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Remembering Modernity: Technics of Temporal Memory in Twentieth-Century Literature and Film

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Author
Podolny, Michael

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Remembering Modernity: Technics of Temporal Memory in Twentieth-Century Literature and Film

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

by

Michael Podolny

September 2012

Dissertation Committee:
  Dr. James Tobias, Chairperson
  Dr. Steven Axelrod
  Dr. Kimberly Devlin
The Dissertation of Michael Podolny is approved:

__________________________________________________
__________________________________________________
__________________________________________________

Committee Chairperson

University of California, Riverside
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Convention suggests that I have written this dissertation myself; however, to paraphrase Deleuze and Guattari, since each of us is several, there was already quite a crowd. If I may be forgiven a martial metaphor: soldiering through a Ph.D. program can be an arduous process, the completion of which is unthinkable without the support of many, and if the dissertation is its culmination, then it too must bear the imprint of a multitude of allies. Here is an attempt to acknowledge the deep gratitude I feel toward the lovely crowd of people who made this process and this work possible.

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Finally, to Krista: you are and always have been the reason, the way, and the reward. Thank you for being you, and being in my life, and being my life. Thank you for getting us here.
This dissertation is dedicated
to my grandfather, who cannot read it, and to the memory of my grandmother.

With love, огромное спасибо за всё.

And, once again, to Krista.
My dissertation explores the notion that human memory is technical, prosthetic, and has been connected throughout history to writing. This thesis, when applied to modernist criticism, suggests several important questions: since modernist art, both literary and visual, often seeks a greater fidelity to its own contemporary condition, can an entire age be contemporary to itself? If traditional memory is eradicated by modernism, what takes its place? How can we remember modernity? To answer these questions, I develop a culturally-specific reading of the technics of modern memory.

While the dissertation, on the one hand, continues the long-standing tradition of interpreting the cultures of modernity and contemporaneity through technology, it offers a new critical and theoretical matrix that departs from this tradition in significant ways. Ultimately, I argue that the changing philosophical conception of technics must be central
to the project of analyzing twentieth-century literature and film, focusing on a series of modernist and postmodernist texts that engage in this process of refiguring memory and subjectivity through writing. Because my framework depends on the conception of technical development as a production-related global phenomenon, I analyze concurrent Eastern European modernisms as well. Also, since the very idea of radical mnemonic reevaluation suggests a disruption of conventionalized epochality, each chapter presents a nonlinear argument, often connecting works from different periods. Additionally, to account for the importance of technics for this project, chapters include intermedia analyses, or discussions of alternative textual forms.

The dissertation consists of five chapters. The first, a general introduction, explores the theoretical and philosophical groundwork outlined above to position the cultural production of modernity within a larger technological history of the human. The second focuses on modernist texts that engage in the process of refiguring memory and subjectivity through writing. The third examines performative memory and its relationship to the prosthetic body, while the fourth concentrates on textual memory following the rise of cybernetics. Finally, the fifth chapter examines film, continuing the comparative study of works from the West and the former Eastern Bloc to trace the differences in their treatment of memory attributable to each culture’s relationship to technical production.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1. Toward a Technology of Modernity: .........................1
  Memory, Technics, and Texts

CHAPTER 2. Radically Remembered Selves .....................................28
  Memory, Time, and the Literary Forms of the Modern

CHAPTER 3. Future Beyond Sense: ............................................69
  Absurd Theatrics of Mechanized Memory

CHAPTER 4. The Limits of Control: .............................................116
  Ethics of Virtual and Cybernetic Memory in Nabokov’s Novels

CHAPTER 5. Film as Virtual Engine: .........................................165
  Actualization, Memory, and Mnemonic Technics
  in Tarkovsky’s Solaris

CONCLUSION. Memory 2.0: ...................................................201
  New Media, Technics, and Time

WORKS CITED ..............................................................................209
Chapter 1

Toward a Techno-logy of Modernity: Memory, Technics, and Texts

*The technical structure of the archiving archive also determines the structure of the archivable content even in its very coming into existence and its relationship to the future. The archivization produces as much as it records the event.*

– Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*

Traditionally, studies of modernity have been inextricably linked with studies of technology. This connection works on the most intuitive level: the fall into modern life, as we understand it from a historical perspective, has been accompanied by an ever-increasing technicization of that life’s everyday processes. The Industrial Revolution, as early as the eighteenth century, began changing material fabrication through the producers’ increased reliance on machinic production. The process toward greater mechanization continued into the twentieth century, when the so-called Great War, with its unprecedented escalation in the use of machines of destruction, deeply disturbed the humanist worldview that still controlled, in however diminished a way, the default idea of self in the minds of the contemporary populace. For the rest of the century, new technical upheavals, from the fall of the atomic bomb to the rise of cybernetics, have served as other signposts for scientific, cultural, and artistic reevaluations of modernity, contemporaneity, and futurity. It seems self-evident that this evaluative trend will likely prove to continue; more interestingly, however, it is one that has also very likely gone on
since the beginning of what we might call “the human age.” That is, one of the underlying arguments of this work is the suggestion that thinking about technological change as a strictly modern phenomenon risks forgetting the role of technics in human history. By “technics,” I will mean the artificial production of and by humanity that includes but is not limited to what is broadly dubbed “technology,” a much older, and a much more important constitutive factor of the “human” as such. Technics, in other words, is the other against which the human finds its identity.

While I am certainly interested in the examination of properly “technological” artifice, a more central thrust of my project is the pursuit of the notion that human memory, that most distinctive of our productions, is itself technical, prosthetic, and connected inextricably to writing (or, more generally, to the recording of archives). Just as important is the inescapable elision of this notion in the human understanding of the self, which could be seen as far back as ancient Greek philosophy and as recently as the contemporary moment of seemingly meteoric technical change. Indeed, as new media technics develop at increasing rates, it becomes more difficult to account for these developments as technical memory. This paradox leads to an important question: if writing is constitutive of the human subject, and if changes in technics engender subjectual changes, or rather prostheticize memory differently, how can critical response to memory (or its reckoning) account for these changes? In other words, is it possible to remember memory, particularly in the modern era which, to accommodate for the radically changing technicity of the world, attempted to modernize its own writing?

Finally, since much of modernist art (both literary and visual) posits its goal as a greater
fidelity to its own contemporary conditions, can an entire age be contemporary to itself? If modernism eradicates traditional memory, what takes its place? How can we remember modernity?

We may begin to approach this question by considering the problem of remembering technics itself, especially since the very term appears esoteric. To distinguish it from the much more commonly used term “technology,” it might be useful to trace it back to its origins in classical philosophy. In *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle describes art as the coming into being, or contriving and considering of coming into being of something that “is capable of being or not being, and whose origin is in the maker and not the thing made.”¹ This famous definition of art as production, fashioning, or designing also signifies an important separation between two kinds of art: that of making and that of acting. It is the difference between technê and epistêmê, the difference that takes the idea of bringing forth into being some thing. Considering the way the distinction between epistêmê and technê was developed from their often complex overlapping meaning in the works of Plato to their forceful disambiguation in Aristotle’s may serve as one of the early (and incredibly persistent) renderings of the aggregate of technê, or technology, as a secondary and parasitic influence. Thus, in an attempt to overturn this traditional drive to render “technological” apparatuses and phenomena, I will avoid the term “technology” in favor of “technics.” Following Bernard Stiegler, I will also attempt to introduce an alternative spelling, arrived at through back-formation, of “techno-logy,” which preserves the sense of root morphemes technê and logos while

¹ Aristotle (141)
self-disambiguating from the too-well-worn term we know so well. And, since technê and epistêmê, as Stiegler suggests, are in essence the same kind of thing, I would like to propose that in this project, instead of asking what we know about modernity through its epistemes, we should instead ask what we know through its technics. To shift the scholarly enterprise then: we are after a techno-logy of modernity (as opposed to its epistemology).

