atoms" that will form a society in tune with the imperative of the world, is as much an expression of his politics as any essay he might have written. Pound writes how Confucius says an emperor should rule: by putting his words in order, by putting himself in order, and then expanding outwards across the layers of complexity until this unity encompasses the world. It is a poetics built from productive ignorance, where the perfection of the system allows the whole to emerge naturally from its parts.

It is for this reason that I have continued to say that Pound sought to be in tune with "nature" despite my earlier invocation of Morton's definition of "ecology" in *The Ecological Thought*. As I suggested briefly during my discussion of Kant, imperative thinking is not ecological thinking, nor is it properly natural thinking, but is instead an unhappy compromise between the two poles. Simply stated, the belief that one *should* be connected to the natural world (however that world is conceived) implies that one is *not*, but it also implies that the division between nature and culture is also not an essential ontological division, since if that were the case the imperative would be doomed to failure to begin with. For Morton, the prime example of ecological thinking is Darwinian

evolution, which recognises no essential division between human beings and other animals, and recognizes humans, sunfish, and wet, black boughs as simply different nodes on an enormous web of relations – abandoning entirely the Aristotelian "great chain of being" that so ruthlessly hierarchicalizes the natural world.[352] So while Pound seems to value ecological thinking above all else, his mode of thought continues to figure the natural world as an eternal "away" to which we must venture, a key characteristic of Morton's "nature."

Let us look, for instance, at this moment in Canto LXXXI:

> Learn of the green world what can be thy place
> In scaled invention or true artistry,
> Pull down thy vanity,
> Paquin pull down!
> The green casque has outdone your elegance.
>
> "Master thyself, then others shall thee beare"
> Pull down thy vanity
> Thou art a beaten dog beneath the hail
> A swollen magpie in a fitful sun,
> Half black half white

[352] Indeed, though Morton identifies his philosophical project with OOO, it is Darwin, in the end, who may be his most important intellectual influence, as one can see in his audacious (though likely accurate) claim that "modern thinking is willfully ignorant of Darwin" (*The Ecological Thought* 18).

Nor knowst'ou wing from tail

Pull down thy vanity

How mean thy hates

Fostered in falsity

(*C* LXXXI/541)

The central line in this long passage – "master thyself, then others shall thee beare," an echo of a similar line from Chaucer's "Ballade of Good Council"[353] – combines Pound's Confucianism with his pedagogical theories, aligning (through the surrounding passage) the attainment of education through the study of specific specimens (whether a sunfish or a line from Chaucer) with the self-mastery expected of any "good" Confucian emperor. The attainment of self-knowledge, here taking the form of a kind of zoology ("knowst'ou wing from tail"), becomes linked to a drive toward the natural "green world," the distance of which has filled the addressee with "falsity" and has given a meanness to their hates. Such is the problem with ethics, as Kant well knew – free will exists, and so ethical laws will always lack the gravity of an inexorable fiat of the universe.

Though the above passage suggests an automatic progression from ignorance and meanness towards the knowledge of particulars and the pulling down of vanity, elsewhere in the later cantos Pound appears to recognize the position of separateness that his ethics have placed him in. As he writes in the *Pisan Cantos*, "the wind is part of the process / the rain is part of the process" (*C* LXXIV/455) – and this after the wind and rain had tortured him in his open air cage in the Pisan prison camp. Then later, in the *Drafts*

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[353] Terrell, 454.

and Fragments, the wind appears again, where Pound implores "do not move / let the wind speak / that is paradise," which comes right after the admission that "I lost my center / fighting the world" (*C* CXVII/822). That Pound twice, in the face of failure, conjures stillness and the autonomy of the wind, keeps his project (even as it collapses) in tune with his Confucian ethics. The vital passage in this regard is as follows:

> Le Paradis n'est pas artificeal
>
> nor does the martin against the tempest
>
> fly as in the calm air
>
> "like an arrow, and under bad government
>
> like an arrow"
>
> "Missing the bull's eye seeks the cause in himself"
>
> (*C* LXXVII/488)

The final line in this quote is a quite direct paraphrase of a passage from Confucius, which holds that "there is an analogy between the man of breed and the archer. The archer who misses the bulls-eye turns and seeks the cause of his failure in himself."[354] Coming as this passage does well into the *Pisan Cantos*, one obvious reading of this line is that the archer here is Pound, looking inwards to correct the failure that has placed him in such peril. Yet the context of the line suggests that we can take the reading even further. The echo of Douglas's definition of the natural – "le Paradis n'est pas artificial" – and the image of the martin adjusting itself to the different kinds of wind together embody the paradoxes of an imperative like Pound's.

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[354] *Confucius*, 127.

The archer is not detached from nature, their shot is as subject to the wind, and its paradisal coherence, as any other entity. Yet the failure of the shot still remains the archer's own, for like the martin they were expected to be in tune with nature, to sense the speed and the direction of the wind, and tilt their bow accordingly. Pound, as he would recognize, was not a demigod, and so could not bridge the gap between his politics and the natural world. He knows that this cohesion exists, and claims to be aware of it, but his attempts to represent this system in his poetry only end up embodying its contradictions: he knows the wind is there, and he pays attention to its force, but when his arrow turns from the target he is unable to incorporate its actions with the breeze. We may be reminded here of an observation from Emmanuel Levinas that seems to have prefigured Harman's work on metaphor. "Things," he writes, "refer to an inwardness as parts of the given world . . . caught up in the current of practice where their alterity is hardly noticeable. Art makes them stand out from the world and thus extracts them from this belongingness to a subject."[355]

To represent an object, Levinas holds, is to remove it from the world it occupied, disentangling it from its relations. As with Harman and Ortega's metaphors, then, it is the very act of holding an object up, alone, for detailed scrutiny that serves to mystify it. But whereas for Harman this detachment arrives from the impossibility of exhausting an object via its relations, for Levinas it is precisely because of the relationality of objects that representation occludes them. These are, in a sense, natural and ecological

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[355] Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2001), 45.

approaches to the ontology of representation – with Harman figuring objects as forever "away," and withdrawn from knowledge, and Levinas reading them as highly integrated into their environments to the point that they become unknowable. Pound, following the logic of his imperative, finds himself in the middle of these two drives. In his distinct images he flirts with the possibility of their withdrawal, while in his flat and integrative politics he continues to valorize the individual and so remove his heroes from the very natural world to which their art and politics supposedly align. "No wind," as he writes in Canto IV, "is the king's wind" (*C* IV/16), invoking the wind-bag of Aeolus, which in the *Odyssey* so famously taunts Odysseus with his homecoming before blowing it all away. Such are the dangers of too quickly joining a force of nature with political might: too often, as you step up to the gates of paradise, its gales will blow and throw them shut across your nose.

Chapter 4

The Semantic Ontology of *Finnegans Wake*: Reading as De-Mediation

It depends upon what the meaning of the word "is" is.

— Bill Clinton

4.1 What "Is" is Not

In a very important sense, there are no words in *Finnegans Wake*. What this "sense" amounts to will be the central topic of the present chapter, but provisionally I will say that the way in which *Wake* criticism and interpretation divides the symbols of the text (implicitly or, less often, explicitly) into both "words" and what Gabriel Renggli has appropriately called "non-words"[356] is unfounded. The narrative and textual ontology of *Finnegans Wake* is flat, populated with non-words as far as the eye can read. The claim that "*Finnegans Wake* contains no words" might be somewhat surprising, since though the text is famously obscure and difficult even a perusal of the first lines reveals the presence of entities that seem like words: "riverrun, past Eve and Adam's, from swerve of shore to bend of bay, brings us by a commodius vicus of recirculation back to Howth Castle and Environs."[357] Before even getting to the close analysis of the word/non-word

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[356] See: Gabriel Renggli, "A Wakean Whodunit: Death and Authority in *Finnegans Wake*" *Joyce Studies Annual* (2014): 3-24.

[357] James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, ed. Finn Fordham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3.1-3. Future citations will be parenthetical and indicated with "FW."

division and what its relation is to ontology, it ought to be clear at a glance that the line above, for all of its obscurity, does indeed contain *words* as the term is commonly understood. Indeed, these appear to be English words placed in the sentence as they would be in common English grammar: past, from, swerve, of, shore, to, bend . . . There are even recognizable names (Eve and Adam) and a place name that should be familiar to anyone who has visited Dublin (Howth Castle).

Other words, of course, are not so easily categorized – "riverrun," for example – and so it can appear that the signifiers of the *Wake* can be split generally into the two categories, "words" and "non-words." A word in *Finnegans Wake* does not generally call for special resolution. While of course scholars are attentive to its place in the larger patterns of signification in which each word participates (such as the way "Howth Castle and Environs" produces an instance of the HCE acronym) words in the *Wake* are seldom decomposed in the way that non-word portmanteaus tend to be. A word like "is" rarely receives the sort of attention that, for example, Umberto Eco lavishes on "sansglorians" (*FW* 4.7) in *The Aesthetics of Chaosmos,* which he resolves into the equation "*sang+sans+glorians+sanglot+riant*,"[358] or like Derek Attridge gives "shuit" (*FW*

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[358] Umberto Eco, *The Aesthetics of Chaosmos: The Middle Ages of James Joyce*, trans. Ellen Esrock (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 65. Eco continually refers to these sorts of constructions as "puns," though for the most part "portmanteau" would be a better term. As Ruben Borg has written with regards to Eco's analysis, "such a forcing together of signified does not constitute a pun in the classical sense of the term. It achieves some of the same rhetorical effects . . . but compounds these effects with an added sense of arbitrariness and extreme verbal innovation" (*The Measureless Time of Joyce, Deleuze, and Derrida* [New York: Continuum, 2007], 64).

620.4), which he breaks down into "suit," "shirt," "shit," and "chute," among other things.[359] This is also an attitude that we see in the much earlier work of Clive Hart, who writes that "the essential value of the pun or portmanteau-word in *Finnegans Wake* lies not in its elusive and suggestive qualities but in its capacity to compress much meaning into little space."[360] Indeed, this kind of analysis goes straight back to the coining of "portmanteau," and perhaps its most famous example, in the poem "Jabberwocky" which Humpty Dumpty recites to Alice in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*, and which begins:

> Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
> Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
> All mimsy were the borogoves,
> And the mome raths outgrabe.[361]

Humpty Dumpty glosses these "hard words" in much the same way that Joyceans have tended to gloss the non-words of *Finnegans Wake*: "Well, '*slithy*' means 'lithe and

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[359] Derek Attridge, "Unpacking the Portmanteau, or Who's Afraid of *Finnegans Wake*?" in *On Puns: The Foundations of Letters*, ed. Jonathan Culler (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), 148-152.

[360] Clive Hart, *Structure and Motif in Finnegans Wake* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1962), 32. More recent scholarship on Joyce's use of portmanteau has revealed a far more complex arrangement behind their apparently simple construction. See: Jordan Bower, "An Immodest Proposal: The Politics of the Portmanteau in *Ulysses*" *James Joyce Quarterly* 51.2-3 (2014): 437-454.

[361] Lewis Carroll, *The Annotated Alice: The Definitive Edition*, ed. Martin Gardner (New York: Norton, 2000), 215.

slimy.' 'Lithe' is the same as 'active.' You see it's like a portmanteau – there are two meanings packed up into one word."[362] For Humpty Dumpty (as with, it seems, many Joyceans), non-words decompose into the words that form their primary elements, their strangeness resolving into clarity.

But while one can often see this scene offered as a clear definition of "portmanteau," its larger context indicates that we should take care to use it suspiciously. As Humpty Dumpty says two pages earlier, "when *I* use a word . . . it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less."[363] This declaration should be a red flag for *Wake* critics for a number of reasons, the most obvious being its brash declaration of the insuperability of authorial intent (a shaky ground at the best of times, and especially given the somewhat aleatoric nature of the *Wake*'s composition), and the way it plays into the larger HCE/Finn meta-myth of a patriarch's rise and fall (in which Humpty Dumpty already participates in multiple ways). But the larger scene itself seems to undermine the portmanteau's supposed unity. As Humpty Dumpty continues to explain the first verse of "Jabberwocky," he is interrupted by Alice at the word "wabe":

> "And '*the wabe*' is the grass-plot round a sun-dial, I suppose?" said Alice, surprised at her own ingenuity.
>
> "Of course it is. It's called '*wabe*,' you know, because it goes along way before it, and a long way behind it—"

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[362] Ibid.

[363] Ibid, 213.

> "And a long way on each side," Alice added.
>
> "Exactly so."[364]

The definition of "wabe" is not so much a combination of disparate words as it is a riddle. Alice is able to figure out its third characteristic because she notices that the first two can be expressed as "*way be*fore" and "*way be*hind" and so makes the leap to "*way be*yond"[365] (which suggests that Humpty Dumpty's pronunciation of "wabe" resembles "way-be" rather than, say, "wade" or "wave"). That Alice is able to do this, however, destabilizes Humpty Dumpty's authority, because it roots the definition of "wabe" in a signifying structure that can operate independently of him. A clever reader can not only figure out the riddle and the three senses that Humpty Dumpty had considered, but also develop further iterations that he seems not to have considered – like "*way be*tween" or "*way be*side." "Wabe," then, is not the sum of a limited set of linguistic elements, a knowable object that can be exhausted by a sufficiently close analysis, but rather a particular node in a network of relationships that exceeds and defies any individual reader's attempt at exhaustiveness.

In his analysis of the non-word "mardred," from the phrase "the author, in fact, was mardred" (*FW* 517.11), Renggli comes to a very similar conclusion. After first marking the obvious connection to "murdered," he asks: "How do we know that a murder has taken place? . . . we do not in fact know it. . . . the constellation of letters that form

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[364] Ibid, 215.

[365] Ibid, 216n13.

'mardred,' is not a word, at least not in any readily recognizable language."[366] Renggli's conclusion very much resembles that of Attridge following his reading of "shuit," where he says that to call the term a "word" is "of course misleading, since it is precisely because it is *not* a word of the English language that it functions in the way that it does."[367] Thus, for the sake of our heuristic, temporary taxonomy of *Wake*ian terms, we can treat as an essential element of the non-word that of the potential for reducibility, of being dis-integrated into a set of lexical elements – a potential signaled by its status as a problem, or as a stoppage in the flow of interpretation. The trait of reducibility seems to arise from a given term's relation to a pre-existing human language, much like how Humpty Dumpty's portmanteaus all seem to reduce to words in modern English. *Finnegans Wake* is likewise closely related to English, though in a much more complex way. As Sam Slote has remarked, "in terms of basic critical orientation, the *Wake* is certainly not written *in* English . . . Perhaps it would be safer to say that it is written *from* English,"[368] and Attridge has likewise observed that "a fundamental property of [*Finnegans Wake* is] its being more than one language at once."[369] But the English-ness of a particular word likely matters less than its being related to *any* language whatsoever.

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[366] Renggli, 4.

[367] Attridge, "Unpacking the Portmanteau," 148.

[368] Sam Slote, *Joyce's Nietzschean Ethics* (New York: Palgrave, 2013), 127-28.

[369] Derek Attridge, *Joyce Effects: On Language, Theory, and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 159.

