WRITING AGAINST TIME: The Paradox of Temporality in Modernist and Postmodern Aesthetics

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I

What notion of time might be involved in the claim that the entire literary aesthetic of this century has been largely determined by the endeavour to write against time? What is it that literary artists have been turning against, and how is it possible at all to write against time when it takes time within time to do so? How have writers shaped their quite clearly temporal art of language in consequence of their struggle against time? These are the kind of questions inevitably triggered by the title of this paper, and I will devote the space given to supply some provisional answers.

First, then, the notion of time involved. This subject calls for discussion not because there are too few relevant ideas floating around but because there are probably too many– not least owing to the fact that time has not only been a favoured theme among literary artists but also with philosophers. And (as one may have expected) the more intensive treatment has made things look more complex rather than simpler. Yet though I will have to refer to one or the other aspect of this discussion later on within a more pertinent context, I will start with the most clear-cut definition I have been able to find, one for which I had to go back to Kant. As is well known, within Kant's transcendentalist approach time as well as space are necessary yet subjective forms of all appearances, space being the a priori condition of outer appearances only, and time as the form of inner intuition being "the *a priori* condition of all appearances whatsoever" ("die formale Bedingung a priori aller Erscheinungen überhaupt")[1]. This is so "since all representations, whether they have for their objects outer things or not, belong, in themselves, as determinations of the mind, to our inner state" ("weil alle Vorstellungen, sie mögen nun äußere Dinge zum Gegenstande haben, oder nicht, doch an sich selbst, als Bestimmungen des Gemüts, zum in-

[1] Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* [1787], ed. by Raymund Schmidt, Hamburg 1956, p. 77 (B 50). English: *Critique of Pure Reason*, transl. by Norman Kemp Smith, New York 1965, p. 77 (B 50).

neren Zustande gehören")[2]. And, in regard to the form of this inner intuition, which is the "condition of all appearances whatsoever" ("Bedingung a priori aller Erscheinungen überhaupt"), according to Kant

> The three modes of time are *duration*, *succession*, and *coexistence*. There will therefore, be three rules of all relations of appearances in time, and these rules will be prior to all experience, and indeed make it possible.
> Die drei modi der Zeit sind Beharrlichkeit, Folge und Zugleichsein. Daher werden drei Regeln aller Zeitverhältnisse der Erscheinungen, wonach jeder ihr Dasein in Ansehung der Einheit aller Zeit bestimmt werden kann, vor aller Erfahrung vorangehen, und diese allererst möglich machen.[3]

Duration or permanence

> [...] as the abiding correlate of all existence of appearances, of all change and of all concomitance, expresses time in general. For change does not affect time itself, but only appearances in time [...]
> [...] drückt die Zeit, als das beständige Korrelatum alles Daseins der Erscheinungen, alles Wechsels und aller Begleitung, aus. Denn der Wechsel trifft die Zeit selbst nicht, sondern nur die Erscheinungen in der Zeit [...][4]

As for succession,

> [...] it is a necessary law of our sensibility, and therefore a *formal condition* of all perceptions, that the preceding time necessarily determines the succeeding (since I cannot advance to the succeeding time save through the preceding) [...]
> [...] es [ist] nun ein notwendiges Gesetz unserer Sinnlichkeit, mithin eine formale Bedingung, aller Wahrnehmungen [...]: daß die vorige Zeit die folgende notwendig bestimmt (indem ich zur folgenden nicht anders gelangen kann, als durch die vorhergehende) [...][5]

With coexistence as the "existence of the manifold in one and the same time" ("die Existenz des Mannigfaltigen in derselben Zeit")[6], we have to presuppose that "all substances in the [field of] appearance, so far as they coexist, should stand in thoroughgoing community of mutual interaction" ("Also ist es allen Substanzen in der Erscheinung, sofern sie zugleich sind, notwendig, in durchgängiger Gemeinschaft der Wechselwirkung untereinander zu stehen.")[7].

This then must suffice for the occasion; it implies that we can never escape time as such so long as we are dealing with appearances; we can at best prefer the one or other of its modes. Indeed, on closer inspection we will find that

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[2] *Critique*, p. 77 (B 50); *Kritik*, p. 77 (B 50).
[3] *Critique*, p. 209 (B 219); *Kritik*, p. 230–231 (B 219).
[4] *Critique*, p. 214 (B 226); *Kritik*, p. 236 (B 226).
[5] *Critique*, p. 225 (B 244); *Kritik*, p. 250 (B 244).
[6] *Critique*, p. 233 (B 257); *Kritik*, p. 260 (B257).
[7] *Critique*, p. 235 (B 260); *Kritik*, p. 262 (B260).

what literary artists in this century have been writing against is simply one of the three modes of time – it is time as succession, the arrangement of appearances in a linear sequence in which earlier data determine the later, a sequence which is thus irreversible. What we will also find, however, when we look at the larger frame of history is a deep irony, since the very attempt to write against time as succession presupposes a previous hegemony of this temporal mode and is therefore itself inescapably bound up in succession.

