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### The Fate of Representation, the Fate of Critique

Our culture is altogether on the guide-book model; Shakespeare has four stars, Milton three, Donne and Blake one. We do not stop to ask on what system, and by whom, the stars were awarded.

—Herbert Read, *The Philosophy of Modern Art*

THE ANSWERS WE GIVE TO THE QUESTION OF INTERPRETATION WILL CONDITION how we think about the possibilities of the aesthetic. If the text is, epistemologically speaking, a nothing, as neo-pragmatists suggest, then there is almost nothing to say about what texts should be or do, since we have decided a priori that they cannot be or do anything. Here the question of whether “the subaltern” can “speak” acquires a certain keenness, as when Santiago Colás considers the implications of antirepresentationalism for the aesthetics of “testimonio,” the first-person literature of witness written by a nonliterary person in “a native voice”; if representations are inevitably self-referential, then of what value can a testimonio be? Must a testimonio such as that of Rigoberta Menchú either make a false promise to represent a pure, unadulterated, authentic history, or else ground itself in some transcendent position “beyond representation,” as George Yúdice argues? Could there be an authoritarian subtext in Menchú’s claim to speak for or represent the experience of her Guatemalan Indian community—a claim perhaps epistemologically undermined by the very fact that Menchú is *writing*, a fact that already makes her “unrepresentative” of this community?<sup>1</sup>

More generally, Colás raises the question: must a radical aesthetic either “reject representation altogether,” or else simply “return to representation” like the rest of the demoralized and defeated Latin American left wing? Is there yet, as Colás suggests, the possibility of “a contestatory, oppositional discourse that seeks to reoccupy and redefine—not escape or flee—the terrain of representation”?<sup>2</sup> This question, unfortunately, is posed in the absence of a certain historical context—the memory of an anarchist critique of aesthetic representation.

One precursor of testimonio is the tradition of *littérature prolétarienne*, of which the anarchist Henry Poulaille was one of the first exponents. Writing

in the time of Eugène Jolas's Modernist "Revolution of the Word" and Henri Barbusse's marxist conception of "proletarian" literature, Poulaille rejected the former as "bourgeois" and the latter as mere "littérature à thèse."<sup>3</sup> An anarchist literature of testimony or "témoignage," as Poulaille imagined it, could be neither antirepresentationalist, an exercise in aestheticism disconnected from social life, nor a mere "vehicle for ideas," representing a fixed ideology anchored outside the social experience it bore witness to. Its "revolutionary character" would be neither-nor, different, other.<sup>4</sup>

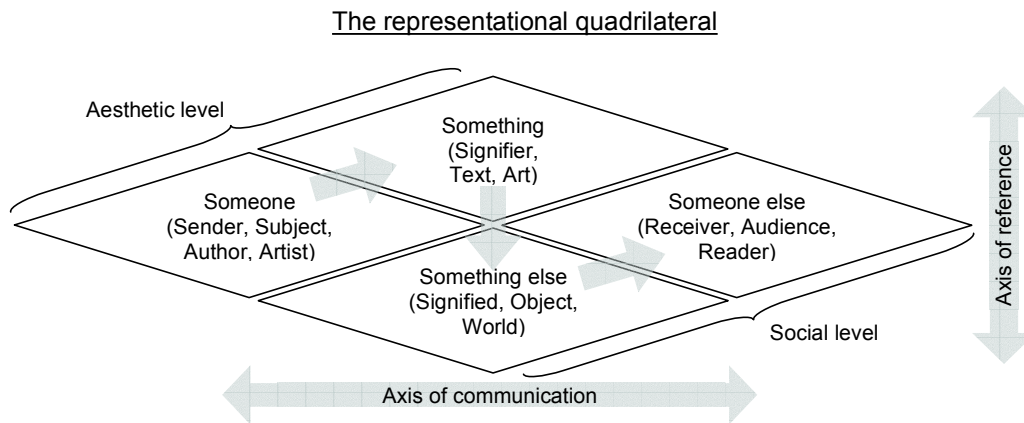
Neither Poulaille's name, nor the names of his primary theoretical sources, Lazare and Proudhon, appear in contemporary discussions of aesthetic representation. They form a tradition outside the modern and postmodern aesthetics to which I now turn.

### REFUSALS OF AESTHETIC REPRESENTATION

Since both modern and postmodern artworks engage in a critique of representation, it is notoriously difficult to make rigorous historical distinctions between modernism and postmodernism in terms of techniques or effects. For David Harvey, the aesthetic roots of the postmodern go back to the "crisis of representation" produced by the financial and political upheavals of 1847–48, while Lyotard calls Montaigne's essays "postmodern." According to Michael Berubé, "every attempt to define postmodern fiction in stylistic terms . . . winds up being a definition of modernist fiction as well." In the end, it seems, postmodern antirepresentationalism looks an awful lot like the modern variety.<sup>5</sup>

If neither the specific devices employed by postmodern writers nor their immediate effects are sufficient to distinguish postmodernism as a literary movement or tendency belonging to a specific historical period, then what is more distinctive to the period is the way in which writers and readers alike conceptualize the *purpose* of these devices and their effects. While both modernism and postmodernism propose a certain critique of representation, then, Craig Owens suggests that the *form* of this antirepresentationalism changes, so that modernist techniques and effects are turned to different ends in postmodern art. Modernism, Owens argues, "proclaimed the autonomy of the signifier, its liberation from the 'tyranny of the signified,'" while postmodernism opposes "the tyranny of the *signifier*, the violence of its law."<sup>6</sup>

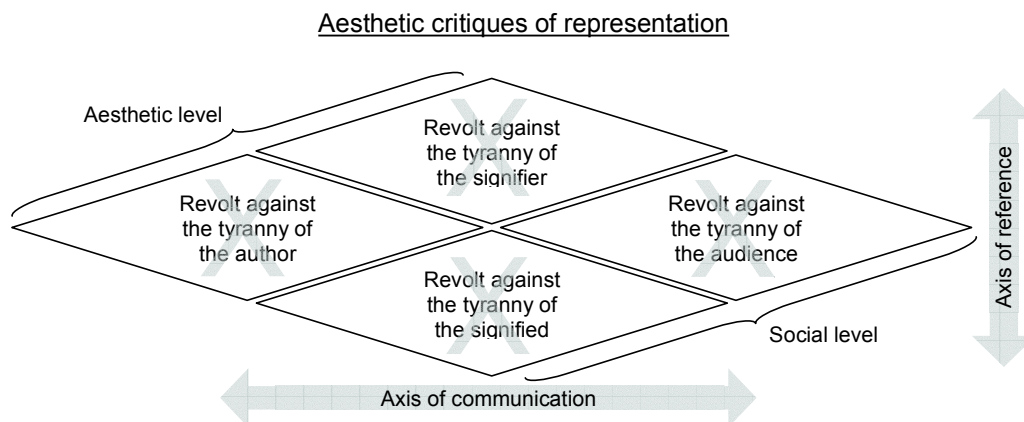
This scheme is too simple, since it only addresses two of the four moments of W. J. T. Mitchell's quadrilateral diagram of representation. Representation, Mitchell writes, entails a relationship between four key elements: a *something* (signifier) through which *someone* (sender) communicates *something else* (signified) to *someone else* (receiver): Cutting from the left-hand



to the right-hand quadrant is the “axis of communication” or speaking-to; connecting the upper to the lower quadrant is what Mitchell calls the “axis of representation” proper,<sup>7</sup> which I would call the axis of reference or standing-for (“representation” rather involves at least the leftmost three quadrants, and ultimately the entire quadrilateral). We could call the ensemble of the top and left quadrants of the quadrilateral, comprising the artist in relation to the art object, the “aesthetic level,” with the other side, comprising the audience’s relation to meaning, forming a “social level.”

Accordingly, we can distinguish in modernist and postmodernist departures from norms of communication and referentiality in art a number of critiques of representation, revolts not only against the respective tyrannies of signifier and signified but also against those of the artist (sender) and the audience (receiver):

Using this second table to classify the welter of modern and postmodern aesthetics, we find that programs aiming at the emancipation of the audience from the burden of being represented or spoken for by artists and their works occupy the upper left-hand corner; metafiction, parody, ironic self-deflation (particularly romantic irony), and self-referentiality or reflexivity in general,



aiming at the emancipation of temporal Being from the arrogance of a static discourse that claims to stand for or reveal its truth, occupies the upper right-hand corner; a wide variety of formalist, abstractionist, minimalist, absurdist, and aestheticist programs for the emancipation of art from the burden of standing for a meaning or representing a world occupy the lower left-hand corner; even more hermetic or hedonistic aestheticist, aleatory, and expressivist programs, meant to emancipate artists from the audience's demands to speak for or be representative of it, occupy the lower right-hand corner.

What unites modernism and postmodernism, let us say, is their identity as avant-garde movements with conscious, articulate programs—this despite the objections of scholars like Mike Featherstone to lumping postmodernism in with other avant-gardes.<sup>8</sup> Granted, many postmodern artworks blur the line between high culture and popular culture, but so did any number of modernist works: the Futurists and Dadas appropriated the typographical style of poster art, Joyce and Dos Passos made use of the newspaper format, the Surrealists tinkered with the commercial cinematic imagery of the *Fantômas* movies, *film noir* returned the favor by translating the alienated, nihilistic impulses of German Expressionism into narrative film, and so on. Conversely, even if the history of postmodernism fails to constitute itself as a long series of isms (Orphism, Vorticism, Cosmism, Abstract Expressionism, etc.), it does present us with groups and group identities—e.g., the Black Mountain Poets, the Apocalyptics, the Beats, Pop Art, the Factory, and so on.

Besides, I am thinking in a more general way of the history of avant-gardes, particularly in terms of Graeber's discussion of the emergence of the concept, which he links to a utopian desire for "a society . . . premised on less alienated forms of creativity," importantly expressed not only through radical works of art, but through a bohemian experiment in the possibility of "new and less alienated modes of life." So it is that Derrida, exemplar of the postmodern, writes of Artaud, paragon of modernism, that he "attempted to destroy a history, the history of the dualist metaphysics . . . of the body and the soul which supports, secretly of course, the duality of speech and existence, of the text and the body"—and, we might add, of art and life.<sup>9</sup> Both modern and postmodern forms of antirepresentationalism are attempts to collapse the duality between the two halves of the quadrilateral of representation, to reabsorb the aesthetic into the social or the social into the aesthetic.

Here, modernists and postmodernists find some important common ground with anarchists old and new. In particular, a recent strain in anarchist theory associated with contemporary writers such as John Zerzan, Fredy Perlman, David Watson, Hakim Bey, and John Moore has taken aesthetic antirepresentationalism onboard as an important form of critique. One can hear an anticipation of their arguments in the 1969 manifesto that Mi-

chael Lucas published in *Anarchos*, wherein it is asserted that the very existence of a realm of practice separate from everyday life, art as an institution, is in itself a symptom of alienation: “The generative condition of art is the dichotomy of man with himself and with reality. . . . In its negativity art is because man is *not*.” Thus, Moore finds anarchists articulating a critique of aesthetic representation through a rhetoric of “abolition,” the route taken by Lucas and Zerzan, or one of “transformation,” the favored idiom of theorists like David Watson, Hakim Bey, and Kingsley Widmer: “in either case art as it is currently constituted would disappear one way or another,” whether through its “suppression” or through its “subsumption in the broader practice of culture as creative play.”<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps we could say, then, that postmodern aesthetics continue the modern pursuit of the end of art, but in a different manner.<sup>11</sup> While it is still impossible to draw rigid boundaries between modern and postmodern aesthetics, we can generally observe that modernisms usually negate the social side of the quadrilateral in favor of the aesthetic level, while postmodernisms tend to negate the aesthetic in favor of the social. Both propose a radical interruption of the axes of communication and reference and identify the rejection of aesthetic representation with the rejection of political representation.

#### ANARCHISM AMONG THE MODERNISTS

This historic conjunction of aesthetic with political antirepresentationalism is one of the great discoveries—or rediscoveries—of the last decade and a half of research in modernist studies. Historians of art and literature like Mark and Allan Antliff, Joan Halperin, Carol Hamilton, John Hutton, David Kadlec, Patricia Leighton, Robyn Roszlak, Richard Sonn, and David Weir have shown how a series of modernist avant-gardes, from Symbolism, Expressionism, Dada, Cubism, Futurism, Constructivism, and Surrealism on the Continent to the Anglophone modernisms of Man Ray, James Joyce, and Ezra Pound, not only drew inspiration from anarchism but, in effect, constituted an anarchist aesthetic—an “anarchist modernism,” as Allan Antliff terms it.<sup>12</sup>

Studying modernism in the context of anarchism (particularly Max Stirner’s individualist variety) has provided scholars with nothing less than a new narrative about modernism. The collective oblivion following anarchism’s eclipse—that is, its apparent world-historical defeat after the First World War in America, the crushing of the Kronstadt rebellion in Russia, and the Falangist victory in Europe—obscured its history to such an extent that Leighton could write, in the significant year of 1989, that “socialism is now popularly conceived as the only revolutionary movement to have risen in the

nineteenth century.”<sup>13</sup> Subsequently, as Kadlec explains, left-wing responses to a dominant history of modern art—e.g. the Greenbergian narrative that describes as “progress” modernism’s development towards pure form without a content—identify this *telos* with a reactionary “bourgeois ‘individualism,’” privileging art with “progressive” communist commitments instead. The new narrative reinstates a third option that had been effectively ignored by previous historians: namely, “left radical anarchism.” As Weir writes, the dichotomy “between politically engaged realist art . . . and apolitical purist art” is challenged by the recognition that “much of modernist art is consistent with”—indeed, directly informed by—“the politics of anarchism.”<sup>14</sup>

Building on a well-documented history of association between anarchists and modernists (e.g., in the exchanges between anarchist circles and those of the avant-garde poets and painters of Paris in the 1880s through the 1890s, or the intensely anarchist milieu inhabited by American artists like Man Ray in the years before the First World War), the new narrative posits a *thematic* as well as a historical link between anarchism and modernism. The primary theme linking modernism and anarchism, in this new narrative, is the translation of an anarchist revolution against every form of domination into the Revolution of the Word fomented by Joyce and Jolas—that is, the translation of an anarchist refusal of *political* representation into a generalized “resistance to representation,” as Kadlec puts it,<sup>15</sup> and particularly into a refusal of *symbolic* representation. A corollary theme is that of “the fragment,” which traces the shattered style of modernism back to Max Stirner’s egoism via figures such as Oscar Wilde and Dora Marsden.<sup>16</sup> The connection between the first and the second theme is to be found in Stirner’s elaboration of an individualist politics that postulates the ego as an irreducible fragment that belongs to no group and therefore cannot be represented.