The relationship between culture and technology, or what we might alternatively describe as the human and technics, is usually understood, thanks in no small part to the distinction made by the classical Greeks, as a causal one. That is, the human artisan causes technics to come into being through poiesis: a solid, already existing craftsperson rendering forth some heretofore-nonexistent device. Of course, for about as long as this understanding has existed, a counterstrain to this notion has likewise inhered in our cultural understanding of technics: that is, as some adversarial force that always threatens the solidity of the creator. Such fears can be traced throughout the history of human culture, though, certainly, never as powerfully as with the rise of what we now broadly term modernity. This conflict may be illustrated by the arbitrariness of the two-sided debate that arose in the second half of the twentieth century around “new media” technics, often represented by Marshall McLuhan’s motto “the medium is the message” and Raymond Williams’s position of technics as strictly a product of the human. That is, the debate between whether technical media determine the human and whether they are determined by the human engages in a theoretical tug-of-war that all the while insists on the primacy of one position over the other. Thinking technics as either a shaping force or
one shaped by another fails to consider a broader concern: that of a deconstructive possibility that always complicates each side of the binary with some taint of its other.

It would be false to suggest, however, that the problem has been unexplored altogether. Scholars of technics have introduced ways of thinking of the relationship that depart from the idea that one side of the binary directly influences the other. Already in the 1930s, Lewis Mumford, in *Technics and Civilization*, highlights the problem, or, as he describes it, “confusion”, suggesting that “for the last three thousand years, at least, machines have been an essential part of our older technical heritage.”

We must not forget that technics has been and continues to be an important element of the human organism. However, while accounting for this complex interrelationship, Mumford goes to some length to disambiguate art and technics, still working within the Platonic model. In a characteristic moment of his lecture series *Art and Technics*, he argues that the two are of the same kind, though “art is that part of technics which bears the fullest imprint of the human personality; technics is that manifestation of art from which a large part of the human personality has been excluded.”

Other twentieth-century theorists and philosophers of technology likewise problematize this binary relationship in various ways. For example, Derek deSolla Price outlines a brief but comprehensive historiography of automata as they relate to the development of what may be referred to as the philosophy of “mechanicism,” or the conception of the world in terms of mechanical simulacra. Price suggests that the traditional idea that the proliferation of

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2 Mumford, *Technics and Civilization* (9)

3 Mumford, *Art and Technics* (21)
mechanism(s) led to mechanicism is inverted, and must be considered in reverse in terms of causality: the advances in the production of automata developed mechanical sciences, not the other way around. In other words, the creation of machines does not result from, but rather causes the changes in the sciences that make future and more advanced machine production possible. More recently, Bruno Latour’s actor-network theory, a material-semiotic method, argues that “we have never been modern [...and] that we have never left the old anthropological matrix behind, and that it never could have been otherwise.” By tracing the connections between actual technical objects and the cultural meanings they have inaugurated, Latour suggests that concepts like pre-modernity, modernity, and postmodernity, particularly when defined through relationships with technics, are largely a matter of faith and convention that depend on our collective forgetting of certain fundamental principles of the way technics works with, or constitutes, the human subject.

What is clear through this most cursory look at the critical reception of the human-technics divide is that, in spite of considerable work done by twentieth-century philosophers to destabilize the binary, it often persists in the study of texts of modernism. Or, more precisely, it persists partially, even when some of the problematics are deconstructed. The “techno-logy” has certainly become stock-in-trade in media studies, particularly those examining new media, but continues to be largely absent from the study of the more canonical texts of high modernism, where technicity functions as a

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4 Price (9-23)
5 Latour (47)
marker rather than a true episteme. Of course, the act of problematizing technical modernity in the terms outlined above suggests several difficulties. If technics is not a cause, but a symptom of a permanent fall into the modern, how do we theorize technics as inherently human, if only in terms of alterity? How do we account for specific technological developments that seem to speak of radical changes in the anthropological subject, even if “the matrix” remains constant? Finally, is it possible to stake a middle ground between the scholarly position that the role of technics is an anthropological constant and one that argues that technics radically shifts the condition of the human, particularly in modernity?

The latter question is perhaps the most crucial, since there is no shortage of ontological discussions of technology arguing that the modern and contemporary advances in technics have, indeed, resulted in radical societal and subjectual changes. Indeed, philosophers, social scientists, and art theorists have long engaged in attempts to theorize technicity in terms of its transformative qualities. For example, in “The Question Concerning Technology,” Martin Heidegger discussed technics of modernity as a Gestell, an enframing that sets upon the self and disrupts the normal “revealing” of the self. Here, Heidegger is interested in discovering the essence of technicity; by going back to the Greek origins of technê and epistêmê, he essentially conflates the two, since they are two similar – though not the same – ways in which a thing comes to be. This move is prologue to the suggestion that technicity is not primarily the accomplishment of ends (according to Heidegger, this is a correct reading of technics, not its Wesen, or essence). Then, the essay makes the following claim: modern technics is different from older
technics in that it makes revelation different, by “setting upon” the resources of the production and “challenging forth” the revealing. This is the nature of Heideggerian Gestell, which is usually translated as enframing: though technics has always been revelatory, the revealing now, during modernity, has become a sometimes predatory, materially agonistic process, so to speak, by which all that is (including the human being) is caused to become a quantity, a resource – this is a commodification of the world, and dangerous. Dasein, or the self (the term is often rendered as “being there”) in thrall to Gestell is threatened because its revealing may no longer have the originality it had before modern technics. While more ambivalent on the topic of danger of technics, Walter Benjamin argues, reflecting on the effects technology has on modern culture in his seminal 1936 essay “The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility,” that mechanistically mediated artifacts have suffered an “aural” withering, which ushered in an era of when analysis of artistic production must be closely tied up with questions of technology and mediation. Specifically, the Benjamin essay suggests that the work of art in the modern age, because of the loss of its originality, has become disconnected from aesthetic tradition, or, at any rate, has assumed a new temporal relationship with that tradition. In a sense, this temporal “unsticking” removes the art object from a unique “here and now” which is possible only when considered against other “heres and nows.” Mediational reproducibility, then, can be seen as a destruction of traditional time and memory.

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6 Heidegger (33)
7 Benjamin (88)
While Heidegger (in the work above and in his other seminal essay “The Age of the World Picture”) and Benjamin are primarily (though not exclusively) concerned with new forms of representation like photography and film, their discussions of technics preview technological questions to come. Indeed, the rise of cybernetics further complicates these discussions. In 1950, Alan Turing published the groundbreaking “Computing Machinery and Intelligence,” which was remarkable not simply for its bold predictions about the future of artificial intelligence, but for defining, concisely and practically, a new kind of a test for intelligence. This paper allowed computer science to move away from the purely logical speculations of earlier twentieth century thinkers into the realm of “hard science,” or hypotheses that could be tested and, through this rather circuitous pathway, reformulated into theory. The implications of this move are important for several reasons. First, by allowing the parameters of the “Imitation Game” to be set in a specific way –namely, divorcing the performance to be judged from any observable physical attributes of the machine under examination – Turing was seemingly able to reduce intelligence (and therefore memory, since recall of knowledge and appropriate performance in response to queries are the entirety of the test) to a purely performative function. Secondly, the answer to the question he himself considered early in the essay, which at that point was simply “Can machines think?” could now be rendered in the following way:

I believe that in about fifty years’ time it will be possible to programme computers, with a storage capacity of about 109, to make them play the imitation game so well that an average interrogator will not have more
than 70 per cent chance of making the right identification after five minutes of questioning.  