II

That this is so results from the well-known fact that the discursive formation of the period preceding modernism, the 19th century, was almost wholly dominated by the notion of time as succession. Yet why, then, this radical change, this decisive turn against the hegemony of successivity, both in philosophy and in literary art at the beginning of this century?

In order to answer this question we have first to note that the notion of time as succession may imply quite contrasting conceptions; we then need to examine what happened in the course of the 19th century. The contrasting conceptions I speak of result from the fact that there is both a deterministic and a liberating aspect of time as succession. If we focus on total coherence and predictability, succession has to be conceived of as being rigorously governed by the law of causality. This is the conception discussed by Kant in the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* as an a priori condition of knowledge and a scientific world view. If, however, we focus on the possibility of human agency, hence on the unpredictable, then succession becomes the very ground for the possibility of ever new beginnings. As Quinones points out in his study of modernism, in historical perspective these "two aspects of time [as succession], the predictive and the innovative, [...] seemed to enjoy a happier coherence in the time of the Renaissance" – that is, at the very beginning of the secularization of the Christian notion of linear history. Yet, as a result of the growing preeminence of a scientific world picture, we can observe an "almost total suppression of one (the innovative) by the other (the predictive) in the course of the 19th century"[8].

In the field of literature, this is well borne out by a gradual shift in world view. We find in Shakespeare the causal entanglement of human choice and historical necessity typified by *Richard the Second*; later on there is the more optimistic 18th-century view of the possibility "to make good men wise", as in Fielding's *Tom Jones* and in the Bildungsroman à la Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*;

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[8] Ricardo J. Quinones, *Mapping Literary Modernism. Time and Development*, Princeton, NJ 1985, p. 7.

and closer to our time is the increasingly pessimistic awareness of being tied to the strings of a far from benevolent puppeteer – as in Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* – and of being trapped by fate as in Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*.

Yet what has still at least to be mentioned before we come to look at the various manifestations of writing against time as succession is the fact that the novel-genre in particular was largely if not wholly dominated by that temporal mode. This has to do, of course, with the development of fictitious biography out of the earlier form of biography, because human beings in their temporary biological existence from birth to death are inescapably under the regimen of successive time. In a broader perspective extending beyond the individual, succession still reigns in terms of lineality. Thus what we get is primarily sequential accounts of fictitious lives and later also the generational novel. We find the same pattern in the 19th-century long poem, from Wordsworth's autobiographical epic *The Prelude* to the so-called Victorian verse novels such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*, Robert Browning's *The Ring and the Book* and Arthur Hugh Clough's *Amours de Voyage*.

What is also worth recalling is that not only 19th-century literature but also 19th-century literary studies are dominated by time in the mode of succession. Not only language but also literary works of art can be found described and interpreted in terms of temporal succession and causality, the spirit of enquiry being determined by the hope of finding all desirable explanations through the retracing of the temporal and causal chain – in other words, through a search for sources and influences – from the work to the biography of the author and from there to the historical forces that shaped the author's life. And it has to be said that the obsession with the historical in the sense of time as succession was much longer-lived with scholars and critics than with literary artists, and extended well into the early 1930s.

III

By that time what has been called the first and second phase of literary modernism[9] were already over, and various ways of writing against time as succession had already been tried. The sense of cultural crisis resulting from a loss of trust in the idea of historical progress had led by the Thirties to a revival of the cyclical view of history – with Spengler's and Yeats's versions and Joyce's involvement with Vico being the better-known formative examples. Furthermore, there had already been a rigorous relativizing of this concept in two opposite directions: within physics, Einstein's Theory of Relativity meant that

[9] Cf. pp. 8–9.

time as succession became totally bound up with motion and, thus, something like a fourth dimension of space; within the humanities, Bergson's theory totally subjectivized time by virtue of the concept of durée or duration as the continuous telescoping of our successive conscious states, our whole individual past, into a living present or élan vital. Thus, as Wyndham Lewis had already pointed out, the creative aspect of time again comes to the fore in the form of an ever new "qualitative multiplicity"[10]. What Bergson tried to conceptualize in durée is actually the capacity of human consciousness to convert the previously successive into the coexistent, replacing linear causality with interdependence, or 'interpenetration' as he called it – thus approaching the third mode of time, permanence. And it is small wonder that this, in conceptual terms, is exactly what the writers of the novel of consciousness tried to present in the form of concrete fictions.

A word about the fictitious world that is presented during the first phase of modernism, which covers roughly the first two decades of this century. The increased emphasis on the inner life of the protagonists does not yet lead to a discarding of novelistic frames determined by time as succession. Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks* (1901), Gertrude Stein's *The Making of Americans* (written 1906–8, published 1925) and D. H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow* (1915) are still generational novels, while Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1915) still contains the residue of the chronology of biography and autobiography. In the novel the hegemony of the mode of succession is first broken w i t h i n these frames. While the Herr Consul in *Buddenbrooks* still conceives of himself as a link in a generational chain, the younger generation does not do so anymore, and – as the subtitle "The Decay of a Family" already indicates – what we thus get is, as in Lawrence's *The Rainbow*, a demonstration of the fading away of trust in linearity as the foundation of individual identity.

