PART II

The long sixties, 1954–1975

Introduction: on or about the year 1966

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"On or about December 1910," Virginia Woolf wrote in 1924, "human character changed."[1] The nineteenth-century view of human character as a stable given – rich and complex, subject to development over time, but in principle knowable and representable – had underwritten the Victorian novel, but it had been under pressure for some time, and on or about December 1910 it gave way to the forces of modernity. Woolf is talking about the onset of modernism, which was surely, as she knew perfectly well, a process spanning decades, not an event. Why identify it, then, with a particular month?

Scholars have puzzled about this. Was Woolf thinking about the exhibition of post-impressionist artists that opened in December 1910, curated by the art critic Roger Fry, a member of her circle, which introduced the English public to advanced French painting? Was she thinking about the death of King Edward VII, ending the brief Edwardian period, or about the governing Liberal Party's threat to abolish the House of Lords? Was she thinking about the bizarre hoax that she and her friends perpetrated on the Royal Navy that month, blacking up and disguising themselves as a delegation of Abyssinians and getting a guided tour of a battleship? Was she perhaps thinking of the nervous breakdown she suffered, the first of several?[2]

Woolf couldn't have expected to be taken seriously. She only wanted to capture, in an appropriately arbitrary and tongue-in-cheek way, some sense of the abruptness of change that her generation experienced in the years of cultural modernization between, roughly, the turn of the nineteenth century and the Great War of 1914–18. For Woolf and her contemporaries, it felt *as if* everything changed in the space of a month or so, and that is what dating the onset of modernism to a particular month and year – on or about December 1910 – expresses. It is also, surely, a cultural-historical thought experiment: *if* we date the onset of modernism to December 1910, then what does that version of modernism look like? It looks, unsurprisingly, like

the modernism that Woolf herself was in the thick of around the year 1924, when she paused to reflect on where, how, and when *this* modernism had emerged.

Cultural producers and consumers in the Western industrialized societies found themselves in parallel position during the 1970s and 80s. They had undergone an experience that felt abrupt and total, and they might have undertaken a parallel thought experiment: when, where, and how had everything changed? When had modernism given way to postmodernism?

Let's try updating Woolf's thought-experiment: *on or about October 1966, modernism became postmodernism.* Why October 1966? For one thing, it could serve as the symbolic date of origin for postmodernist fiction, or at least for a certain strain of postmodernism in fiction. As he tells it, Raymond Federman, a French-born American scholar of Samuel Beckett, sat down to begin composing his first novel, *Double or Nothing* (published 1971), on October 1, 1966, in Paris.[3] Unflaggingly self-reflective and experimental, *Double or Nothing* is a model of the American brand of postmodernism that Federman himself preferred to call *surfiction*, but that others (following William Gass) called *metafiction*, and that would in due course be assimilated to the broader category of postmodernism. Other postmodern novels of the year 1966 – or at any rate, novels on their way to a postmodernism still in the making – included Barth's *Giles Goat-boy*, Christine Brooke-Rose's *Such*, Burroughs's *The Soft Machine* (a 1961 novel reissued in a new version in 1966), Coover's *The Origin of the Brunists*, William H. Gass's *Omensetter's Luck*, B. S. Johnson's *Trawl*, McElroy's *A Smuggler's Bible*, Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*, Sorrentino's *The Sky Changes*, and Charles Wright's *The Wig.*

The occasion could not be more perfectly symbolic: Federman, in Paris to research Beckett, exemplary late-modernist and one-time secretary to James Joyce, begins his own novel and helps launch postmodernism. *Too* perfectly symbolic, in fact: Federman was a notorious self-mythographer, and his story is as untrustworthy as any of his novels, a fiction of origins rather than a sober matter of fact. Altogether more serious-minded were the events later that same month of October 1966 at Johns Hopkins University in Maryland, when at a conference called "The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man," French poststructuralism was introduced to the United States, essentially for the first time. Roland Barthes and Jacques Lacan were both there. Derrida delivered a seminal lecture entitled, "Structural, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences." Of all the poststructuralists who

would figure so crucially in the development of what, in the Anglophone world, would come to be called "theory," only Foucault was missing.