This answer, if we may call it that, seems problematic precisely because of its overt scientificity. It is not simply that despite sixteen years of attempts on the part of AI developers, not a single computer has been able to pass the Turing test. Much more important is the fact that even if a computer were to perform well in the test, the result of this performance would have to be rendered not with a simple yes/no, pass/fail evaluation, but rather in a language of percentages and probabilities. If the test as it has been so far applied proves anything, it is that the concept of humanness (if to think is to be human) is a scale, a line along which the arbitrary points of each specific human mind must be charted. And, even humans must “play” human when taking the test lest their own thinking ability becomes suspect. In a significant way, the argument of the paper seems to fail on this level: having first problematized the notion of “thinking” to the point of rendering it meaningless through his assertion that using the “normal” definition of the word would be akin to trying to answer the computing intelligence question by using “a statistical survey such as a Gallup poll,” Turing seems to return to just this sort of definition to prove his thesis. Presumably, a non-contradictory consensus of the type he suggests would follow from a series of interlocutions by human interrogators who themselves must be assumed to think, and to think in generally the same way in which the machines they are assessing think. In other words, the statistical particulars of the

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8 Turing (442)

9 Ibid (433)
imitation game, so carefully set up, do not matter in the end, since the outcome of the game depends on an evaluation that may only be made by another “thinking” machine. Thus, while Turing’s essay does not succeed in showing that machines can “think” due to the ultimate indeterminacy of the term “think” itself as well as the subjective manner in which such determinations must be made, it does something else which is no less fascinating: by setting up his “machine” largely in terms of the program it is running – that is, as a disembodied (or variously embodiable) set of regulations to be followed, or a message without the medium – Turing is able to show that as far as any available evaluation can be brought to bear on the cognitive test, there is no necessary difference in “thinking” between a human and a machine, however thinking may be defined. To consider Turing in terms of the posthuman is only natural, though for N. Katherine Hayles, as well as scholars like Margaret Morse, the magic trick is problematic not because it removes the subject into the realm of the digital, but because it seems to threaten humanity with a disembodied future that seems, to them, to be a conclusion of a nightmarish progression into “a culture inhabited by posthumans who regard their bodies as fashion accessories rather than the ground of being.”

This is a position that envisions information as the source of power, while at the same time seeing the body as a vessel of information. This is the way, in short, by which the ideological work of posthuman and cyborg theory can fail, since it risks creating not a hybrid, transgressive subjectivity, but a hopelessly fragmented one instead. What is more, Hayles continues, is that “this separation allows the construction of a hierarchy in which information is given the

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10 Hayles (5)
dominant position and materiality runs a distant second.”¹¹ This is the source of the posthuman nightmare – reducing embodiment to an inconvenient accident that must be borne or even corrected. Therefore, it is not surprising that Hayles’s critique of the Turing test essentially amounts to an exhortation of “putting embodiment back into the picture.”¹² In other words, the test appears to be flawed until the completion of habeas corpus, and will likewise obviously fail after the body is produced, since it will be a nonhuman body of a machine. Also not surprisingly, Žižek joins the ranks of critics of Turing who take him to task for his “blindness to the distinction between doing and saying,”¹³ or, in other words, for confusing the linguistic signification system for the only thing that matters, while at the same time ignoring the performative aspect of its utterances. Reformulating his objection in expressly Lacanian terms, he argues that “one should claim that ‘humanity’ as such ALWAYS-ALREADY WAS ‘posthuman’ – [and] therein resides the gist of Lacan’s thesis that the symbolic order is a parasitical machine which intrudes into and supplements a human being as its artificial prosthesis” (original emphasis).¹⁴ If we read the mirror stage as the moment when a human organism “gets” a body as a prosthesis in a sense that it is only formed as such in terms given to us through the symbolic, then, indeed, Turing’s test misses some crucial point of the very process that makes a human subject. To put it another way, on the level of formulation, the test

¹¹ Ibid (12)
¹² Ibid (xiv)
¹³Žižek (43)
¹⁴ Ibid (45)
seems to disavow a kind of dualism between the real and the symbolic that makes subjectivation according to Lacanian theory possible in the first place. After all, does not Lacan, while commenting on the Cartesian cogito and its conception of the intersection of thought and being, still maintain a clear separation between the “enacted” body and the projected subject, when he says “Where I am, I don’t think, or where I think, I am not?”15 While the mirage of the intersection is dispelled, the stubborn dualism remains. In fact, Turing’s own scientific setup seems to mirror other great moves in history of science that first delimit the framework of their own inquiry and then attempt to use that framework as a kind of a complex topological system of demarcations that such delimitation itself establishes. For example, in a claim very much like Žižek’s above, Latour has proposed that not only have we never been posthuman or postmodern, but that we have never been modern either. In a comprehensive analysis of Boyle’s Law and the experimental process by which it was established, Latour shows that science was invented by a delimiting process that required agency to be recognized in inanimate objects such as scientific measuring devices, or, in Boyle’s specific case, the air pump. When Boyle and his followers announce their results, Latour asks, “Who is speaking when they speak?”16 While the scientists might insist that the facts themselves are speaking, it is in fact the machines within which the facts exhibit themselves that are doing the talking, and “little groups of gentlemen take testimony from natural forces, and they testify to each other

15 Ibid (27)
16 Latour (28)
that they are not betraying but translating the silent behavior of objects.”\textsuperscript{17} While Latour’s project centers around a critique of the scientific project’s attempt to disavow the speaking power of inanimate objects after “listening” to them testify, it nevertheless highlights precisely how such agency in a machine is not only possible, but in fact necessary for the formation of the modern idea of human. If we read the Turing test in this way, it becomes clear that embodiment, or the possibility of the loss of embodiment in a subject, is actually not as crucial as it first appears. If, for Latour, a device like the air pump can have agency, then would it not also be reasonable to say that the object can now suddenly become, in some real sense, a subject as well? Of course, if we take this point to its logical conclusion, the disembodied subject seems not only possible, but somehow necessary to the successful “hard science” experiment, which the Imitation Game clearly aspires to be. The significant difference between Boyle’s slippery act of forgetting (as read by Latour) and Turing’s own logical move is that instead of divesting machines of agency, it seeks to give it back to them. For Turing, the machines can not only speak; they must be taken seriously and listened to with respect. Therefore, in overruling of Professor Jefferson’s objection, which comes from a solipsist point of view that one can only know one thinks by \textit{being} the one who thinks, Turing suggests something that is in fact radically new: that machines must be included in “the polite convention that everyone thinks.”\textsuperscript{18} Instead of listening to the computer and pretending that it is the “natural facts” that speak through it, or its program, the Imitation Game

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid (29)