Yet the turn-about from evolution to devolution does not really question the dominance of the mode of succession, though the process of disintegration makes it more difficult to observe linearity. The individual trapped within a phase of decay is still securely placed in linear history. A more radical writing against time in the novel we find in this early phase only in Gertrude Stein's *The Making of Americans*, and in Andrej Belyj's cubist novel *Peterburg* (1913). Stein does everything to subvert the subtitle of her book, "Being a History of a Family's Progress"; for in the sequence of generations and the sequence of events and actions making up any single life there is neither progress nor regress but only sheer progression, and even that is radically relativized by endless repetition. All individual lives appear as mere variants of the repetitive pattern of birth, continuous aging, and death; all seemingly individual features

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[10] Wyndham Lewis, *Time and Western Man* [1927], Boston 1957, p. 424.

are mere variants of much more general traits. Heavily supported by a highly artificial style which is dominated by the persistent recurrence of simple words, phrases, and sentences in near-repetitions, the ineluctable sequence of time is transformed from causal succession into the mode of a mythic permanence in terms of an endless repetition of the same. Belyj in *Peterburg* also radically erases time as succession in his attempt to conjure up the complexity of the coexistent, the spirit of place, the city of St. Petersburg – in this sense prefiguring Joyce's depiction of Dublin in *Ulysses*. To avoid the illusion of temporal succession through the continuity of sequential presentation, Belyj reverts to fragmentation and collage, mixing passages of realistic description with metaphorical writing, quotations, allusions and philosophical discourse, a method of composition only just discovered for painting by the cubists Picasso and Braque.

It is evident that the kind of writing presented by Stein and Belyj made for an entirely new literary aesthetic: after several centuries of visions focussed on the mode of succession, the causal chain, either in terms of "What will this lead to?" or "What does it come from?", most 20th-century literary art demands a vision centered on either the mode of coexistence, "What are the interdependencies between the coexistent?", or the mode of permanence, "What are the persistent patterns behind the fleeting experiences?", or even both.

That the move away from succession can be replaced by either of the other modes can be seen in Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Here, a systematic pattern of complementary themes important to the artist is superimposed on the chronological spine of biography. Successive life experience is thus transmuted into the coexistence of the various traits of a portrait. As well as this, the continuity of the flow of experience is broken by an interspersing of epiphanies or momentary glimpses into the realm of total vision, hence by brief shifts towards the mode of permanence.

In the poetry of this early phase this shift becomes evident in Imagism, in the focussing on the image as – to use Ezra Pound's famous definition – "that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time"[11], that is, on coexistence; and it becomes also evident in poems like T. S. Eliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* and Pound's *Mauberley,* which demonstrate that – in Eliot's words – "the mind of Europe [...] is a mind which changes" but "abandons nothing *en route*"[12] or, in Hegel's, 'that the present world, the form taken by the spirit, its *self-consciousness*, embraces and in-

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[11] Ezra Pound, "A Few Don'ts", *Poetry* I, p. 6 (March, 1913), repr. in: *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. by T. S. Eliot, London 1968, p. 4.

[12] T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" [1919], in: T. S. E., *Selected Essays*, London, repr. 2nd ed. 1966, pp. 13–22, here p. 16.

cludes all earlier stages of history' ("daß die gegenwärtige Welt, Gestalt des Geistes, alle in der Geschichte als früher erscheinenden Stufen in sich begreift")[13]. In presentational terms, this telescoping of the previously successive into the coexistent is achieved by a profusion of inserted quotations from and allusions to works from various historical epochs, a constant juxtaposition of the present and the past, which also renders visible the repetitive within the different.

A more radical way of writing against the mode of succession was chosen by the Italian and Russian Futurists. In *Zang-Tumb-Tumb* (1914), for example, Marinetti demonstrated his poetics of "free words", within which even syntactical sequence is abandoned in order to promote multiple relationships between single words. And Mayakovsky, in his early poems, for the same purpose arranged the words on the page in a spatial design. In consequence of this method, succession is invalidated, because it becomes arbitrary; instead, we get multiple interrelationships between the coexistent.

The favouring of poetry and prose narrative in most literary theory, including aesthetics, tends to make us overlook the fact that the first more radical turn away from the successive mode occurred in drama: namely, in the later plays of August Strindberg. In the so-called drama of stations, exemplified by the trilogy *Till Damascus* (1897–1904) and by *Stora Land Vägen* (1909), Strindberg transformed the Aristotelian mimesis of actions into a portrayal of the human soul, above all the subconscious, in its various stages. Thus the subsequent scenes are no longer causally connected, the continuity of successive time is broken up into isolated and static presentations of complex inner states which are held together only through their relation to a persistent subjective ego. What we get is a series of renderings of the coexistent; how and why the protagonist gets from one stage to the next on his way through life is left wholly to our imagination. In his *Et Drømspel* (1901–1902), Strindberg applied the same principle to the presentation of the larger world of human interaction. Human behaviour is shown to the distanced gaze of the daughter of the god Indra in a loose sequence of scenes, comparable to that of a musical show – a prefiguration of later epic drama taking the form of a turn away from the temporal mode of succession towards the "timeless" mode of permanence.