"Theory," in the sense of philosophical speculation, had of course existed for millennia, since the Greek forerunners of Plato, but "theory" in the peculiarly postmodern Anglophone sense – not theory *of* this or that, but theory as the "critique of whatever is taken as natural" – dates, at least symbolically, from this occasion.[4] It would arrive in waves – a first wave of the thinkers who were (or should have been) at Johns Hopkins in 1966, and then a later wave of Baudrillard, Deleuze, and Félix Guattari, and the feminist theorists Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva – and it would transform academic discourse in the United States and Britain, and even penetrate as far as popular culture. Theory, however, should not be mistaken for something like the *cause* of postmodernism; that is, post-structuralism does *not* constitute the blueprint for the production of postmodernist artworks or other forms of cultural expression, as some people have rashly concluded. Poststructuralism is not the theory of which postmodernism is the practice. Rather, theory, the subject of Thomas Doherty's chapter in this section, is itself one of the *symptoms* of postmodernism, on a par with postmodernist novels, poems, films, buildings, cities, and so on.

The origin myth of postmodernist fiction and that of poststructuralist theory converge in October 1966. It makes for a compelling synchronicity, but hardly the only one we can observe in the year 1966. For instance:

On or about January 1966 the leading Pop artist, Andy Warhol, having renounced painting and reoriented his art practice toward film, installation, and performance, began staging mixed-media shows under the title of "The Exploding Plastic Inevitable," featuring a short-lived rock band that would have an enormous impact in the long run – The Velvet Underground. Warhol's collaboration with The Velvet Underground crossed the divide between high and low culture that had been carefully policed in the modernist era, and signaled the onset of a new era when avant-garde tendencies converged and cross-pollinated with developments in popular culture, to explosive effect.

On or about April 1966 the Canadian poet Leonard Cohen, published his second and last novel, the difficult, controversial, and frankly pornographic *Beautiful Losers*, and in the aftermath, like Warhol, reoriented his career, renouncing literature for the life of a singer-songwriter. *Beautiful Losers* is arguably one of the most fully, unreservedly postmodern novels to appear in 1966. In it, the fantastic and the everyday, the historical and the hallucinated, mix and mingle. By the end, one of Cohen's protagonists has

literally, physically disintegrated, as Pynchon's protagonist Tyrone Slothrop later would in *Gravity's Rainbow*, but then reassembles himself as, of all things, a movie of the R 'n' B singer Ray Charles projected onto the sky. Where Oedipa Mass, the heroine of Pynchon's 1966 novel *The Crying of Lot 49*, asks herself "Shall I project a world?" but then stops short of doing so, Cohen embraces the alternative-reality mode and morphs his character into a literal, fantastic projection.

On or about July 1966 Bob Dylan, having returned home to Woodstock, New York, after a series of grueling and confrontational concerts in support of his latest recording, the double LP *Blonde and Blonde*, showcasing his new electric sound, was involved in some sort of motorcycle accident – how serious remains unclear.[5] Dylan, then at the very height of his powers as a visionary poet of rock, had seemingly achieved what other rock musicians around 1966 – especially the Beatles, but also Warhol's "house band," The Velvet Underground – were also seeking: recognition as a serious artist, not just a commercial entertainer for the teenage market. Whether forced by his injuries to abandon touring for the time being, or merely using the accident as a pretext for doing so, Dylan literally went underground, down into the basement studio of his band's house near Woodstock, to reacquaint himself with the raw materials of his own musical tradition, emerging a year later having reinvented himself as a much sparer, more severe songwriter on the album *John Wesley Harding*. Like Dylan, the Beatles, too, stopped touring in 1966, after an unsatisfactory tour in North America and Asia; also like Dylan, they disappeared into the recording studio, reinventing themselves continually over the next several years, first of all as *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. Unlike Dylan, however, the Beatles never reemerged from the studio to perform together as a touring band.