\textsuperscript{18} Turing (446)
insists that attention must finally be paid to such a computer. It is important to distinguish here the use of word “embodiment” in the above paragraph from, let us say, something like substantialization, because it is impossible to separate embodiment from its root morpheme, body. The reason for this necessary distinction is that a body is not at all an obvious or inevitable fundament to subjectivity, but rather something that is made, achieved, and maintained. In fact, Hayles’s own description of this entity as an “enacted” body is curiously apt; curiously precisely because her argument against the Turing test and disembodiment seems to forget this initial moment of first enactment of the body, or its creation, while the Imitation Game remembers it well. Of course, the objection against total desubstantialization still holds true, as it is both theoretically and practically impossible to conceive of an information set that could exist without an instantiation. However, the objection omits the distinct possibility that a subject, or at the very least a thinking entity with agency, could in fact be theoretically embodied in a way other than what is available to human subjects. It is this initial assumption (if we could use this word with its physical connotations intact) of a body, whatever this body may in fact look like to observers or feel like to the subject that inhabits it, that the Turing test effectively allows to happen without the constraints and considerations of prior embodiment. Early in his essay, Turing considers what may indeed be the strongest objection to his thesis when he asks: “May not machines carry out something which ought to be described as thinking but which is very different from what a man does?" ¹⁹ Though he does not answer the question directly, the essay implies that while thinking may in fact be tied to

¹⁹ Ibid (448)
specific embodiment cases (as in human embodiment), this specific embodiment is not in any way an inevitable and exclusionary criterion for thought. Is disembodiment (or the threat of disembodiment) really the problem, or, more specifically, is it the problem with the Turing test? While a radical etherealization of intelligence and memory indeed presents a problem, Turing’s own essay does not insist on anything of the kind. Instead, it proposes a variable embodiment, or substantialization that, while always elusive and difficult to pin down, is nevertheless completely necessary. This is most evident in his brief formulation of a thinking computer as a machine of infinite capacity:

There is no theoretical difficulty in the idea of a computer with an unlimited store. Of course only a finite part can have been used at any one time. Likewise only a finite amount can have been constructed, but we can imagine more and more being added as required. Such computers have special theoretical interest and will be called infinitive capacity computers.  

The above formulation, while at first glance purely theoretical, in fact offers what amounts to a new theory of substantialization. The language itself is curious: instead of talking about the creation of infinite information, Turing speaks of “construction,” that most physical concept, which implies that the information that the computer receives, and, by logical extension, produces, is necessarily substantive. The passage also features an interesting lack of both doing subjects and being-done-to objects, rendering the distinction between those who construct and that which is constructed grammatically

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20 Ibid (438-39)
indistinguishable. The crucial result is not therefore disembodiment of thought, but multiple and variable materiality that is not confined to a computer hard drive or a human programmer’s head. It is rather in between these machines, and in the interstices of the machines that comprise the machines. The thinking computer is not a body but a system, a complex machine within which other bodies lurk, feeding it, receiving it, making thought out of the very stuff of the system itself. What is so radical about a Turing machine, then, is that we must imagine it as everything, and its thinking as everywhere. Whether it is a clicking wheel, a Manchester machine and its programmers, or a complex system of neurons, it thinks in the turning of the wheel, or the ones and zeros, or the snapping of the synapses. In other words, no matter how the machine is substantialized, it thinks. Following Turing’s own example of “bad” grammar, we might actually reduce the claim of machine intelligence to a justified opposition of the dualistic cogito which might look something like this: “everywhere thinks.” It is, in the final analysis, a truly ahumanistic claim. But is this also an unproductive claim? Does it not effectively render human (and by extension machine) individuation meaningless? Can the world really be seen this way, or are we too human to be ahuman? For Latour, whose actor-network theory disavows “the modern” as a sometimes-damaging fiction, it is productive precisely because it reties the Gordian knot of humans and things, showing that “nothing is sufficiently inhuman to dissolve human beings in it and announce their death.”

This is not to suggest, of course, that Turing’s work directly influenced this thrust in thought; it can be more accurately described as symptomatic of the kinds of changes in

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21 Latour (137)
understanding of the human that became the hallmark of later twentieth-century subjectual theory. For example, Jacques Derrida suggested that the human drive to store information, or to archive, works because “the technical structure of the archiving archive also determines the structure of the archivable content even in its very coming into existence and its relationship to the future. The archivization produces as much as it records the event.”22 Derrida’s project is crucial for this discussion because it undertakes thinking the archive not only historically, but also in terms of new media technics and the changes of the prosthetic formation and understanding of the human. Likewise, Bernard Stiegler follows both Heidegger and Derrida to propose that technics constitutes the human through temporalization. This important step accounts for technics as constitutive of the human in time, allowing temporal distinctions to come into the discussion of the prosthetic subject. In other words, technics creates subjectual transformations that become instantiated not only in strictly technical production, but also in cultural production taken more broadly. To put it another way: technics makes and remakes perception, but more crucially, it makes and remakes memory. In fact, thinking with technics is prosthetic memory, or that memory that is inscribed, preserved, and passed on generationally through technics.

In his project Technics and Time, Stiegler theorizes ways in which memory is transmitted through technics, positing an understanding of technics itself as the medium of memory. In his analysis of French anthropologist Leroi-Gourhan, Stiegler argues for what he calls “epiphylogenesis” or a third level of mnemonic inheritance that happens

22 Derrida (17)
through the way a prostheticizing technics creates or contains techno-logical memory (as opposed to other forms of memory, like genetic and that of the central nervous system).  

Thus, memory embodied in technics is something that is always already there before the subject, constitutes the subject, and provides for a way to imagine a process whereby the virtual of memory exists in and through technics. Stiegler uses the myth of Prometheus and Epimetheus (the latter “idiot” brother, responsible for giving out gifts to all the animals, forgets man, and forces the former to steal technics from the gods, thereby forcing the transformation of humanity into time and finitude, since they have experienced the gods’ technics but not their immortality) and further argues that it is technics that contains human time, that constitutes the human in relation to death. Memory therefore is prosthetic, and is unique to the human creating and using the technics that constitutes both memory and the human, simultaneously.

This formulation of technics as prosthetic temporal memory is central to this project for several important reasons. Firstly, Stiegler’s work as a key reconciliation between the two seemingly opposed positions regarding the epistemology of the human vis-à-vis technics. That is, while taking as given the inherent prosthetic and technical constitution of the human, the methodology developed here will at the same time allow us to account for important changes and shifts that the anthropological matrix has undergone without relying on largely conventionalized conceptions of “technological modernity.” Secondly, I intend to show that this prosthetic technical memory is first of all a temporal phenomenon, or, put another way, can be best understood as that which

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23 Stiegler (177)
situates the human in time. This approach will allow me to eschew discussions of the
development of technics as merely history, but rather as subjective time, or that which
makes the “who” in the first place. For Stiegler, “techno-logy becomes properly speaking
a thanato-logy”\textsuperscript{24}; the study of technics becomes the study of human temporality and,
therefore, finitude. Through this approach, we may see that time as a result of technics is
not a mathematical abstraction, but a way to rethink history as such. As Friedrich Kittler
puts it of media technics, they “cross one another in time, which is no longer history.”\textsuperscript{25}
That is, in order to consider technics, we must unthink historical time in favor of two
additional kinds of time: time as technics and time as pure duration. If historical time is
no longer available, and no longer valid as a way to account for human memory, in what
sense can it be said that memory endures at all, both in the individual and in a generation
of modern subjects?