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[13] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte*, in: G. W. F. H., *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. by Hermann Glockner, 20 vols, Stuttgart 1961, vol. 11, p. 120. English: my translation.

IV

As has already been mentioned, the shifts away from succession or temporal causality to either coexistence or permanence which we find in the first phase of modernism can also be combined, and this is what happens in the second phase in a much more elaborate way than in Joyce's *Portrait.* In his *Ulysses* (1922), one of the prime examples of high modernist literary art, time as succession is replaced by both the mode of coexistence and the mode of permanence. The represented world shrinks to the experiences and observations of two characters, and the thoughts and feelings of a third, on a single day in Dublin, and the sequent chapters exhibit above all the variety and complexity of the coexistent, both in terms of the life of that particular city and in terms of the individual consciousness of the protagonists. This impression of coexistent variety is enhanced by ample changes of style which reveal the coexisting multiplicity of ways of representation beyond the multiplicity of the represented. In addition, we find a complex interdependence between the two. Joyce's formal demonstration reaches its climax in the chapter "The Oxen of the Sun", where the whole history of English prose style is compressed into a single chapter. Yet beyond that, the last residue of succession, the progression through the day and night (which also implies a change of consciousness), is not only fragmented into discontinuous episodes but is also robbed of its historical singularity by the pervasive, superimposed comparison with the quest of the Homeric Ulysses. Thus behind what seems most individual, most place-specific, most marked by a unique position in the flow of irreversible historical time, there lurks always the archetypal repetition of the same, the permanence of the human condition. Thus the momentary and coexistent is given a wider meaning not by placing it within a causal chain of succession but by projecting it onto a horizon of the mythic and archetypal, by its linkage with permanence. The new kind of aesthetic sensibility that is called for has to be alive to multiple interrelationships both between all that is coexistent on the one hand and between the momentary and the permanent on the other. And this is much more important than tracing the causal linkage between the earlier and the later.

That this can hold true for works that cover a much wider timespan and should thus be prone to succession as their dominant mode, is demonstrated by Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927). By focussing on two minutely rendered conditions of great complexity that are separated by a large timespan covered in a brief interchapter, Woolf replaces the continuous flow of time by a juxtaposition of coexistences. Time as succession is therefore relegated to the interval between intense presences, and its power to effect change can only be inferred. The residue of continuity in the flow of experience that is inevitable even within brief periods minutely and extensively rendered, is broken by moments of vision, which, like Joyce's epiphanies, allow a glimpse of permanence,

of an archetypal contrast between life-giving and destructive forces, between a gender-specific desire for the concrete or for the abstract, and of a resolution of that contrast in the androgynous vision of the artist.

A more modest individual approach to permanence can be found in the amplitude of Proust's writing against successive time in *A la recherche du temps perdu* (1913–1927). Time as succession governing life experience implies continuous loss, and it is this loss that the autobiographical narrator Marcel will not accept. This stance he may share with other autobiographers, but in contrast to them he documents the process of the search rather than the temporal sequence of the retrieved. Thus – though a skeleton of chronology inherent in the rendering of a life is preserved – what we encounter is above all a sequence of past experiences as they become accessible to the memorising self, and continuity of time is fragmented into associative units of retrieval characterised by the complexity of the coexistent and by the parallelization and telescoping of the temporally distant. Instead of being led along a track of causal succession we are drawn into a tangled web of reminiscences, with innumerable interrelationships and interdependencies. Within this search, the most potent instrument is mémoire involontaire, an instant total recall of past experience triggered by a similar sense perception in the present that leads to an ecstatic awareness of a victory over tempus edax. And as Joseph Frank has pointed out, Proust enables the reader to experience this himself by a discontinuous presentation of character "that forces the reader to juxtapose disparate images spatially, in a moment of time"[14].

In the most famous poem of the period, Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), temporal succession and narrative continuity are abandoned in favour of coexistence, with its five parts illuminating different aspects of the present condition of Western civilization. Between and within these parts, the principle of arrangement is that of collage as it had been previously developed for painting by Braque and Picasso. This includes the montage of different voices, quotations from and allusions to a more distant or more recent past, a conjuring up of multiple places and scenes, cultures and languages, historical times, times of the year and the day, emotional and intellectual states, all serving the purpose of circumscribing the present spiritual condition or, rather, an interpretation of that condition. The whole panorama, held together by the vision of the blind androgynous seer Tiresias, in its presentation of historical parallels and repetitions is a move towards the archetypal, the timelessness of the human condition. On the other hand, it implies a devolutionary development of religious consciousness and spiritual meaning, made evident by taking recourse to Jessie Weston's

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[14] Joseph Frank, *The Widening Gyre. Crisis and Mastery in Modern Literature*, Bloomington, IN 1968, p. 24.

anthropological interpretation of the Grail legend, so that on the semantic level of cultural critique time as succession becomes reinstated.