The division between word and non-word therefore seems to be fairly straightforward. A non-word is something which does not exist in any linguistic system outside of the *Wake*, and which can by one means or another be resolved into a set of words. I use the word "resolve" deliberately, because in a certain kind of reading (Eco's, for example) it is the function of analysis to explain and to "explain away" the non-word by essentially transforming it into a short-form for the combination of words that it "really" represents. The critic becomes like Carroll's Humpty Dumpty, listing the basic components of a non-word so to define its meaning once and for all. But as Renggli and Attridge make clear, it is Alice one ought to resemble instead – taking the non-word not as a mystery to explain, but rather as an invitation to explore the ways and contours of the *Wake*ian language game. Yet even this openness leaves the basic word/non-word split in place, since it recognizes this exegetic potential in only the "problematic" non-words not clearly part of any external language system. What I wish to attack here is the unspoken assumption that if one can gloss a given word as simply a term from English, French, Mandarin, Latin, Arabic, Romansch, Somali, Frisian, Cree, Korean, Basque, or what have you, then the kind of analysis we see granted to "sansglorians," shuit," and "mardred"[370] is either needless or unlikely to be fruitful.

This issue brings us back to the book's first lines, and in particular the phrase "commodius vicus." "Commodius" both is and is not a "word" in the sense that I have

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[370] Or, indeed, "mememormee" (FW 628.14) which I discuss in my paper "Textual Authority and Diagnostic Joyce: Re-Reading the Way We Read the *Wake*" (*Joyce Studies Annual* [2016]: 69-72). An analysis of this word also appears in Lorraine Weir's *Writing Joyce: A Semiotics of the Joyce System* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

been using the term. To begin with, the recent corrected edition of *Finnegans Wake* released by Danis Rose and John O'Hanlon indicates that it is mis-spelled, with their edition presenting it as "commodi*o*us."[371] However, as the OED indicates, *both* of these are correct English words – and are in fact different variations of the same word, which means "advantageous, beneficial, profitable, of use" and also simply "convenient." (And is, in keeping with Joyce's "cloacal obsession,"[372] related also to the word "commode.") The -ius spelling that we see in the first edition is rarer, but it has still seen definite use.[373] It is perhaps a fortuitous coincidence that the variation between these two versions of the term have no effect on its pronunciation, meaning that (in a manner similar to the word-play behind Derrida's coinage, "*différance*") the variation is purely textual. This silence contrasts with the doubling of the word "vicus," which many readers quite logically take as an allusion to Giambattista Vico, whose historiographic philosophy is an important structuring element in the *Wake*. However, "vicus" is also a word in its own right – a Latin one, which the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* defines as "a group of dwellings" and "a block of houses, street, group of streets, etc., in a town, often forming a social or

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[371] James Joyce, *The Restored Finnegans Wake*, eds. Danis Rose and John O'Hanlon (New York: Penguin, 2010), 3.2.

[372] H.G. Wells, review of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, by James Joyce, *The New Republic*, March 10, 1917.

[373] The OED entry provides two examples of the variant spelling, from the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries: from Richard Grafton's *A chronicle at large and meere history of the affayres of Englande and kinges of the same* (1569) and Polydore Vergil's *English History* (1846).

administrative unit," and which originates in the Greek "*oikos*" ("*οἶκος*"). (This connection to municipal units likely also connects the word to the "Vico Road, Dalkey" we encounter in the "Nestor" episode of *Ulysses* [U 2.25].) And, since "vicus" is a Latin word, it makes sense that we should read it with Latin pronunciation, which the dictionary provides as "*uīcus*." The term's status as a Latin word thus splits it, giving it a textual resemblance to "Vico" but not an auditory one. Given the importance of the sounds of words in *Finnegans Wake*, the common advice to read a section aloud if one finds it impenetrable, and the importance of sound and pronunciation to many of the *Wake*'s allusive patterns, this is not a division that we should take lightly. While one could argue that an etymological relation between "*uīcus*" (a spelling I will retain to indicate its pronunciation) and "Vico" would allow us to bring the philosopher in again through the back door, this still does not remove the division between text and sound, nor does it restore the obviousness that the allusion seems to have if we ignore the Latin pronunciation. In fact, it seems that to read the word at all we will have to ignore at least one of its signifying relations.

But let us return to "commodi(o)us," with which we have not yet finished. I add the O in brackets because, though I do not doubt that the alteration is well supported by the *avant-texte*, I question whether the existence of the word's second version in the manuscripts ought to permanently remove the first version from the field of consideration. Consider, for instance, the term's allusion to the Roman Emperor

Commodus, which Roland McHugh points out in his annotations.[374] If it were the case that we were deriving this allusion from the textual resemblance alone, then the –ious spelling the new edition adopts would certainly weaken it. Yet the allusion clearly remains in the (unchanged) pronunciation of the word, as it does with the term's wider context. As we see from the larger line, the "commodi(o)us vicus of recirculation" sends us "back to Howth Castle and Environs" – an instance of the HCE acronym with which Joyce identifies the presence of the book's continually rising and falling patriarch, who manifests both in this lexical tag and in the appearance of any similar figure (Parnell, Moses, Napoleon, etc.). Commodus's identity as an emperor assassinated by strangulation while taking a bath in CE 192 fits the model fairly well, but what clinches the association is his appearance later in the *Wake*, where he provides the acronym's C: "Heliogobbleus and Commodus and Enobarbarus" (*FW* 157. 26-27). Of the several possible ways to read this section (for brevity's sake I will not subject every passage of the *Wake* I analyze this kind of minute critique) we can see how "Heliogobbleus" resembles "Heliogabalus," an alternate name for the Roman emperor Elagabalus, who ruled between CE 218 and 222. "Enobarbarus" can also refer to Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus, more popularly known as the emperor Nero.[375] All three emperors died by

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[374] Roland McHugh, *Annotations to Finnegans Wake* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 3.

[375] The name is also shared with one of Marc Anthony's lieutenants in Shakespeare's *Anthony and Cleopatra*.

assassination, which suggests that, in the "rise and fall" pattern of the HCE arc, this particular instance places its emphasis on the latter.

We can already begin to see how these two "words," when placed under close scrutiny, take on many of the traits of the *Wake*'s non-word portmanteaus, particularly in the way that portmanteaus resist "the impression of a carefully arranged context or of a successfully engineered verbal coincidence [as in a pun]."[376] What is troubling here is not that these words can be read in multiple ways, or that their meanings split off in multiple directions, but that their multiple readings seem to oppose each other. We are tempted in equal measure to resolve "commodius" as "Commodus," as befitting the allusion, *and* as "commodious," as befitting the textual history, but doing so means deliberately privileging one layer of signification over the other. A similar problem occurs with "vicus" – which links up to "Vico" either closely or tenuously depending on whether we privilege its textual or auditory components, which itself partially depends on whether we consider it to be a word at all. None of this even gets to the issue of how we ought to read the words in conjunction. Shall we gloss it as "commodious *uīcus*" (a village that is homely and comfortable), "Commodus's *uīcus*" (Commodus's hometown), "commodious Vico" (reflecting the philosopher's usefulness to Joyce's project), or perhaps as something else entirely? To choose any one reading means deciding to privilege one set of relations over another, and more importantly means ignoring the specific form of the terms as we encounter them on the page. The *Wake*'s "vicus" does

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[376] Ruben Borg, "Neologizing in *Finnegans Wake*: Beyond a Topology of the Wakean Portmanteau" *Poetics Today* 28.1 (2007): 146.

not "really" mean "Vico," or "*uīcus*," or any of the other glosses we may supply it. Likewise, even my earlier point about "commodius" being an English word ignores its complex and historically specific usage history, and likewise the fact that, given *Finnegans Wake*'s vast historical and linguistic range, we ought to be attentive to the *multiple forms of English* that have existed over time.[377]

The central issue of the word/non-word division thus seems to be that the wordiness of a *Wake*ian word dissolves under a sufficient degree of scrutiny. Words in *Finnegans Wake* are as withdrawn and inexhaustible as non-words, and for this reason the division between them is not actually meaningful. In few places do we see this problem better than in the word "is." The present tense of the verb "to be" is one of the most common words in the English language, and it is so small and so simple as to be seemingly atomic, indivisible, and thus exhaustible by analysis. But the language of the *Wake* contains no atoms, as we can see in two related instances of "is," in "even when Oldsire is Dead to the World" (*FW* 105.29) and "the citye of Is is issuant" (*FW* 601.5). A

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[377] The multiplicity of English also, of course, opens up the question of the multiplicity of Latin, which over its long history as a living language saw drastic changes in lexicon, spelling, and pronunciation, as well as the growth of the various forms of colloquial vulgar Latins that would eventually evolve into the modern Romance languages. (Not to mention the variations in pronunciation that Joyce would encounter as he heard the Latin mass spoken in the accents of the various countries he lived in.) This history is far too complex and detailed for me to be able to address it in this chapter with anything approaching the care and attention it deserves. For information on Joyce's relationship to the Latin language, see R.J. Schork's *Latin and Roman Culture in Joyce* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997). See also, Joseph Farrell, "Joyce and Modernist Latinity," in *Reception and the Classics*, eds. William Brockliss, Pramit Chaudhuri, Ayelet Haimson Lushkov, and Katherine Wadsin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 57-71.

scan of these two lines reveals two odd but still readable phrases, with "Oldsire" and "Is" functioning as proper nouns operating as normal (and with "Oldsire" – i.e. "old father" – alluding to the "old father, old artificer" Stephen Dedalus apostrophizes at the end of *A Portrait*[378]). In both of these lines, the "is" functions as it does in standard English, and one can generate perfectly coherent and interesting readings which treat the "is" at face value.

The complexity arrives by a similar means as it did with "commodius vicus," by way of the same problem, that being how, as Derrida writes, "the distinction between grapheme and the empirical body of the corresponding graphic sign separates an inside of phenomenological consciousness and the outside of the world."[379] There is a split between the "empirical" form of a given sign and its "ideal" – one that we might be tempted to see as between what a word "looks like" and what it "is." It is precisely the same mistake that leads us to say that "vicus" is "supposed to be" "Vico" or "*uīcus*" or something else, while at the same time ignoring the specificity of the sign on the page. Thus, we might also be tempted to read "Oldsire is" and "Is is" as, respectively, the Egyptian gods "Osiris" and "Isis," and we would do so with as much ease and justification as we earlier read "Oldsire" as "old father." But to do either would be to reduce the meaning of the "is" to conform to a single network of signification, to choose

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[378] James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, ed. Jeri Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 213.

[379] Jacques Derrida, *Voice and Phenomenon: Introduction to the Problem of the Sign in Husserl's Phenomenology*, trans. Leonard Lawlor (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2011), 65.

either its graphic form or its audible one and set that particular construction above the rest. It is in this sense that we can see how the *Wake* "simultaneously makes both possible and impossible the search for truth understood as proximal presence in the text."[380]

Thus, the phrase "there are no words in *Finnegans Wake*" is best understood as a maxim enjoining against the elision of any given sign's empirical and contextual specificity. All signs in *Finnegans Wake* are basically undecidable, in that the act of reading them causes the condensation of one particular set of relations into a calcified interpretation that, if one is not careful, may come to masquerade as the true and final reading of a word. Nowhere is this sort of reading more dangerous than with what we might commonly take to be words, simply because the obviousness of the reading. These different readings are not only multiple, but irreconcilable, meaning that a given sign cannot simply be disintegrated into its component parts, as we see Eco try to do. To produce *a* reading is invariably to decide which lines of connection shall take precedence over the others, a decision that ultimately arises from the act of reading rather than anything in the text.

4.2 What's What when Everything is Something Else?

> [I]f Being is being-with, then it is, in its being-with, the "with" that constitutes Being; the with is not simply an addition.

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[380] Peter Mahon, *Imagining Joyce and Derrida: Between Finnegans Wake and Glas* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 21.

— Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*[381]

A fair question at this point would be what all this discussion of words and non-words is leading to. After all, am I not dangerously close to the problem articulated (though not endorsed) by Fritz Senn, in which one "stop[s] at every word and worrie[s] at its philological justification . . . [so that one can] never even envisage such a thing as *Finnegans Wake*, much more than the sum of its mysterious pars"?[382] It is in avoiding this trap and linking my word-level analysis to broader critical questions of what "such a thing as *Finnegans Wake*" amounts to that I will approach what is the key issue of this chapter, that being to what extent and in what way anything can be said to exist within the structure of the *Wake*. The above section should be seen as a necessary prologue to this deeper analysis. While anyone well-read in Joyce criticism will be aware of how *Finnegans Wake* enacts and intensifies the processes of semantic displacement underlying signification generally,[383] the point that I have been trying to emphasize is that what we are dealing with is not simply a single layer of relations that, once sufficiently enumerated, can be "understood," but rather several contradictory, intersecting layers that cannot be reconciled with each other. Importantly, these sets of

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[381] Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O'Byrne (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 30.

[382] Fritz Senn, *Inductive Scrutinies: Focus on Joyce*, ed. Christine O'Neill (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1995), 231.

[383] See for example the eighth and ninth chapters of Alan Roughley's *Reading Derrida, Reading Joyce* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999).

relations extend throughout the book, incorporating both larger thematic patterns and repeated words (as we saw with the allusion to Commodus) as well as the immediate semantic context of the sign.

This undecidability leads to several problems with even referring to the characters and events that would form the basis of a more macroscopic reading of the text. Indeed, as Finn Fordham has written, the *Wake*'s characters "are carriers of Joyce's exercises in style, rather than self-consistent entities."[384] *Finnegans Wake*'s radical undermining of character has in this manner largely been understood and articulated as a kind of dissolution, in which the fixed form of a fictional character disintegrates upon contact with the text, being pulled along without form or character like so much silt in the Liffey. I do not necessarily consider this description inaccurate so much as incomplete. While it acknowledges the breakdown of character as we normally understand it, the dissolution metaphor does not provide us with direction towards describing what the Wake actually does – and something similar could be said for our understanding of what *Finnegans Wake* does with other basic narratological structures, like plot. I began this chapter with my analysis of the non-word because it shows the problem in miniature. The basic problems, in all of these cases, includes the failure to treat the macrocosm and the microcosm on equal terms, along with the related failure to remain cognizant of the specificity of a given sign while still attending to the larger patterns of signification in which it participates.

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[384] Finn Fordham, *Lots of Fun at Finnegans Wake: Unravelling Universals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 220.

How does one approach *Finnegans Wake* in this way? My point of access comes in the form of three related figures: Giordano Bruno, Nicholas Cusanus (AKA Nicholas of Cusa), and Graham Harman. Bruno and Cusanus's connections to the *Wake* are already well-known while Harman's usefulness here requires explanation, so I will begin with him. At the very end of *Tool-Being*, the text in which he introduced his Object Oriented Ontology, Harman alluded to a problem that could have disastrous effects for his burgeoning metaphysics: after spending his book describing a world of objects circumscribed by their own mutual withdrawal, the impoverishment of their interactions with other entities implied by Harman's generalization of Heidegger's tool analysis to all object relations, Harman reached the conclusion that his system if taken to its logical conclusions would proscribe any direct inter-object collisions. "The world," as he writes, "has been said to contain no relations – nothing other than entities. But entities are always primarily withdrawn tool-beings, and as such, they are sealed away in a vacuum devoid of all relation. . . . Any contact between distinct entities would seem impossible."[385] An object, for Harman, is anything that withdraws. So the human subject and the hammer are objects, but so is the human-hammer synthesis, as well as the synthesis of the hammer's handle and its head. Every relation is, for Harman, actually an object – a definition that proceeds along an infinite regress. At this point, OOO seems at risk of invoking a kind of Zeno's paradox against itself, permanently foreclosing any relations between objects, just as Zeno foreclosed their motion.