Because modernity (and modernism, by extension) has been analyzed historically
(both in the sense of “traditionally” and “as method”) through the development of
technics, I argue that its cultural production can be even more usefully studied and
deconstructed through a techno-logy, or a comprehensive study of the temporal networks
that produced it. By asking a series of questions about the ways in which technics shapes
the modern subjectivity, I propose to analyze a range of twentieth-century texts in order
to suggest a theoretical pathway to understanding modernity (and contemporaneity, more
broadly) through an examination of modernist cultural production as technical artifacts.

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid (187)

\textsuperscript{25} Kittler (115)
To that end, I intend to offer a way of reading both written and visual texts of the period as temporal memory. While Stiegler offers perhaps the most precisely relevant formulation of memory as technical prosthesis, a more comprehensive study of memory can be traced through the work of Henri Bergson and Gilles Deleuze. Bergson’s metaphysics, in *Matter and Memory*, is largely concerned with the question of the relationship between consciousness and matter. To respond to the Cartesian cogito, or to the problematic relationship between the soul and the body, Bergson proposes a way to theorize consciousness not as “located” anywhere, but rather transpiring in the relationship between matter and memory, thus asserting a temporal nature of consciousness rather than a spatial one. This is a philosophy that asserts a temporal “location” of consciousness rather than a spatial one (of course, the concept of location becomes dangerously destabilized in the course of this work). Therefore, memory is not located in the brain, since the brain itself is an “image,” but exists virtually. Objects are images, in a sense; thus, one image (the body, the brain, etc.) cannot have primacy over other images. For Bergson, an image is a certain existence which is more than a representation but less than a thing, and matter is the aggregate of images, meaning that the way matter is experienced is through a process of selection of images pertinent to a body’s possible action on them. Matter exists objectively, in other words, but is experienced subjectively as images. This is complicated by different kinds of images – perception-images, memory-images, etc., all of which combine to make a subject in time in relation to the world. Thus, perception exists in the selection of pertinent images at the intersection of matter and memory.
In his discussion of the virtual and real, Bergson makes the distinction between the perception which is a process of selection of objects (images) for possible action versus affection, or the power to absorb the actions of objects upon the body or of the body upon the objects, thus: “our sensations are, then, to our perceptions that which the real action of our body is to its possible or virtual action.” The real is less than the virtual, not more, and affection is what we must “subtract from perception to get the image in its purity.”

Therefore, it appears that the active interaction of images is actual, while perception, because passive and contemplative, is virtual. These definitions allow Bergson to discuss two forms of memory – motor memory, whereby the body acts; and image-memory, which is virtual. It may be said that the body as a subjective image exists at the ever-advancing boundary between the past and the future, as a sort of a conduit between pure memory and pure matter, always at the intersection between the two. The body thus conducts memory toward the matter, which are both limits, inaction/contemplation/virtuality and action/affection/actualization, respectively.

This work on memory postulates duration as the immediate data of consciousness, and later, allows Deleuze to argue ontological difference over identity. In Bergsonism, he works to define the kind of movement that is found in the actualization of the virtual which is and is in memory. That is, if memory is virtual and matter is actual in the sense that this is where the virtual “becomes” actualized, then the relationship between these

26 Bergson, Matter and Memory (58)
27 Ibid (60)
two limits leads to the rethinking of individuation, of consciousness, and of any meaningful sense in which things (and human subjects) can “endure,” which, for Deleuze, occurs in the process by which we actualize out of the virtual into the actual. As a result, memory can be defined as duration, as freedom, and as the virtual. Deleuze also meditates on the nature of duration here, rethinking time in the following terms: “The present is not; rather, it is pure becoming, always outside itself. It is not, but it acts. Its proper element is not being but the active or the useful. The past, on the other hand, has ceased to act or be useful.”28 That is, time is not a succession, but a coexistence; a kind of meeting place at which all past and present coexist, yet which makes a leap from the virtual into the actual through the process of becoming: “The idea of a contemporaneity of the present and the past has one final consequence: Not only does the past coexist with the present that has been, but, as it preserves itself in itself (while the present passes), it is the whole, integral past; it is all our past, which coexists with each present.”29 In becoming-actual, we move from the past to the present, from recollection to perception. If we may simplify by saying that memory is virtual and matter is actual in the sense that this is where the virtual “becomes” actualized then the relationship, or the play between these two limits is what must be considered. This is the question of individuation, of consciousness, and of any meaningful sense in which things and human beings can “endure.” This occurs, for Deleuze, in the process by which we actualize out of the

28 Deleuze, Bergsonism (55)

29 Ibid (59)
virtual into the actual: the metaphor here is the child with a toy train of memory throwing it rather than dragging it behind.

To consider these concerns in terms of modernity’s time suggests significant shifts in reading modern cultural production. The human/technics binary, now severely complicated, must be considered against the historicized notion of time, which is now suddenly and radically divorced from a kind of enlightenment-ideal time. This earlier conception, which posits an autonomous and cohesive subject who traverses a time-line, or a time-path, no longer works: we must now consider time as a collision between past and present, always made and remade, always radically unstable. The shift of modern time literally is a shift from Newtonian physics of certainty and mathematical truths to the post-Newtonian, Heisenbergian world of uncertainty. Ronald Schleifer’s study *Modernism and Time* suggests important ways in which ideas of recordable time begin to destabilize; real life can no longer be covered by the meager recordings of remembered life. This is precisely what we might call modernist memory: the recording or “real” life, with a real temporality divorced from linearity. Time, in other words, is not some “thing,” but something that must be articulated by something other than itself. It is only available to us prosthetically.

It therefore becomes clear how the Bergson-Deleuzian, together with the post phenomenological, Derridean formulations of consciousness, memory, and time I discussed earlier open up avenues and suggest parallels for the discussion of cybernetics and artificial intelligence – for example, we may be able to view Turing’s argument in more favorable light because, suddenly, consciousness, thought, or memory (and we will
privilege the latter term here) need not be “located” anywhere but is rather always, by
definition, technical and prosthetic, and, therefore, relational.

I see my project as accounting for the problematic of technical development while
at the same addressing the inherent and constitutive nature of technicity through treating
technics as memory. I also plan to use Stiegler’s notion of the technicity of language and
prostheticity of technics in order to build upon the work of theorists like Derrida who
argue that writing itself, that key mode of cultural production, is always already
inherently prosthetic. Overall, the critical approach and scope of this work will undertake
the task of complicating and reevaluating the conventional scholarly notions of cultural
modernity and postmodernity through a technological lens (and particularly the rise of
cybernetics) to develop a reading of technics of modern memory with greater specificity,
relating technical content to its cultural context, and highlighting the importance of
conceptualizing writing as technics and memory. On the one hand, I will continue the
long-standing tradition of interpreting the cultures of modernity and contemporaneity
through technology; on the other, I hope it will offer a new critical and theoretical matrix
that departs from this tradition in significant ways: namely, avoiding the confusion of
causality that renders many such analyses incomplete (for example, Heidegger warns
against Dasein in thrall to the Gestell without addressing the very problem of thinking
Dasein without technics); also, by discussing technics as temporal memory, I will be able
to suggest new ways of understanding cultural production and its relation to the
subjectival transformations that make changes in this production occur. Overall, I hope
that the project will move forward in terms of defining the issues of technical modernity
while at the same time providing a backwards look at its texts to reevaluate their modern, postmodern, or contemporary status in new and exciting ways.