To find writing against time in the drama of this period we have to go the surrealists, to the grotesque distortions of the realistic in the dream-like scenes of Yvan Goll's *Methusalem oder Der Ewige Bürger* (1924), Stanislaw Witkiewicz's *Kurka wodna* (1922), or Roger Vitrac's *Victor ou les enfants au pouvoir* (1928). In these plays, which all try to launch a massive critique of bourgeois civilization and convey an acute sense of crisis, sheer temporal sequence is preserved but deprived of causality; thus time loses the irreversibility of true succession which limits the range of possibilities in reality. In *Methusalem oder Der Ewige Bürger* a student who has been killed in a duel can subsequently marry and live happily ever after; in *Kurka wodna,* the female protagonist is shot dead in the first and again in the third act. In the surrealist work of art all linearity is transformed into simultaneity[15].

V

In the third and much longer phase of modernism which extends from the Thirties into the early Sixties, writing against the successive mode continues, even where historical change becomes the subject. Thus when Dos Passos in his trilogy *USA* (1930, 1932, 1936) presents the changes over time in American society between the turn of the century and the early Thirties, he does this in the form of three cross-sections, coexistent states whose complexity is mirrored in a montage of fragments of life-stories, newspaper articles, radio-announcements and authorial commentaries. And when Faulkner in *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) sets out to demonstrate the destructive nature of a presence that is unduly determined by the past, he does so by contrasting three different streams of consciousness in which the successive becomes coexistent, with a more or less realistic rendering of successive time. In Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano* (1947), the traditional life story is transformed into an account of a single day, the last in the protagonist's life, and the complexity of his and the human condition is rendered by a mixture of associative chains of images, interior monologues, allusions to thematically pertinent works of world literature, symbolic scenic descriptions, and significant action. Carlos Fuentes, who in *La región más transparente* (1958) tells what has become of the Mexican revolution from the perspective of the status quo in 1951, covers more than half a century of political development without even approaching a consistent chro-

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[15] Cf. Eric Sellin, "Simultaneity: Driving Force of the Surrealist Aesthetic", *Twentieth-Century Literature* 21/1975, pp. 10–13.

nology. Instead we get a grand cultural reportage in the collage style of Dos Passos' *Manhattan Transfer*, within which the fragments of past events are related to various locations in Mexico City and thereby transposed into the coexistent.

What is intensified in later modernism is also the move into the mode of permanence in terms of the mythic and archetypal, the eternal repetition of types and actions and situations. In his tetralogy *Joseph und seine Brüder* (written 1926–42, published 1948), Thomas Mann uses the Joseph legend to present a comprehensive psychology of mythic consciousness. Thus the story from the Old Testament is not only fictitiously extended but placed within a wide frame of similar ancient myths, and the ample insertion of theological, sociological and psychological discourse supports the paradigmatic effect. At the core lies the conviction that under the rule of mythic consciousness the individual and time-bound appears as the repetition of timeless types of character and event. Individual life takes on the quality of a quotation, a ritual celebration of the already prescribed. Yet it has to be added that Mann does not celebrate this kind of consciousness. Not least because of what happened in Germany in the Thirties, he has Joseph become finally aware of the illusory nature of this kind of thinking, and has him commit the sin of reflection that drives him out of the mythic Garden of Eden, yet enables him to act responsibly in relation to himself and others.

In *Finnegans Wake* (written 1923–39, published 1939), Joyce aimed at no less than an epic of all humankind, informed by Vico's cyclical view of history. Styled as a dream vision of Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker, the book presents the phases of the historical cycle in terms of fragments of the stories of significant characters who finally, through a mythic metempsychosis, become all one. Thus Earwicker, who on the one hand is geographically, culturally and historically placed in early 20th-century-Dublin, becomes at the same time Adam, Noah, Buddha, Finn, Falstaff, Caesar, Napoleon and Oscar Wilde. And Joyce alludes to works from various times and cultures, to oriental mythic poetry, Buddha's lectures, the Scriptures, the Koran, the poetry of classical antiquity, and Western secular historiography to make his method all-embracing. This effect of mythic persistence within seeming change is strengthened by a use of the Freudian theory of dreams with its notions of transposition and translation and the Jungian concept of the archetypal. What makes the book so singular is, however, above all the attempt in the language to mirror the telescoping of the multiple into sameness. Words and phrases are chosen or twisted persistently to create the effect of meaning several things at the same time, with the multiple meanings of the same signifiers symbolizing the variety of phenomena in human history deriving from the same underlying patterns. If multiple meanings can relate to the same signifier, multiple phenomena dispersed over time and space can relate to the same archetype. Thus Joyce tries to demonstrate that

historical specificity which is linked to the successive mode of time does not preclude permanence in the shape of recurrence. And in *Finnegans Wake* the historically specific only reveals its meaning when related to the persistent.