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[385] Graham Harman, *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects* (Chicago: Open Court, 2002), 295.

To remedy this problem, Harman makes a strange gambit, introducing occasionalism into his system. The use of this term was possibly a mistake, since (as Harman points out) his is not the theistic occasionalism of Al-Ghazali or Malebranche. Whereas their occasionalist philosophies posited an omnipotent god whose infinite power subsumes all causation within itself, so that "the states of bodies and minds are only so-called secondary causes which 'occasion' or incite the primary cause, God, to act,"[386] Harman's occasionalism was far more limited and "local."[387] *Tool-Being* does not fully explore the concept, but instead simply drops it in on the final pages to function like a metaphysical cheat code to nullify a formerly intractable problem. The development would come later, in *Guerilla Metaphysics* and in several subsequent essays, at which point he sensibly adopted the more accurate name "vicarious causation." Harman's key point is that all relations must occur though some form of mediation, that these mediations themselves constitute objects, and that since objects are supposed to be inexhaustible these mediations themselves require further mediations, a state that (in the absence of the *je ne sais quoi* of vicarious cause) would imply that all relation was impossible. In the later book, vicarious causation re-appears as OOO's "most pivotal issue,"[388] not only because it introduces into Harman's metaphysics a question not unlike

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[386] Steven Nadler, *Occasionalism: Causation Among the Cartesians* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 1.

[387] *Tool-Being*, 295.

[388] Graham Harman, *Guerilla Metaphysics: Phenomenology and the Carpentry of Things* (Chicago: Open Court, 2005), 91.

the one Hume posed in his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (the Kantian aftermath of which,[389] fittingly, Harman has long attempted to overcome) but also because the problem extends to the composition of objects themselves. As Harman explains in a later essay, "relations never encounter the autonomous reality of their components,"[390] and since all relations, for Harman, themselves create new objects, and since his system excludes any kind of "atomic" object that would be invisible and fully apprehensible by others, then all objects are themselves constructed out of smaller objects whose relations are just as questionable as any other. Objects cannot touch, cannot combine, cannot form themselves in any coherent way – and yet Harman's system can only work if they somehow do.

Harman has never provided a coherent, plausible explanation of what vicarious cause is, what it does, how it works, or where it comes from – and as much as he denies it, the *deus ex machina* quality of the interjection is inescapable. In *Guerilla Metaphysics*, he attempts to offer this mystery up as a site for future philosophical speculation and research, but he has not yet foreclosed the possibility that vicarious cause simply indexes a fatal contradiction in his system. However, though I have not come here to praise

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[389] I.e. the metaphysical system Kant describes in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, and which, as Meillassoux and others would have it, drew European philosophy into an "correlationist" mindset that it has yet to escape from.

[390] Graham Harman, "On Vicarious Causation," in *Collapse II*, ed. Robin Mackay (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2007) 189.

Harman, neither have I come to bury him.[391] OOO is interesting not because it provides a fully coherent and exhaustive metaphysical system that one can "apply" to *Finnegans Wake* (or any other literary work) but because the contours of its flaws and limitations open up several fascinating critical and philosophical questions. For example, in an essay from 2010, Harman explains how vicarious causation might work with the following comparison:

> There needs to be some way for objects to relate without relating. This might sound impossible, but analogous situations already exist in other spheres. Consider the case of language. Here we are not just able to say something openly or not say it at all – there is also the third option of *alluding* to it . . . One can call someone an Olympic victor without quite saying so, simply by saying that he had been three times crowned with a wreath.[392]

The particular allusion to which Harman alludes comes from Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, where it is used to show that familiar propositions do not need to be described in their full

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[391] Certainly the world has no shortage of hostile responses to OOO. See, for example, the self-explanatory title of Nathan Brown's review, "The Nadir of OOO: From Graham Harman's *Tool-Being* to Timothy Morton's *Realist Magic: Objects, Ontology, Causality*" *Parrhesia* 17 (2013): 62-71.

[392] Graham Harman, "Asymmetrical Causation: Influence Without Recompense" *Parallax* 16.1 (2010): 101.

detail: "to show that Dorieus has been victor in a contest for which the prize is a crown, it is enough to say 'For he has been victor in the Olympic games.'"[393]

Harman's purpose in this particular essay is not merely to describe what vicarious causation is, but also to show that it can be unidirectional – or, as he puts it, "causation is never reciprocal except by accident."[394] Unfortunately, the nature of the example is such that it immediately undermines his point. After all, in Aristotle's day the wreath was the normal and standard award given to Olympic athletes, but for the modern Olympics gold medals have been the norm since the 1904 games in St. Louis. Thus, if we look to the audience of the (as of this writing) most recent games in Pyeongchang, we can be confident that not a single person among them would have any memory of an Olympic winner receiving a wreath. Certainly there are many who know the history of the games well enough to be aware of the old prizes, but the information is by no means widespread enough today for "she won an Olympic event" to be reliably synonymous with "she received a wreath." The example suggests that relations by allusion are symmetrical, in that the categories of "Olympian" and "has won a wreath" become linked through the repeated invocation of their overlap, and that this symmetricity only becomes apparent *over time*, and is not visible at the level of an instant. This example, first of all, points to one possible way that OOO could save itself: that being the development of a more rigorous conception of temporality. Harman's discussions of time tend to be fairly schematic, and occur mostly in the context of his attempts to re-consider Heidegger's

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[393] Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, trans. W. Rhys Roberts (New York: Dover, 2004), 9.

[394] "Asymmetrical Causation," 96.

notion of the fourfold.[395] His summaries of inter-object relations, however, all seem to occur within instants, focusing on the moment of contact to the exclusion of all else. Since this limitation seems to largely extend from a lack of consideration rather than any constituent a-temporality within the system, it is possible that further development would permit OOO to dig itself out of its hole.

The reciprocity of relation, and the absence of purely instantaneous relations, also points to the manner in which vicarious causation – and in particular its emphasis on mediation – becomes useful for my analysis of the *Wake*. So I may explain how, let us imagine two speeding cars colliding head-on in the middle of an otherwise empty intersection. It is not merely the case that (if we follow Harman) the two car-objects will themselves, at the moment of collision, form a larger object from their instantaneous interaction (however it may be mediated), but rather that they will continue during every point of time to disassemble and reassemble a vast number of other relational objects as their internal components shift and change their relations. The back window of Car A ceases to exist as its components shatter into pieces, which themselves will form a new object consisting of a set of falling glass shards. Those shards will remain connected vicariously to both Car A, from which they fell, and Car B, without which the crash would not have occurred. But – importantly – the object Car A-Car B-shards remains for Harman completely distinct from, say, the object Car A-Car B-dented bumper, despite the fact that both of these relational objects themselves form part of the larger object that

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[395] For a recent instance of Harman's work on the fourfold, see "The Future of Continental Realism: Heidegger's Fourfold" *Chiasma: A Site for Thought* 3 (2016): 81-98.

is the car crash. And I say "both" of these objects, despite the overlap between them, because according to OOO they would still withdraw from each other even though they share many of the same components. It would seem then that in addition to an infinite regress, OOO also has to deal with an infinite dispersal, as the sheer vastness of the relations occurring in any complex physical event would lead to the formation of an unfathomable number of relational objects, spread out across the full mass the event-object and incorporating every smaller object within it many times over. This dispersal would also continuously re-occur over time – with the relational object of the car crash at T_1, T_2, and T_3[396] actually amounting to three completely unique and distinct objects (whose relation across time would itself constitute another object).

Though Harman is quite clear about his desire to avoid a purely relational ontology like the one he sees in Latour,[397] the centrality of vicarious cause in OOO as, it seems, the prime unknown of the system, means that thinking with OOO invariably

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[396] I adopt this rather Aristotelian expression of time as a series of distinct instants largely to simplify my expression of the issue at hand, since I suspect that an OOO summary of a car crash fitted within, for instance, a Bergsonian conception of time would be far too complex for me to properly express without giving most of the chapter over to it. This temporality also seems to be implicitly assumed by Harman's system, though given his still incomplete expression of OOO's approach to time, I grant that this may simply be a misunderstanding on my part. In any case, given that it is not my goal to *solve* this problem, but rather to *point it out*, I do not think it inappropriate to borrow this approach to time as a useful heuristic.

[397] For an overview of the convergences of and distinctions between Latour and Harman's philosophies, see: Bruno Latour, Graham Harman, Peter Erdélyi, *The Prince and the Wolf: Latour and Harman at the LSE* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2011).

becomes a matter of thinking with and through relations. Furthermore, it is not despite, but *because of* the closed-off nature of Harman's objects, that relation takes the form of interpenetration, where two objects relate by sharing components. While in the example above Car A is present in both objects, in each relation Car A is apprehended by its co-actors in a different manner, withdrawing in a configuration unique to every touch. It is therefore multiple, taking on a unique relational existence across every larger object in which it is a part (something that would also be true of each of its components, downwards to infinity). Since the objects "internal" to a larger object are likewise independent entities, they too can enter into relations which would themselves form new objects and that would therefore enter into an interpenetrative relationship with the above-mentioned larger object.[398] What we end up with is an ontological system roughly (though by no means exactly) comparable to Leibniz's monadology, but with the location and nature of the hidden elements externalized. While for Leibniz, all objects are identical monads whose essential sameness is hidden behind the accidental qualities visible to our impoverished perception – i.e. the similarities are hidden "within" the object and are only perceivable by an omniscient God – Harman's system implies a state in which every object is continually intersecting with every other through a complex web of causal relations, most of which is invisible. The individual hammer I hold in my hand thus appears to be independent, singular, and coherent because of the poverty of my

[398] An unspoken downside to Harman treating all existing things as "objects": keeping a varied vocabulary while writing about him becomes extremely difficult.

perception, and the breaking of the hammer reveals to me the existence of interior relations that intersect with the surrounding world in ways previously unknown.

It is in this way that the breakdown of vicarious cause into a relational ontology can allow us to understand how the linguistic and narrative entities of the *Wake* function. As we have seen above, the non-words of the *Wake* likewise interpenetrate each other, with each one being part of multiple and contradictory sets of relations that permit mutually-exclusive interpretations. Despite his frequent criticisms of Derrida, when the implications of Harman's system are properly teased out, they clearly resemble an ontologized form of the linguistic play of *différance*. Whereas for Derrida, "every concept is inscribed in a chain or in a system within which it refers to the other, to other concepts, by means of the systemic play of differences,"[399] in OOO all objects become engaged with other objects in a network of inter-object relations that ultimately obscure the original object's self-identity. So too in the *Wake*, where (as I will describe in more detail below) every entity can only be encountered through mediation with another entity, in which no particular instance of mediation exhausts the entities involved, and in which the sum total of the medial relations creates contradictory but internally consistent images that cannot be resolved to a single essential presence. While Harman is emphatic that he believes that all objects have an "autonomous essence"[400] – one of the many ways in which his system resembles that of Aristotle – given the problems caused by vicarious

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[399] Jacques Derrida, "*Différance*," in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 11.

[400] Graham Harman, *Immaterialism: Objects and Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity, 2016), 16.

causation, I fail to see how these essences would actually arise, save for perhaps in a completely inaccessible (and dare I say "noumenal"?) object-in-itself that Harman's ontology explicitly forecloses from relation. Instead, it is more useful and instructive to understand any given object (like any given non-word) as *multiply-present*, in that it has several independently-operating "phenomenal" existences created by the inability of each interaction to exhaust it – much like how I "perceive" a hammer quite differently than does the nail it strikes.

Returning now to *Finnegans Wake*, while this critique of Harman's ontology does point to how we might generalize the earlier word-level analysis of the *Wake* into a conception of its abstract structure and its treatment of plot and character, it does not show how we might discern the relationship between different related narrative objects. A naive OOO reading of, for example, the relationship between Parnell and HCE might direct us towards metaphors of building blocks and containment. That is, while Parnell and HCE are, in *Finnegans Wake*, independent objects just like any other, HCE is "bigger," being "made of" not only Parnell, but all the similar figures who populate the book. Though there is not yet any significant literature on OOO and Joyce, we do see readings that come to similar conclusions in, for example, Harry Burrell's *Narrative Design in Finnegans Wake*, which holds that "to understand *Finnegans Wake* readers must maintain a mindset that what they are apprehending is fundamentally nothing but the [Biblical] Fall story with all the other levels of meaning and reference grafted onto

and embellishing it."[401] But metaphors of containment can be misleading, since they risk the implication that the parts can be determined by the whole, just as metaphors of construction can result in the equally misleading notion that it is the whole that determines the parts. While it is perfectly reasonable to see in the "commodi(o)us"/Commodus relationship (for example) the appearance of an HCE-like figure, we cannot let this connection blot out the sign's other relations. We must understand the relationship between different, interpenetrative levels of signification in such a way that we can appreciate the wide-scale networks of relations that crisscross the text while also paying due attention to the specificity and singularity[402] of the individual sign before our eyes. And it is Bruno who shall show us how this can be done.

Bruno's place in Joyce scholarship has tended to be spotty and non-committal. While he appears in Samuel Beckett's highly influential essay "Dante... Bruno. Vico.. Joyce,"[403] he serves as far more of a bit player than his position in the title would suggest

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[401] Harry Burrell, *Narrative Design in Finnegans Wake: The Wake Lock Picked* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), 7.

[402] I use this term in reference to Derek Attridge's *The Singularity of Literature* (London: Routledge, 2004), where he uses the term to refer to a cultural object's "difference from all other such objects, not simply as a particular manifestation of general rules but as a peculiar nexus within the culture that is perceived as resisting or exceeding all pre-existing general determinations" (63). If anything could be said of the *Wake* which is generally true everywhere in the book, it would be that all of the signs it contains, under sufficient scrutiny, reveal themselves to be singular.

[403] Samuel Beckett, "Dante... Bruno. Vico.. Joyce," in *James Joyce/Finnegans Wake: A Symposium* (New York: New Directions, 1972), 1-22.

– most of the essay concerns Joyce's relationship to Vico, while only a small portion of it directly discusses Dante and Bruno.[404] Joyce scholarship has tended to follow a similar pattern: of the three writers whose names precede Joyce in the essay's title, it is Vico by far whose relationship to the *Wake* has received the most attention. Likewise, when Joyce scholarship talks about Nicholas Cusanus at all, it is almost always in relation to Bruno, with the relationship summarized in terms of a direct line of influence. For example, Donald Phillip Verene writes that "Bruno's conception of the infinite as well as his principle of the coincidence of contraries have their origin in Cusanus's famous little treatise, *De docta ignorantia* [*On Learned Ignorance*]."[405] Similarly, as Ingrid D. Rowland writes in her biography of Bruno, the Nolan "clearly drew his belief in infinite worlds, and a good deal else, from . . . Nicholas of Cusa."[406] While neither of these summaries are, strictly speaking, inaccurate, they gloss over an important way in which Bruno and Cusanus conceptualized the relationship between infinity and the coincidence of contraries.