The approach outlined here is useful precisely because it can concretize the ways in which literature, for example, can function not simply as memory in a metaphoric sense (this is perhaps the way memoir or general nonfictional writing is popularly conceived, with the almost-always attached patina of the maudlin), but a real one, while at the same avoiding the discourses about technics that tend to be evaluative in nature rather than interpretive. Ultimately, the changing philosophical conception of technics must be central to the project overall, since it will allow me to develop, following Stiegler, a formulation and a reexamination of the relationship between the “natural” and the “technical,” and to consider this relationship as temporality and memory. I will draw upon theories of memory from philology, philosophy and social sciences, while at the same time connecting them to recent scholarship on text after cybernetics, which attempts to rework the very notion of text to consider it as a technical production and the constituting Other of the human, using terminology and practice of cybernetics to assess the future of text while at the same time reconsidering the way texts have been historically constructed and consumed. By including the medium and the work of cultural consumption in their discussion, these critics offer a concrete instantiation of cultural artifact as a technics that modern literary criticism, for example, often ignores. Finally, I will outline the dual linguistic-cultural structure of the project, or, its comparative nature: in order to explore writing and memory of modernity as ineluctably related, I plan build a sustained comparison between certain canonical Anglophone modernisms and
contemporary to them eastern materialisms of memory. Since modern temporality is always prosthetic, the actual machinery producing the prosthesis will likely reflect the way memory is temporalized differently according to the differences in technical production. The west’s embracing of Marxian theories of production and capital and the east’s literal enacting of them will become the double-pronged structuring principle.

The second chapter considers literary production of high modernism through the lens of time and memory. By concentrating on the work of Virginia Woolf and Gertrude Stein, I hope to show the way certain works on modernism rethink and reconsider literary form itself as a way to approximate the mnemonic and temporal upheavals of modernity. The third chapter, in an attempt to imitate the epochal confusions of modernity, uses contemporary film and theories of theatrical performance to evaluate the way futurism and late modernism, attempted to cope with the lack of futurity of this new temporality while considering this cultural production against the larger economic and political forces at work before World War II. In the fourth chapter, I position the work of Vladimir Nabokov as a pivotal moment between modernism and postmodernism, reading his work against the rising influence of cybernetics. The fifth chapter concentrates on film, particularly on the work of Andrei Tarkovsky and Terrence Malick, in order to show the way filmic texts attempt to reconcile what has become, by late twentieth century, a conflict between two distinct conceptions of memory in the face of the meteoric rise of information technology.
Chapter 2
Radically Remembered Selves: Memory, Time, and the Literary Forms of the Modern

*The identity of the object read really dissolves into divergent series defined by esoteric words, just as the identity of the reading subject is dissolved into the decentered circles of possible multiple readings. Nothing, however, is lost; each series exists only by virtue of the return of the others. Everything has become simulacrum, for by simulacrum we should not understand a simple imitation but rather the act by which the very idea of a model or privileged position is challenged or overturned.*

--Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*

According to Gilles Deleuze, the way that the language texture of James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake* radically reinvents author, reader, and text through suggests that what modernist stylistic innovations accomplished through the increased obscuring of traditional literary and linguistic forms that preceded them is a radical reevaluation of one its modernism’s chief goals: a de-centering of a humanist subject. Importantly, the term “de-centering” itself, when considered through the lens of Deleuze’s Bergsonian philosophy, does not appear to go far enough: in those literary innovations Deleuze valued – Joyce, Woolf, Proust, and many others – the text and the reader, at the surface *interface* between the two, form a virtual machine which leads to a subjectual difference (as opposed to identity) that is bound up in a new conception of time itself. We may call
this “reading time,” during which conventional memory (as in historical memory) is shown to be radically inaccessible, and must be replaced by some form of time reminiscent of Bergsonian duration.

For Bergson, duration (\textit{la durée}) became an early important concept in the 1889 \textit{Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness}, where he attempts to untangle what he sees as a mistake of the time-space conflation. This duration, which is the immediate data of consciousness, is experiential and temporal, not spatial. That is to say, duration is the process whereby a thing – a person, an object, the universe – endures, continues to be itself while undergoing constant change. In our perception of the world around us, which is experienced in time, we create the illusion of stasis, though, as Bergson shows over the course of his work, duration never ceases its flow. When we observe an object, or an image (which, for Bergson, is the preferred nomenclature) we are seeing it at the meeting point of several elements. On the one hand, our memory is there, conveying something from the past to the present. On the other hand, our mental state, “as it advances on the road of time, is continually swelling with the duration it accumulates: it goes on increasing – rolling upon itself, as a snowball on the snow.”\textsuperscript{30} This temporal advancement is marked by uninterrupted change, but we “notice it only when it becomes sufficient to impress a new attitude on the body, a new direction on the attention. Then, and only then, do we find that the state has changed. The truth is that we change without ceasing, and that the state itself is nothing but change.”\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{30} Bergson, \textit{Creative Evolution} (5)

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid (5)
Duration, then, is the temporal modality of being, an experience of becoming, as Deleuze puts it; but this temporality does not mean transience or fleetingness because it is, crucially, a temporality that endures: “it is a change that is substance itself.”\(^{32}\)

Indeed, working back through Deleuze to Bergson’s turn-of-the-century work on time and memory opens up fruitful new avenues for analysis of modernist texts, precisely because the contemporary upheavals in scientific discovery of that period are to be found clearly in the contemporary cultural production as well. By working outside a predetermined concept of time, Bergson attempts to think around time as a master system of reference. While such systems may certainly be conceived of and perform some functions (as in Newtonian physics), without a real lived observer they must remain mere abstractions. Determined relationally, a second concept of time – that of personal duration – must be considered alongside “objective” non-observed spatial time. This new time is a multiplicity, in the sense that it is truly temporalized; Bergson argues that only through personal duration can time be experienced temporally. Simultaneity and succession are nothing but points in spatial terms; duration makes them temporal, and without duration, the consciousness traversing time must be infinitesimal like such time’s “infinitely adjacent instants.”\(^{33}\) Bergson’s engagement with Einstein, famously highlighted by their actual encounter at the Philosophical Society of Paris in April 1922, began from the former’s belief that the latter, in addition to giving the world a new

\(^{32}\) Deleuze, Bergsonism (37)

\(^{33}\) Bergson, Duration and Simultaneity (65)
The publication of Einstein’s *General Theory of Relativity* in 1916 suggested that time could be understood in two distinct ways: duration, “philosopher’s time,” which is personal, experiential time of the observer, and time proper, “physicist’s time” or “public time,” which is symbolically inscribed in space. While Einstein himself was dubious about the concept of philosopher’s time, Bergson argued that because duration could not be, in any real sense, split into instants while being preserved, it had to be understood as a multiplicity, a time that temporalizes itself in being experienced. Relativity seems to threaten the very existence of conventional time, rendering past, present, and future largely meaningless, and because of this threat, it becomes even more important to offer a theory of time—duration—that understands temporality not as some entity, “simply given once and for all,” but as a personal, creative (that is, productive), and indivisible multiplicity of being.