Max Stirner’s *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* (*The Ego and His Own*, or more literally, *The Unique One and Its Property*), which has been called individualist, nihilist, egoist, and even poststructuralist, seems to inform almost every direction taken by anarchist modernism. Stirner, Marx’s fellow Young Hegelian, makes his own radical inversion of Hegel: the Spirit whose cunning made toys of individual wills becomes the will of the bodily individual, the ego or *Einzige*. This sovereign self may choose to have “commerce” or “intercourse” with other individuals or not, depending on the values it assigns its varying interests, desires and whims. Prior to every thought and sign, declaring that “no concept expresses me, nothing that is designated as my essence exhausts me; they are only names,” it wages unconditional war on the categories, universals, and ideals threatening its uniqueness (“God,” “truth,” “freedom,” “humanity,” “justice,” “people,” “fatherland,” etc.), unmasking them all as mere “spooks” and “fixed ideas.”<sup>17</sup> Ultimately, for Eisenzweig, this critique is “more radical . . . than the texts of Proudhon,

Bakunin, and their successors” in its insistence on “refusing all representative systems and questioning the denotative nature of language.” Koch, Newman, and Colson agree that *The Ego and His Own* is uncannily proleptic of poststructuralist critiques of representation.<sup>18</sup>

Stirner’s subordination of social relations to individual expediency—“we have only one relation to each other, that of *usableness*, of utility, of use,” he writes; “for me, you are nothing but—my food, even as I too am fed upon and turned to use by you”—disgusted Marx, who, with Engels, spent much of *The German Ideology* attacking “Saint Max.” It likewise repelled most anarchists, whom Stirner himself never bothered to address, apart from directing a little scorn at Proudhon’s maxim that “property is theft,” for similar reasons, since theirs was primarily a socialist movement, associated with the trade unions, centered on notions of a common identity and shared values.<sup>19</sup> Nonetheless, Stirner’s work found its way into a sort of anarchist theoretical canon when it was rediscovered near the turn of the century, partly due to the devotion of a small but vocal group of individualist anarchists such as John Henry Mackay and Benjamin Tucker. It entered the milieu of the literary and artistic avant-gardes via intellectuals such as Felix le Dantec and Zo d’Axa, who interpreted Stirner for the readers of journals like *Entretiens Politiques et Littéraires* and *L’Endehors*, and Dora Marsden, whose journal *The Egoist* published her own Stirnerite analyses of politics and culture alongside the writings of Pound and Eliot.<sup>20</sup> In making of “nominalism” a weapon against the humanist who, in Stirner’s words, “takes little heed of what you are *privatim*” but “sees only what you are *generatim*,” Marsden constructed an egoist aesthetic that “would encourage a numbering of the streaks of the tulip, details stripped of the discursive apparatus that facilitates generalization.”<sup>21</sup> Marsden articulates the philosophical roots of the modernist campaign against disembodied “ideas” (William Carlos Williams) and “abstractions” (Ezra Pound) in poetry:

They are made up of misty thought-waste, confusions too entangled to be disentangled; bound together and made to look tidy by attaching an appellation-label, i.e., a sign. It is the tidiness of the sign which misleads. It is like a marmalade label attached to an empty jar. Remove the label, and confusion vanishes: we see the empty jar, the bit of printed paper, and know there is no marmalade. And so with abstract terms and ideas . . . An idea is a privileged assertion. It is seated high on a pedestal above question and offering no explanation. The only concern is to learn the most fitting form of rendering such idols allegiance—justice, law, right, liberty, equality, and the rest; each matched with a spouse, its negative. It is part of our work to shatter the pedestals.<sup>22</sup>

The anarchist project of stripping the would-be representatives of humanity of their political authority is here translated into a program stripping symbolic representations (thoughts, abstractions, ideas, signs, binary opposi-

tions) of their metaphysical authority, reducing them to their lowly, fragmentary, material origins. If “Culture is Thought,” Marsden argues, we must instead engage in “Thinking”—that is, the “destruction of Thought.”<sup>23</sup>

In so arguing, Marsden rephrases arguments made over seventy years earlier by Stirner himself in an essay for the *Rheinische Zeitung*. Here, he argues that the only liberatory role for art to play is that of the negative “comedy” that destroys accumulated thought: “Comedy, as befitting its essence, probes into every holy area, even into Holy Matrimony, for this itself is no longer—in the actual marriage—Holy. It is rather an emptied form, to which man should no longer hold.” However, where comic art plays a useful role “in openly displaying the emptiness, or better, the deflation of the . . . old belief,” it tends to do so merely in order to clear the way for a new fetish; the nihilistic moment in comedy is merely idealism showing its disappointed face before it recovers its spirits.<sup>24</sup> Thus, as Paul Goodman observes, Shakespeare’s *Henry* plays subject the feudal ideal of “honor,” with its antique ideal of “personal allegiance to the chief,” to a throughgoing comic deflation: “What is honour?” Falstaff asks rhetorically. “A word . . . What is that word honour? air.” Nonetheless, the impetus of comic art is to “form again” or re-form the discarded ideal:

By the end of the sixteenth century, when *Henry IV* was written—and Cervantes was writing *Don Quixote*—the old feudalism was dead and gone. . . . And honor has become air.

Yet in the same Histories, Shakespere tried to give the word “honour” a new lease on life, as national patriotism, for instance in Henry V’s speech on Crispin’s Day at Agincourt. Honor was now securely fastened to the ideology of dying for England and being a household word in every English mouth. It is likely that Shakespere himself believed in the renewed word—at least he consigns Falstaff to disgrace—and patriotic honor certainly proved to have vitality and reality for the nation-states for a couple of centuries.<sup>25</sup>

Ordinarily, then, art plays the recuperative role of cultural guardian, providing the world’s Matthew Arnolds with a surrogate for waning faith: “even comedy, as all the arts, precedes religion, for it only makes room for the new religion, to that which art will form again.” Stirner’s pragmatism in dictating that all anything and anyone can be is “an object in which I take an interest or else do not, an interesting or uninteresting object,” dictates that art, like everything else of the world of ideas, can only be an instrument, one that must be thrown away after its has worn out its usefulness, lest it become a new spook or *idée fixe* dominating the subject.<sup>26</sup>

For art can and will act as a force for domination. “Art creates disunion, in that it sets the Ideal over and against man,” Stirner writes; “this disunion is called by another name—*religion*.”<sup>27</sup> Men and women possessed by a religious attitude project ideal selves “over and against” their real selves, then



strive to match these ideals, to fit themselves to the Procrustean bed of an abstraction: as Marsden remarks, “the Symbol . . . is not even an approximation to anything in life, but is the tracery of an arrangement among dead things which accidentally Life, in its passage through, has left. Is Life restive inside the Symbol? Then Life must learn Duty.”<sup>28</sup> In ostensibly post-theological discourses like Marx’s, this striving after the unattainable ideal reappears as “alienation,” the separation of one’s false, fragmented, merely apparent being from one’s potential, whole, true self. This is precisely what Stirner’s account of the *Einzigste* is designed to counter: “The true man does not lie in the future, an object of longing, but lies, existent and real, in the present . . . I am it, I am the true man.” For Stirner, as for Baudrillard, the notion of alienation, in postulating subjects as incomplete fragments of an emergent whole, is *itself* alienating: “What an absurdity it is to pretend that men are ‘other,’ to try to convince them that their deepest desire is to become ‘themselves’ again! Each man is totally there at each instant.” The *Einzigste* only manifests itself, however, as an unrepresentable “creative nothing” that subsumes everything: “all things are nothing to me.”<sup>29</sup>

For Marsden and Stirner, this emptiness or lack of essence in the subject renders every representation of it a lie, every “effort to mirror life” a crippling form of “submission.” When the empty subject looks in the “mirror” of its own “Intellect,” becoming “self-conscious,” it makes a drastic error:

Intellect, like fire, is a good servant but a bad master . . . in place of being directed it becomes director: in place of its performances being judged by Soul . . . it begins to judge the Soul—to prove that the Soul is not there in short, and establishes itself in its place. . . . In pressing its mirror back upon the inner life and failing to find the spatial qualities with which alone it has experience, Intellect has adopted one of three courses: either it has maintained that it could detect nothing there distinct from itself, or that the something which existed was identical with itself, or finding nothing but being conscious of a vague uneasiness, it has faked up false images and declared that these are what it found.<sup>30</sup>

Here Marsden, like many other individualist anarchists at the turn of the century, blends Stirner’s declaration that “thinking and its thoughts are not sacred to me” with Bergson’s rejection of the Kantian belief that all “experience” is “infra-intellectual” to project an aesthetic for which, as the anarchist painter Signac declared, “the subject is nothing, or at least is . . . not more important than all the other elements, colour, drawing, composition.” Thus, as Kristeva points out, from the nineteenth century through the early twentieth, “It seems thus that certain anarchist tendencies, far from stopping at the contestation of social and official structures, assert a major transformation of the concept of the speaking subject itself,” both in the political and aesthetic fields.<sup>31</sup> It is in keeping with the logic of this antirepresentational aesthetic that the work of radically questioning “the speaking subject” is

assigned to “one who . . . will struggle with all of his individuality, with a personal effort, against bourgeois and official conventions”: what often appears to be a suggestion that the artist owes the *world* an act of “self-effacement” is actually a strategy whereby “the artist exercises individualism by negating it, or rather, by appearing to negate it,” since the work of art is taken to “embody the political ideal of egoism merely by its existence, so that individualist politics is enacted through aesthetic practice.” It is significant that even T. S. Eliot, a conservative for whom “anarchy” is merely synonymous with “futility,” should publish his call for the poet to pursue “a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality” in the pages of Marsden’s *The Egoist*.<sup>32</sup>

It is in just these terms (at least initially) that the anarchist Max Baginski attacks traditional Western drama in a 1906 issue of Emma Goldman’s journal *Mother Earth*, impeaching its claim to represent the human subject. In the drama’s representational pretense, he finds a disciplinary institution:

The inscription over the Drama in olden times used to be, “Man, look into this mirror of life; your soul will be gripped in its innermost depths, anguish and dread will take possession of you in the face of this rage of human desire and passion. Go ye, atone and make good.”

Even Schiller entertained this view when he called the Stage a moral institution. It was also from this standpoint that the Drama was expected to show the terrible consequences of uncontrolled human passion, and that these consequences should teach man to overcome himself. “To conquer oneself is man’s greatest triumph.”

This ascetic tendency, incidentally part of chastisement and acquired resignation, one can trace in every investigation of the value and meaning of the Drama, though in different forms.<sup>33</sup>

The very claim of the drama to hold up a truth-telling mirror to the spectator is, on this account, a deception, and moreover a religious one, calculated to evoke a guilty fear of “uncontrolled human passion,” and thus to justify forms of control and rule: once again, “Life must learn Duty,” only this time, not from the projection of an ideal self beyond the real self, but from the very reverse—the projection of a bad self that one is simultaneously to *identify with* and *reject* (producing another kind of disunion). What one sees in the representational medium of the dramatic mirror is not a neutral description of life, but an aggressively moralistic prescription: *This is how you should not live*. A robust, self-affirming individual, however, ought to see through these representational scare tactics: knowing himself or herself to be unique, and affirming rather than fearing his or her own desire, an *Einzig*e should laugh at these false reflections in the tragic mirror.

In this way, Baginski formulates one version of the antirepresentational stance in relation to art: the very stance that the Dadas, led by Hugo Ball

(an assiduous reader of Bakunin and Kropotkin, familiar as well with Gustav Landauer and Otto Gross) were to take up a decade later. As Robert Varisco notes, Dada was not merely anarchic in the frequently noted sense of being chaotic and “anti-sensical,” but in the way that it programmatically “turned its face away from recognizable representation.”<sup>34</sup> In Tristan Tzara’s *Le Coeur au Gaz*, the sort of conventional drama in which “clearly delineated identities permitted the action to proceed in an orderly fashion” became a target. Whereas the protagonist of the traditional drama impeached by Baginski is a richly rounded “character,” Tzara sees any such unified, specular identity as a lie and a trap. Instead of characters, we are presented with “general, undisguised body parts as names for the play’s characters: Eye, Mouth, Nose, Ear, Neck, and Eyebrow; Tzara thus deconstitutes customary dramaturgical organization and re-constitutes a spontaneous, revolution/riot-type (mob formation) anonymity . . . They jockey for position above their squirming audience, anesthetizing the hall with ravings and gibbering.” Rather than presenting an organically unified subject, Tzara gives us organs at odds with one another—a riotous “mob” or “anarchist swarm.”<sup>35</sup> Where traditional drama encourages us to recapitulate our *méconnaissance* of ourselves in the coherent whole of a self-representation, Dada antirepresentationalism gives us something remarkably like the state of fragmentation we occupy prior to the mirror stage—a dis-organ-ized body: that which Deleuze and Guattari name, following Antonin Artaud, the “organless body.”<sup>36</sup>

Just as “Dadaists believed that language, like other representational art forms . . . had become a tool bankrupt of artistic probity, one which effectively buoyed ideological power structures,” so Symbolist aesthetes such as Mallarmé, seeking a “purified poetry,” took on board an anarchist critique of representation. In fin-de-siècle Paris, indeed, the Symbolist poets were so closely involved with the anarchists that Sonn speaks of them as “dual libertarian avant-gardes.” In this milieu, as Kristeva remarks, “writers engaged in an investigation into the liberation of the subject in language encounter the preoccupations of anarchists, the combat against social structures,” engaging in a bilateral exchange of ideas.<sup>37</sup>

Among other things, individualist anarchists and Symbolist aesthetes agreed on the need to protect what Alfred Jarry called the “sacred disorder of my spirit” from the menace of an administered world and its rationalist representational systems. Together, they came to see language as having been corrupted by commercialization and propaganda; for Mallarmé, “the attitude of a poet in an epoch like this one, in which he is on strike against society, is to put aside all the corrupt means that may offer themselves to him.”<sup>38</sup> Since, for Symbolist aesthetes like Maurice Devaldès, “communication” had in some sense become impossible, it became “irrelevant” as well: *silence*, whether figurative (in the sense of withdrawing from a shared, publicly accessible language) or literal (in the case of Rimbaud, whose desertion

of poetry some have taken to be the prototypically modernist act), became an aesthetic protest against the banalization and mediocrity of modern existence—ultimately, the means by which the poet could escape from the constraints of the social symbolic order. The modern word, as defined by Mallarmé, is precisely that which refuses complicity with the “system of representation” to which writer and readers are subjected.<sup>39</sup>