On or about August 1966 the Beatles themselves released their most aesthetically ambitious recording to date, *Revolver*, the album that marks the emergence of the rock album as a unified artwork. Arguably the first rock album designed to be experienced as an integrated whole, *Revolver* is crisscrossed with motifs, both musical and verbal, that echo across the album from cut to cut.[6] Even as it aspires to a higher degree of integration than any rock album to date, however, *Revolver* also seems more eclectic and heterogeneous than almost any rock album to date, each of its songs seeming to belong to a different sound world from all the others.[7] On the one hand, then, *Revolver* anticipates highly integrated albums including the Beatles' own *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* or later "concept" albums by The Who, Marvin Gaye, David Bowie, Pink Floyd, and

others. On the other hand, *Revolver* also anticipates the radical stylistic and thematic eclecticism of the Beatles' *White Album* (1968). Balancing its centripetal and centrifugal tendencies, *Revolver* stands poised between integration and disintegration, unity and diversity, concentration and dispersion – between, some might say, modernism and postmodernism.

On or about December 1966 the Italian director Michelangelo Antonioni's first English-language film, *Blow-Up*, opened in the United States (it would not open in the United Kingdom until August of the next year). *Blow-Up* in itself is a dense knot of convergences and synchronicities. Its ostensible literary source is a short story entitled "Las babas del diablo" (1959) by Julio Cortázar, a major figure of the Latin American literary *Boom* – the subject of Wendy Faris's account in Chapter 8 of this volume – who, together with another postmodernist forerunner, Jorge Luis Borges, was already widely read and admired on the Continent, and soon would be in the English-speaking world as well. (The English translation of his 1963 novel *Hopscotch [Rayuela]* was published in 1966.) *Blow-Up* addresses, with a mixture of anthropological curiosity and existentialist angst, the very milieu in which boundary-breaking rockers such as the Beatles and Dylan (on his 1966 tour) flourished, namely "Swinging London" of the mid-1960s. Of the two major European art films of 1966 that tried, with only partial success, to come to terms with global youth culture – Godard's *Masculine Feminine* being the other one – *Blow-Up* is the more prescient, featuring as it does an explosive scene of the British blues band the Yardbirds performing in a London club; the budding pop star or *yé-yé* girl of *Masculine Feminine* pales by comparison. (A few years later Godard would engage more robustly with rock music than he was able to do in 1966, incorporating documentary footage of the Rolling Stones recording "Sympathy for the Devil" in *One Plus One* [1968]).

Antonioni establishes the tone of alienation and absurdity in the world of his film by setting its opening scene amid the severe, stripped-down architecture of the *Economist* complex, designed by Alison and Peter Smithson, which provides a suitably hostile, regimented backdrop for the anarchic antics of a mime troupe. The architecture critic Rayner Banham, in a book that appeared in 1966, gave this architectural style a name, calling it the *New Brutalism* – a term of approval for Banham, referring to the use of exposed, undecorated materials such as *béton brut*, raw concrete, which in his view was a sign of this style's aesthetic honesty and integrity: what you see is what you get. It was a sign, in other words, of New Brutalism's adherence to the aesthetic standards of architectural *modernism*: integrity, functionality, expression of the materials, renunciation of decoration.

Antonioni's use of this style to connote alienation anticipates the sorts of critiques of high-modernist architecture that would eventually provoke the search for some alternative to modernism – the search for a postmodern architecture.

Antonioni's cinematic critique of modernist architecture coincides with the appearance of two books that would lay the groundwork for the emergence of architectural postmodernism in the 1970s. The first of these is *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, by the American architect Robert Venturi. Here Venturi argues for an alternative set of values to those of modernism: not unity and simplicity but complexity and contradiction; not clarity and the expression of materials but ambiguity and the principle of "both-and"; not "less is more," Mies van der Rohe's modernist slogan, but "Main Street is almost all right." By "Main Street" Venturi means the pop-cultural and commercial elements of the urban and ex-urban landscape – its signage, iconic forms, and visual busyness and clutter, its *bad taste*. It is Venturi's embrace of the complexities and contradictions of Main Street that would over the next few years evolve into the postmodernist appreciation of the Las Vegas Strip in *Learning from Las Vegas*, his 1972 collaboration with Denise Scott-Brown and Steven Izenour.