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[404] Notably, as Beckett reported in an interview with his biographer, Joyce once remarked to him that he found Bruno "rather neglected" in the essay (James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* [London: Bloomsbury,1997], 100). For an analysis of this remark, see Gareth Joseph Downes, "The Heretical Auctoritas of Giordano Bruno: The Significance of the Brunonian Presence in James Joyce's 'The Day of the Rabblement' and *Stephen Hero*," *Joyce Studies Annual* 13 (2003): 37-39.

[405] Donald Phillip Verene, *James Joyce and the Philosophers at Finnegans Wake* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2016), 55.

[406] Ingrid D. Rowland, *Giordano Bruno: Philosopher/Heretic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 60-61.

In *On Learned Ignorance*, Cusanus articulates a philosophical position that would later be known as pantheism – one that would receive its most thorough and systematic articulation in Spinoza's *Ethics* (which clearly bears the mark of Bruno's influence[407]). Pantheism is a theology that treats the divine as fully immanent to the natural world.[408] It is a position we see, for example, in Spinoza's formulation of "God, or Nature," which treats the two entities as logically equivalent.[409] But Cusanus's pantheism is more fraught, oscillating at times between a pantheism like Spinoza's, in which there is no real distinction between nature and the divine, and one in which God can still be conceived as an independent entity, one that cannot simply be derived from the natural world.[410] As Eugene Thacker writes, Cusanus "is caught between a fully immanent pantheism – a pure

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[407] See: Arthur D. Imerti, Introduction, *The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 45.

[408] As it happens, the Catholic Church has long considered pantheism to be heretical, a fact that never seemed to occur to Cusanus's readers in the Vatican. As J. Michael Marse has remarked "eight years after publishing the pantheistic *De Docta Ignorantia* [Cusanus] was made a Cardinal, thus demonstrating in his own person – as heretic and Prince of the Church – the unity of all things in God" ("Burrus, Caseous, and Nicholas of Cusa" *MLN* 75.4 [1960]: 227).

[409] The Latin formulation, "*Deus, sive Natura,"* makes this equation more explicit, since "*sive*" denotes only the inclusive form of "or," rather than the exclusive (such as you find with "*aut*").

[410] The complications are such that some, like John Spencer Hill, have argued that Cusanus should not be considered a pantheist at all (*Infinity, Faith, and Time: Christian Humanism and Renaissance Literature* [Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1997], 21).

immanence of supernatural and natural, God and world – and a tempered, transcendental pantheism . . . in which God, as absolute maximum, transcends the world by its very encompassing."[411] For Cusanus, as with Bruno, contrary terms can be coincident as a result of their encompassing within an infinite entity, the "one absolutely maximum" which "exists in itself as eternally, equally, and unchangeably the same."[412] For Bruno, who in following (and advancing beyond) the work of Copernicus was able to imagine that the universe was itself infinite, no higher transcendence is necessary for this coincidence within the infinite to be possible.[413]

Bruno's more immanent, materialist pantheism is more similar to what we encounter in *Finnegans Wake* for quite a few reasons. We of course counter his famous decentering of the universe, such as the kind we see in *The Ash Wednesday Supper*, where Bruno extends Copernicus's critique of geocentrism to claim not only that the Earth is not at the center of the universe, but that the universe in fact has no center, and that there are multiple Earth-like planets besides.[414] But, in a manner not unlike what we see in Harman, this immanence leads to an obsession with mediation. As we see in

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[411] Eugene Thacker, *After Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 205.

[412] Nicholas of Cusa, *Nicholas of Cusa On Learned Ignorance: A Translation and an Appraisal of De Docta Ignorantia*, trans. Jasper Hopkins (Minneapolis: A.J. Benning Press, 1981), 125.

[413] Though Cusa does at one point call the universe "unbounded" (90), he does not treat it as infinite in the sense that Bruno does.

[414] Giordano Bruno, *The Ash Wednesday Supper*, eds. and trans. Edward A. Gosselin and Lawrence S. Lerner (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 152-153.

Cause, Principle, and Unity, the argument that an unchanging divinity is present in all things leads to the question of how change and alteration is possible. Whereas in OOO the flattening of ontological relations leads to an implied stasis by cutting off all objects from each other so to make causal connections impossible, the pantheistic flattening that Bruno embraces instead squashes change by subsuming disparity and difference into an omnipresent infinity. But Bruno has a solution:

> [M]utation is not striving for another being, but for another mode of being. And this is the difference between the universe and the things of the universe: for the universe contains all beings and all modes of being, while each thing of the universe possesses all being but not all modes of being. Each thing cannot possess, in all act, all particulars and accidents . . . outside each one of them there exits an infinity of other things. . . . Understand, therefore, that each single thing is one, but not in the same way.[415]

That is to say, though every entity is permeated by the infinite, each remains a singular finite thing that cannot itself express the boundlessness to which it is linked. Thus,

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[415]Giordano Bruno, *Cause, Principle, and Unity and Essays on Magic*, eds. and trans. Robert De Lucca and Richard J. Blackwell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 89-90.

entities can vary in their particular expressions of being, as seen through their interactions with other things.[416]

This relationship between infinite being and finite expression leads Bruno to an obsession with mediation and interposition. Everything that interacts seems to do so through an intermediary, and every cause must be multiple, heterogeneous, branching off into byways of whys and hows and wherefores. We see this medial obsession, for example, in his essay "On Magic," where Bruno combines his cosmology with his interest in occultism, alchemy, and Hermeticism. In the process of arguing that celestial events are able to influence events on Earth – an argument that rests on the claim that "there is a descent from God through the world to animals, and an ascent from animals through the world to God"[417] – Bruno traces a ladder stretching from God through planets and stars, elements, compounds, the senses, the soul, and finally the body itself.[418] Bruno's ontology requires this linkage because for him, as with Harman, causation as we normally understand it is impossible, since (as we saw earlier) the fact

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[416] As Antonio Calcagno writes, "when Bruno speaks of the One he is simultaneously speaking of multiplicity, for each is contained within the other" (*Giordano Bruno and the Logic of Coincidence: Unity and Multiplicity in the Philosophical Thought of Giordano Bruno* [New York: Peter Lang, 1998], 109).

[417] *Cause, Principle, and Unity and Essays on Magic*, 108.

[418] As Frances A. Yates writes, Bruno held that "by Magia man has learned to use the chain linking earth to heaven, and by Cabala he has learned to manipulate the higher chain linking the celestial world, through angels, to the divine Name" (*Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* [London: Routledge, 1965], 145).

that objects are "limited and circumscribed by their surface" (i.e. are finite) means that they cannot act directly on each other, meaning that instead "all action comes from quality and form and ultimately from soul."[419] Thus, for Bruno (and unlike Cusanus), God does not take the form of a super-entity that can be conceived of independently of the world it occupies, but rather "reaches each object through its center" and "governs it from the inside" without transcending it.[420]

It is important to emphasize the everydayness of these relations, the fact that despite involving what might seem like grand, transcendent events, it is ultimately in the mundane that this ontology manifests. It is this mundanity that we encounter in Bruno's dialogue *The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast*, during a brief dalliance with occasionalism where we see Mercury executing a command from Jove. An occasionalist god, Jove must dictate every event down to the most minute, and as befitting a work by Bruno these commands come through the mediation of a messenger. The list of Mercury's tasks – which is quite lengthy – is notable for its mundane details, like the decree that "Vasta, the wife of Albenzio, while she tries to curl the hair on her temples, shall burn fifty-seven of them because she overheated her iron,"[421] that "two hundred fifty-two maggots be born out of the dung of Albenzio's ox; that of these, fourteen be

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[419] *Cause, Principle, and Unity*, 115-116.

[420] Paul Henri Michel, *The Cosmology of Giordano Bruno*, trans. R.E.W. Maddison (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973), 115.

[421] Giordano Bruno, *The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast*, trans. Arthur D. Imerti (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 132.

trampled upon and killed by Albenzio's foot; that twenty-six of them die from being turned upside down; [and] that twenty-two live in a cavern,"[422] and that "the cuckoo should be heard singing from Starza, and that he must 'cuckoo' neither more nor less than twelve times."[423] As the long, humorous, almost Joycean list goes on, we should at no point forget that each of these events is the manifestation of a singular and infinite divine will, which arises from "one simple and singular act, [with which Jove] creates all of the past, present, and future."[424] Thus, mundanity, for Bruno, is not the opposite of the divine, but rather the surest means of encountering it.

As we turn back to Joyce and to *Finnegans Wake*, it is this relationship between interpenetration and the coincidence of the macroscopic with the microscopic that we should keep in mind. As Donald Phillip Verene sees in his analysis of Bruno's role in the *Wake*, with the opposing brothers Shem and Shaun we see "a dialectic that coincides at the human level, unlike the opposites of Cusanus that can be reconciled only at the level of divine being, they are a twone [sic] that is wholly accessible to us."[425] It is the greater immanence of his philosophy that makes Bruno key to understanding the role of the coincidence of contraries in the linguistic and ontological structure of *Finnegans Wake*, and it is likewise this immanence that makes Bruno an erstwhile predecessor to Harman.

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[422] Ibid.

[423] Ibid, 133.

[424] Ibid, 135.

[425] Verne, 71.

It is notable that both philosophers posit that objects possess an inaccessible "inside" that cannot be exhausted by their relations – for Harman because of the implications of Heidegger's tool analysis, and for Bruno because each object takes part in the infinity of the universe despite also being bounded and finite. Likewise, in the work of both philosophers boundedness and inexhaustibility come paired with multiplication and interpenetrability. In Harman, the distinctness of each object as it is apprehended by other nearby objects – an apprehension that leads to the creation of larger objects (which I have been distinguishing from their components with the term "relational," though it is not Harman's) – means that an object's role and apprehension will be different in every larger relational object in which it participates. Likewise, the infinite regress of mediation that vicarious causation implies means not only that every object has a boundless number of components, but also (because these components are themselves objects) that each one of them may enter into relations independently of the object of which they are a part. Thus, every object, through its components, is criss-crossed by other relational objects that take part in one or more of its components. For Bruno, the multiplication and interpenetration is far simpler. Since every entity contains within it the infinity of the universe, and because this infinity is such that it comprehends all aspects of existence, including (as with Cusanus) opposing ones, then each entity plays a part in the other's existence by way of its role in the universe's immanent pantheism. It is for this reason that Bruno takes alchemy and astrology seriously (as he does in "On Magic"), since both systems depend on a basic linkage between "higher" and "lower" cosmological entities.

It is also for these reasons that, when understanding character in *Finnegans Wake*, we avoid the employment of transcendent categories, such as what we encounter in

readings of the *Wake* in terms of Biblical typology,[426] in which the particulars of a given story are subsumed into larger narrative patterns that explain and ultimately supersede the original specificity. "Howth Castle and Environs" may appear to be a "type" of HCE, but to read it in that framework ignores the trajectory that the opening line takes us from Adam and Eve's church in central Dublin to Howth Castle on its outskirts – indicating that the "rivverrun" of the tidal river Liffey is at that moment washing outwards to the sea, bringing full circle the water that had earlier been carried inwards on the previous tide, and so implying at the first line the "recirculation" that would characterize the entire book. It is not the case that a Brunonian, interpenetrative reading of this line would privilege the river over the type, but rather that such a reading would recognize the intersection of both sets of relations at the sign of "Howth Castle and Environs," one which renders them both immanent to that sign and thus on an equal narrative and lexical footing with smaller-scale relations, such as that between the phrase and the basic syntax of the sentence.

4.3 Brown, Nolan, and The Nolan

My earlier argument, and my alignment of OOO's implications with the Brunonian ontology structuring much of the *Wake*, implies a complex and difficult relationship between a phrase or non-word in *Finnegans Wake* and the larger networks that, like any word, lend it its meaning and significance. To read *Finnegans Wake* is to pay attention to reversals, and nowhere is Bruno's contribution more misunderstood than in his role in the

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[426] For an example of this approach, see Gian Balsamo, *Scriptural Poetics in Finnegans Wake* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2001).

reversal between categories and the elements that make them. Let us consider, for example, Bruno's preferred moniker, "The Nolan" (after his birthplace Nola, a city near Naples). In his early essay "The Day of the Rabblement," Joyce picked up on this usage, as indicated by the opening line: "no man, said the Nolan, can be a lover of the true and the good unless he abhors the multitude."[427] This usage would in *Finnegans Wake* evolve into a common pattern of alluding to Bruno of Nola by way of the Dublin bookseller Brown and Nolan. To list a few instances, we see such variations as "O'Bruin's polerpasse at Noolan" (*FW* 128.25-26), "B. Rohan meets N. Ohlan" (*FW* 251.33-34), and "Browne yet Noland" (*FW* 599.23). The "yet" in the last example points to an important effect of Joyce deferring "Bruno of Nola" off to "Brown and Nolan" – splitting supposed unity of Bruno's identity into two parts, which may then be placed in opposition despite ostensibly being different elements of the same person. It is an effect we see, for instance, in III.3, where we encounter the "dearly beloved brethren: Bruno and Nola" – here playing the parts of Shem and Shaun, who, as the "dearly beloved" implies, may also be married – who are "equal and opposite brunoipso, *id est*, eternally provoking alio opposite equally as provoked as Bruno at being eternally opposed by Nola" (*FW* 488.4-11). Bruno, then, is the Nolan, Brown and Nolan, Bruno of Nola, both Shem *and* Shaun, and also a huge number of minutely different yet clearly distinguishable manifestations besides. No wonder Joyce has him at war with himself!

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[427] James Joyce, "The Day of the Rabblement," in *Occasional, Critical, and Political Writing*, ed. Kevin Barry (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 50.

It is clear then that by adopting Bruno's use of "The Nolan," Joyce was able, first, to grant Bruno a doubled and incomplete presence in the *Wake*, one which renders the common signifier "Bruno" incapable of pointing to its usual referent unless countersigned by its double (and vice versa). Second, this splitting permits Joyce a great deal of leeway in how he incorporates other characters and identities with the name.[428] Splitting Bruno in half and pitting his identities against each other instantly makes them resemble Shem and Shaun, and by extension all of the variant forms in which Shem and Shaun appear. It also turns the name of the Italian philosopher into an allusion to a particular place in Dublin, the center of the Joycean universe but a place that Bruno himself never visited. These three intersections pose a problem for critics of *Finnegans Wake* very much like the one we encountered earlier with "commodius vicus": each instance of a Brown and Nolan variant gestures in different ways to multiple larger categories at once, each of which offers us the potential to explain away and "overmine" the text. But despite gaining its significance through its relations to other parts of the book, no particular sign can be exhaustively described simply by summing up its relations. No matter how hard one squints, "Browne yet Noland" will never magically

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[428] I use "character" here despite the bookshop Brown and Nolan being more accurately a location, in part because Joyce uses it to refer to a character, and in part because in *Finnegans Wake* the line between person and place is often blurry. Most of the major figures in the book – ALP most famously – appear in the form of locations, settings, and characteristics of the landscape, and it is simply impossible to distinguish between, for instance, when the Liffey is supposed to refer to ALP, and when ALP is supposed to refer to the Liffey. Attempting to do so seems too much like a fool's errand for me to be willing to try.

transform into “Brown and Nolan” or “Bruno the Nolan,” any less than “mardred” will become “murdered” or “shuit” will become “suit.”