Here, once again, we can see how a certain critique of the unified subject—that figure whose commanding eye projects the visual space of the theater of representation, whose retrospective gaze brings all the fragmentary moments of action into the end-shaped unity of a plot<sup>40</sup>—is paradoxically compatible with an egoist politics, since this subject is seen as a false image or a reified structure imposing itself on the unnamable. If the self is actually a creative nothingness, “a fluctuating element,” as Herbert Read writes, then it cannot be fixed through mimetic “mirror knowledge” or “representation,” and “we . . . cannot *know* a self; we can only *betray* our self. . . . All art is in this sense an unconscious self-betrayal.” Accordingly, for Read, the lesson of Stirner’s *Ego and His Own* was its warning against “surrendering one’s self to an abstraction, to an illusion of any kind,” including the illusion of an ideal, unified self: “the Self (with a capital S) is not an essence to which the self (with a small s) must pay homage.”<sup>41</sup> For Hugo Ball, one could “discard the Ego like a coat full of holes” precisely because “man has many Egos, just as the onion has many skins. It is not a matter of one Ego more or less. The center is still made of skins.” Likewise, in poetry, the unrepresentable uniqueness of the ego could not express itself in a language of communication, whose function, as Nietzsche says, is to “make the uncommon common.” Thus, for the Dadaists, the fluctuating self could be recognized in “a fluctuating style,” an anarchist aesthetic in which “the separate parts of the sentence, even the individual vocables and sounds, regain their autonomy.” Seen in this light, the decadent art that has most frequently been depicted as a mere aesthetic reflection or symptom of modern urban anomie can be reinterpreted as a deliberate “expression of anarchist politics” in the form of “aesthetic individualism.”<sup>42</sup>

For Kristeva, as Moore explains, poetry manifests radical force only in a “refusal of meaning,” the embrace of “incoherence.” Ordinary discourse, in presenting itself as a transparent conduit of meaning, subjects us to a repressive, socially governed structure of signification. Poetry, conversely, instead of concealing its artifice, produces a “crisis, explosion, or shattering” that makes this artifice visible. The overthrow of the speaking subject through poetic fragmentation reveals the fragmentary, disunified nature of the pre-linguistic self, liberating it from its semantic prison.<sup>43</sup> Thus, while chiding Mallarmé for his reticence about politics, which amounted to a “refusal to consider the possibility of a political activity that would be simultaneous to textual activity,” she agrees with him that politically committed art is self-

canceling, nonrevolutionary. “One cannot ask that ‘art’ . . . emit a message which would be considered ‘positive,’” she declares; since art is only “ethical” in *destroying* the language within which this “message” could be carried, the language that situates self in relation to society, “the univocal enunciation of such a message would itself represent a suppression of the ethical function as we understand it.” As an attack on representation, art’s social mission consists in its *violation* of the social; it has a “social-anti-social function.”<sup>44</sup> The negation of an illusory selfhood is the liberation of ego as “creative nothing”; the refusal of ethico-political commitment in favor of autonomous aesthetics is itself an ethics and politics of autonomy *in an aesthetic form*.

Thus, as Sonn observes, the “politicization of aesthetes” in fin-de-siècle France was matched by an “aestheticization of politics.” While poets elaborated this critique of representation into a style of hermetic “incommunicability,” some anarchists turned toward a similarly solitary and antisocial practice. After the 1876 Berne conference, anarchists turned to a practice of “propaganda by the deed” which is held to be revolutionary precisely by virtue of being pure of all representation, all signification—one for which communication is no longer relevant.<sup>45</sup> If bombings such as the ones rending the Restaurant Foyot and the Café Terminus in 1894 “seemed to defy logic,” writes Howard G. Lay, this could be taken to demonstrate how “in the absence of authorial identity and interpretive legibility . . . [an] explosive ‘!’ was liable to stretch language to its limits, to reveal both its ideological constitution and its deficiencies as a system of representation, to contest both its powers of containment and its capacity to establish the parameters of cognition.”<sup>46</sup> This attempt “to navigate around the referential trap of language, to pass beyond the cognitive borders that governments and language both patrol” drew approval from Symbolists like Mallarmé, who compared poems to anarchists’ bombs, and Laurent Tailhade, who after Vaillant’s bombing of the Chamber of Deputies commented, “What do the victims matter if the gesture is beautiful? What does the death of some unidentified persons matter if, by it, the individual is affirmed?”<sup>47</sup> Spontaneous, individual violence, as the epitome of “the nonutilitarian act,” functioned as an *embodiment* rather than a *representation* of the individual’s desires. Thus, art critic Félix Fénéon undertook his own bombing, while the poet Pierre Quillard re-described Symbolist poetry as “an eminent form of propaganda by the deed,” praising its “destructive power.”<sup>48</sup>

This valuation of “dynamic embodiment”—action, force, and motion—over the “static,” abstract intellectuality of representation was embraced by another explicitly anarchist avant-garde, the *Action d’Art* group founded by Gérard Lacaze-Duthiers, André Colomer, and Geraldo Murillo, whose aesthetic philosophy combined Wilde’s endorsement of *l’art pour l’art*, Bergsonian and Nietzschean irrationalism, and Stirnerite egoism.<sup>49</sup> Echoing

Bergson's argument that "representation" is merely the reflex of blocked, delayed, or frustrated "action," Lacaze-Duthiers declared "action" to be more "concrete," more "sensory," hence more "real" than "the word and writing," the resorts of mere "chatterers" and "soapbox speechmakers." It is in this spirit that Herbert Read would later write admiringly of the Action painters that their works "are not the result of any process of reflection"—in the sense both of introspection and mimesis: "there did not first exist an object, or even an internal feeling, for which the artist then found an equivalent symbol." Rather, they present "a Gestalt that has not yet been organized for formal communication—that is still free."<sup>50</sup>

The Bergsonian valorization of *le Geste*, action, and intuition over "reflection," ideation, and intellect, as Georges Sorel advocates in his *Reflections on Violence* (translated into English by T. E. Hulme in 1912<sup>51</sup>), links anarcho-modernist resistance to representation with a revolt against the domination of the ego by reason, which after all is a matter of following rules, signifying, and making sense. In place of Dadaist negation and Symbolist silence, therefore, the Surrealists proposed nonsense—bending rather than breaking the representational mirror. Despite this limited use of mimetic illusionism, Surrealists maintained a critique of any commonsense notion of referentiality. Magritte declared that his famous painting *The Human Condition*, in which he "placed in front of a window, seen from inside a room, a painting representing exactly that part of the landscape which was hidden from view by the painting," was an analogy for "how we see the world: we see it as being outside ourselves even though it is only a mental representation of it that we experience inside ourselves."<sup>52</sup> The limited embrace of a representational practice becomes a means to question the epistemology of representationalism.

Set diametrically against the claims of bourgeois and socialist realism alike, this anarchist modernism claims the broadest possible privileges for the "peculiar consciousness of the artist," defined in terms hostile to *all* forms of sociality, whether those produced by capitalist conformism or socialist collectivism.<sup>53</sup> Just as Pound declares in *The Egoist* that the Vorticist artist is "born to rule," while Marsden declares that "what I want is *my* state . . . the world should be moulded to my desire if I could so mould it" and Artaud imagines the figure of "the crowned anarchist," members of *Action d'Art* paradoxically crown themselves "Artistocrats" to express their Nietzschean master morality.<sup>54</sup> Consequently, the only appropriate relationship between Artistocrats is what Colomer calls "La Bande," a collective project that "can only exist through the conscious will of the individuals who form it."<sup>55</sup> The inspiration for this conception would appear to be Stirner's proposal for a limited form of social cooperation, a Union of Egoists, which is never allowed to become anything more than the "instrument" of the individuals who engage in it. Like Stirner, Colomer also defines "society" as

an alienated instrument that instrumentalizes its creators, a contract whose “conditions” are unconditionally imposed on each by all; the Artistocrat refuses to be a party to these conventions, as to any “which he was not the author of.”<sup>56</sup>

Rather than participate in society as its subject, an Artistocrat aspired to be self-authoring, both authorized and created by his or her own ineffable selfhood, in something like the manner of Foucault’s *askesis* or aesthetico-ethical “care of the self.” Just as Ball had proposed that artists “adopt symmetries and rhythms instead of principles” and Erich Mühsam had proclaimed the artist’s “thoroughly unethical character” in opposition to every regime of control, the philosophy of *Artistocratie* substituted aesthetic values for ethical values: one was to “make of his existence a work of art.”<sup>57</sup> Conversely, the artwork itself was to *enact* the individual’s freedom from constraints: “Artistocratic art was beautiful by virtue of its utter individuality and complete separation from anything construed as ‘social.’” The artist, in short, in joining an aesthetico-social body without organs, is enjoined to represent nothing and no one, fulfilling Ball’s prophecy that one could “reach an incomprehensible, unconquerable sphere” by abjuring the “dreary, lame, empty language of men in society.”<sup>58</sup>

The connection between individualist anarchism and aesthetic abstraction, however paradoxical—Stirner, after all, condemns “abstraction” as “lifeless” and propounds an instrumentalism seemingly incompatible with the aesthetics of disinterestedness entailed in *l’art pour l’art*—makes sense when framed as the artist’s refusal to subject himself or herself to the signifying regime of a social audience by representing a subject: thus, as Tzara asserts, “DADA is the mark of abstraction.” “Abstraction in art,” reasoned the Stirnerite anarchist John Weichsel in an influential manifesto in Alfred Stieglitz’s journal *Camera Work*, is “the index . . . of the artist’s anarchistic freedom from socially-imposed aesthetic demands through the affirmation of his own expressive individualism.”<sup>59</sup> Formalism, condemned as apolitical by Marxists, is understood by its originators as a means of revolt against authority far more far-reaching than “bourgeois and Marxist aesthetics,” which “subordinate [art] to an ideal,” could ever be. Where politically committed art reduces its rebellion to finite, identifiable “theses,” Moore argues, “the coherence of its discourse indicates its lawfulness”; the truly subversive text, however devoid of a thesis it may be, achieves a more thoroughgoing rebellion by disrupting the very laws of discourse, destroying coherence itself. That is to say, works of anarchist modernism distinguish themselves not by what they *say*, since saying emanates from a self who is subject to a structure, but by what they *do*: even when taking place in the medium of words, what transpires is a gesture, an action. “In the beginning,” writes Lacaze-Duthiers, quoting Goethe’s revision of Genesis, “was the deed.”<sup>60</sup>

It is this deed, this performative gesture, which may be most characteristic

of anarchist modernism in its many forms. The seeming diversity of modernist styles, Harry Redner argues, from Mallarmé to Malevich, from Kafka to Cocteau, conceals a programmatic, a *pragmatic* unity: all enactments of “an anti-representationalist aesthetic” whose “political import . . . is stated by Theda Shapiro: ‘modern art is the ultimate act of anarchism.’”<sup>61</sup>

### THE IMPASSE OF ANARCHIST MODERNISM

The violent implications of a modernist flight away from representation ought to be enough to give us pause; if terrorist *propagande par le fait* was the practical corollary of the formalist embrace of *incommunicabilité*, history records the dismal practical results of this anti-intellectual fetish of action among anarchists. First of all, while earning applause from “literati and artists,” terrorism may have actually contributed to the well-being of a political elite that was otherwise in serious trouble, conveniently drawing public attention away from the scandals of power. Indeed, some investigators have pointed to evidence that the enthusiasm of a few anarchists for violent revenge on the State was supplemented by the State itself via agents provocateurs and even “phoney attentats.” Furthermore, as Lay observes, the supposedly sublime unreadability of the terrorist’s bomb “was immediately delimited by the discourses to which it was accordingly conjoined”: the juridical discourse that pinned the act to an agent (the “perpetrator” as author or final referent), and the medical discourse that redefined the act as “a *symptom* (of a sociopathic personality) rather than a *statement* (of revolutionary intransigence),” as well as the novelistic discourse of writers such as Henry James (*The Princess Cassamassima*), Joseph Conrad (*The Secret Agent*), and G. K. Chesterton (*The Man Who Was Thursday*), which helped to cement the public perception of anarchists as pathologically violent miscreants.<sup>62</sup>

Indelibly associated with lunacy and criminal violence, turned into fodder for thrilling novels, the anarchist movement was in danger of becoming permanently estranged from the working classes whose cause it championed. In the end, the unreadable act only gave way to “readerly gratification” and a return to “the congenial placidity of false consciousness.”<sup>63</sup> Meanwhile, in Sorel’s hands, the ideology that valorized violent action over communication and cognition became part of the intellectual armory of a new European movement, one that, like anarchism, held the representational pretenses of bourgeois democracy in contempt—namely, fascism.

The anarchist movement only managed to return to health when the infatuation with immediate revenge gave way to a renewed commitment to organized struggle. For these purposes, a reading of anarchist theory that set the gesture (action without legitimation, pure deed, pure violence) against repre-



sentation (theorization, propaganda work, entry into public discourse) was not only incompatible with the ethical premises of anarchism, but no longer even ideologically useful or tenable; ultimately, the policy of propaganda by the deed, as the operation of “a tiny band of the ‘elect’ substituting itself and making the choices for everybody,” proved inconsistent, not only with the basic populist thrust of the movement, but with its own antirepresentationalist premises:<sup>64</sup> even as the lone terrorist functioned as a scapegoat for State crimes, he became the icon of a quasi-religious cult of martyrdom. As terror increasingly became the pretext for an emergent police state (complete with domestic spying, repressive legislation, and public executions), the appeal of individual violence faded, even for the minority who had embraced it at first; instead, theories emphasizing social relationships (anarcho-communism) and the formation of shared identities (anarcho-syndicalism) came to the fore of the movement.<sup>65</sup>

Apart from the historical failure of antirepresentationalism as a political practice, there is another major problem with the history that reduces anarchism to the aesthetics of modernism: its flat historical redundancy. “For better or worse,” as Weir remarks, “in today’s postmodern, postrevolutionary society, anarchy itself is a sign of culture.” In our time, according to Andrei Codrescu, the culture of individualism has already *won*; in the endless stream of fragmentary, libidinal, often surreal images circulating through our media, anarchist modernism seems to carry the day.<sup>66</sup> Decadence is positively respectable, and the rebellion of the unique ego against the masses is a mass-marketed product. If commercial culture has learned to market individuality, then the rediscovery of an individualist aesthetic is politically belated indeed. What was once an experiment and a political act is now so nearly an official style, a “new ‘cultural dominant.’” Indeed, as Graeber acknowledges, it is possible that “insofar as bohemians actually were an avant garde, they were really the vanguard of the market itself, or more precisely, of consumerism”—the hip white kids who settle in the rough, scary neighborhoods of outlaw desires only to help developers commodify them into loft apartments, boutiques, and upscale restaurants, the cutting edge of gentrification.<sup>67</sup> The multiplicity of desires unleashed by capitalism are, at least in the ruling economies, readily satisfied by capital itself. Individualist anarchy is indeed a sign of capitalist culture, only it hasn’t gotten us anywhere: to the extent that we are socially fragmented, we are no more free.