Thus, it is clear that the decade after relativity lead to the overturning of the Western conception of time, both scientifically and philosophically. Not coincidentally, it also happened to be the decade of tremendous upheavals in the language-based arts. The troubling of Newtonian physics by Einsteinian-Heisenbergian reality, then, is clearly mirrored by a concurrent temporality shift: a transformation between an enlightenment conception of a cohesive subject traversing a line, as it were, through a clear succession

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34 Scott (183-213)
35 Scott (182)
36 Davies (26)
37 Scott (184)
of points to an unstable subject and an unstable time that is always an interplay between past and present, and where no clearly certifiable distinctions exist between these two “times of the subject.” This necessitates a rethinking of historical memory: if “it is we who are passing when we say time passes,” then individuation is actualization of an entire virtual history in each moment. Considered in light of these changes in thinking, writing must be understood as memory- and self-actualizing simultaneously; consequently, writing as understood in the enlightenment model must be radically reworked, restructured, and reinvented. The language itself, for a generation of cultural practitioners, has suddenly become no longer capable of doing the work once considered its province; its formal reinvention, from larger structural norms down to the smallest units of sentence, word, and letter must be considered as an abandonment of the idea of history for a new temporality, or duration of being. Thus, the radicalization of modern form must be seen as nothing less than the radicalization of modern time and self in a whole which is both spatial and temporal, and both at once. This is a central problem of modernity: if it does, in fact, engender an epochal split, how can memory endure? I argue that the literary forms of the modern accommodate duration through such split, seen as both the introduction and suspension of a historical period of conventional time.

Thinking of this shifting conception of time, history, and the self invites a significant re-evaluation of the modernist form itself. It is somewhat of a critical commonplace to refer to the difficulty of modernism as its defining stylistic feature. For example, as early as 1929, Max Eastman derided modernism as a “cult of

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38 Bergson, *Duration and Simultaneity* (43)
unintelligibility.” Less than two decades later, F. W. Dupree stated as a matter of fact that this difficulty was a matter of “general style, of which no single poet was the inventor and in which those who participate do so without necessarily having the full awareness of it cultural implications.” Other critics alternatively praised and decried difficulty’s unquestioned status as the defining characteristic of modernism while it became the basis for much of the critical work done in the field: New Criticism, for example, relied on the assertion that difficulty was inherent to poetic language. More recently, Matei Calinescu described the modernist avant-garde as “aesthetic extremism,” suggesting that the “cult of the new” often necessarily involved “the process of the destruction of tradition.” Similarly, Leonard Diepeveen dedicates a book-length study to the difficulty of modernism, examining the movement’s democratization, and, alternatively, its elitization (often in the same works).

The critical response sampled here represents an ongoing debate around the question of whether this “making difficult” is indeed a stylistic innovation as such, for its own sake, or a necessary adjustment to account for some broader conditions. I argue that this shift is undeniable, and that it reflects new ways of understanding memory and temporality. In order to examine this claim closer, we might take Russian Formalists’ insistence on ostranenie, or “defamiliarization,” as a key critical term to consider the way

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39 Eastman (632-39)
40 Dupee (356-57)
41 Calinescu (117)
42 Diepeveen (250)
the form reimagines the time of memory. Here, I would like to suggest a different translation of this well-known term coined by Victor Shklovsky in his 1917 essay “Poetry and Technique.” While the destruction of familiarity known and used by conventional representation remains central for Shklovsky, just as important is another meaning derived from the root morpheme stran or “strange”, thus rendering the term to mean something like “making strange,” also echoing the Freudian unheimlich. What the language of modernism achieves, in other words, is not just creating of difficulty, but of strangeness of reading. This slight-seeming adjustment of terminology helps critical analysis to eschew important political and class debates in modernism, those between the so-called progressive and reactionary forces within the movement, as well as the distinctions often seen between eastern and western modernisms. Quite simply, the difficulty can be very broadly generalized as the “making strange” of heretofore-logical and conventional distinction between present and past, reader and text, memory and truth. It is, at the most basic level, a Bergsonian technique.

Thus returning to the concept of duration, we must understand it as a driving force behind the formal innovations of modernity, or, as Peter Nicholls puts it, a shift that “entailed a ‘compenetration’ of forms which implied the dissolution of the ‘merely’ individual in a field of shifting and collective states of consciousness.”43 Nicholls further shows how key leading figures of modernism, for example, Italian Futurism’s Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, used Bergson’s notions of personal time to suggest the way duration has been spatialized through the perceptional processes of modern life. Perception or

43 Nicholls (83)
consciousness, then, exists in the moment of choice, of a jump back into memory before springing toward matter. What is constant here is change; the body and the soul (consciousness, whatever) is therefore not located in space, but in time. Consciousness is “the paying of attention” in the virtual before actualizing itself. Therefore, we must unlearn the old habit of thinking “things” rather than “movement.” It is this conflation of the temporal and the spatial that is so crucial to the broad intellectual and artistic landscape of the first half of the twentieth century; according to Bernard-Henri Lévy, bergsonism became “the unsurpassable horizon of a whole epoch of thought, literature, and political history.”

In order to support this rather grandiose claim, Lévy constructs a philosophical genealogy that covers a range of works that uniformly mistrusted rigid concepts and favored ontological fluidity, including the broad insistence, among the practitioners of arts and sciences, on “lived experience” and “interiority.” Extending the claim, then, it may be apt to describe a significant segment of modernism as a broadly Bergsonian movement, or at least a movement caught in the complex negotiations between Einstein and Bergson, at the point of a break from what had become conventional understandings of time and memory.

To make so bold a claim about an entire literary “movement,” however ill-defined and contested it might be, it is first necessary to ground modernism’s quest of remembering its own past differently (and thus reinventing its own contemporaneity) in general terms that might, however imperfectly, capture some key connections within the multiple branches of the movement. Early in the twentieth century, writers began

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44 Levý (106)
grappling, in unambiguous ways, with the problem of storytelling itself: what might be described as “inherited narratives,” or traditional stories passed unproblematically from the past, through the present, and into the future, became suspicious for a vast range of authors. For example, T.S. Eliot’s fragmentary poetics might be seen as a reactionary version of this suspicion of time’s narratability: 1922’s The Waste Land attempts to shore fragments against ruin, but they are fragments nonetheless. Joyce and Virginia Woolf likewise counteract this suspicion by forging new novelistic techniques that stage reinterpretations of the workings of the human mind itself – and not “mind” as extension of the “body”, but more specifically as a new kind of thing entirely, made of new stuff, and working in new ways. To this effect, Woolf famously theorized the contemporary writer, in her 1919 essay “Modern Fiction,” as a “spiritualist” who is primarily interested in the inner psychology45 of the characters; elsewhere in the essay, she attempts to formulate a radically new way of depicting the daily reality, or the temporal existence, of modern fiction’s characters in any given moment in time as “the mind receives a myriad impressions – trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, [...] they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday.”46 This dual formulation suggests several important values adapted by the modernist movement taken broadly: the dissolution of the boundary between the subjective and the objective, or between the observer and observed, as well as an increased rejection of fixity in both narrative point

45 Woolf, Collected Essays (162)
46 Ibid (106)
of view and clearly delineable moments of time. This is no doubt precisely the kind of artistic and perceptual upheaval that Eliot apprehensively described as “mixing memory and desire.”  