This problem of course raises the question of what relation exists between categories and their elements in *Finnegans Wake*. Though scholars have long (and usually for good reasons) read particular textual arrangements consistently in terms of one of the book’s primary figures – and I confess that the margins of my own copy of the *Wake* are well decorated with HCEs, ALPs, and other similar tags – the question of what it is critics are actually doing when they invoke these meta-characters in their analysis of a passage has not yet been adequately explored. To approach this problem, I will extend the above analysis of Bruno’s name, as well as my critique of his and Harman’s philosophies, to a reading of a story often read as an instance of the Shem/Shaun subplot – that being the fable of “The Ondt and the Gracehoper” (*FW* 414.16-419.10).

The story, told to the artistic and free-spirited Shem the Penman by his conservative and conventional brother Shaun the Post, is in its basic outline a re-telling of Aesop’s fable of “The Ant and the Grasshopper.” In particular, it is a revision of the 1912 translation by V.S. Vernon Jones, which Joyce owned.[429] Since, like all of Aesop’s fables, it is quite short, I will quote the translation in its entirety:

THE GRASSHOPPER AND THE ANTS

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[429] The Jones translation of Aesop is the only version listed in Thomas E Connolly’s catalogue of Joyce’s book collection (*The Personal Library of James Joyce* [Buffalo: University of Buffalo Press, 1955],7). Though of course it is highly likely that Joyce had read or was aware of one or more of the other translations that were available at the time.

> One fine day in winter some ants were busy drying their store of corn, which had got rather damp during a long spell of rain. Presently up came a Grasshopper and begged them to spare a few grains, "For," she said, "I'm simply starving." The Ants stopped work for a moment, though this was against their principles. "May we ask," said they, "what you were doing with yourself all last summer? Why didn't you collect a store of food for the winter?" "The fact is," replied the Grasshopper, "I was so busy singing that I hadn't the time." "If you spent the summer singing," replied the Ants, "you can't do better than spend the winter dancing." And they chuckled and went on with their work.[430]

There are a number of reasons why Joyce would likely have found this particular version of the story interesting, the first of which being Jones's decision to make the tale about *multiple* ants speaking to a single grasshopper. As far as I have been able to tell this is Jones's own invention: though Jones's edition does not list the specific version of the fables he bases his translation on, G.K. Chesterton's introduction to the book suggests that Jones was translating out of the version collected by Babrius,[431] a Roman poet from

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[430] Aesop, "The Grasshopper and the Ants," in *Aesop's Fables*, trans. V.S. Vernon Jones (New York: Doubleday, 1929), 125.

[431] G.K. Chesterton, Introduction, *Aesop's Fables* (New York: Doubleday, 1929), vii.

the third century CE whose surviving work consists of 123 fables (originally 160) written in Greek. A glance at the Loeb edition of the fable reveals that it is only a single ant ("μύρμηξ") who turns the Grasshopper (or in this version, a cicada) away, rather than a team of them.[432]

This shift, though subtle, is significant given the manner in which fables often treat their animals not as characters, but as types. The tendency is reflected in the stories' titles and their use of proper nouns – it is, after all, "*The* Fox and *the* Grapes" as opposed to "*A* Fox and *Some* Grapes." I do not imagine that we are expected to believe that all of these stories with foxes in them are about the *same* fox, who perhaps Aesop had once spent the day following around, taking note of everything it did. Rather, as Laura Gibbs writes, "the characters in Aesop's fables . . . are still basically generic representatives of their species; they have not yet become specific individuals."[433] The genericizing of the animals in Aesop then provides a useful counter-example to the appearance of those same animals in Joyce's fables in *Finnegans Wake*. In both "The Ondt and the Gracehoper" and the other major fable, "The Mooske and the Gripes" (a re-working of "The Fox and the Grapes"), Joyce expands on and multiplies the characters, giving them internal divisions and individuality quite unlike what they have in Aesop. As Margot Norris has argued in relation to "The Mooske and the Gripes," Joyce's re-telling of the fable, in its anthropomorphization of the fox, grants the animal and its desires a degree of complexity

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[432] *Babrius and Phaedrus*, ed. Ben Edwin Perry (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), 182.

[433] Laura Gibbs, Introduction, *Aesop's Fables*, ed. Laura Gibbs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), xx.

not at all found in Aesop, though at the expense of submerging the genre's interest in non-human life.[434] Likewise, as Sam Slote observes, the Gracehoper's character is much more complex than his grasshopper counterpart, in this case as a result of Joyce's "detailed account of [his] predilection for excess."[435] As with Bruno and The Nolan, the addition of this complexity and multiplicity permits an extension of the overlapping reference structure we saw in Joyce's non-word portmanteaus to characters and plots.[436]

To see exactly how this similarity works, we should first turn attention to the fable's ethical ambiguity. While readers of the story tend to take the "moral" as an endorsement of the ant(s), holding that it is an endorsement of industriousness, planning, and the deferment of gratification (certainly traits that Shaun would encourage), the ants' callousness towards the Grasshopper's apparently mortal danger suggests that we ought to give this position a second look. Indeed, even other fables about the ants suggest that they are not to be uncritically imitated: one other fable in the Jones translation describes how the ants "were once men" who, covetous of their neighbors' crops, stole them

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[434] Margot Norris, "The Animals of James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*" *MFS: Modern Fiction Studies* 60.3 (2014): 535.

[435] Sam Slote, "The Prolific and the Devouring in 'The Ondt and the Gracehoper'" *Joyce Studies Annual* 11 (2000): 55.

[436] I am not the first person to remark on the similarity between Joyce's fables and the *Wake*'s portmanteaus – Michael H. Begnal having made the comparison as far back as 1969 ("The Fables of *Finnegans Wake*" *James Joyce Quarterly* 6.4 [1969]: 357). But while the comparison is of course illuminating, subsequent commentators have not followed it to its logical conclusions.

"whenever they got the chance" and so were transformed into ants by Jupiter as punishment.[437] Another fable, this one not included in Jones, makes the ants the victims: they save and gather all winter, only to have their stores raided by pigs – the misfortune leading into a moral against miserliness[438] (of which I imagine Shem would approve).

Already, then, the story has begun to lose both the fixity of its moral stance and the unity of its characters, a loss that Joyce both exploits and intensifies. Shaun, who begins his tale following Shem's clamouring for a song, demurs and says instead that "I would rather spinooze you one from the grimm gests of Jacko and Easup, fable one, feeble two" (*FW* 414.16-18). "Spinooze," among other things, provides the first of several allusions to insects and arachnids (by way of the German *Spinne*, or spider). It also points both to the brothers Grimm and the Biblical story of Jacob and Esau (as well as their *Wake*ian manifestations, Jerkoff and Eatsup) – allusions that locate the proceeding story in the narrative traditions of the fairy tale and the Biblical parable, forms that, though similar to the fable, nevertheless undermine the genre's claim to determining the structure of Shaun's story. Moving on to the first paragraph of the story proper, one of its most obvious characteristics is its large number of insect allusions, which we find scattered through this section as a whole in much the same way that we see river names dropped into "Anna Livia Plurabelle." Of particular interest is one set of allusions in a passage early in the paragraph: "he [the Gracehoper] was always making

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[437] Aesop, "The Ant," in *Aesop's Fables*, trans. V.S. Vernon Jones (New York: Doubleday, 1929), 159.

[438] Aesop, "The Ants and the Pigs," in *Aesop's Fables*, trans. Laura Gibbs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 66.

ungraceful overtures to Floh and Luse and Bienie and Vestpatilla to play pupa-pupa and pulicy-pulicy and langtennas and pushpygyddyum and to commence insects with him, there mouthparts to him orefice and his gambills to there airy processes" (*FW* 414.24-28). McHugh glosses "Floh and Luse and Bienie and Vestpatilla" as, respectively, "flea" (via German), "louse" (via Dutch), "bee" (via French), and "wasp" (via Latin).[439] The inclusion of bees and wasps via French and Latin (which are part of the same linguistic family) is interesting given that the two insects are themselves related, sharing the taxonomic family *formicidae,* which also includes ants.[440] This family resemblance foreshadows the more explicit signals of the Ondt and Gracehoper's similarity that we encounter later. The four names reappear later in the story, but this time while attached to the Ondt, who we see "ameising himself hugely at crabround and martpose, chasing Floh out of charity and tickling Luse, hope too, and tackling Bienie, faith, as well, and jucking Vestpatillia jukely by the chimiche" (*FW* 417.28-31). Indeed, the tale seemingly alludes to this connection earlier in the same paragraph, where it calls the Ondt "that true and perfect hose, a spiter asipnne" (*FW* 417.24), another invocation of the German "*Spinne*" that we saw Shaun attach to himself earlier with "Spinooze."

This identification between Ondt and Gracehoper is troubling given Shem's apparent rhetorical goals for reciting it, and also the ease by which the two insects can be

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[439] McHugh, 414.

[440] Surprisingly little has been written on Joyce and taxonomy, with the only text I could find to deal with the relation in even a cursory way being Hugh Kenner's "Taxonomy of an Octopus" (*James Joyce Quarterly* 18.2 [1981]: 204-205).

mapped onto the oppositional Shem/Shaun dynamic. It is also interesting given the suggestions in the earlier passage I quoted of the Gracehoper's sexual impropriety, with the four insects having "commence[d] insects with him." We should recall that the Grasshopper's crime in Aesop was to play his music all summer instead of hoarding his food for the winter – behaviour that is quite clearly in line with the carefree artist Shem. Shaun's transposing this error into a sexual transgression would seem to align the Gracehoper (and perhaps by extension Shem) with HCE, whose un-described voyeurism in Phoenix Park is a matter of much discussion in the Wake, and whose relationship with his daughter Issy has itself occasionally been read as incestuous.[441] The HCE identification continues farther down the paragraph, where Shaun has the Gracehoper "always striking up funny funereels with Besterfarther Zeuts, the Aged One, with all his wigeared corollas" (*FW* 414.35-36). There are several HCE connections here: "Zeuts" alludes to Zeus, and "the Aged One" is a title given to the god Ra in *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*[442] (with both "Besterfarther" gods playing the part of the patriarch), while "wigeared" points to earwigs, another insect allusion, and one that is closely associated with our Mr. Earwicker. Finally, "funny funereels" clearly points to Finnegan's titular wake, the "funferall" (*FW* 13.15) that leads to HCE's arrival in Dublin during I.1.

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[441] For the role of incest in *Finnegans Wake*, and also in Joyce's work more generally, see Jen Shelton's *Joyce and the Narrative Structure of Incest* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012), especially chapter five.

[442] McHugh, 414.

What then is the moral of the story? The allusion to Aesop and what we know about Shem and Shaun suggests that the Ondt both stands ethically opposed to the Gracehoper (who, it seems, has found grace hopeless) while also holding the upper hand in their power relationship as a result of the Gracehoper's profligacy. But the Shem/Shaun dyad, though it in some ways gestures towards and secures the allusion to Aesop, nevertheless prevents the Ondt and the Gracehoper from settling cleanly into their roles as the ant and the grasshopper. The ant (or ants, in Jones) are independent from the grasshopper in a way that Shaun simply cannot be from Shem. Shaun the postman, after all, depends on letter writers like Shem the penman in order for his job to exist. If Shem ever ceased to go "jigging ajog, hoppy on akkant of his joyicity" (*FW* 414.22-23) Shaun would be out of a job and out in the cold. Mapping the fable onto the brothers' relationship – though it does take advantage of several clear similarities between the stories – drives the fable's principal characters into a kind of identification that the source material simply cannot support. The Ondt, in order to fulfill these roles, must expand the scope of his character, becoming "a weltall fellow" (*FW* 416.3) – "*weltall*" here being the German word for "universe"[443] – who, just like the infinity of Bruno's universe, can reconcile even contrary elements. The Gracehoper, meanwhile, becomes an expression of those contradictions, appearing as "pooveroo quant a churchprince" (*FW* 416.13) – which

[443] "Ondt" is also Danish for "hurt" or "sore," so another way to read this passage is to see the Ondt as covered in "welts," or injuries from being hit. But, because "ondt" also means "hard" in Norwegian, he can probably handle the abuse.

McHugh renders "as poor as a church mouse,"[444] but which could also mean that the Gracehoper has gotten the grace he hopes for, becoming a Cardinal (or, a "prince of the church"), which would hardly make him impoverished. Thus, having taken form as the universe and a reconciled opposite, the Ondt and the Gracehoper appear to us as two of a kind.

Connected to these problems is Shaun's use of the fable as a rhetorical tool. Though today the fable genre is often closely linked to children's literature, in ancient Greece and Rome it was instead more common for fables to be recited as Shaun does here – as a tool of persuasion, or as a way to present or clarify an idea. Aristotle, for example, invokes Aesop in his *Rhetoric* while cautioning that the fable's usefulness is often limited, especially in cases where one is advising a course of action based on similarities between actual events and those one finds in the story. "Fables," he writes, "are suitable for addresses to popular assemblies; and they have one advantage – they are comparatively easy to invent, whereas it is hard to find parallels among actual past events," but nevertheless it is advisable for the speaker to employ actual historical parallels whenever possible, since "quoting what actually happened" makes it easier to argue that acting in line with the story will lead to comparable results.[445] The rhetorical use of the fable therefore creates problems similar to those that we found in Bruno's name and in the *Wake*'s non-words. Shaun's attempt to posit a neat identity between his irresponsible brother and the irresponsible Grasshopper is bound to fail because, as

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[444] Ibid, 416.

[445] *Rhetoric*, 94.

Aristotle knew, the pre-existing story of the fable cannot relate to the present events as closely as the speaker would like it to. Each, then, deforms the other, Shem and the Grasshopper becoming instead the Gracehoper, a new entity that exists completely apart from them yet which only attains significance in relating to them. And thus we encounter the rhetorical failure of Shaun's attempt to link Shem to HCE via sexual innuendo, since that very same innuendo ends up aligning the Gracehoper closer to the Ondt, who, for the rhetorical gesture to work, must likewise be identified with Shaun. And all of this closeness can be seen in Shaun's decision to even tell the story – which for a brief time turns him into a "penman" like his brother. As John Bishop observed, "an association is not an identity" – but what then do we do when associations appear to be all we have?[446]

Thus, in much the same way that Harman's attempt to circumscribe objects from relations and figure each entity as permanently cut off and withdrawn from all other existing things eventually causes each object to break down into endless independent branching paths of overlapped relations, so does the appearance of narratological unity of the *Wake*'s characters conceal a dispersed and irreconcilable multiplicity. Furthermore, just as Bruno's pantheism is not a subsumption of all entities into a supreme infinity, nor the embrace of dissolved particulars without connection, but rather a reciprocal interpenetration of larger and smaller entities in relations that relay smoothly between large and small, so too are the various interconnected characters of the *Wake* never pre-determined by category nor reducible to the particularities of their manifestation. For the

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[446] John Bishop, *Joyce's Book of the Dark, Finnegans Wake* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), 36.

characters of *Finnegans Wake*, singularity is multiple: Bruno, the Nolan, and Brown and Nolan all maintain their relations with each other in terms of the historical person Giordano Bruno of Nola, but likewise are their particular textual manifestations inescapably singular and unique,[447] permitting the overlapping of relations in a manner that permanently restrict generalized abstraction.[448] To put it another way, while we can never claim that "the Gracehoper is the grasshopper" or "the Gracehoper is Shem" without problem and without remainder, we can also never really understand the Gracehoper unless we let Shem and the grasshopper in on the conversation. While, as Aristotle cautions us, such mapping cannot help but remove us from the thing under discussion, without bringing these relations into play the non-word in question simply cannot be discussed at all.