The other foundational book of 1966 is Italian architect Aldo Rossi's *Architecture of the City* [*L'architettura della cittá*], which proposes a vision of architectural historicism and urban form at odds with orthodox modernism. Resisting the modernist tendency to view the city in exclusively functionalist terms, Rossi argues that, apart from its economic, administrative, circulatory, and other functions, a city is also a repository of history and memory. Reluctant to apply too dogmatically the modernist dictum that "form follows function," he entertains the possibility that in cities, especially in older cities, function can sometimes follow form, in the sense that inherited urban elements – monuments, ancient buildings, squares and plazas, entire quarters (his example is the Roman Forum) – can continue to shape the city even after their function changes or disappears altogether. Rossi's approach clearly has something in common with Kevin Lynch's earlier insights (in *The Image of the City* [1960]) into the role of urban landmarks in making cities navigable and livable – insights that would later inform Fredric Jameson's critique of postmodernism. Rossi also evidently shares something with the American urbanist Jane Jacobs, whose defense of urban complexity (in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* [1961]) in turn influenced Venturi's postmodernism.

We could continue accumulating details of cultural history that, item by item, substantiate one's sense of 1966 as a threshold year for postmodernism,

the year when postmodernism achieved critical mass or escape velocity. *On or about the year 1966, modernism became postmodernism.*

But why identify an onset "moment" at all, whether that moment is a month long or a year long? Just as in the case of modernism in Virginia Woolf's thought experiment, the onset of postmodernism, too, is really a process, not a discrete event – a more or less long duration, not a "moment." The consensus view seems to be that postmodernism emerged over the course of the "long sixties," the span of years from the mid-fifties to the early seventies.[8] This is a reasonable and defensible position, for even if elements of what would later be called postmodernism can be traced back to the early fifties, or even as far back the late thirties or earlier – maybe much earlier – these elements converge only in the sixties to form something like a period style.

Granted the reasonableness of the consensus view, there is still something to be gained by entertaining more narrowly focused onset dates. As with Virginia Woolf's 1910, each date implies a working hypothesis about the nature of the postmodernism that could be said to emerge around that time. Each is a thought experiment: *if* we date the onset of postmodernism to the mid-sixties – 1966, let's say – then what does that version of postmodernism look like?

Other dates have been proposed, it goes without saying, and each proposal implies a somewhat different construction of postmodernism. Thus, for example, the avant-garde Fluxus artist Dick Higgins once identified 1958 as the onset year of what he called "post-cognitive" art, while Sally Banes nominated a somewhat later date, 1963, associated with the onset of a countercultural artistic practice that sprang up initially in New York's Greenwich Village among overlapping circles of Pop artists, dancers, performance artists, and underground filmmakers.[9] The postmodernisms that Higgins and Banes construct, though somewhat different in their emphases, are nevertheless both oriented toward the avant-garde component of postmodernism – postmodernism as the continuation of the modernist-era avant-garde impulse down to the postwar period and beyond. While the avant-garde impulse is surely one component of postmodernism, their constructions exclude the popular-culture component that emerges so clearly when one focuses on 1966, the year of the Exploding Plastic Inevitable, of *Revolver*, of *Blow-Up*.

Alternatively, one could nominate a year like 1968 as postmodernism's onset – surely a more compelling candidate than 1966, from many points of view. To identify 1968 as postmodernism's threshold year inevitably entails privileging the historical determinants of cultural change – historical in the

capital H sense of world-historical developments such as the Tet Offensive in Vietnam and the antiwar movement on the home front, the May Events in Paris, the Prague Spring, the political assassinations of that year, and so on.[10] A postmodernism keyed to the onset year 1968 will inevitably emphasize the legacy of liberationist politics and mass movements, which certainly deserve to be taken into account, but it also risks obscuring or muting the *semi-autonomy* of culture. Culture develops *not only* in response to the unfolding of capital H History, but *also* as a consequence of its own internal dynamics, which is not entirely determined by historical conditions. Culture unfolds not in lock-step with History, but in counterpoint with it; the rhythm of its unfolding is syncopated. This syncopation is easier to discern if we privilege a year less freighted with world-historical events than 1968.