In poetry we find an equivalent to this, though with a strong religious bias, in Eliot's *Four Quartets* (written 1936–42, published 1944), a work devoted entirely to the relationship between succession, the flux of time, and permanence, the stillness of eternity, in human existence. In *Burnt Norton*, the first of the quartets, the dualism between the two modes of time is resolved by tracing all change back to the unmoved mover, God the Father as the creator. In the second, *East Coker*, the emphasis is on succession in its aspects of growth and decay, of "dung and death", and on the necessity of God the Son's becoming flesh to redeem historical time. The third, *The Dry Salvages*, tries to demonstrate that man can be set free from past and future in right present action, with the Holy Virgin as paragon. The fourth, *Little Gidding*, is centered in the intersection of the timeless and the timebound, the ideal and the real, by means of the Holy Spirit, and thus the redemption of time through the inherence of the eternal in the temporal.

This whole contemplation on time and existence is itself only made possible through the ability of consciousness to transcend its momentary existence within the flux of successive time, something Eliot makes us aware of by autobiographically linking each of the four quartets to a place that calls up a quite different point in history. Burnt Norton is a country house near which he lived shortly before he wrote the poem, in 1934; East Coker is a village where his forebears lived in the early 16th century; The Dry Salvages are a rock formation off the New England coast where he spent part of his youth; Little Gidding is a place in Huntingdonshire, visited by Eliot in 1936, where an Anglican religious community had existed that was founded in 1625 and shortly after desecrated in the course of the Civil War. Thus the historically distant in factual terms attains a synchronic symbolic meaning in Eliot's consciousness, a transformation which itself symbolizes the possibility of harmonizing temporal unity and difference. Yet more persuasive is, after all, Eliot's achievement of creating an analogy in his writing to the kind of musical composition called up in the general title. Each of the quartets consists of successive 'movements', which at the same time are variations of a common theme, and the same pattern is repeated in the larger sequence of and relationship between the four quartets of the whole poem. What we get in this way is a formal demonstration of the inherence of the persistent within the successive.

In later modernist drama, writing against time takes the shape of a turn to the exemplum, to parable, or to symbolism. The action of exemplary drama is still realistic in the sense of being securely placed in history, yet at the same time claims paradigmatic valency because it is presupposed that history repeats itself. Thus Brecht in *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder* (1941) presents the

specific life story of a sutler in the Thirty Years' War within a frame of epic commentary designed to point out the 'timeless' political message it exemplifies. In his *Leben des Galilei* (1947) the fragmentary scenes from the life of the 16th-century Italian astronomer are quite clearly chosen to exemplify the tension between the political powers interested in the preservation of the status quo and the progress of knowledge that will effect change. And still stronger is the move into the "timeless" in his parable plays *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan* (1943) and *Der kaukasische Kreidekreis* (1947), in which the placement of the events in some vague past and in a far-off region is meant to signify how far removed our present political praxis is from the utopian execution of justice that forms the core of the message.

In the plays of Samuel Beckett the condition humaine is determined by the timeless in the negative form of an endless repetition of the same. "There is nothing to be done" and "There is nothing to be said", as we read in *Waiting for Godot* (1952), because the hope to effect change through human agency has been lost and the hope that a change will come from outside, which still keeps the characters going on, seems futile as well. In *Endgame* (1957) even aimless mobility which serves the purpose of killing time is reduced to language only: to exist is to speak and be listened to. And in *Play* (1963), the endless repetition of the same extends even beyond death – with a gradual fading of intensity as the only hope left.

VI

There has been an ongoing debate about whether the different kind of literature written from the Sixties onwards is post-modernist in the sense of having left modernism quite behind or in the sense of being a still more radical realization of modernist ideas and forms. I believe that the step from epistemological to ontological scepticism in postmodernist thought – which also informs literary art – is significant enough to speak of something new. There is, however, at least one thing modernist and postmodernist literature have in common: writing against the temporal mode of succession.

Thus it is of no regard in this respect whether the nouveau roman is seen as a last consequence of modernist thought or a first entry into postmodernism. The indirect presentation of the growth of jealousy within human consciousness through configurations of objects in Alain Robbe-Grillet's *La Jalousie* (1957) leads to a sequence of impersonal descriptions that distorts realistic chronology and compresses time into the coexistence of a state of mind. Michel Butor in *Degrés* (1960) abandons temporal succession in favour of the complexity of the simultaneous in the account of the protagonist Vernier's endeavour to reconstruct in full one particular moment in history, and in *Réseau aérieu. texte ra-*

diophonique (1962) synchronicity even cuts across different clock times in the rendering of conversations among passengers on different airplanes that fly at the same moment in all the time zones of the world.