4.4 There Goes Everybody

As Federico Sabatini writes, Bruno's "poetics of the enlarging style," in which narrative and dialogue endlessly expand in size and complexity (and which, it goes without saying, makes him and Joyce quite stylistically alike), mirrors the "cosmological expansion" we

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[447] It is not just Bruno's name that appears in this fashion. As Richard Beckman points out, "although the word 'arise' occurs in the *Wake* with some frequency, it is so spelled only once" (*Joyce's Rare View: The Nature of Things in Finnegans Wake* [Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007], 17).

[448] As Kristen L. Olson writes, "Joyce's treatment of opposition reveals a synthesis in which a subject becomes recognizable through cycles of resonance . . . The Brunonian pattern of cycle is, therefore, both subject and form of *Finnegans Wake*" ("The Plurabilities of 'Parole': Giordano Bruno and the Cyclical Trope of Language in *Finnegans Wake*" *James Joyce Quarterly* 42/43.1/4 [2006] 254).

find in his scientific writings.[449] Joyce pursued this maximalist open-ended expansiveness elsewhere in his work – in *Ulysses* most obviously – but its appearance in *Finnegans Wake* is both more intense and more fundamental to the work's structure than previously. We have already seen how the text's collapsing of the macrocosm and the microcosm leads to a simultaneous destabilization and multiplication of character, how, just as with words, it is the singularity of a given *Wake*ian signifier that leads to it taking on multiple irreconcilable identities.

It would thus be misleading to say that a character in *Finnegans Wake* can "contain multitudes" *a la* Whitman. Though they are indeed multitudinous, these characters cannot really be said to "contain" anything, since much (perhaps all) of their identities are implicated in textual and narrative objects that at the same time exist autonomously from their connection to the name in question. For instance, one could imagine a study of Spinoza's influence on *Finnegans Wake* which incorporates the above-cited "Spinooze" while never mentioning that it also points towards the German word for "spider" – a fact that is crucial to my entomological reading of how the Ondt and Gracehoper become implicated with each other (one that, similarly, never mentions Spinoza, despite how obvious the connection seems). Yet it would likewise be inaccurate to say that a given non-word "contains nothing," that it is an empty signifier, if only because no intersection would be possible if the relevant sign had never existed. The

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[449] Federico Sabatini, "James Joyce and Giordano Bruno: An 'Immarginable' and Interdisciplinary Dialogue," in *Renascent Joyce*, eds. Daniel Ferrer, Sam Slote, and André Topia (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2013), 28.

relationship I pointed to earlier between "commodi(o)us," Commodus, and HCE, would become illegible if that sign was ever to disappear. Non-words, non-characters, non-stories – despite their figuration in the negative, in relation to the "non-," they are crucial to the act of reading, even as they fail to be determinate or to resolve into a "clear" and non-contradictory set of relationships.

This multiplication continues even as we scale up to the levels of plots and stories. As we have seen already, it is common for Joyce to have one character ventriloquize through another – a process that, as we saw with Shaun and the Ondt, eventually implicates the ventriloquist in the personality and structure of the mouthpiece. This ventriloquism also occurs at the narrative level, like in the multiple uses that Joyce gets out of the story of Tim Finnegan's rise and fall, which is eventually so interpenetrated with the stories of Parnell, Adam and Eve, Moses, Noah, Napoleon, and the like that it becomes impossible, in the end, to determine who is the speaker and who the dummy. This pattern is itself connected to Joyce's common expansion and multiplication of his plots. We can look, for example, to the story of how Buckley shot the Russian general, a story in the *Wake* based on a brief tale originally told to Joyce by his father. Richard Ellmann provides the following summary:

> Buckley . . . was an Irish soldier in the Crimean War who drew a bead on a Russian general, but when he observed his splendid epaulets and decorations, he could not bring himself to shoot. After a moment, alive to his duty, he raised his rifle again, but just then the general led down his pants to defecate. The sight of his enemy in so helpless and

> human a plight was too much for Buckley, who again lowered his gun. But when the general prepared to finish the operation with a piece of grassy turf, Buckley lost all respect for him and fired.[450]

As Ellmann goes on to describe, Joyce ran into a great deal of trouble finding a way to incorporate the story into the *Wake*, much as he wanted to. This remained the case until he came to tell the story to a young Samuel Beckett, who upon hearing the part about the general wiping himself with the grass "remarked, 'Another insult to Ireland.'"[451] Ellmann recognizes how this connection (between Ireland's national colour and the colour of the grass) permitted Joyce to incorporate the story into his larger commentary on the colonial domination of Ireland and its subjugation to British goals (such as the fighting of the Crimean war, which Ireland, absent England, would have had no stake in). But what I find much more interesting is how this linkage came about.

Without Beckett's interjection, Buckley's revocation of his pity appears rather inexplicable. The general, after all, would appear no less human while wiping himself than he did while defecating, and certainly he was no less vulnerable. In both the original story and the version Joyce adopted in the *Wake*, Buckley shoots the Russian general after watching the general wipe himself with the grass. What Beckett's addition supplies is the *because*: Buckley shoots the Russian general *because* the grass reminded him of

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[450] Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce: New and Revised Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 398.

[451] Ibid, 398n.

Ireland, and it reminded Buckley of Ireland *because* it was green. The importance of "because" should already indicate how this narrative expansion connects the story to my earlier analysis. "Because," after all, indicates a *causal relation* between the events. Or, to speak in Harman's terms, "because" indicates the presence of a mediating object – in this case, the grass's chromatic relation to Ireland. But, as we saw with OOO, a causality that rests solely on mediation cannot help but spiral into an infinite regress of more and more granular objects, each one failing to connect by tinier and tinier margins.

Joyce's dependence on causality as a catalyst for integrating the Buckley story with *Finnegans Wake* opens the story up to the same kinds of divisions and interconnections that we have already encountered with (non-)characters and (non-)words. And the mediations do not stop, for while we have from Beckett the "because" of why it was the turf, of all things, that drew out Buckley's bloodlust, it is now Joyce who supplies the "because" of why that was enough to overcome his earlier pity. In the *Wake*, the story is (as with the Ondt and the Gracehoper) ventriloquized through the opposition between Shem and Shaun, now in the form of Butt (playing Buckley) and Taff. Butt, as in the story, hesitates, and it is Taff who eggs him on, encouraging him to shoot by layering invective on the general, who of course has been linked with HCE – a patriarch who must be killed and replaced by his sons. As Taff shouts, "the fourscore sloculums are watchyoumaycodding to cooll the skoopgoods bloof. Harkabuddy, feign! Thingman placeyear howed wholst somwom shimwhit winkledinkledelled Shinfine deed in the myrtle of the bog tway fainmain stod op to slog, ffree bond men lay lurkin on" (*FW* 346.25-29). To provide a cursory gloss of this section, "sloculums" can refer to the *General Slocum*, a steamboat that caught fire in New York in 1904, killing about a

thousand people. Since it occurred on June 15, the day before *Ulysses* takes place, Bloom reads about it in the newspaper and is quite affected by the tragedy (*U* 8.1146-7). The ship's name also points to the Russian general. Taff has spotted his target, and the story already contains the what seem like sufficient causal mechanisms for him to take his shot, yet he hesitates. The line "somwom shimwhit winkledinkledelled" suggests the reason in its resemblance to the phrase "someone had blundered,"[452] repeated throughout Tennyson's "The Charge of the Light Brigade."[453] The clear chain of causation, then, has been replaced with a vacillation: then invocation of Irish turf that explains Buckley's decision to shoot, and which opens the story up to comparisons to other historical instances of Ireland's mistreatment in the name of British interests, brings also into view questions of other such mis-deeds, particularly those also committed during the Crimean War. But the "someone" is dangerous, misleading, in that it posits a definite cause of the blunder while obscuring what that cause may be.

As Jean-Michel Rabaté writes, Beckett's intervention in the Buckley tale "gave Joyce a convenient relay . . . Not only does Joyce fully 'nationalize' the story, but he also universalizes the national problem."[454] But this integration also mean segmentation, and the severing into parts what had once proceeded smoothly as a whole. Beckett's

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[452] McHugh, 346.

[453] Alfred Lord Tennyson, "The Charge of the Light Brigade," in *The Major Works*, ed. Adam Roberts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 302-303.

[454] Jean-Michel Rabaté, *James Joyce, Authorized Reader* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 136.

suggestion, then, did not aid Joyce so much because it filled in a vexing plot hole, but rather because in pointing out how the seemingly rounded-off story was full of access points and imperfections that implicated it synchronically with other narratives, Beckett put the unity and integrity of the entire plot in question. Once cannot chase backwards the myriad branches of causality and explanation unto their exhaustion: as one finds so often in the *Wake*, there is simply too much. At some point, one must stop reading.

And by no means is this OOO-like fragmentation and interpenetration unique to the Buckley story. We see it as well in Joyce's use of the Norwegian captain story, which like many of the tales in the wake Joyce first heard from his father.[455] As Ellmann summarizes, the tale involves "a hunchbacked Norwegian captain who ordered a suit from a Dublin tailor . . . the finished suit did not fit him, and the captain berated the tailor for being unable to sew, whereupon the irate tailor denounced him for being impossible to fit."[456] In *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce expands this brief story until it runs about twenty pages (*FW* 311-332), with much of the expansion happening in a manner similar to before. Perhaps it is because of its brevity that the original Norwegian captain story proved so porous, given that it contains so few details (we do not even know why the captain was in Dublin, or what he was planning to use the suit for). As David Hayman observes in his analysis of the episode's genetic history, "the structure of the 'Norwegian Captain' segment echoes that of the chapter as a whole in that the narrative sequences

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[455] Vicki Mahaffey has also recognized the similarity between these two stories. See: *Reauthorizing Joyce* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 183.

[456] Ellmann, 23.

include longer paragraphs and contain references to the pub audience's response. . . . Both developments become increasingly longer and more complex as the tale evolves."[457] The expansion, then, not only involves the narrative itself, but also the nature of its telling and, as Alison Lacivita describes, its geography and landscape.[458] This narration – which as Thomas Hofheinz remarks depicts a mode of expression that is both "compulsive [and] essential" and an "inadequate expression of human desire"[459] – grasps towards a the consummation of the causal link, the filling out of the story-object of the Norwegian captain tale, and yet from the very start has failed to do so.

4.5 Learning How Not to Read

I have so far made much of the singularity and uniqueness of the *Wake*ian non-word, the way its hidden multitudes (both external and internal) causes it to resist reduction into its component parts, and how this structure extends upwards to characterization and plotting, eventually filling out the whole of the *Wake*. It ought not to be a surprise then when we encounter our old friend HCE lost in eternal extensions and expansions of his basic point, in which whenever he says one thing "he quickly qualifies it, adds whatever associated information occurs to him as he goes along, and wanders farther and farther from where

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[457] David Hayman, "Male Maturity or the *Pub*lic Rise and Private Decline of HC Earwicker: Chapter II.3," in *How Joyce Wrote Finnegans Wake: A Chapter-by-Chapter Genetic Guide*, eds. Luca Crispi and Sam Slote (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2007), 264.

[458] Alison Lacivita, *The Ecology of Finnegans Wake* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2015), 181.

[459] Thomas Hofheinz, "Group Drinkards make Grope Thinkards': Narrative in the 'Norwegian Captain' Episode of *Finnegans Wake*" *James Joyce Quarterly* 29.3 (1992): 645.

he began."[460] It is a pattern very much like the narration we find in the "Eumaeus" episode of *Ulysses*, with its twisty drunken meanderings that conspicuously fail to ever arrive at a point. Non-words can be called "pointless" in two ways. First, in the sense that they lack a definite location, which is to say that they cannot be pinned into a coordinate structure with neat and knowable values on the X and Y axes. They are instead dispersed across the text's narrative landscape, and penetrated by relations that both define them and undermine them at once. The second sense follows from the first: non-words are pointless because they are unbounded, lacking clear outlines that define where they begin and end. It is impossible to say, for instance, whether "Is is" is one sign or two, for the act of combination we perform whenever we gloss it as "Isis" is an act of multiplication as well. Thus, what "Is is" *is* is variable.

Given this singularity, I think it is vital to at least address the question of iterability as it pertains to language, and in particular how that iterability relates to the system of *Finnegans Wake*. Though Joyce scholars so often reach for the obvious nonsense words and portmanteaus when they focus on a single sign as a way to make a point or punctuate an argument, it is often the signs that, outside the *Wake*, exist as perfectly normal words which are the most interesting. It is a kind of citation when Joyce writes "vicus" or "is." As Derrida observes in "Signature Event Context," it is a basic trait of linguistic signs that they can be taken from their context, repeated, cited, put in quotation marks. Indeed, for nonsense phrases (Derrida cites Husserl's "green is or") it is

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[460] Michael H. Begnal, *Narrator and Character in Finnegans Wake* (Lewisberg: Bucknell University Press, 1975), 321.

only through citation that they can have any semantic meaning at all.[461] But Joyce characteristically invades this citation, most directly with his portmanteaus, which often possess a "clear" or "obvious" meaning due to their close resemblance (perhaps only one character off) to a "real word," often to the point of obscuring other interpretations from view. But what of non-words that are visibly identical to something one would find in a dictionary?

Part of the problem here is that Joyce's use of these words removes the vital distinction between citation and allusion. Citation, as Derrida rightly points out, has the power to capture any set of symbols regardless of their agrammaticality, whereas allusion must be vicarious, but not so distant as to lack any obvious relation to the text alluded to. This is why Aristotle's wreath no longer works very well as an allusion to the Olympics: the old context is no longer present as a mediator between sign and referent. And just as one can allude without citing so too can one cite without alluding. For instance, I can cite the phrase "he looked at them" (*U* 4.250) – which I have taken from *Ulysses*, but which is so innocuous and common a phrase that it would not be legible as a reference to the novel had I not explicitly said it was so. For a citation to also function as an allusion, then, it needs to also possess a metonymic, vicarious connection to some larger aspect of the text in question, and in particular to aspects of the text that have themselves been culturally recontextualized. If a novelist has their character say "errors are portals of discovery," they are (partially) citing Stephen Dedalus's line, "a man of genius makes no mistakes.

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[461] Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context," in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 320.

His errors are volitional and are the portals of discovery" (U 9.228-229), but also alluding the wider uses that the phrase has been put to. (The line, in all its mis-quotations, has taken on a life of its own as blanket statement on the nature of creativity, shorn of the complexities contained in the scene where it appears.) Ironically, it is by removing the sign one or more steps from its origin that a citation may become also an allusion: the most effective allusions are those that employ signs that have taken on significance beyond what they possess in their first appearance.