It was partially in response to the growing sense that earlier waves of modernist anarchy were being recuperated by the system that the last great push for a “rejection of representation” as the refusal of audience and signification came in the form of Action Painting or Abstract Expressionism. As Zerzan recounts, artists such as Mark Rothko, Clyfford Still, Adolph Gottlieb, and Barnett Newman, most of whom in fact had explicit commitments to anarchist politics, castigated surrealism for what they deemed its “conservative

representationalism” in incorporating elements of recognizable empirical reality. “Action paintings,” by contrast, “do not ‘stand for’ anything outside themselves, and in the autonomy of the artistic act imply an autonomy in the world.”<sup>68</sup> Specifically, they claimed an absolute autonomy from the demands of the public for “the social art, the intelligible art, the good art”—producing instead “something that fills utterly the sight and can’t be used to make life only bearable.”<sup>69</sup>

The very negativity, the almost purely destructive character of anarchist modernism defined it as unsustainable. “Anarchist texts,” Moore suggests, “are in a sense suicide notes, but notes left by suicides who expect to survive the leap into the unknown, anticipating the miraculous existence of utopia on the other side of the abyss.” Here he recalls Sontag’s cautionary note that the pursuit of an ever more perfect silence is not a sustainable program. Indeed, Moore recognizes that “anarchist artists risk falling into incomprehensibility.”<sup>70</sup> This is the edge over which the Abstract Expressionists leapt, one by one—many via a literal as well as a metaphorical act of suicide.

Moreover, the drive to create an art unrecuperable by capitalism—“something that would ruin the appetite of every son of a bitch who ever ate in that room,” as Rothko said of his plan for the Seagram Building murals—was, in the end, fruitless. Ultimately, Zerzan admits, even the works of Pollock and Newman succumbed to commodification: “It becomes hard to resist concluding, let me concede, that the heroic AE enterprise was destined to be a dead end, inspiring to some, but unrealizable.” Zerzan quotes the Abstract Expressionist painter Clyfford Still, who reflected after the fact that, in the face of the “cool, universal Buchenwald” constructed with the active collusion of authoritarian Bauhaus and Proletkult modernisms, anarchist modernisms had proved useless: “All the devices were at hand, and all the devices had failed to emancipate.”<sup>71</sup>

Was this not, then, the limit-case of anarchist modernism? George Marcus and Michael Fischer trace the emergence of “postmodern aesthetics” in part to the “crisis of representation” created by the *waning* of the “shock value” once possessed by modernist rejections of realist representation.<sup>72</sup> Most commentators trace the modernist moment, in turn, to the challenge posed to the arts by the rise of nineteenth-century positivist science (including, with particular relevance to the narrative arts, the science of sociology) and its technological applications (including, with special relevance for the visual arts, photography). By the end of the nineteenth century, the proliferation of modernist avant-gardes was fully underway, as Naturalist social novels and Neo-Impressionist paintings vie with Symbolist poetry either to rival the achievements of scientific and technological representation or to spurn them as unworthy. A few decades later, this contest seemed exhausted.

Magritte had already hinted, in works such as *Evening Falls* (*Le soir qui tombe*, 1964)—in which, as Gablik describes it, we look out at a landscape

through a “window [that] has shattered . . . but fragments of the landscape reappear on the broken bits of glass as they fall inside the room”—that attempts to destroy representation and meaning still left representation somehow intact. Indeed, representation had survived in the form of the “visionary” artist who “expresses” himself or herself in the work of art—as Graeber observes, a thoroughly representationalist conception in the political sense as well. From the moment that Saint-Simon coined the term “avant-garde” or “vanguard,” the concept linked the “priestly function” of artists to that of party leadership, so that ultimately avant-gardes began to imitate political vanguardists, “publishing their own manifestos [and] communiqués, purging one another, and otherwise making themselves (sometimes quite intentional) parodies of revolutionary sects.” This visionary authority had already been proclaimed by the Romantics, who seemed to want poetry to subsume the functions of both spiritual and political leadership: Blake says that poets *are* prophets, and Shelley calls poetry unacknowledged legislation—leading Paul Goodman to ask the inevitable question: does poetry then *want* the acknowledgment of Church or State? Similarly, Kenneth Burke, commenting on Read’s anarcho-modernist manifesto, *Poetry and Anarchism*, suggests that art, rather than being “the opposite of authority,” inevitably “derives its strength as much from the structure of authority as from . . . resistance”; while “the artist will tug at the limits of authority . . . authority provides the gravitational pull necessary to a work’s firm location.”<sup>73</sup>

In its critique of the signifier and the subject, then, postmodernism becomes a meditation on the complicity of modernist antirepresentationalism with representational systems, an inquiry into the source of art’s authority. According to Lyotard,

Painting obtained its letters of nobility, was placed among the fine arts, was given almost princely rights, during the Quattrocento. Since then and for centuries, it made its contribution to the fulfillment of the metaphysical and political programme for the organization of the visual and the social. Optical geometry, the ordering of values and colours in line with a Neoplatonically inspired hierarchism, the rules for fixing the high points of religious or historical legend, helped to encourage the identification of new political communities: the city, the State, the nation, by giving them the destiny of seeing everything and of making the world transparent (clear and distinct) to monocular vision.<sup>74</sup>

This vast representational project—“the intellectual counterpart of political tyranny,” as Read calls it<sup>75</sup>—was taken up, between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, by literature, particularly by realist fiction. As Elizabeth Ermarth points out, the realist novel, as “representational fiction” par excellence, is presided over by the unifying figure of the narrator, who operates as its vanishing point, a panoptical eye whose recollective gaze, located

after and often altogether outside the action—a metaphysical view-from-nowhere—“enables the many to speak as one” via an “arbitrary hindsight which unifies the field.” The “consensus” thus generated by this narration

has absolute ontologizing power. The agreement between present and past, or present and re-present, is a purely formal agreement that literally objectifies the world. Ordinarily, we may assume, we agree among ourselves about things (to the extent that we do agree) because we all live in the same world. But a close look at the conventions of realism gives rise to a disconcerting reversal: not “it exists, therefore we agree,” but the reverse, “we agree, therefore it exists.” What is objective in realism is only so because all available viewpoints agree and to the extent that they so agree . . . the very act of reading [a realistic novel] thus entails acceptance of the view that the world is a common world, a “human” world, a world that is the “same” for everyone.<sup>76</sup>

The oppressive enforcement of sameness on the different elicits submission. The “world picture” produced by this aesthetic act of “enframing,” as Heidegger would put it, is of an essentially “invariant world”; while each subject’s experience is particular, conditioned by culture and circumstances, the “representational convention” of the all-seeing narrator assures us that “if each individual could see all the world . . . all would see the *same* world.”<sup>77</sup> Once again, essentialism and representationalism ride together.

Since this task of turning the world into a picture by rendering it in its objectivity could now be taken over by technology and science, modernist art could only justify itself by either reconstituting itself as a quasi-scientific activity of controlled observation (particularly in terms of the still heavily verbal and narrative study of social relations), as in Zola’s Naturalism, or, in a manner pioneered by the Romantics, by claiming to produce representations of something more sublime or ineffable than the object world—for instance, the object world as it appears in the act of seeing (Impressionism and Neo-Impressionism), or in the act of seeing over time (Cubism), or filtered through moods (Expressionism), or refracted through the unconscious (Surrealism). In any case, classical representationalism was no longer an option.

A further problem with classicism, apart from its technological obsolescence, is its wedding of community to hierarchy. The anarchist modernism charted by Weir, Allan and Mark Antliff, and Kadlec, as a subjectivist and individualistic reaction against tradition, never resolves its relationship to community. Pound, for example, began his career under the communitarian influence of Ruskin and Morris, but came to find its neo-medieval traditionalism abhorrent and its reliance on reference unsupportable; when Pound arrived in London, modernist critics like Ford Madox Ford were already turning against Morris, and “by 1913 Pound was cursing the ‘slush’ of Pre-Raphaelite verse.”<sup>78</sup> Modernist hostility toward community vitiates attempts

“to efface the boundary between art and everyday life,” rendering them incomplete and internally incoherent. Thus, Symbolism, whose goal is to liberate art from the world, inaugurates an aestheticism (a program of abstraction or drawing away from the social), separating art from community; Dadaism, whose goal is to liberate the world from art, inaugurates a negation of the aesthetic (a program summed up in Francis Picabia’s declaration that “art must be unaesthetic in the extreme”), separating community from art—which ironically places it in apposition to aestheticism, for which art must be “useless and impossible to justify.” The final expressions of aestheticism empty art of all content, anything recognizable from everyday life: art has gotten as far away from everyday life as it can possibly get. At the same time, they strip art of any aesthetic sensuality or erotic appeal, producing “unaesthetic” art as nausea, as if to exemplify the dour Frankfurt School slogan: “To be pleased means to say Yes.”<sup>79</sup>

Robbed of any connection to “art” as a wholly separate, private institution, the community goes elsewhere for its pleasure: to art as commoditized, mass-produced “entertainment.” This so-called popular culture offers only a sham populism: images, gestures, and impulses originating outside of (and even in opposition to) the marketplace are recuperated by it and commoditized, while the overwhelming spectacle of cultural production intimidates the public into playing a passive, spectatorial role, leaving the production of art to specialists in the pay of commercial elites. Similarly, in the *Proletkult* designed for “the undifferentiated mass of the collectivist state,” as Read writes in his 1936 manifesto, *Poetry and Anarchism*, “the artist must have one aim and only one aim—to supply the public with what it wants.” Under authoritarian socialism and capitalism alike, “what this public wants is what it has wanted throughout history—sentimental tunes, doggerel verse, pretty ladies on chocolate-box lids: all that which the Germans call by the forceful word *Kitsch*.”<sup>80</sup> The “aesthetic ideal” of this cliché-ridden “kitsch” art and literature, as Milan Kundera writes, is a representation of the world “in which shit is denied and everyone acts as though it did not exist . . . kitsch excludes everything from its purview which is essentially unacceptable in human existence.” This “categorical agreement with being,” this will to believe that nothing is essentially wrong with the world, that all is well (or at least that all the problems we see are exceptions to the rule, transitory, temporary, destined for *Aufhebung*), expresses a rejection of whatever is unacceptable about the world—including the ultimate unacceptable fact, to which all the others refer: Kundera calls kitsch “a folding screen set up to curtain off death.”<sup>81</sup> Thus, kitsch encodes a “world-hatred,” a compulsive, repetitive “expression of [dominant] ‘values,’” ultimately “the enactment of the assertion that what is ought not to be,” in the words of Crispin Sartwell; rather than evoking a utopian desire for world transformation, it transforms the *existing* world into the utopia of one’s desires. In short, commercial cul-

ture provides both the sort of generalized endorsement of existence that Marx calls an opiate with the sort of generalized hatred of existence that Nietzsche calls nihilism.<sup>82</sup> To be pleased, here, means saying No to one's own concrete experience of everyday life (which certainly includes shit) and Yes to an illusion.

Here is the impasse, then, as summarized by Andreas Huyssen: "While low art . . . floods the consumer with positive models which are as abstract as they are unrealistic, the function of high art is to legitimate bourgeois domination in the cultural realm by intimidating the non-specialist, i.e., the majority of a given population."<sup>83</sup> The only two options on offer seem to be the elitist populism of consumer culture (art produced for popular consumption against elite culture but in exclusive elite interests) or the populist elitism of avant-garde modernism (art produced against elite interests by an elite for its own exclusive consumption).

Yet the modernism that once declared war on kitsch<sup>84</sup> is no longer an option: now, having exhausted its populist and anarchist energies, it appears merely *as* elitism. The refusal to communicate, to send a message in a common code, only renders artworks more recuperable: one can make them mean whatever one likes. This resignification takes place via the agency of the universal economic subject, whose absolute individuality is signaled by a resistance to all signification, whose calculating practices spring from incalculable desires, who makes of everything a property, annihilating it and taking it into its interior nothingness.

Postmodern artists have taken a more skeptical attitude toward the very "oppositional pretensions" of modernism, forgoing the "austere indecipherability" of autonomous art to operate from the belly of the beast, and abandoning the abstractionist dream of making a clean break from representation: the postmodern, Mitchell notes, appears as the reversal of minimalist abstraction and the quest for purity into the proliferation of copies and simulations, a period of "hyper-representation."<sup>85</sup> The question is: does postmodern art thereby renounce its critical function, becoming a dutiful duplicate of commodity culture? Does postmodernism dispose not only of modernism but of anarchism?

### POSTMODERN ANARCHY

To the extent that anarchism is a utopian politics,<sup>86</sup> it might seem unlikely that postmodern aesthetics could have any affinity to anarchism. The concept of "the loyal opposition" in postmodern theory militates against revolutionary political commitments *per se*, and postmodern aesthetics embrace complicity rather than seeking purity. As Linda Hutcheon writes, "postmodernism questions centralized, totalized, hierarchized, closed systems: questions, but

does not destroy”; thus, “postmodern art self-consciously acknowledges that, like mass culture, it is ideologically loaded because of its representational (and often narrative) nature.”<sup>87</sup>

Moreover, to a postmodern eye, utopias appear under the sign of Apollonian idealism, as attempts to realize ideals like freedom, happiness, equality, and justice—static, closed representations from which, inevitably, something must be *excluded*, but on which the representation surreptitiously relies. Not incidentally, that which utopias appear to exclude is that which is celebrated by postmodern theory: the Dionysian multiplicity, diversity, and flux of unruly and unpredictable desires. Where the classic utopians, from Plato and More all the way through to the communal experimenters of the nineteenth century, assumed that “truth is one, and only error is multiple,” in Judith Shklar’s words, postmodernists tend to assume the reverse.<sup>88</sup> Some postmodernists have even suggested, à la Baudrillard, that the cynicism and passivity generally displayed by the postmodern masses with regard to politics is itself the only credible politics remaining, a form of mass “resistance” to utopian ideologies of both the Left and the Right.<sup>89</sup> For a Marxist such as Eagleton, conversely, much postmodern art seems to present a cruel parody of the modernist aspiration to merge art with life: “Mayakovsky’s poetry readings in the factory yard” return as “Warhol’s shoes and soup-cans.”<sup>90</sup>

Nevertheless, Tobin Siebers argues that postmodernism, in evoking the desire for some absolute liberation of difference, *is itself* “a utopian philosophy.” This utopia of difference or “heterotopia” is conceived as the place “where community is based on the inclusion of differences, where different forms of talk are allowed to exist simultaneously, and where heterogeneity does not inspire conflict.”<sup>91</sup> Opening space for this coexistence of differences means not so much leaving representations behind as placing them all under suspicion, bracketing their claims to be connected to anything extra-representational. Accordingly, Marike Finlay locates two moments in the postmodern destruction of “representational” art that present a return of the utopian mode. First of all, this destruction stands for “the negation of what is not utopian,” the unmasking of official representations of the status quo as free, happy, just, and good. At the same time, it stands for some radically different form of relation in which the state of being a fragment would not be experienced as a wound or a deviation from any norm (such as coherence, self-similarity, or wholeness), reconceiving utopia as “*a dispersion, a dissemination, a free, unconstrained production and practice of discourse.*”<sup>92</sup> While Finlay takes Adorno and Schlegel for her primary points of reference, we can see here the return of that nexus of agreements about fragmentation and representation that constituted the common politics of anarchism and modernism. Indeed, in Ihab Hassan’s famous chart of “differences between modernism and postmodernism,” reproduced in Harvey’s *Condition of Postmodernity*, “hierarchy” is classified as modern, while “anarchy” is clas-

sified as postmodern. If Yeats's anxiously conservative modernism worried, as had Matthew Arnold, that "mere anarchy" had been "loosed upon the world," Cage's postmodernism declared, "We must make the world safe for poverty / Without dependence on government"—or, with Ferlinghetti, that it was "waiting / for the war to be fought / which will make the world safe / for anarchy."<sup>93</sup>

Thus, while a popular reading of postmodernism frames it as the collapse of modernist opposition to representation, Owens argues that it is primarily "a *critique of* representation, an attempt to use representation against itself to challenge its authority, its claim to possess some truth or epistemological value," and therefore a continuation of that anarchist project.<sup>94</sup> Postmodernism responds to the impasse posed by an obsolete classical tradition, a corrupt commercial culture, and an exhausted anarchist modernism by attempting to cobble together what it needs, in a mode of *bricolage*, from each of these sources—using elements of the commercial and the classical as a means to a kind of populism, and using a blend of classical and modernist techniques, particularly techniques of reflexivity and irony, to neutralize the conservative content of realism without a step back into abstraction.