Which is not to say that 1966 is bereft of world-shaping events. Arguably, many of the world-historical transformations that emerge so spectacularly in 1968 actually have their roots in developments dating to 1966. The anti-Vietnam War movement is already mobilized in 1966, as reflected, for instance, in Allen Ginsberg's monumental antiwar poem of that year, *Witchita Vortex Sutra*, composed orally during a bus and car trip through the Midwest and recorded on a portable tape recorder bought with money donated expressly for that purpose by none other than Bob Dylan.[11] The second wave of feminism crosses an institutional threshold in 1966 with the founding of the National Organization for Women (NOW) to agitate for justice for women in the workplace, the home, and the public sphere. The black-separatist Black Panther Party is also founded in 1966, amplifying fears of violent rebellion, while on the other side of the world Mao Zedong launches the Cultural Revolution in China, throwing his country into turmoil and incidentally creating a model for revolutionary utopianism in the West.

Finally, if we do carry out our thought experiment and accept the working hypothesis that on or about the year 1966 postmodernism began, then what *does* that version of postmodernism look like? It looks more or less like the chapters that follow. As John Johnstone shows in Chapter 5, "Mass Mediation," the postmodernism that emerges in the mid-sixties is, first of all, profoundly shaped by the ubiquity of the mass media, theorized by Marshall McLuhan, whose vision of a mass-mediated "global village" would be nightmarishly realized in the televisualization of the Vietnam War. As David Shumway's chapter shows, that version of postmodernism is also characterized by the emergence of countercultures intimately affiliated with the political movements of the era, including black nationalism and the antiwar movement. The countercultural arts of the sixties are the

contact zone where popular culture mingles and cross-breeds with the avant-garde, as in Warhol's Factory and other sites of high/low contact and cultural exchange.

Randall Stevenson illustrates how anxious reports of the death of the novel, echoing throughout the long sixties, are belied by the vigor of innovation in long-form fiction, beginning with the French *nouveau roman* of the fifties and continuing through the emergence of black humor, metafiction, and other experimental and adventurous forms. Though the term itself was not yet current, many of these developments would later by subsumed under postmodernism, as would, perhaps with less justification, the Latin American *Boom* writers, whose emergence predates postmodernism by decades and whose legacy, especially among postcolonial and diasporic writers worldwide, is arguably broader and longer-lasting than postmodernism's – this is the subject of Faris's chapter. Finally, the postmodern era also coincides with the era of "theory," a conjuncture treated by Thomas Doherty in Chapter 9. Not only is theory's onset on or about the year 1966 coincidental with postmodernism's, but theory and postmodernism develop in tandem, with many reciprocal influences.

Notes

1 Woolf, "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown," 4.
2 See Peter Stansky, *On or about 1910: Early Bloomsbury and Its Intimate World* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1996. For a different version of 1910, emphasizing Kandinsky's breakthrough to abstraction and Schoenberg's to dissonance in that year, see Thomas Harrison, *1910: The Emancipation of Dissonance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).
3 See Raymond Federman, *Critifiction: Postmodern Essays* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993) 113–14.
4 Jonathan Culler, "Literary Theory," in Joseph Gibaldi (ed.), *Introduction to Scholarship in Modern Languages and Literatures,* 2nd edn. (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1992), 208.
5 See David Hajdu, *Positively 4th Street: The Lives and Times of Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, Mimi Baez Fariña and Richard Fariña* (London: Bloomsbury, 2001), 292–5.
6 Russell Reising, *Every Sound There Is: The Beatles' "Revolver" and the Transformation of Rock and Roll* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 251–2.
7 Reising, *Every Sound There Is*, 236.
8 See Fredric Jameson, "Periodizing the Sixties," in *The Syntax of History. The Ideologies of Theory: Essays, 1971–1986*, vol. 2 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 178–208; DeKoven, *Utopia Limited,* 2004.

9 See Dick Higgins, *A Dialectic of Centuries: Notes toward a Theory of the New Arts* (New York: Printed Editions, 1978), 101; Sally Banes, *Greenwich Village, 1963: Avant-Garde Performance and the Effervescent Body* (Durham, NC; London: Duke University Press, 1993).

10 See Mark Kurlansky, *1968, The Year That Rocked the World* (London: Vintage, 2005).

11 See Mike Marqusee, *Chimes of Freedom: The Politics of Bob Dylan's Art* (New York Press, 2003), 190–2