In the postmodern American novel of the Sixties and Seventies, the opposition to temporal succession with its causal chain of events becomes particularly evident when the subject is history. In Richard Brautigan's *A Confederate General from Big Sur* (1964), a pastiche of Stephen Crane's depiction of the American Civil War, naturalistic discourse with its attempt at causal explanation is replaced by fragmented, discontinuous storytelling in which the moves from one event to the next seem deliberately unmotivated. And if temporal succession is broken here by frivolous incohesion, a radical underdeterminacy of events, in Pynchon's *V.* (1963) and *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) it becomes invalidated by a paranoid excess of cohesion, a similarly radical overdeterminacy. In *V.* the absolute alternative to historical consciousness, the drifting from moment to moment in mid-Fifties New York of the drop-out Benny Profane, is connected with an obsession with causal linking in a "hothouse of history", the autobiographically motivated search for an elusive character "V." by Herbert Stencil, Jr., the son of a British secret agent. What is linked through the many roles of V. are events no less distant than the Fashoda crisis in the Sudan in 1899, an anarchist plot in early 20th century Florence, the massacre of the Hereros in German Southwest Africa in 1904, a Paris love story in 1913, and the last air raid on Malta in which she died. And almost everything seems to be secretly connected with everything in the paranoid consciousness of Oedipa Maas in *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966) and the surmised web of intrigues spun by secret agents in *Gravity's Rainbow.* What is more, the tangle of parallel plots and subplots thwarts every effort to distinguish between factual and merely imagined causal linking, between what can be rationally explained and the uncanny. Thus in spite of the abundance of references to the historical, the presented world takes on the quality of a quasi-mythic nightmare.

The lack of a boundary between the real and the fantastic also invalidates time as succession in Latin American magic realism. In Gabriel García Márquez's *Cien años de soledad* (1967), several members of the family of the Buendías spend their lives in the attempt to decipher a mysterious old chronicle that proves to contain the story of their lives in the prediction that they will do just what they do: devote their lives to the deciphering of the chronicle. The persistent temporal mode is that of archetypal repetition, both in nature and in human consciousness; nevertheless, the individual characters behave as if they could determine their own lives. Thus what we get is a paradoxical combination of a permanent mode of time with the notion of an open future, both equally removed from the determinism of causal succession.

The blending of the historical and the mythic in Carlos Fuentes' *Terra nostra* (1975) which gives the represented world a dreamlike quality is even more

attuned to a revealing of the archetypal, to what beyond all historical specificity turns all times into permanence, an eternal present.

But, as Julio Cortázar's *Rayuela* (1963) had already shown, such timelessness not only harbours the cyclical inevitability of human fate but also freedom from time as a feeling of being free from history which the characters in this novel cannot have in Europe but only in Latin America. And this freedom from linear succession is mirrored in the quite uncommon structure of the novel, which in its third part contains "expendable chapters" that according to a "Table of Instructions" must be inserted in an unpredictable order into the two parts we have already read. Thus the reader is to move through the text in hopscotch fashion, repeatedly re-arranging and revalidating the already familiar according to the newly established sequence.

This brings us to another stage of writing against succession, an attack on narrative sequentiality as an equivalent of temporal succession. Vladimir Nabokov in *Pale Fire* had already one year before presented a novel in the shape of an annotated edition of a poem – with the annotations containing a story of their own – in which the different parts can be read in a multiple sequence (poem with annotations; first poem, then annotations; first annotations, then poem). And if, in the blurb of the Weidenfeld and Nicolson edition, *Pale Fire* is called "a do-it-yourself kind of novel"[16], this is even more true for B.S. Johnson's *The Unfortunates* (1969), which consists of 27 separately bound folios that come in a box. As only the first and last are marked as such, the reader is invited to arrange the others according to his own choice. And even Johnson does not go as far as Marc Saporta, who, in his *Composition No. 1* (1962), had presented only loose unnumbered pages. In postmodern formal experiments of this kind, authorial control over presentational sequence – and thus over temporal succession in the reading process – is relinquished. The consequence is – as long as we share E.M. Cameron's minimalist definition of a text as "these words in this order"[17], – that what we get instead of one text is a set of components from which we may construct multiple texts ourselves. The latest version of this tendency to turn the reader into a kind of writer is "hypertext", a computer program consisting of a set of textual units, so-called "lexias", and a number of combinational rules minimally guiding a virtually endless aleatory process of text construction[18]. And it is obvious that temporal

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[16] Vladimir Nabokov, *Pale Fire*, London 1962, back cover.

[17] E. M. Cameron, *The Night Battle. Essays*, London 1962, p. 145.

[18] Cf. for example Michael Joyce, *Afternoon* (Environment: Storyspace Beta 3.3), Jackson, MI 1987, and Stuart Moulthrop, *Forking Path. An Interaction after Jorge Luis Borges* (Environment: Storyspace Beta 3.3.), Jackson, MI 1987.

succession thus becomes totally dependent on human agency, losing every trace of its deterministic aspect.

In the domain of postmodern poetry, writing against time as succession is most obvious in the so-called L-A-N-G-U-A-G-E poetry, a term signifying language-centered writing in the sense that language is taken as a play of signifiers, not as a medium of expression for a lyric subject. What we thus get is a grammatically and semantically quite unusual arrangement of words whose graphic distribution on the page often suggests a non-linear – or rather a multilinear – reading[19]: something closer to early modernist poetry by Gertrude Stein or the Futurists than to anything else. The result is a heightening of polysemy to a point where referential meaning becomes arbitrary and the mode of succession is radically invalidated in favour of multiple virtual relationships between the coexistent.