Along these lines, Eco describes postmodernism as a step away from the kind of modernist program that "destroys" or "defaces the past" in an attempt to be free of it: "the past, since it cannot really be destroyed, because its destruction leads to silence, must be revisited; but with irony, not innocently."<sup>95</sup> That is, instead of seeking to eradicate everything that is impure in the received codes and traditional forms, a project which ends in self-annihilation, the postmodern ironist distances himself or herself from these materials by citing them, appropriating them while holding them at one remove. In doing so, the ironist restores communicative understanding. This ironic restoration, this "replenishment" of what has been "exhausted," as John Barth has it,<sup>96</sup> seems like an odd outcome for what is still a critique of representation in all its forms: is not communication synonymous with representation, since one communicates through representational signs, and what represents must, by definition, communicate something to someone? This paradox makes more sense if, as Mitchell suggests, one sees the axis of representation connecting signifier to signified as *interrupting* or *obstructing* the axis of communication connecting speaker to hearer.

Since the concern with purity is gone, postmodernism celebrates the Bakhtinian mixture of genres: all the conventions and standard tropes of the universe of low-art genres (romance, western, science fiction, mystery) spawned within the matrix of mass culture from traditional realist fiction and cinema (as if in imitation of the classical genre taxonomy of lyric, epic, dramatic, etc.) become part of the common store of imagery and styles. Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* references both Rilke and Plastic-Man comix, while Auster's *City of Glass* blends Dashiell Hammett with Wittgenstein.



Where classical realism entailed an insistence that our senses are adequate to represent an ultimately sensible world, the heteroglossic mixture of genres deployed by postmodernism suggests that “*nothing we know makes ‘a lot of sense’ and perhaps even that nothing ever could.*”<sup>97</sup>

A shift in materials and tactics is accompanied by a shift in strategy. Where anarchist modernism typically emphasized the liberation of artists and their works from a restrictive social framework—both from the bigotry of bourgeois moral codes, with their strictures as to what is and is not a proper subject for representation, and from the combined pressure of the commercial marketplace and philistine popular tastes for artists to produce representational art—anarchist postmodernism tends to take these freedoms for granted as having been won by modernism.<sup>98</sup> Instead of defending the autonomy of the artist and the artwork, an anarchist postmodernism deflates the artist’s pretensions to authority, contesting the power of art to reveal a natural realm outside of its own artifice or a transcendent truth beyond its own historical materiality. Authors and narrators are fragmented, as are the wholeness of narrative and symbol.

In *The Art of the Novel*, Milan Kundera sketches a brief history of the novel as the story of a series of attempts to represent the self. At first, the self is revealed through action, the picaresque experience of adventure on the open road; as the world becomes increasingly colonized, however, this sphere of free action diminishes, and the self resorts to revealing itself through words (the epistolary novel) and ultimately through thoughts (the stream-of-consciousness novel). Finally, with the modernism of Kafka and Beckett, the self is utterly flattened and negated by a totalitarian environment that makes personality irrelevant. Beyond this modernist *ne plus ultra*, Juliana Spahr traces how postmodern “antirepresentational impulses” are realized instead through the representation of the self as a “multiple subjectivity”—hermetic, unknowable, irreducibly fragmentary. As Sartwell writes, lived experience resists representation: “Every attempt I make to narrativize my life is radically impoverished . . . my life is no novel and cannot even be described.” In Paul Auster’s stories, the indescribability of the self, its absolute otherness to itself, is powerfully affirmed, and when his protagonists succumb to the temptation of accepting identities imposed on them as a way to “pull all these things together and make sense of them,” they take a step toward oblivion. Thus, Auster says that his *The Invention of Solitude* poses “the question of . . . whether it’s in fact possible for a person to talk to another person.”<sup>99</sup> A kind of Stirnerian self, resistant to identity, reappears.

This singular-plural self presupposes plural-singular realities. In place of a realist representation that claims veracity for itself—a mimetic matching of its own unified system of categories to a unified system of nature, so that each natural kind fits its cultural category and vice versa—postmodern fiction presents us with multiple worlds.<sup>100</sup> If, as Hubert Dreyfus and Charles

Spinoza argue, representationalism entails the essentialist assumption of an “all-embracing set of types”—in Borges’s famous analogies, a perfect Map that would cover the Empire point for point, or a perfect language whose noun structure would exactly fit the structure of really existing things—then an antirepresentationalist approach would dispense with this unified picture of things, acknowledging the creativity of language and embracing the coexistence of many realities.<sup>101</sup> Gianni Vattimo defines postmodern beauty in terms of this ontological fecundity, the proliferation of “possible life worlds,” rather than the reduction of the manifold to unity, à la Percy Bysshe Shelley.<sup>102</sup> As Bruce Sterling observes, this antirepresentationalist pluralism underlies many of the techniques of postmodern fiction: in a manner notably dramatized by Burroughs’s reappropriation of the Dadas’ cut-up technique, all manner of texts, from pulp fiction and publicity to political propaganda, the factual alike with the fictional, are reduced to “raw material for collage work.”<sup>103</sup> Thus, in Steve Erickson’s *Arc d’X*, more or less factual historic episodes (Thomas Jefferson’s embassy to Paris, his rape of his slave Sally Hemings) are combined with the counterfactual (in a sublime act of revenge, Hemings stabs Jefferson in his bed) and the marvelous (in the moment after the murder, “she picked herself up from the floor to see fly out of his body a hundred black moths which filled the room”).<sup>104</sup> Such juxtapositions, in suggesting that these “fantastic elements . . . are not clearcut ‘departures from known reality’ but ontologically *part of the whole mess*,” challenge the reality principle, inviting the subversive question: “‘real’ compared to what?” This disrespect for intellectual property and ontological propriety, as well as the presentation of “worlds in the plural,” is what Brian McHale calls the “anarchic” in postmodern literature.<sup>105</sup>

An anarchic plurality of worlds, as Dreyfus and Spinoza acknowledge, means a certain “incommensurability” between them; even in a Habermasian “ideal speech situation,” according to Andrew M. Koch, the irreducibility of one world to the terms of any other implies relativism, “skewed languages speaking at one another—neither truth nor consensus.”<sup>106</sup> This, in turn, spells out a further ramification of postmodern antirepresentationalism—the ethical responsibility of the artist *not* to represent or “speak for” others. For Craig Owens, Martha Rosler’s 1974–75 photographic series *The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems* is exemplary in its renunciation of representational “mastery.” A number of oblique, vacant photographs—for example, the façade of a “First National City Bank” with two empty bottles of liquor resting on its granite stoop—are juxtaposed with a scattered series of words for drunkenness (“plastered,” “stuccoed,” “rosined,” “shellacked,” “vulcanized,” “inebriated,” “polluted”). In this stark “juxtaposition of two representational systems, visual and verbal,” Rosler not only denies us the satisfaction of a direct statement, an explanation, a single meaning; she has also

refused to photograph the inhabitants of Skid Row, to speak on their behalf, to illuminate them from a safe distance (photography as social work in the tradition of Jacob Riis). For “concerned” or “victim” photography overlooks the constitutive role of its own activity, which is held to be merely representative (the “myth” of photographic transparency and objectivity). Despite his or her benevolence in representing those who have been denied access to the means of representation, the photographer inevitably functions as an agent of the system of power that silenced those people in the first place. Thus, they are twice victimized: first by society, and then by the photographer who presumes the right to speak on their behalf.<sup>107</sup>

We are thus presented only with floating signifiers that stubbornly refuse our wish to master them, to subdue them into revealing a final meaning. The only statement Rosler offers is one about “the impoverishment of representational strategies”: All these images and words, she writes, “are powerless.”<sup>108</sup>

Anarchist postmodernism thus aims at the displacement or decentering of the artist as privileged representative. Here, once again, the postmodern both cancels and preserves the results of modernist experimentation. On the one hand, what modernists conceived of as the artist’s liberatory struggle for autonomy is redescribed as the attempt to retain for the artist, in the face of the challenge posed by science, some degree of his former “authority,” a “claim to represent some authentic vision of the world.” At the same time, as Featherstone writes, “This attack on autonomous, institutionalized art was itself not new,” but had already been anticipated by modernism.<sup>109</sup> The earlier generation of the Symbolists, like their Romantic forebears, had already been fascinated with the unconscious forces outside the artist’s control; Dada put the idea of abdicating conscious control into practice with Tzara’s cut-up poetry method, and the Surrealists extended this experiment with the aleatory and the unconscious in practices of automatic writing (*écriture automatique*) and the Exquisite Corpse poetry game. By replacing authorial will with Mallarmé’s ineradicable *hasard*, these anarchist moderns aimed to radically de-privilege the poet as individual genius. Anti-art strikes at the spirit of aesthetic hierarchy,<sup>110</sup> not only by painting a mustache on the Mona Lisa or placing a urinal on a pedestal, but also in more modest uses of vernacular (from Wordsworth’s timid attempt to introduce everyday language in poetry to Picasso’s incorporation of the day’s newspaper headlines in cubist collages) and attempts to popularize art by siting it in everyday life (e.g., Man Ray’s abstract chess set or the Muralists’s public art). Arguably, then, this aspect of postmodernism begins with those modernists “who effectively practised postmodernism *avant la lettre*.”<sup>111</sup>

Once again, as they struggle to articulate the antirepresentationalist project in aesthetics in terms of a radical deflation of the authority of art, postmodernists find themselves referring to modern experiments. According to Harvey, Picasso’s collage and Eisenstein’s montage come to be redefined as

*the* postmodern techniques par excellence, in part because the fragmentary style they produce undermines our sense of stability and univocity, but also because “minimizing the authority of the cultural producer creates the opportunity for popular participation and democratic determinations of cultural values.”<sup>112</sup> Rather than creating art ex nihilo like a god, the postmodern bricoleur produces the new through recombinations of the old, as collage and montage; since we are all now equipped with a store of recombinable materials, all of us are the potential creators of Duchamp’s ready-mades. This deification of the artist expresses itself in a camp aesthetic of travesty and parody: what Spanos considers “the essential characteristic of postmodern literature,” i.e., its “mockery of the canonical literary forms of ‘official’ culture,” finds ample precedent in modernist parodies of official art, from the ridicule Pirandello heaps on the “well-made play” to Eliot’s mock-melodrama, *Sweeney Agonistes*.<sup>113</sup>

This anti-aesthetic reduction of the distance between artist and audience, between art and everyday life, means that the didacticism of traditional drama must give way to something nonmimetic. Once again, postmodernism looks to a modernist precedent. If, according to Derrida, traditional drama is tied to humanism by its commitment to “a representation of life,” then anarchist antirepresentationalism dictates Artaud’s antihumanist Theater of Cruelty, which “is not a *representation*” but “life itself.” Rather than a drama of realism and the word, Artaud’s is one of action. Refusing the transcendental pretense of the signifier, Artaud produces what Perez terms a “theater of the flesh,” a “theater of passion and desiring-production, where expression is not linguistic but hieroglyphic and *a-signifying* in nature,” so that “flows of the body replace the flows of words” and “linguistic expression is replaced by the emotive *a-signification* of ‘affective athleticism.’” Thus, instead of enacting a predefined text, actors in the Theater of Cruelty engage in “gestures, dances, and shouts,” for “the gesture is always spontaneous, non-coded and non-inscribed; and it disappears like a musical note the moment it is performed. But most importantly, unlike the despotic and imperial Signifier it does not refer back to anything.” In Deleuze and Guattari’s terms, this theater is one of “production” rather than “expression”: if psychoanalytic representation inappropriately imposes an expressivist or dramaturgical model on the unconscious, Artaud’s theater presents instead “a factory, a workshop.” Within this workshop, Derrida notes, everyone and everything is productive: rather distancing a contemplative audience from the action on stage, cruelty involves them, enters into their bodies. Anarchist theater proposes to abolish “the distance between the spectator and the actor”—displacing the performer’s agency and the author’s authority in favor of the active audience. Thus, in Artaud’s words, “the true theater, like poetry . . . is born out of a kind of organized anarchy.”<sup>114</sup>

A postmodern emphasis on the active audience valorizes what Umberto

Eco calls the “open work”—the text that forces the reader to produce, rather than passively consume, its narrative form.<sup>115</sup> Already, in modernism, we find hints of de Certeau’s notion of the text as a kind of space that readers inhabit differently: Sonn cites the Symbolist writer Léon Deschamps as one who believed that a poem “only provided the palace which the reader was free to furnish,” so that a poem’s ambiguity should allow “freedom of interpretation.” Indeed, for the Bloomsbury modernist critic Roger Fry, “the accusation of revolutionary anarchism” leveled at formalism by conservatives was due to its elimination of elitist requirements on its interpretation, the abolition of an aristocratic genre vocabulary.<sup>116</sup> The spirit of this open work is democratic and leveling, typified by Kerouac’s cavalier invitation at the end of *Tristessa*: “This part is my part of the movie, let’s hear yours.” Juliana Spahr describes this kind of text as “giving the reading act as much authority as the authoring act,” arguing that it “cultivates readerly agency by opening an anarchic space for reader response.”<sup>117</sup>