But when Joyce reconfigures some word or phrase for use in the *Wake*, he reveals the messiness behind this clear distinction. One can, as we saw above, allude with a citation, but it is another thing entirely to cite with an allusion – since citation (as it appears in Derrida) clearly takes the form of a reproduction of the signs in question. Indeed, it is *because* signifiers have an autonomous existence beyond their semantic meaning that nonsense phrases can still be cited and incorporated into a linguistic system. Yet when we argue that "vicus" is an allusion to Vico, and in so doing rob it of the U sound that its Latinate nature demands – we are, in effect, "citing" the Latin word allusively, reaching it through the medium of Vico and his hard V. This is but the earlier problem of the "obvious" reading overwriting the alternate ones, but in reverse. Much like in Pound's parable of the sunfish, the *Wake* extols the reader to treasure what is clearly and obviously in front of their nose, taking in it in all of its particularity. It is, contra Harman, precisely *because* the beings of the *Wake* fail to stand up as closed autonomous objects that the text is able to retain its flatness, its ability to hold up both the individual sign and the text-spanning monomyth and grant them equal value.

What then do we make of all these connections, of these repetitions without repetitions, of these citations that do not cite? It should be clear by now how closely implicated the reader is with their interpretation when it comes to *Finnegans Wake* – but I am hardly the first person to say so. What is much more interesting, and what I have been trying to emphasize since the beginning of this chapter, is the extent to which any interpretation of any word or passage in the *Wake* relies on a readerly act of *de-mediation*, or the extraction of a particular set of relations from their medial position. When, for example, I earlier glossed "spinooze" as an allusion to the German word for "spider" while ignoring its connection to Spinoza I inserted a regrettable, but necessary, omission. As Harman argues – citing Book Zeta of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* – if every object were implicated in every other, then there would no longer be distinctions, but rather an extended grey ooze of total sameness.[462] In systems like Leibniz's monadology, the explanation for why the monads look different despite all being metaphysically the same is that human perception is limited in such a way that their sameness remains hidden. *Finnegans Wake* does not offer that luxury: though readers are in no sense omniscient, they can be (and often are) aware of the several overlapping connections condensed into any given word. We cannot see everything, but we can see enough – which is to say, too much.

To de-mediate, then, is essentially to ignore – or it might be better to say, to "bracket off" – the myriad connections so that the non-word may provisionally take on a definite shape. It is, in a sense, a voluntary apprehension such as what Harman describes

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[462] *Tool-Being*, 273-74.

all objects engaging in, by which I mean that the act of reading a given passage of *Finnegans Wake* requires that part of that passage's "content" be allowed to withdraw so that another part may rise to the surface. One must translate the non-words into words in order to read them, a process that, as with all translation, always leaves something behind. This is as true for Eco's reading of "sansglorians" as it is for my reading of "commodius vicus," and indeed there is nothing about Eco's gloss that is *incorrect*, since every word that he derives from "sansglorians" intersects with it in some way. The problem arises when one fails to see the reading – any reading – as a willful deformation of the singularity of the text, and instead registers it as a successful disassembling of a non-word into its obvious component parts. But as the God of Cusanus, *Finnegans Wake* cannot be bounded by perception, so that to seek knowledge in its shadow is to recognize our criticism as the plaything of our ignorance. If a word is a painting, then ignorance is its canvas, subtending it, lending it shape, making the image possible even as it fades from view. One gropes through *Finnegans Wake* as one might through a darkened room – not because the book, like some mystery cult, has hidden its form from view, but because *Finnegans Wake* is not the room, but the darkness, a book of the night as much as *Ulysses* was a book of the day.

Conclusion

On Knowing What We do not Know

> A text presents itself as the simulacrum of a forward, a discontinuous series, an archipelago of aphorisms: an intolerable composition in this place, a rhetorical and architectural monster. Demonstrate it. Then read this book. You will perhaps begin to have your doubts.
>
> — Jacques Derrida, "Fifty-two Aphorisms for a Forward"[463]

As I began, so I will end – with a foray into science fiction, that great factory of ideas. In 2005 the American author Ted Chiang published the flash-fiction story "What's Expected of Us" in the journal *Nature* (it is one of several Chiang stories the science journal has published). The story describes the release of a new novelty toy called a "Predictor" – "a small device, like a remote for opening your car door. Its only features are a button and a big green LED. The light flashes if you press the button. Specifically, the light flashes one second *before* you press the button."[464] As the story explains, there is no way to "trick" the light by, for instance, pretending to press the button and then moving away, or by clearing one's mind of all intent to press the button and then pressing it anyway. The

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[463] Jacques Derrida, "Fifty-two Aphorisms for a Forward," in *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*, vol. 2, eds. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg, trans. Andrew Benjamin (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 118.

[464] Ted Chiang, "What's Expected of Us" *Nature* 436.7 (2005): 150. As the story is only one page long, I will refrain from future citations, as they are redundant.

device is not precognitive, it does not “see” the future, but is instead under the future’s direct and mechanical influence: pressing the button activates a “negative time delay” which sends a signal one second back in time, activating the light.

Predictors are not mere party tricks, for each one is effectively empirical proof of the inexistence of free will. If you see the light flash then you know with absolute certainty that the button is about to be pressed in one second’s time, since it is the pressing of the button that causes the light to turn on. The widespread dispersion of these Predictors results in what we might call an epistemological disaster (as opposed to a natural disaster): for a large portion of the population, the sudden realization that they lack free will, unclouded by the feeling of possessing it, is such a shock that it inflicts a state of near-catatonia. As Chiang writes:

> Some people, realizing that their choices don't matter, refuse to make any choices at all. Like a legion of Bartleby the Scriveners, they no longer engage in spontaneous action. Eventually, a third of those who play with a Predictor must be hospitalized because they won't feed themselves. The end state is akinetic mutism, a kind of waking coma. They'll track motion with their eyes, and change position occasionally, but nothing more. The ability to move remains, but the motivation is gone.

I imagine that everyone who has studied the topic has entertained the possibility that there is no free will, whether or not they find the arguments for determinism convincing. But even the most emphatic determinists must face the position’s key weakness: the

dearth of practical repercussions. As I have observed already, the hypothetical scenario of a super-intelligence encompassing all of the universe who is able to make perfect predictions is a pure thought experiment – no entity will ever know enough to be able to actualize determinism's key postulate. Chiang's story imagines a solution to this problem, bringing the issue down from omniscience and reducing it to its key elements. It is not actually necessary to predict all of the things that could happen; one need merely predict *one* thing over and over again with absolute certainty in order to resolve the question once and for all. The force of the blow, which sends the Predictor's victims to the hospital, is purely epistemological – Chiang is, in effect, a rationalist Lovecraftian, whose characters have gone mad from an encounter with that which we were never meant to know.

But for my purposes the more interesting question here is what was going on *before* these people pressed the button. What makes Chiang's story interesting in the context of this study is the manner in which it demonstrates the active effects of ignorance, or the manner in which an unawareness of some aspect of the world (in this case the inexistence of free will) forms a part of the general worldview within which the people of his story operate. Their ignorance is as much a component of their world of their perception as their knowledge, it takes on a *presence*, it *acts*, and when the ignorance is removed so too is the force of that action. The mutism of Chiang's story is but an extreme and distilled version of the kinds of effects I have been discussing throughout this study, and is indeed a good excuse to clarify a potential misunderstanding. As I discussed in the introduction, ignorance, when taken up as a topic of academic study, is often treated as necessarily a problem, necessarily a disease in need

of a cure – and certainly for good and understandable reasons. The topics studied in the *Agnotology* collection from which I took my key-term (climate change denial, anti-vaccination, tobacco industry disinformation, etc.) indicate the dangers of a cultivated, willful ignorance, the manner in which an unwillingness to pursue new knowledge and integrate new information can lead to irreparable harm. *And yet*, as ought to be clear by now, the automatic equation of "ignorance" in general with its most extreme and damaging forms ignores the (perhaps unsettling) fact that we will never not be ignorant, both in terms of a generalized "we" (i.e. "we know how to split the atom," though I personally do not know how to split an atom) which will never arrive at a perfect rationalized description of the universe's physical laws, and also in terms of a localized "we" of individual subjects who always tread above an ocean of unknowns. When I say that we must cease treating ignorance in general as a problem, I mean simply that we must recognize its mundanity, its inescapability, and the manner in which it constructs our daily lives.[465]

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[465] A 2002 study in the journal *Cognitive Science* provides several examples of ignorance's everydayness (Leonid Rozenblit and Frank Keil, "The Misunderstood Limits of Folk Science: An Illusion of Explanatory Depth" *Cognitive Science* 26 [2002]: 521-562). The researchers asked several subjects to provide detailed step-by-step descriptions of how several common household objects worked, and found that these subjects' abilities to describe, say, the mechanism of a flushing toilet was far less than their confidence suggested. As the researchers conclude, "most people feel they understand the world with far greater detail, coherence, and depth than they really do" and "knowledge of complex causal relations is particularly susceptible to illusions of understanding" (522) – a point that, I think, Latour already grasps in his initial description of techno-scientific black boxes in *Science in Action*, published back in 1987. In any case, this lack of explanatory depth is but one example of ignorance's total pervasiveness, and the confidence of the study's

Which returns us to Chiang's story. When I wrote earlier in the introduction of agnotological processes producing ontological entities – "black boxes" – out of epistemological gaps, the easiest examples to point to were things like vitalism (c.f. chapter one) or nature (c.f. chapter three). Part of the problem with treating these instances as the poster-children for agnotology is that they have, to a certain extent, been "overcome," both among scientists (who no longer speak of vital energies that divide the living from the dead) and theorists of ecology (who are often loathe to talk of "nature" as a unified entity). But I do not wish to create the impression that agnotological entities lie along some positivist teleology with each passing era refining their theories en route (though asymptotically) towards a perfect state of scientific enlightenment. Agnotological entities are not problems, they are not overcome, though they may be swapped out for others as the landscape of ignorance changes, and for this reason the question of the nature of ignorance must in many cases be asked in isolation from questions of the history of science. Chiang's story provides an instructive example: within the world of the narrative, the people's belief in free will is clearly and empirically incorrect, an artifact of their ignorance as to the existence of retroactive causality. Yet the revelation of the Predictors is nevertheless a catastrophe, robbing untold numbers of their will to live. The story in a sense studies the agnotology of free will in the way that one might study the structure of a Roman archway by removing its keystone – the importance of which becomes manifest in the structure's collapse.

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subjects perhaps a means of coping with this otherwise unsolvable problem. The study itself provides a highly detailed description of several process that I have only been able to speak of in the abstract.

My desire for a non-antagonistic study of ignorance in part explains the structure of this study. As I have said earlier, each chapter approaches its central author in terms of a particular black box: Lewis and vitalist life, Woolf and panpsychist life, Pound and nature, Joyce and words. It is not for nothing that the Joyce chapter is at the end, for while it has been most convenient to explain agnotology with reference to the other chapters it is the agnotological structure of *Finnegans Wake* which I consider the best expression of what wanted the study of agnotology to look like. For the ignorance one encounters in *Finnegans Wake* is impossible to overcome, being structured not in terms of concealment but rather undecidability. Indeed, even a novice reader will often find in certain passages of the wake an overwhelming abundance of information, and will remark, much like Freud remarks in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, that though the text under analysis "may perhaps fill half a page" its explication "may occupy six, eight, or a dozen times as much space."[466] The problem here is not a lack of information, as one could possibly say of the vitalists, or even of a defect in the managing and arranging of information (as one might see in Pound) – for as I demonstrate, the potential readings of a given passage are not merely multiplicities, but are instead irreconcilable. Thus, ignorance appears to the reader of *Finnegans Wake* as a basic constituent fact of any productive engagement with the text, a kernel of it present in any act of reading. In a sense, then, the agnotology of *Finnegans Wake* manifests an extreme naturalism, for by constructing within itself an irreducible ignorance Joyce's final work forces us to engage

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[466] Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams: The Complete and Definitive Text*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 296.

with the necessity of agnotology as a pre-condition for reading the text at all – an "invincible ignorance" (to pilfer an old phrase) well in keeping with the mundane ignorance of daily life.

The difficulties with Joyce can point us towards a non-teleological model for understanding agnotology. As one shifts from one network of signification to the other, selectively attending to and ignoring different textual relations, one encounters an effect much like the duck-rabbit of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, which is always perceived as *either* a duck *or* a rabbit despite being both (and neither).[467] To say that a given sign in the *Wake* is *this* in one reading and then *that* in another is not to move from an early, imperfect reading towards a better one, or even to recognize and correct a previous mistake. Which is to say, the relationship between hermeneutics and ignorance in the *Wake* does not at all resemble the teleological model of scientific progress (even to the extent that anything does). In science, the ignorance underlying an old, discarded theory is treated like a flaw – one says, for instance, that while Copernicus's contributions to astronomy were great, he was nevertheless hampered by his belief in a finite universe, an error that Bruno would overcome and thereby "advance" science even further. In this case, one recognizes, as one should, that Copernicus's ignorance of the universe's unboundedness is a constituent element of his cosmology, an essential fact of its configuration. But one also treats that ignorance as a flaw to be expunged, and the destruction of the Copernican universe in favour of a Brunoian (or Newtonian, or

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[467] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, eds. P.M.S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 204-205.

Einsteinian) replacement as an uncomplicated good – and perhaps, if one's interests are strictly scientific and ahistorical, it is. However, a drawback of this ranking is that it implicitly treats ignorance as fully expungable, and thus binds our thinking to a counterfactual assumption, impairing our capacity to study the role and function of ignorance as such.

The shifting ignorance of *Finnegans Wake* provides a much more felicitous framework, one that permits us to ask not what ignorance is present and how it might be eliminated (for the study of agnotology must begin with an acknowledgement of ignorance's omnipresence) but rather what role or function it plays within its particular conceptual framework. The issue, then, is how one frames the question of what ignorance is and what it does, and how that framing limits and conditions one's investigations. And once we recognize that ignorance is productive because it *has* to be, because its omnipresence makes it inevitable that it will ground and modify our perceptions, then the decision to see ignorance as always and in all places a flaw waiting to be repaired seems like utter folly, as it places needless restrictions on the manner in which we may study and discuss the topic. It would be as though we discussed the human lung only in terms of its susceptibility to drowning, discussing at length its inability to extract oxygen from liquids, the tendency of the breathing reflex to fill the lung with water when the person breathing is submerged, their tendency to fill with fluid under the influence of certain diseases ("they even drown themselves on dry land!"). Would it not be great, given that the earth's surface is covered in water, for humans to instead sprout gills? Or better, develop some hybrid, amphibious arrangement permitting us to breathe wherever we may be? In a strictly literal sense these observations are all correct, but they also drastically

limit the field of discussion – imagine attempting to study pulmonology under such ridiculous conditions! It would mean allowing the problems inherent in the subject to overwhelm the discussing of the subject itself, never permitting scholars to take it on as an object of analysis on its own terms.