In drama we find a similar tendency, for instance, in the texts that Richard Foreman has written for his "Ontological-Hysteric Theatre"[20], a kind of performance theatre working with tableaus and making visible the multiple relationships between objects and actors by means of cords strung up between them. As Gertrude Stein had done already in her "landscape plays", Foreman also employed many near-repetitions in his texts, and like her he is bent on replacing the causal chain of temporal succession by the impression of a sequence of 'present' moments.

VII

Much of what has been described so far has led narratologists and literary theorists to introduce spatial metaphor instead of concepts of time. From Joseph Frank's extensive *Sewanee Review* article[21] in 1945 onwards through Sharon Spencer's *Space, Time and Structure in the Modern Novel*[22], Joseph A. Kestner's *The Spatiality of the Novel*[23] and Jeffrey R. Smitten's and Ann Daghistany's critical anthology *Spatial Form in Narrative*[24] (1981) – to name only a

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[19] *In the American Tree*, ed. by Ron Silliman, Orono 1987, and *'Language' Poetries*, ed. by Doug Messerli, New York 1987.

[20] Richard Foreman, *Plays and Manifestos*, ed. by Kate Davy, New York, 1976.

[21] Joseph Frank,"Spatial Form in Modern Literature", *Sewanee Review* 53/1945, pp. 221–240; pp. 443–456; pp. 643–653; revised in: "Spatial Form: Some Further Reflections", *Critical Inquiry* 5/1978, pp. 275–290.

[22] Sharon Spencer, *Space, Time and Structure in the Modern Novel*, New York 1971.

[23] Joseph A. Kestner, *The Spatiality of the Novel*, Detroit, MI 1978.

[24] Jeffrey R. Smitten/Ann Daghistany (eds.), *Spatial Form in Narrative*, Ithaca, NY 1981.

few major works – this recourse to spatial metaphor has been firmly established. As I have tried to demonstrate, the reason for this does not lie in 20th-century literary art – for I have been well able to do without spatiality in my description. It rather lies in the employment of structuralist thought, which is based on spatial metaphor and brackets the temporal dimension. This can be closely observed, for instance, in the employment of architectural metaphor in Gérard Genette's chapter on 'Literature and Space' ("La littérature et l'espace") in *Figures II*[25].

What should also have become clear by now is that spatial metaphor not only blinds us to the fact that the major concern of 20th-century literary artists was with time, not space, but also tends to make us forget that we cannot ever in our inner intuition – that is, where meaning is constituted – replace time by space but at best one temporal mode by another one.

Within the broader scope of poststructuralist theory, the traces of structuralist architectural (that is, spatial) metaphor and the desire for indeterminacy have even led to the general assumption that writing comes before speech, the spatial arrangement of signs before the temporally successive one. Derrida in his quasi-concept of différance even speaks of "spacing [...] the becoming-space of time" ("espacement [...] devenir-espace du temps")[26] without ever giving the slightest hint how this can be achieved. Yet this is part of a wider issue requiring a discussion of its own[27]. Here it may suffice to mention that neither writing nor reading can take place outside the temporal mode of succession. And – as anyone who ever tried to find out whether some arabesques on an ancient stone are language signs or mere ornaments can certainly tell you – that the spatial coding of language in writing is quite incomplete without a rule of sequential perception that determines the transformation of the spatially coexistent into the temporally successive. In short, language is essentially a temporal medium and literary art a temporal art – temporal in terms of the mode of succession. And what literary artists have tried to do in this century is to break free of the limitations of their medium, to create at least the illusion of the two other temporal modes, permanence and coexistence, within the inescapable successive mode of their writing.

We can see this now all the more clearly because things seem to have changed somewhere in the Eighties. Sequential and continuous – even chrono-

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[25] Gérard Genette, "La littérature et l'espace", in: G. G., *Figures II* (Collection Tel Quel), Paris 1969, pp. 43–48.

[26] Jacques Derrida, "Différance", in: J. D., *Marges de la philospophie* (Collection critique), Paris 1972, pp. 1–27, here p. 8. English: J. D., *Margins of Philosophy*, transl. by Alan Bass, Brighton 1982, pp. 1–29, here p. 8.

[27] Cf. Herbert Grabes, "Space, Time, and the Theory of Transformations", *English Studies in Transition*, ed. by Robert Clark and Piero Boitani, London 1993, pp. 73–83.

logical – narration has come back on a grand scale, even narrative poetry is being written again, and in drama a "new realism" has been established. This may have much to do with the historical and political turn in the second phase of postmodernism promoted by feminism, ethnic groups and third-world "postcolonial" writers. What they deem necessary is a re-writing of the pre-modernist stories of causal linearity. Yet this is another topic, the ending of 20th-century literary aesthetic and what comes after the writing against time. It may be significant that Ursula LeGuin's *The Dispossessed*[28] relates the career of the physicist Shevek who has made himself a name by discovering the "principles of simultaneity" and is working at a "General Temporal Theory" uniting simultaneity and sequency – a story which LeGuin narrates in a wholly linear manner.

[28] Ursula LeGuin, *The Dispossessed*, London 1974.