Presumably, this “anarchic space” is offered as an answer to Marxist concerns about ideology and repressive structures. Instead of confronting a nearly all-powerful “culture industry” that reifies subjects into objects at every turn, we find active agents subverting the system by creatively, autonomously appropriating its products. Thus Virginia Postrel rereads a 1950s ad for Dove soap as high camp: “Read with today’s eyes, the ad is quite insulting, but it is also hilarious. It is so unabashedly over-the-top that only the most irony-deprived could find it truly offensive. The 1990s reaction is to puncture it, to make jokes at its expense. In the age of Monica, the story cries out for reinterpretation as soft-core phone sex (‘Well, darling, I’m all over *cream*. Just imagine, cream tip to toe. Arms. Legs. *All* of me!’ says the ad) or a desperate cry for attention.” Our knowing, ironic responses to this priceless bit of kitsch, Postrel argues, are the cumulative result of advertisers’ attempts to craft ever-more-effective pitches, “a media dynamic that made consumers increasingly immune to the ad men’s favorite techniques.”<sup>118</sup> The ability of such images to elicit credulous and affective responses has steadily declined, while a postmodern culture of resistance has arisen, in which advertising imagery and narrative style are subject to the continual “parodies and satirical allusions,” which have become a ubiquitous part of pop culture. As Carl Matheson explains, postmodern comedies like *The Simpsons* “tend to be highly *quotational*: many of today’s comedies essentially depend on the device of referring to or quoting other works of popular culture. Second, they are *hyper-ironic*: the flavor of humor offered by today’s comedies is colder, based less on a shared sense of humanity than on a sense of world-weary cleverer-than-thou-ness.” These quotational and hyper-ironic strategies both reflect and participate in what Matheson calls “a pervasive crisis of authority, be it artistic, scientific or philosophical, religious or moral”: no one, in any of these fields, now has an unchallenged

right to speak for others, or can claim uncontested legitimacy for his or her representations of the world.<sup>119</sup> As Sterling remarks, when one can no longer either faithfully represent a world (as classicism aspired to) or create one *ab novo* (as modernists aspired to), one instead quotes worlds, cutting them up and turning them to new uses. The culture of ironic appropriation, on this account, is an antiauthoritarian “politics of subversive quotation,” an attack on elite culture.<sup>120</sup>

It is left to a few Marxist types, such as Thomas Frank, to question these notions of agency, resistance, and elitism: such “active-audience theorizing,” he argues, is little more than an ideological fig leaf for neoliberal capitalism. For Postrel, however, Frank’s ideology-critique is still another version of elitist vanguardism, claiming a higher epistemological ground from which to speak for others—a representational authority—at the expense of the autonomous agency of those for whom he would speak, who are represented as dumb victims. By contrast, Postrel’s active audience is positively empowered, and she includes herself in its ranks.<sup>121</sup> The consumerist self recreates itself, in magpie fashion, by adopting and rewriting the texts of others, making them part of its own fictional project.

This notion of performative self-construction, and ultimately of “liberation through fiction-making,” Hutcheon argues, is what makes postmodern fiction at least potentially something more than a form of textualist escapism; indeed, “if self-reflecting texts can actually lure the reader into participating in the creation of a novelistic universe, perhaps he can also be seduced into action—even direct political action.”<sup>122</sup> Rather than presenting an apolitical textualism à la Borges or Nabokov, works of self-referential art may indeed, as Takayuki Tatsumi and Larry McCaffery argue, “[have] very direct and relevant implications for our daily lives.” In particular, metafictionalizations politicize their own antirepresentationalism when they prompt us to reflect on our own status as scripted characters in a mediated, artifactual, virtual world: “Metafiction made us aware that what fiction can tell us is not reality itself but a narrative version of reality . . . our contemporary lives are all ideological versions of reality, with us characters within narratives. It isn’t so much that metafiction is now out-of-date, but that it’s no longer an avant-garde literary device. It’s part of the popular life we are leading now.”<sup>123</sup> McCaffery and Tatsumi argue that despite the ebbing shock value of metafictional devices now incorporated into pop culture—the very pop culture that to some degree *constitutes* our “ideological versions of reality”—there is still room for a radical aesthetic intervention. This intervention would be neither quite avant-gardist nor pop-cultural but a hybrid “avant-pop”—“emphasizing the ‘avant’ part of the term,” as McCaffery insists,

to foreground the connection between A-P and the avant-garde movement which hoped to use its radical aesthetic orientation to confuse, confound, bewilder, piss

off, and generally blow the fuses of ordinary citizens exposed to it. The idea being that it's now useless to try to create change via political institutions (useless because they are so infused with corruption, stagnation, and blind adherence to the tautologies that create and protect their existence), so artists need to try and work on peoples' consciousnesses *directly*. Radical formal devices are one means of trying to swerve peoples' consciousnesses off the daily "grooves" of normalcy—the kind of "tracks" of response, desire, intuition, beliefs, etc. that have been laid down for us by our governments, advertisers, and schools (they're interlocking systems, at this point, don't you agree?), and to steer people *away* from the predictable places . . . to maybe discover "tracks" that are more interesting and maybe even more *appropriate* for our *own* tastes and desires (if we could only discover *for ourselves* what these actually *are*, for a change).<sup>124</sup>

The call for a return to an avant-garde strategy of *épater les bourgeois* might seem datedly modernist, but what seems to make avant-pop postmodern is the "pop" component. Rather than trying to create art outside of and against the mass-marketed art produced by capitalism (presumably no longer an option), McCaffery promotes "*active* resistance" in the form of a "subversive, guerilla-art" produced from within the belly of the beast, using the images, texts, and sounds thrown up by the marketplace as the very materials through which it will enact aesthetic rebellion. Postmodern avant-pop thus continues that modernist strategy pioneered by the Dadas and Cubists—what Read called, in a 1930 review of Max Ernst's collage-novel *La Femme 100 Têtes*, that "function of art" that is "to snatch things from the security of their normal existence." This new brand of subversive appropriation, according to McCaffery and Tatsumi, will be about "seizing control" of the collective cultural product, remixing and "*re-narratiz[ing]*" boring, racist, sexist, capitalist pop-culture narratives, subverting and appropriating them: "In other words, you *storm the reality studio. And retake the universe.*"<sup>125</sup>

### PROBLEMS WITH THE POSTMODERN PROJECT

As ambitious and inventive as this project is, here are some flaws in the assumptions animating it that will seem a little familiar. First of all, there is a heavy dose of essentialism here that belies the constructivism of McCaffery and Tatsumi's postmodern premises: they presume the reality of a preexisting actual or true self that is outside capitalism, but simultaneously argue that the *seemingly* true self that we discover on introspection is likely to be just another ideological construct: just as the childhood experiences that the replicant Rachel "remembers" in *Blade Runner* are merely an implanted "fake memory," so, in the time of late capitalism, "our past . . . becomes [a] commodifiable object that we can sample, cut and mix, colorize, and otherwise re-experience."<sup>126</sup> McCaffery and Tatsumi want to be strategic realists

in facing up to the absolutely dominant power of capitalist structures, but at the same time, they seem to imagine that the subjects of this dominant structure—who appear, in this column, as colonized, constructed, programmed, and completely passive—are capable of using the media of their own domination for the purpose of resistance. The late-capitalist world, supposedly utterly impervious to *political* intervention, is at the same time supposed to be open to forms of *aesthetic* rebellion that still have as their goal the production of an avant-garde-style shock effect, the very possibility of which has already largely been lost to the advance of capitalist pop culture. Avant-pop is conceptualized partly from a quantum perspective, from which it appears that nothing now is real and everything is possible for us, and partly from a genetic perspective, from which it appears that the very reality we now have to face is that nothing is possible.

Indeed, metafiction may have the paradoxical effect not of empowering us to *rewrite* our own scripts, but of making us feel all the more paranoiacally powerless (since, like Thomas Pynchon's Oedipa Maas, we are trapped inside a narrative prison-house, a conspiracy of sublime proportions) and all the less concerned to change anything (since we are convinced, like David Foster Wallace's Lenore Stonecipher, that none of this is real anyway<sup>127</sup>). From the subject positions offered by metafiction—remarkably similar to those occupied by the protagonists of the virtual-reality paranoia films of the late 1990s—we find, as Slavoj Žižek writes apropos of the latter, that we are looking at “the ultimate American paranoiac fantasy,” with all the contradictions that entails. The scenario is terrifying in that the protagonist “suddenly starts to suspect that the world he lives in is a fake, a spectacle staged to convince him that he lives in a real world, while all people around him are effectively actors and extras in a gigantic show”; it is nonetheless the obverse side of a “fantasy,” in that the “real social life” of “late capitalist consumerist society” promotes itself as a “paradise” that is somehow “*unreal*, substanceless, deprived of material inertia.” In such a disembodied world, no one can really suffer, nor need any such suffering take place, for the bounty of consumer pleasures and pleasant appearances is not produced through exploited labor; everything is produced mysteriously, as if by wishing, from the flow of ephemeral images, information, desires, and “financial speculations disconnected from the sphere of material production.”<sup>128</sup> Paranoia, as Pynchon recognizes, is the twin of narcissism: for the “paranoid,” he writes, “all is organized in spheres joyful or threatening about the central pulse of himself.” If, in conspiracy narratives, the numinous forces organizing appearances are “basically omniscient,” hence omnipotent, we can only respond with (im)passivity.<sup>129</sup> Better yet, as Sartwell speculates, the conviction that all appearances have been arranged for our benefit, that we are blanketed in a solipsistic “representation,” provides a consolation, for at least “images are *safe*”: “In my fantasy, in the world of images, I can commit



horrific crimes and remain innocent. I can plunge off cliffs and awaken before I hit bottom. No one has ever been blown to bits by a picture of an explosion. So if the world as I experience it were an image, I would be perfectly safe.”<sup>130</sup> In the root sense of the word, then, postmodern paranoia is *fascinating*: it invites passive speculation and spectatorship rather than action. The paranoid’s universe, like the detective novels favored by Auster’s protagonist Daniel Quinn, is infinitely readable:

What he liked about these books was their sense of plenitude and economy. In the good mystery there is nothing wasted, no sentence, no word that is not significant. And even if it is not significant, it has the potential to be so—which amounts to the same thing. The world of the book comes to life, seething with possibilities. . . . Since everything seen or said, even the slightest, most trivial thing, can bear a connection to the outcome of the story, nothing must be overlooked. Everything becomes essence; the center of the book shifts with each event that propels it forward. The center, then, is everywhere, and no circumference can be drawn until the book has come to its end.<sup>131</sup>

Like Borges’s Library of Babel, Quinn’s world is a kind of utopia of interpretative plenitude. If it appears meaningless, this is because it is overflowing with meanings: *everything* represents something else, and yet nothing represents anything, for unlike a book, the system of language (in which signifiers merely point to other signifiers) has no end. At the extremes, antirepresentationalism and hyper-representationalism meet.

If postmodern utopia consists in this kind of overflow or superabundance of signification, one might ask whether it is also a material paradise, abundant in the means of life—food, water, shelter, clothing. Here, postmodern fictions fall curiously silent. Auster is certainly aware of the material world; throughout *The New York Trilogy*, his characters confront the dilemma posed by their dwindling resources, as they are drawn into the rapture of their respective mysteries; after a certain point, the plots of the stories are like a countdown toward the exhaustion of the protagonist’s savings, the zero-point of survival. Still, they *do* leave behind the normal world of money, work, property, and the relationships bound up in these. Thus, near the end of *City of Glass*, Quinn is mysteriously relieved of the need to work or take care of himself so that he can spend all of his time writing in his red notebook. Similarly, the inhabitants of Borges’s library-universe are mysteriously supplied with light, warmth, and even, it must be assumed, food and drink. However, these last considerations are not even mentioned, though the narrator does write that each hexagonal gallery contains a “closet” in which one can “satisfy one’s fecal necessities”; this seems to leave us with a world in which people read and defecate but do not eat. This image of the universe tends to confirm Jane Flax’s warning that postmodernism, when it takes the deconstructive aphorism that “nothing exists outside a text” too literally,

essentializes its own preoccupations into a human vocation, “as if the modal human activity is literary criticism.” Flax further worries that “this lack of attention to concrete social relations (including the distribution of power) results . . . in the obscuring of relations of domination.”<sup>132</sup>

The degree to which the utopian moments in postmodern fiction as well as postmodern theory are invested in images of reading, writing, textuality, and interpretation raises certain concerns. How is such an investment compatible with action in and on a real world (however socially constructed) that is not merely what any particular individual wants it to be, a world in which saying doesn’t simply or immediately make it so? If postmodern utopia is conceived in such a way as to have no meaningful relation to the world of bodily, material experience and action, then how can it lay claim to reality? I’m not sure that any sufficient answers can be made to these questions. Tobin Siebers seems to answer these in the negative in his introduction to *Heterotopia*: “What distinguishes postmodernism ultimately is the extremity of its belief that neither utopia nor desire can exist in the here and now . . . [it] is concerned with what lies beyond the present moment, perhaps beyond any present moment.”<sup>133</sup>

One line of argument would defend Siebers’s statement while denying its implied reinstatement of the transcendental beyond. Heterotopia, in the original sense of the word proposed by Foucault, is both “here and now” and not-here, not-now: it lies in the “juxtaposition” of normalized spaces with certain “elsewhere” spaces—railway cars, cemeteries, motels, cinemas—that host transitory episodes of the abnormal, the liminal, the transgressive. In this sense, “there is probably not a single culture in the world that fails to constitute heterotopias.” Similarly, Michel de Certeau proposes that the most seemingly obedient subject can be seen to be “poaching in countless ways on the property of others,” subversively appropriating the spaces that it occupies.<sup>134</sup> In this spirit, postmodern anarchist Hakim Bey (a.k.a. Peter Lamborn Wilson) argues that the seeming omnipresence of “the State” conceals innumerable “cracks and vacancies” in which spontaneous life can flourish. While the repressive apparatus is more than capable of destroying or co-opting any revolutionary program, it cannot prevent the eruption of the “Temporary Autonomous Zone,” “an uprising which does not engage directly with the State, a guerilla operation which liberates an area (of land, of time, of imagination) and then dissolves itself to re-form elsewhere/elsewhen, *before* the State can crush it. As soon as the TAZ is named (represented, mediated), it must vanish, it *will* vanish, leaving behind it an empty husk, only to spring up again somewhere else.”<sup>135</sup> This antirepresentationalist tactic, however, is only successful to the degree that it is *temporary*, an evanescent and to some extent private experience of the non-ordinary, leaving the spatial hegemony of the ordinary unchallenged. As Murray Bookchin argues, the TAZ is an aesthetic substitute for politics, irrelevant because it

fails to engage with historical actuality.<sup>136</sup> Revolution, like the final signifier, is infinitely deferred, its possibility relocated to an elsewhere or virtuality outside of every actual. Condemned to a deterritorialized exile, one consoles oneself by valorizing the nomadic.