I thus placed my *Wake* chapter at the end so that it may function as a short-circuit on this problematic way of thinking. Criticism of *Finnegans Wake* can often treat the book as a kind of scavenger hunt, a repository of blank spaces that can be filled by any intrepid scholar willing to hunt through Joyce's notebooks and the eleventh edition of the *Britannica*. But as I have argued, the manner in which different lines of meaning overlap and intersect with each other means that even in a hypothetical ideal reading condition in which one "got" all of the puns and allusions contained in the text, no singular complete reading would be possible. One cannot exhaust the *Wake* – not because it is infinite (though it might be) but because one can never see all sides of it at once. Indeed, as much as I criticize Graham Harman in that chapter, there is a certain compatibility between *Finnegans Wake* and his infinitely deep, withdrawn objects, in the shared impression of a cyclopean eternity beneath the manifold of our perceptions. But whether or not *Finnegans Wake* is inexhaustible in the same way that, for instance, the digits of pi are inexhaustible – by going on forever so that no element in the set is ever final – what is important for my purposes is that it is inexhaustible in the same way that the duck-rabbit is inexhaustible, through a constant oscillation that makes impossible any final meaning, regardless of the finitude of the object itself. Thus, since perfect knowledge of the *Wake* is impossible, one has no choice but to accept ignorance as a constant traveler through the

text, an acceptance that begs us to treat that ignorance itself as a neutral object of analysis. The old excuses simply will not fly.

From this standpoint, it is useful to return to my initial chapter to see how this short-circuiting plays out. I can imagine that, despite my frequent mention of vitalism as the key term of the chapter and the black box of Bergson and Lewis's thinking, it is monism that takes the chief position in the chapter's title and indeed through much of the text. In large part my purpose there was to begin the work that I would complete in the Joyce chapter, i.e. the decentring of the ignorance-as-problem position from my agnotological readings. As I have said, a black box is essentially the ontological projection of one's own ignorance, as kind of phenomenological machine that permits one's world-picture to function despite the gaps embedded in it. "Monism" is, in a sense, the name we give to the gap that Lewis was trying to fill with vitalism, just as in Joyce the notion of a "word" fills in the gap created by the non-word's undecidability. It is for this reason that Ravaisson's attempt to rehabilitate habit leads to a system that is strikingly homologous to Bergson's, since the two essentially perform the same feat: they see the gap between living and non-living matter and attempt to place a black box in the middle. Bergson's box treats the gap as essential and offers an explanatory mechanism for how the gap comes about and where the line is drawn (a line that Lewis fights to re-draw). Ravaisson's box treats the gap as inessential and offers an explanatory mechanism for how an entity might move from one side to another. For Bergson "monism" is a null-hypothesis that must be avoided while for Ravaisson it is a fact of existence that needs to be explained – and, importantly, neither of them actually knows what the "real" answer to the question of monism is, which is to say that neither provides a complete and correct

answer to what, if anything, separates living and non-living things. As Bergson's critics (like Bertrand Russell) were fond of pointing out, *élan vital* does not actually explain all that much (a fact that Bergson himself acknowledges), but then again Herbert Spencer and the Behaviourists were hardly correct in their belief that all human thought could be explained mechanistically, or at the very least they grossly underestimated the difficulty of actually pulling that off. But what Bergson, Lewis, and Ravaisson have over people like Spencer is that the black boxes of their systems draw in their elucidation the outlines of the problem they were attempting to solve, enabling a productive engagement with our ignorance of the "true" answer in a way that Spencer's dogmatism simply does not. Thus it is monism which takes center stage in the chapter, because it is ultimately monism to which all of the questions in the chapter point.

The etiology of the black box is likewise the key issue in my Woolf chapter. Once again it is not so much the box itself at issue – not a matter of identifying panpsychism as an element in Woolf's writing and then listing its instances – but of using that box as a means of accessing the void in which it fits. Whereas for Lewis the notion of "life" fills a void of – for lack of a better term – taxonomy, explaining a split between two categories of existence, for Woolf it arrives as a means of overcoming discontinuity. The chief value of introducing Richard Bucke's ideas to Woolf criticism is not that they explain the origin her panpsychism – for one because a connection between them, though in my opinion very likely, is not definite enough for one to argue for a direct line of influence. Bucke is also, furthermore, not strictly necessary as a perquisite for a reading of panpsychism in Woolf, since panpsychism has a history independent from him, one which Woolf could conceivably have drawn. Bucke is valuable here primarily because he provides a clear

origin for cosmic consciousness, a process by which one achieves this awareness of the inter-connectedness of all things which (as I show in the chapter) closely parallels the origins of both traumatic experience and scientific discovery. With Bucke, then, we are able to see that Woolf develops her agnotology as a response to perceptual discontinuity, and in particular the historical shock of the Great War. In *To the Lighthouse*, it is not merely the case that the sudden tragedy of the war was traumatic (though certainly it was) but also that it demanded a fundamentally new mode of thinking – not only in terms of how one thought about the war itself, but also everything peripheral to the war, up to and including all of one's perceptions generally. Thus, while among the texts I analyze it is only Septimus Smith who provides a definite example of cosmic consciousness (with Clarissa Dalloway seeming to stand on the threshold) the basic logic of Bucke's system, and its relation to the "cotton wool" of everyday life, pervades Woolf's writing, and particularly the mature works upon which her literary reputation rests. Panpsychism thus becomes not an argument, but an epistemology – and thereby also appears to us as an access to the world behind the box.

What, then, does "nature" hide for Pound? The matter is somewhat more complicated, in part because of the disconnected nature of his non-fiction. While Woolf and Lewis produced sustained and focused expositions of their philosophical ideas (most notably for my work *Time and Western Man* and "A Sketch of the Past") Pound's writing, though voluminous, are highly discordant and scatter-brained. For sure, this erraticism is part of the joy of reading Pound, part of what gives his works their vibrancy, but it nevertheless makes him difficult to write about. It is in part for this reason that I had to triangulate from his work the notion of an imperative logic – to give a name to a

pattern of thinking that I found manifest throughout his works but never fully articulated. As I concluded in the chapter, this logic is Pound's answer to a question implicit in his political and artistic theories: how does one integrate certain kinds of human action with the natural world while excluding others? Or, put more crudely: why is agriculture good and usury bad? Indeed, the double-bind for Pound was that his many suggestions of an ultimate cohesion beneath our perceptions – one that in some cases gives his work a resemblance to Woolf's – seems to imply no distinction between different kinds of human action. But for Pound, an opposition to usury was axiomatic, part of the system from its inception and therefore impossible to exclude. Pound's problem can therefore seem to resemble Lewis's, in that he saw a suggestion of a perfect contiguity and so formulated a principle by which he could assert a distinction. But we must avoid too much haste in our comparisons. For while in Lewis the enemy is never only Behaviourism or Bergsonism, but rather monism and flat ontology generally, for Pound the flatness of a continuous relationship between humans and nature (what Morton calls "ecological thought") is in many ways desirable. We should not forget that imperative thinking begins with an assertion that what is ethically right is that which proceeds as though it were a natural law – even when (as Bergson and Lewis both argue) that kind of mechanistic behaviour is inherently humorous and worth mocking. Indeed, if we follow the argument of Bergson's *Laughter* to its extremes we can say that Kant's categorical imperative might be the greatest joke ever played by a philosopher. As the ending of his *Cantos* suggests, Pound never managed to resolve these problems – but in the death of Herakles we can see what form that resolution might have taken.

What, then, does all this tell us about modernism? In a sense an agnotology of modernism re-assert's Deleuze's observation that "the effort of invention consists most often in raising the problem, in creating the terms in which it will be stated."[468] The study of agnotology is not the study of black boxes, but rather the study of ignorance. The boxes are interesting most often as the tags of ignorance, as puzzle pieces that suggest the shapes of the holes they fit. Research, then, often resembles a game of *Jeopardy!*, where you are given the answer and then have to guess the question it aligns with. Scholars of modernism often speak of its questions – the dissolutions of Victorianism and history and the unified subject which make up the boilerplate summation of the period – but then spend their research focusing on the answers: montage, religion, monomyth, anxiety. We have treated these answers as though springing from a virgin birth, standing on their own with neither origins nor pasts – never asking from what questions they have sprung, what eternal need gave birth to them, what void they represent. These are not matters of explanation, or of teleologies of development, but rather of origins, pathways, histories instead of historicisms. I mean to say that we must not think of these answers as solutions, because the baseline problem is never solved, but rather as responses or, perhaps better, as coping mechanisms. A true awareness of one's ignorance does not mean a compulsion to remove it, but rather demand to cope with it and live with it, to accept that opening the black box never lets inside the light but rather, like Pandora's box, permits the darkness to creep out, pervading all. The shocks of modernism, the

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[468] Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 15.

historical schisms of which scholars so often speak, were such an opening, and the story which followed is not one of resolution but rather of the end of resolutions all together. To study modernist agnotology is to take this observation not only as a fact, but as a method, to see in the work of modernist studies precisely the same questions from which modernism sprang.

To a certain extent, then, the problems of modernism are the problems of epistemology. When reading accounts of how knowledge is created, collated, disseminated, arranged, often (and for good reasons) the focus is academic. We speak of *knowledge* as it relates to *research* – analyzing the epistemologies of the sciences, social sciences, and humanities, their different and multivalent relationships to doubt and ambiguity, their various modes of argument and standards of evidence. But we forget that while a physicist and an art historian have very different relationships to knowledge and knowledge production, the fact that they are both engaged in a scholarly enterprise means that they have a very similar relationship to ignorance. The presumption that ignorance is bad and must be eradicated is built into the whole scholarly enterprise, within which it is self-evident that, for instance, the fact that we have no theory of quantum gravity is a problem, and that its solution is worth a considerable expenditure of time, money, and expertise.

My point here, I should state directly, is not that ignorance of science and of natural laws is a non-problem, but simply that it isn't the only type of ignorance we should be concerned with. For example, what do we make of the fact that if you asked a random person to draw a blueprint for a flushing toilet, or an inkjet printer, or a microwave oven, or a wrist-watch, they would probably be incapable of doing so? And

that even if they could describe one – say they happened to be a trained watch-maker – the odds are clearly against them being able to describe the others? Yet people use these objects every day, despite being entirely unaware of how they work. Certainly this simple, everyday ignorance, by simple virtue of its commonality and the impossibility of ever eradicating it, is worthy of greater attention by philosophers, historians, and literary critics, yet precious few conceptual tools exist for pursuing this end. Creating these tools, and establishing their importance, was an overriding goal of this study. What I tried to, and what I hope I have done, is establish the conceptual importance of ignorance, while also sketching the outlines of how we might go on to understand its place in our various modes of knowing the world. Ignorance is not the enemy of knowledge, but its older sibling – preceding it, guiding it, and introducing it to the world. And truly, if we wish to understand this world, we must learn as well the nature and the limits of our understanding.

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Curriculum Vitae

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Education

2013-2018	**Ph.D.** English, the University of Western Ontario
2012-2013	**Masters of Arts**, English, the University of Western Ontario
2008-2012	**Bachelor of Arts**, English and History, Brock University.

Publications

"Punctuations of the Virtual: Spectating Sex and Disability in Joyce's 'Nausicaa.'" Forthcoming in *Modern Fiction Studies*.

"The Mote in God's *i*: Fourier, Fractals, and Imaginary Numbers in Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia*." Forthcoming in *Modern Drama*.

"Nothing is Impossible: Bergson, Beckett, and the Pursuit of the Naught." *Journal of Modern Literature* 40.4 (2017): 38-50. Print

"Textual Authority and Diagnostic Joyce: Re-Reading the Way We Read the *Wake*." *Joyce Studies Annual* (2016): 65-83. Print.

"The Progress of 'Faustus and Helen': Crane, Whitman, and the Metropolitan Progress Poem." *The Canadian Review of American Studies* 46.2 (2016): 182-201. Print.

"The Grotesque Gigantic: *Stephen Hero*, Maximalism, and Bakhtin." *Joyce Studies Annual* (2014): 63-92. Print.

"The Joyce Commemorative Coin: The Error and Its 'Portal to Discovery.'" *The James Joyce Quarterly* 51.1 (2013): 168-169. Print.

Conference Presentations

"Not Swimming, Not Drowning: Lucia Joyce as Collaborator." The International James Joyce Symposium (2018).

"'Dublin as it Presumably Is': Documentary Realism and the Exilic Imagination in *Dubliners*." The North American James Joyce Conference (2017).

"What 'Is' Is Not: Undecidability and the Non-Words of *Finnegans Wake*." Fieldnotes Speaker Series. The University of Western Ontario, London. 29 March 2017. Invited talk.

"The Cosmic Mind of Septimus Smith: Reading Panpsychism in *Mrs Dalloway*." Modernist Studies Association Annual Conference (2016).

"Unexpected Bodies: Time, Voyeurism, and the Surprise of Gertie McDowell." The International James Joyce Symposium (2016).

"The Siren Song of Silence: Bergson, Nothingness, and Kafka's 'The Silence of the Sirens.'" Northeast Modern Languages Association Conference (2016).

"Plagues that Will End War: The Doubled Epidemics of *Mrs Dalloway*." Modernist Studies Association Annual Conference (2015).

"'An Engine in a Cloud': The East River and the Progress Poem in Crane and Whitman." Northeast Modern Languages Association Conference (2015). Winner of NeMLA's Graduate Student Essay Prize.

"Your Gaelic is all Greek to Me: Translation as Censorship and Colonization in Joyce and Friel." ACCUTE Congress (2014).

"Stephen's Carnival: Joyce's early Maximalism." The UCD James Joyce Research Colloquium (2014).

"Disauthoritative Joyce: Reading *Finnegan*(')*s Wake*(s)." The International James Joyce Symposium (2014).

"The Animal that therefore You Are: Jefferson's Dehumanizing Critique of Phillis Wheatley." Canadian Association for American Studies Conference (2013).

"*Ulysses* and the Poetics of Doubt." The Eighteenth Irregular Miami J'yce Birthday Conference (2013).

Teaching Assistantships

2018	English 1028G: The Storyteller's Art II (UWO)
2017	Biology 1001A/1201A: Introduction to Biology (UWO)
2016-2017	English 1020E: Understanding Literature Today (UWO)
2015-2016	English 2307E: Major British Authors (UWO)
2014-2015	English 3554E: Modern British and Irish Literature (UWO)
2013-2014	English 3227E: Shakespeare (UWO)
2013	English 3667: Literatures of Blues and Jazz (UWO)
2012	English 2074F: Mystery and Detective Fiction (UWO)

Academic Honours and Awards

2016 Graduate Student Essay Prize (NeMLA Graduate Caucus)
International James Joyce Symposium Graduate Scholarship (International James Joyce Foundation)
The Mary Routledge Fellowship (UWO)

2015 SSHRC Doctoral Fellowship (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council), renewable for three years
Ontario Graduate Scholarship (The government of Ontario) (Declined)

2014 Ontario Graduate Scholarship (The government of Ontario)
The Mary Routledge Fellowship (UWO)

2013 Ontario Graduate Scholarship (The government of Ontario)
The Provost's Entrance Scholarship (UWO)

2012 The Joseph-Armand Bombardier CGS Master's Scholarship (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council)
The Dean's Entrance Scholarship (UWO)

Comprehensive Examinations

Twentieth Century British and Irish Literature (Primary)
American Literature (Secondary)