Postmodern fiction, like postmodern theory, seems to locate itself in a spurious *ou-topos* or no-place, taking as its perspective the very view from nowhere (the imaginary position-that-is-not-a-position) that it attacks as a transcendental fiction. After relativizing all values, it issues the Nietzschean call to create new values, without realizing or admitting that this very invitation is *itself* a value, and without confronting the contradiction this poses for relativism and the limiting principle it implies. In annihilating the metaphysical ground of both knowledge and ethics, it promises that we can live in a noncoercive relation with our world and each other, but leaves no ground for that promise to take root in, so that these new relations are relegated precisely to the no-ground, the no-place. It is a way of thinking about human possibility that, in Kafka's terms, leaves plenty of room for hope, but not for us.

Utopia, in postmodern culture, *appears as its own disappearance*—or reappears as an empty simulation of freedom. Just as the participants in a TAZ pretend that a propertyless world is here now, that the streets are theirs, commercial culture openly invites us to appropriate its symbols: “Make 7UP Yours,” as the slogan goes (openly calling attention to its naughty counter-reading: *up yours!*). Many, perhaps most of the songs played on the radio and music-video TV are open works or reader-centered texts, offering fragmentary lyrics, loose semantic bundles, maximally open to interpretation. Take, for example, a classic hit by that epitome of postmodern self-creation, Madonna: “Papa Don't Preach.” While entirely straightforward and narrative in contrast to the more avant-garde stylings of contemporaries New Order, The Cure, or R.E.M., the subject of the video, according to Renate Müller, was interpreted by young white audiences as “teenage pregnancy” and as “[a] father-daughter relationship” by young black audiences; Planned Parenthood staffers saw it as a “commercial for teenage pregnancy,” and antiabortion activists saw it as “a positive prolife video.” Müller proposes that the ability of such commodities to elicit “multiple and contradictory meanings” makes them “open to cultural struggle over meaning,” but I see no evidence of such a struggle. Consumerist pluralism, in its superficial displays of tolerance and more fundamental anomie, allows these interpretations to float past one another without connecting, avoiding conflict. We can see anything we want in the mirror of the commodity, which is magically all things to everyone.<sup>137</sup> Polysemy, promising everything and nothing, saves one the risk of getting caught taking a position—a surefire marketing technique.

As long as audiences take what they want and tune out the rest without

resistance from the text, the text does not challenge its self-understanding, as Eco hopes, or promote its sense of autonomy and creative empowerment, as Spahr hopes. Listeners who encounter the “social codes” in the songs as if they were autonomous “users,” in de Certeau’s formulation, who can make them into narratives and symbols of themselves, ironically fulfill Adorno and Horkheimer’s prediction that the culture industry would extend its reign of uniformity precisely by ensuring that “something is provided for all so that none may escape.”<sup>138</sup> In this way, like Siebers, Eagleton sees postmodernism as desiring a utopian world of “plurality, free play, plasticity, [and] open-endedness,” but argues that it “prematurely” identifies this utopia with the present, creating a “false utopianism . . . for which freedom exists in reading the world differently.”<sup>139</sup> The freedom thus afforded is false because it is essentially *private*. It is entirely possible for members of this supposedly active audience—who are never forced to depart from their essentially passive stance as consumers of music made *for* them, who never engage in a true gift-exchange by giving *back* their own representation of reality—to be appropriated by the industry at the same time that they appropriate its products. Instead of a modernist abolition of meaning, postmodernism pursues a *privatization* of meaning, just as neoliberal capitalism proceeds to privatize all experience.

#### THE IMPASSE OF ANARCHIST POSTMODERNISM

Some might argue that all discussions about prescriptive aesthetics or poetics have been mooted by the pragmatist argument that, as Rita Felski suggests in *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics*, the radical or conservative effects of texts can be traced not to anything inherent in the texts themselves but to their reception by audiences.<sup>140</sup> If radical readers are capable of discovering radical potentials within *any* text (and conservative readers likewise capable of reading *any* text as an affirmation of traditional values), then why bother asking writers to write one way or another? But this attempt to circumvent aesthetic debate falls prey to the same logical problems as the pragmatist subjectivisms of Richard Rorty and Stanley Fish, for it cannot be the case that just any text can have just any effect, or that readers are all-determining—otherwise, lacking any texts to inform and shape consciousness, there would be no radical or conservative readers to do the reading. We are thrust back into the old debate willy-nilly.

However, the desire to leave this long-contested terrain was understandable. The conversation over aesthetics has gotten stuck in a groove, with generations of theorists doing little more than oscillating between the twin poles of the same old binaries. If readers’ power does not provide us with a way out of the impasse, does this not return us to the old choice “between

an autonomous art which protests against society but remains elitist and ineffective,” on the one hand, “and the products of the mass media, which encourage identification and blur the distinction between art and life but with the loss of any critical dimension” on the other<sup>141</sup>—or, even less promisingly, between an irredeemably compromised traditional aesthetic and the dead end of all avant-garde aesthetics, whether modernist or postmodern?

30. Burke, *A Grammar of Motives and a Rhetoric of Motives*, 443.
31. *Ibid.*, 228.
32. *Ibid.*, 443; *Attitudes Toward History*, 3.
33. Goodman, *Creator Spirit Come!: The Literary Essays of Paul Goodman*, ed. Taylor Stoehr (New York: Free Life Editions, 1977), 22–28, 31, italics mine; *Speaking and Language*, 181.
34. Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, 3.
35. William Butler Yeats, “Sailing to Byzantium,” in *The Poems*, ed. Richard J. Finneran (New York: Macmillan, 1983), 21–24.
36. Robert Scholes, *Textual Power: Literary Theory and the Teaching of English* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 72–73.
37. Goodman, *Speaking and Language*, 181.
38. Goodman, *Creator Spirit Come*, 80–81, 137.
39. de Cleyre, *Selected Works*, 82–84.
40. Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, 4.
41. Timothy W. Crusius, *Kenneth Burke and the Conversation After Philosophy* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999), 41.
42. Bookchin, *Ecology of Freedom*, 44–45, italics on “with” mine.
43. Peter Lamborn Wilson, “Amoral Responsibility.” *Science Fiction EYE* 8 (Winter 1991): 57; Booth, *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 14–15; Goodman, *Speaking and Language*, 171–72.
44. John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin Books, 1988), 10; Lucien Goldmann, quoted in Roger Webster, *Studying Literary Theory* (UK: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), 71; Goodman, *Speaking and Language*, 172.

## CHAPTER 6. THE FATE OF REPRESENTATION

1. Santiago Colás, “What’s Wrong With Representation?: *Testimonio* and Democratic Culture,” in *The Real Thing: Testimonial Discourse and Latin America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 161, 170, 161, 170, 162.
2. *Ibid.*, 169, 171.
3. Karl-Anders Arvidsson, *Henry Poulaille et la littérature prolétarienne française des années 1930* (Göteborg, Sweden: Acta Universitatis Gotoburgensis, 1988), 11; Rosemary Chapman, *Henry Poulaille and Proletarian Literature, 1920–1939* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1992), 165.
4. Poulaille, quoted in Chapman, 164, translation mine.
5. Harvey, *The Condition Of Postmodernity*, 260–63; Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition*, 81; Michael Berubé, “Teaching Postmodern Fiction Without Being Sure That the Genre Exists,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 46, no. 37 (19 May 2000), <http://chronicle.com/free/v46/i37/37b00401.htm> (accessed 10 March 2005).
6. Craig Owens, “The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism,” in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1983), 58–59.
7. W. J. T. Mitchell, “Representation,” in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin, 12 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).
8. Mike Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1991), 37.
9. Graeber, “Twilight of Vanguardism”; Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 175.
10. Michael Lucas, “Guerrilla Theater, the Esthetic, and Technology,” *Anarchos* 3

(Spring 1969): 34; John Moore, "Composition and Decomposition: Contemporary Anarchist Aesthetics," *Anarchist Studies* 6 (1998): 118.

11. O. B. Hardison Jr. calls this project "the disappearance of art." See O. B. Hardison Jr., *Disappearing Through the Skylight: Culture and Technology in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Viking Press, 1989).

12. Alan Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism: Art, Politics, and the First American Avant-Garde* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

13. Patricia Leighton, *Re-Ordering the Universe: Picasso and Anarchism, 1897–1914* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), xv.

14. David Kadlec, *Mosaic Modernism: Anarchism, Pragmatism, Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 2–3; David Weir, *Anarchy and Culture: The Aesthetic Politics of Modernism* (Amherst, Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 160.

15. Kadlec, *Mosaic Modernism*, 2.

16. Weir, 168, 185, 188.

17. Stirner, *The Ego and His Own*, trans. Stephen Byington (New York: Benjamin R. Tucker, 1907), 3, 11, 55, 177, 337, 490.

18. Eisenzweig, *Fictions*, 120, translation mine; Colson, *Petit lexique*, 11, 16n2; Koch, "Poststructuralism," 332; Newman, *From Bakunin to Lacan*, 68.

19. Stirner, *Ego*, 100, 394.

20. John G. Hutton, *Neo-Impressionism and the Search for Solid Ground: Art, Science, and Anarchism in Fin-de-Siècle France* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994), 54, 244; Richard Sonn, *Anarchism and Cultural Politics in Fin de Siècle France* (University of Nebraska, 1989), 16–17.

21. Stirner, quoted in Robert von Hallberg, "Libertarian imagism," *Modernism/Moderernity*, 2, no. 2 (1995): 65; von Hallberg, 65.

22. Kadlec, *Mosaic Modernism*, 225, 4; Dora Marsden, "Views and Comments," *The New Freewoman* 1, no. 11 (1913), 204.

23. Marsden, "Culture," *The Egoist* 1, no. 17 (1914), 322. If this formulation reminds us of Deleuze's admonition that "thought thinks its own history . . . in order to free itself from what it thinks" (Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, translated by Séan Hard (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988) 119, it is nonetheless quite directly attributable to Stirner: "a fixed idea arises by a thought—to wit, by the vanishing of the energy of the thought (the thinking itself, this restless taking back all thoughts that make themselves fast) from the thought" (*Ego*, 407).

24. Stirner, "Art and Religion," trans. Lawrence Stepelevich, *Egoist Archive* (rest of text in bibliography?)

25. Goodman, *Speaking and Language*, 84–85.

26. Stirner, "Art and Religion"; *Ego*, 211, 407, 414–15.

27. Stirner, "Art and Religion."

28. Marsden, "Intellect and Culture," *The New Freewoman*, 1, no. 2 (July 1, 1913), 22.

29. Stirner, *Ego*, 436–37; Jean Baudrillard, *The Mirror of Production*, trans. Mark Poster (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1975), 166; Stirner, *Ego*, 490.

30. Marsden, "Intellect and Culture," 22.

31. Stirner, *Ego*, 197–98; Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 380; Signac quoted in Donald Drew Egbert, *Social Radicalism and the Arts: Western Europe: A Cultural History from the French Revolution to 1968* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), 249; Kristeva, *La révolution du langage poétique: l'avant-garde à la fin du XIXe siècle, Lautréamont et Mallarmé* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1974), 426–27, translation mine.

32. Signac, quoted in Egbert, *Social Radicalism and the Arts*, 249; Weir, *Anarchy and Culture*, 181; T. S. Eliot, *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (New York: Har-

court Brace Jovanovich, 1975), 40, 177. None, to my knowledge, have placed Eliot in the context of anarchism—probably for good reason, given his “extraordinary sense of ‘the reality of Sin,’” which seems to have led him to “Hulme, Maurras, and Action Française” rather than Spain. However, his disgust with “wasteland” modernity, his resistance to representational language, and even his rejection of democracy are not too different from the beliefs that once sent Symbolist writers careening between anarchist, royalist, communist, and proto-fascist positions—nor, as George Franklin points out, from those that propelled Percy Bysshe Shelley toward William Godwin’s philosophical anarchism. Indeed, Eliot owes an unacknowledged debt to Shelley (George Franklin, “Instances of Meeting: Shelley and Eliot: A Study in Affinity,” *English Library History* 61, no. 4 [Winter 1994]: 956, 960, 979–80).

33. Max Baginski, “The Old and the New Drama,” *Mother Earth* 1 (April 1906): 36.

34. Robert A. Varisco, “Anarchy and Resistance in Tristan Tzara’s ‘The Gas Heart,’” *Modern Drama* 40, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 139.

35. Varisco, “Anarchy and Resistance in Tristan Tzara’s ‘The Gas Heart,’” 141–42.

36. Guattari, *Molecular Revolution*, 290.

37. Varisco, “Anarchy and Resistance in Tristan Tzara’s ‘The Gas Heart,’” 140; Weir, *Anarchy and Culture*, 131; Leighton, *Re-Ordering the Universe*, 49–50; Sonn, *Anarchism and Cultural Politics*, 38; Kristeva, *Révolution*, 427, translation mine.

38. Jarry, quoted in Sonn, *Anarchism and Cultural Politics*, 77; Read, *Poetry and Experience*, 120; Mallarmé, quoted in Joan U. Halperin, *Félix Fénéon, Aesthete and Anarchist in Fin-de-Siècle Paris* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), 50, translation mine.

39. Alexander Varias, *Paris and the Anarchists: Aesthetes and Subversives During the Fin de Siècle* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), 146; Sontag, *A Sontag Reader*, 183–84; Sonn, *Anarchism and Cultural Politics*, 222; Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 183.

40. Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, 69–70; Spanos, *Repetitions*, 20.

41. Read, *Icon and Idea: The Function of Art in the Development of Human Consciousness* (name city: Harvard University Press, 1955), 110–11; *The Forms of Things Unknown: Essays Towards an Aesthetic Philosophy* (New York: Horizon Press, 1960), 173–74.

42. Hugo Ball, *Flight Out Of Time: A Dada Diary*, ed. John Elderfield, trans. Ann Raimés (New York: Viking, 1974), 29; Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967), 428; Ball, *Flight Out of Time*, 22; Weir, *Anarchy and Culture*, 186.

43. Moore, “Public Secret: Fredy Perlman and the Literature of Subversion,” in *Twenty-First Century Anarchism*, ed. Jon Purkis and James Bowen (London: Cassell, 1997), 128; Kristeva, quoted in Moore, “Public Secret,” 127–28.

44. Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 189, 195, 232.

45. Laurence M. Porter, *The Crisis of French Symbolism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 11; Guérin, *Anarchism*, 74–75.

46. Howard G. Lay, “*Beau Geste!*: On the Readability of Terrorism,” *Yale French Studies* 101 (Spring 2002): 91.

47. *Ibid.*, 95; Sonn, *Anarchism and Cultural Politics*, 255; Tailhade, quoted in Sonn, 234.

48. Sonn, *Anarchism and Cultural Politics*, 3, 234; Halperin, *Félix Fénéon*, 373n1; Pierre Quillard, *L’Anarchie par la littérature* (Paris: Editions du Fourneau, 1993), 14, translation mine.

49. Kadlec, *Mosaic Modernism*, 2; Mark Antliff, “Cubism, Futurism, Anarchism: The ‘Aestheticism’ of the Action d’art Group, 1906–1920,” *Oxford Art Journal* 21 (1998): 102.

50. Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 151–52; Lacaze-Duthiers, “Action,” in *Encyclopédie anarchiste*, 18–19, translation mine; Read, quoted in Herbert Peter Hogue, *The Anarchic Mystique of Five American Fictions* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 1971), 34.



51. Kadlec, "Pound, Blast, and Syndicalism," *English Literary History* 60, no. 4 (Winter 1993), 1027.
52. Magritte, quoted in Suzi Gablik, *Magritte* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1985), 185–86.
53. Murillo, quoted in Mark Antliff, "Cubism, Futurism, Anarchism," 110; Mark Antliff, "Cubism, Futurism, Anarchism," 114.
54. Pound, quoted in Allan Antliff, "Man Ray's Path to Dada," *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed* 18, no. 2 (Fall 2000–Winter 2001): 52; Marsden, quoted in Weir 180; Artaud, *Heliogabalus: Or, The Anarchist Crowned*; translated by Alexis Lykiard (London: Creation Books, 2003); Antliff, "Man Ray's Path to Dada," 53.
55. Colomer, quoted in Mark Antliff, "Cubism, Futurism, Anarchism," 114.
56. Stirner, *Ego*, 234, 417; Colomer, quoted in Mark Antliff, "Cubism, Futurism, Anarchism," 114.
57. Ball, quoted in Weir, *Anarchy and Culture*, 232; Erich Mühsam, "The Artist in the Future State," trans. Christopher Winks, in *Revolutionary Romanticism*, ed. Max Blechman, 188–89 (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1999); Lacaze-Duthiers, "Artistocracy," in *Encyclopédie anarchiste*, 145–47.
58. Mark Antliff, "Cubism, Futurism, Anarchism," 110; Ball, *Flight Out of Time*, 77.
59. Stirner, *Ego*, 112; Tzara, quoted in Varisco, "Anarchy and Resistance in Tristan Tzara's 'The Gas Heart,'" 139; Alan Antliff, "Man Ray's Path to Dada," 51–52.
60. Max Blechman, "Toward an Anarchist Aesthetic," in *Drunken Boat: Art, Rebellion, Anarchy* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1994), 15; Moore, "Public Secret" 128, 131n23; Lacaze-Duthiers, "Action," in *Encyclopédie anarchiste*, 18.
61. Harry Redner, *A New Science of Representation: Towards an Integrated Theory of Representation in Science, Politics and Art* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), 288.
62. Alexandre Skirda, *Facing the Enemy: A History of Anarchist Organization From Proudhon to May 1968*, trans. Paul Sharkey (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2002), 57, 55–58; Lay, "Beau Geste!" 91, 82; Weir, *Anarchy and Culture*, 52–53.
63. Guérin, *Anarchism*, 74–75; Lay, "Beau Geste!," 95.
64. Skirda, *Facing the Enemy*, 54.
65. Lay, "Beau Geste!," 87, 96.
66. Weir, *Anarchy and Culture*, 267; Andrei Codrescu, *The Disappearance of the Outside: A Manifesto for Escape* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1990), 131–56.
67. Weir, *Anarchy and Culture*, 259, 264; Graeber, "Twilight of Vanguardism."
68. Zerzan, "Abstract Expressionism: Painting as Vision and Critique," *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed* 17, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 1999), 37, 39, 41–42, 39.
69. Baziotes, quoted in Zerzan, 43; Francis, quoted in Zerzan, 39.
70. Moore, "Composition and Decomposition," 120; Sontag, *A Sontag Reader*, 204; Moore, "Composition and Decomposition," 121.
71. Rothko, quoted in Zerzan, "Abstract Expressionism," 41; Zerzan, "Abstract Expressionism," 38, 40; Still, quoted in Zerzan, "Abstract Expressionism," 42.
72. Marcus and Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*, 7.
73. Gablik, *Magritte*, 97; Graeber, "Twilight of Vanguardism"; Goodman, *Speaking and Language*, 230; Burke, *Philosophy of Literary Form*, 225, 232.
74. Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988), 119.
75. Read, *The Philosophy of Modern Art*, 112–13.
76. Elizabeth Ermarth, "Fictional Consensus and Female Casualties," in *The Representation of Women in Fiction*, ed. Carolyn G. Heilbrun and Margaret R. Higonnet, 4–5 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983).
77. Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 20, 128; Ermarth, *Sequel to History* 30.

78. Kadlec, "Pound, Blast, and Syndicalism," 1015–16, 1023.
79. Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*, 66; Picabia, quoted in Weir, *Anarchy and Culture*, 228; Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 144.
80. Read, *Poetry and Anarchism* (London: Freedom Press, 1941), 27.
81. Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, trans. Michael Henry Heim (New York: Harper & Row, 1991), 248, 253.
82. Sartwell, *Obscenity, Anarchy, Reality*, 12, 5; Robert C. Solomon, *Nietzsche: A Collection of Critical Essays* (New York: Doubleday, 1973), 207.
83. Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 150.
84. *Ibid.*, 35.
85. Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*, 108; Mitchell, "Representation," 16.
86. Which is by no means an incontestable claim: Daniel Guérin, for one, insists that "anarchist theory emphatically rejects the charge of utopianism" (41). However, anarchists have typically been more willing to elaborate a vision of the good society than have their orthodox Marxist counterparts.
87. Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (Cambridge, UK: Routledge, 1988), 41, 230.
88. Judith Shklar, "What Is The Use Of Utopia?" in *Heterotopia: Postmodern Utopia and the Body Politic*, ed. Tobin Siebers, 42 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994); Richards, *Letters From Quebec*, 1.2.8.
89. Baudrillard, *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities: Or, the End of the Social, and Other Essays*, trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton and John Johnston (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983), 9.
90. Eagleton, "Capitalism, Modernism, and Postmodernism," in *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, ed. David Lodge, 385–86 (New York: Longman, 1988).
91. Siebers, *Heterotopia*, 2, 20.
92. Marika Finlay, *The Romantic Irony of Semiotics: Friedrich Schlegel and the Crisis of Representation* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1988), 169–70.
93. Yeats, "The Second Coming," in *William Butler Yeats: The Poems*, 4; John Cage, "Anarchist Poem," The Anarchist Library, [http://flag.blackened.net/daver/anarchism/john\\_cage.html](http://flag.blackened.net/daver/anarchism/john_cage.html) (accessed 3 April 2004), 25–26; Lawrence Ferlinghetti, "I Am Waiting," in *A Coney Island of the Mind* (New York: New Directions, 1958), 17–20.
94. Charles Jencks, quoted in Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*, 36; Owens, *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture*, ed. Scott Bryson et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 88.
95. Umberto Eco, *Postscript to The Name of the Rose*, trans. William Weaver (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984), 67.
96. John Barth, "The Literature of Replenishment," in *The Friday Book: Essays and Other Nonfiction* (New York: Putnam, 1984), 193–206.
97. Bruce Sterling, "Slipstream," *Science Fiction EYE* 1, no. 5 (July 1989): 78.
98. David Graeber approvingly notes Bourdieu's argument that modernist formalism, despite its political aloofness, achieved a political victory in securing "the autonomy of one particular field of human endeavor from the logic of the market" ("The Twilight of Vanguardism").
99. Kundera, *The Art of the Novel*, trans. Lisa Asher (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 23–26; Juliana Spahr, "Resignifying Autobiography: Lyn Hejinian's *My Life*," *American Literature* 68, no. 1 (March 1996): 146; Sartwell, *Obscenity, Anarchy, Reality*, 15; Paul Auster, *The New York Trilogy* (New York: Penguin, 1986), 9; Auster, *The Art of Hunger* (New York: Penguin, 1993), 300.

100. Harvey, 301.
101. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Charles Spinosa, "Coping with Things-in-Themselves: A Practice-Based Phenomenological Argument for Realism," *Inquiry* 42, no. 1 (March 1999): 752; Jorge Luis Borges and Adolfo Bioy Casares, *Extraordinary Tales*, ed. and trans. Anthony Kerrigan (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971), 123; Borges, *Other Inquisitions, 1937–1952*, trans. Ruth L. C. Simms (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1965), 101–5; Dreyfus and Spinosa, "Two Kinds of Antiessentialism and Their Consequences," 747.
102. Gianni Vattimo, *The Transparent Society*, trans. David Webb (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 72.
103. Sterling, "Slipstream," 80.
104. Erickson, *Arc d'X* (New York: Poseidon Press, 1993), 38.
105. Sterling, "Slipstream," 80; McHale, quoted in Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 301.
106. Dreyfus and Spinosa, "Two Kinds of Antiessentialism," 759; Koch, "Poststructuralism," 338.
107. Owens, "The Discourse of Others," 68–69.
108. Rosler, quoted in Owens, "The Discourse of Others," 70.
109. Owens, "The Discourse of Others," 58; Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*, 38.
110. It strikes at the spirit of hierarchy, but does not kill it: instead, it calls into being new élites (of literati who "understand" anti-art as a continuation of aesthetics, wealthy patrons who own "valuable" aesthetic objects, and arts bureaucrats who commission control aestheticized "public" spaces), and at the same stroke, destroys the spirit of aesthetic community (excluding the public from art as plebian "philistines," rather than impressing it through art, as did the old aristocracies via ostentatious art-display). Even in 1865, Proudhon was concerned that "art's 'true significance' is falsified" by its "commodification" through "awards, galleries, government sponsorships, etc." (Max Raphael, *Proudhon, Marx, Picasso: Three Studies in the Sociology of Art*, trans. Inge Marcuse, ed. John Tagg [Atlantic Highlands, NJ]: Humanities Press, 1980), 4); by 1936, Herbert Read was lamenting the state of affairs in which the most radical modernisms could be cheerfully ignored by an oblivious public while government patronage meant dependence on bureaucrats (*Poetry and Anarchism*), and by 1949, Paul Goodman bemoaned "the disappearance of a popular audience for good work" and the self-isolation of artists, the familiar dilemma in which art and the public mutually excluded one another (*Creator Spirit Come!*, 77–79).
111. Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*, 38.
112. Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 51.
113. Huyssen, *After the Great Divide*, 196; Spanos, *Repetitions*, 20.
114. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 234, 237; Rolando Perez, *On (An)archy and Schizoanalysis* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1990), 38–39; Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 55; Artaud, quoted in Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 249.
115. Eco, *The Open Work*, trans. Anna Concogni (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 3–4.
116. Sonn, *Anarchism and Cultural Politics*, 223; Roger Fry, *Vision and Design* (New York: Brentano's, 1924), 291; Jack Kerouac, *Tristessa* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992), 96.
117. Spahr, *Everybody's Autonomy: Connective Reading and Collective Identity* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2001), 47; "Resignifying Autobiography," 148.
118. Virginia Postrel, "The Pleasures of Persuasion," *Reason*, 2 August 1999, <http://reason.com/opeds/vp080299.shtml> (accessed 22 March 2004).
119. Carl Matheson, "The Simpsons, Hyper-Irony, and the Meaning of Life," in *The Simpsons and Philosophy: The D'oh! of Homer*, ed. William Irwin et al., 109, 117 (Chicago: Open

Court Publishing, 2001). Note the conspicuous absence of *political* authority from Matheson's list of the kinds that are in crisis.

120. Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 178; Postrel, "The Pleasures of Persuasion."

121. Frank, quoted in Postrel, "The Pleasures of Persuasion"; Postrel, "The Pleasures of Persuasion."

122. Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* (London: Methuen, 1980), 155.

123. Larry McCaffery and Takayuki Tatsumi, "Toward the Theoretical Frontiers of 'Fiction': From Metafiction and Cyberpunk Through Avant-Pop," *Science Fiction EYE* 12 (Summer 1993): 45, 43–44.

124. *Ibid.*, 48–49.

125. Read, quoted in Andrew Causey, "Herbert Read and Contemporary Art," in *Herbert Read Reassessed*, ed. David Goodway, 128 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1998); McCaffery and Tatsumi, "Toward the Theoretical Frontiers of 'Fiction,'" 49.

126. McCaffery and Tatsumi, "Toward the Theoretical Frontiers of 'Fiction,'" 46–47.

127. Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*; David Foster Wallace, *The Broom of the System* (New York: Avon Books, 1997).

128. Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real! Essays on September 11 and Related Dates* (New York: Verso, 2002), 12–13, 14.

129. Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*, 129; Sterling, "Sneaking for Jesus 2001," December 1992, [http://www.eff.org/Misc/Publications/Bruce\\_Sterling/Catscan\\_columns/catscan.11](http://www.eff.org/Misc/Publications/Bruce_Sterling/Catscan_columns/catscan.11) (accessed 10 July 2003).

130. Sartwell, *Obscenity, Anarchy, Reality*, 10–11.

131. Auster, *The New York Trilogy*, 9.

132. Flax, quoted in Margery Wolf, *A Thrice-Told Tale: Feminism, Postmodernism, and Ethnographic Reponsibility* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), 118–19.

133. Siebers, *Heterotopia*, 3.

134. Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986), 22, 24–25; de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), xii, xxi.

135. Hakim Bey, *T.A.Z.: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, and Poetic Terrorism* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1991), 99.

136. Bookchin, *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism: An Unbridgeable Chasm* (Berkeley: AK Press, 1995), 20–26.

137. I am reminded of Bookchin's remark that fortune-tellers typically "hedge their statements lest a prophecy fail to materialize in reality" by using "vague phrases" with "multiple meanings" (*Re-enchanting Humanity*, 216).

138. de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xx–xxi; Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 123.

139. Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 64–65.

140. Rita Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 157.

141. *Ibid.*, 181.

## CHAPTER 7. RECONSTRUCTING ANARCHIST AESTHETICS

1. Sonn, *Anarchism and Cultural Politics*, 297, 294; Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1987), 171; Stirner, *Ego*, 421.