While the bulk of critical attention to these changes in modernism have been considered through the lens of psychoanalytic writings, it would be valuable to consider the movement’s shifts through the work of Bergson, specifically because of his groundbreaking work on time and memory that roughly coincided with the radical scientific and philosophical changes of the fin-de-siècle. For example, considering Woolf’s own relationship with Sigmund Freud (whom she met in 1939 but whose work Leonard Woolf’s Hogarth Press began issuing in English in 1924) makes clear both the fascination and the dissatisfaction many modernists felt toward Freud’s work. Indeed, members of the Bloomsbury group frequently discussed Freud and his ideas, some trained as psychoanalysts, and Melanie Klein delivered her 1925 lectures in the home of Adrian Stephen, Woolf’s brother. However, Woolf herself questioned the value of the emerging field; as she read the proofs of Freud’s complete works, she warned against relying too heavily on psychoanalysis as the sole theoretical advance with which to achieve modernism’s new goals. On the other hand, tracing the presence of Bergson’s work in Woolf’s own writing, as well as that of other modernists, may be fruitful not only because it works (as I will show) but also because it is a co-influential relationship.

47 Eliot (29)
48 Woolf, Letters (135)
between philosophical and literary production that remains largely untapped by critics of modernism.

For instance, considering *To the Lighthouse* alongside Bergson’s “Intuition as Method” may be one way in to re-imagine temporality and memory in modernism. Much has been made of both the usefulness and the perceived philosophical imprecision in this concept; however, we may want to look at intuition as something that produces and activates the tendency to not think in differences in degree, or, rather, to recognize differences in kind between the differences in degree. This method is particularly important to Bergson’s understanding of memory, and its interrelationship with personal duration in the perception of “matter” or objects external to the self. Deleuze, in his rehabilitation of Bergson’s philosophy, summarizes the importance of intuition as memory for perception thus: “There cannot be a difference in kind, but only a difference in degree between the faculty of the brain and the function of the core, between the perception of the matter and matter itself.”

This restatement of the Bergsonian thesis suggests some interesting consequences: if the image of the brain cannot, by definition, be different in kind from other images, then the moment of its engagement with matter would only retain it (the body) as such through the intervention of memory, which gives it a personal duration in time. Thus, we have duration as the expression of genuine differences in kind, opposed to differences in degree (what Deleuze sometimes calls differences in proportion) which are in space.

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49 Deleuze, *Bergsonism* (25)
What this means for the novelist, then, as well as for the novelist’s characters, is the necessity for an entirely different method of creating textual representations of both memory as recapitulation of the past and contemporaneity as the sum of present perceptions. Bergsonian influence (together with that of William James) on the definition of certain aspects of the modernist literary technique as stream-of-consciousness has been well documented, Shiv Kumar’s 1962 *Bergson and the Stream of Consciousness Novel* offers a thorough analysis of duration as consciousness; while the roots of the concept of “stream of consciousness” itself may be traced to James’s “On Some Omissions of Introspective Psychology”50 and the seminal chapter “The Stream of Thought” in *The Principles of Psychology*, 51 as well as Bergson’s *Time and Free Will: The Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*. The term itself, though originally applied to Dorothy Richardson’s *Pointed Roofs* (1915), has become a popular convention when referring to Joyce and Woolf; however, Woolf’s work does, in fact, undertake something both larger in scope and different in design: we may call it the “duration of memory” technique. Indeed, *To the Lighthouse* offers a perfect point of analysis from the mnemonic perspective: among Woolf’s novels, it is arguably the most autobiographical – a novel that attempts, at the most basic level, a family portrait.

It is well established by critics and Woolf herself that the basis for the portrait is her own mother and father, and that the book recreates her memory of Leslie and Julia Stephen; the unnamed island in the Hebrides where the action of the text takes place is a

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50 James, “On Some Omissions” (7)

51 James, *Essential Writings* (56)
comparable setting to St. Ives, Cornwall, where the Stephens spent their summers during Virginia’s childhood. Of course, to describe the novel exclusively as an autobiographical enterprise is incredibly limiting, or, indeed, misguided, since instead of capturing the characters, it attempts to depict a time, or a moment in time, a collective arrangement of impressions, expressions, enunciations, and affective details that combine into something larger and more profound than a mere snapshot. The people populating the novel’s pages are available to the reader in a fleeting, uncertain way: they appear ethereal and fragmented. In other words, intrinsic, essential traits are not only not explicitly (or implicitly) provided by the narrative schema of the novel, but are often explicitly forbidden by its structure. It appears that Woolf attempts something more than pure depiction here, or even more than signification in the normal sense of the word: rather, the book is after a new way of rendering the world, or the readers’ understanding of this world’s modality, or, as Eudora Welty puts it in her introduction to the novel’s 1981 edition, “beyond being ‘about’ the very nature of reality, it is itself a vision of reality.”

It is also, unmistakably, an originally temporalized version of remembered reality. While ostensibly following the three-part- novel approach, schematically the structure undercuts its very conventionality by reworking the expected relationships between characters and lived and experienced time. This shift suggests that Woolf is rethinking

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52 For an overview of the biographical connections of the novel, see Beja, as well as Woolf’s own *Diary.*

53 Welty (xii)
historical memory: if “it is we who are passing when we say time passes,”\textsuperscript{54} then individuation is actualization of an entire history in each moment. Considered in light of these changes in thinking, Woolf’s writing must be understood as memory- and self-actualizing simultaneously; consequently, writing as understood in the enlightenment model must be radically reworked, restructured, and reinvented.

Still, \textit{To the Lighthouse} resembles a conventional novel in many ways even as it engages and challenges the very form of the novel. “Time Passes,” the middle section, diegetically the novel’s longest, occupies a mere twenty pages, while “The Window” and “The Lighthouse” which open and close the text take place during a single day each while occupying the bulk of its pages. Aside from sheer word volume, though, the middle section is curious in the way the main characters are relegated to sudden enclosure in square brackets while their fate (and death, in case of Andrew, Prue, and Mrs. Ramsay) occupies a few short sentences. For instance, the latter’s death, at least syntactically, fails to receive even its own independent clause: “Mr. Ramsay, stumbling along a passage one dark morning, stretched his arms out, but Mrs. Ramsay having died rather suddenly the night before, his arms, though stretched out, remained empty.”\textsuperscript{55} His wife’s absence is thus subordinated to Mr. Ramsay groping stumble in the dark. Similarly, Andrew’s death barely registers: “Twenty or thirty men were blown up in France, among them Andrew Ramsay, whose death, mercifully, was instantaneous.”\textsuperscript{56} Once again, the barely-there

\textsuperscript{54} Muldoon (43)

\textsuperscript{55} Woolf, \textit{To the Lighthouse} (128)

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid (133)
presence of the dying Andrew in the very sentence, let alone section, that announces his demise, suggests that Woolf is concerned with conveying, specifically in “Time Passes,” a cold impersonal passage of spatialized time. The characters are barely there because their individual temporalities are barely there; the square brackets and subordinate clauses perform textually the so-called objective temporality; the empty geographicality of Andrew’s death (somewhere “in France”) is almost comic in its lack of precision.\(^{57}\) The section as a whole is curiously devoid of human presence and filled with emptiness, or perhaps rather emptied of fullness: house, season, and time alike. “Time Passes” certainly presages the interchapters-to-come 1931’s *The Waves*, where characterless ebbs and flows, while providing the objective correlative to the aging characters, likewise literally set objective time. The waves here, as in *To the Lighthouse* (it is a recurring image already in the earlier novel), function both as the central image and a textual temporal device. Perhaps, to consider the setting that gives us the lighthouse without at the same time considering the island off the coast of which it stands, as well as the waters that surround it, is in and of itself too limiting. As Deleuze and Guattari argue, for Woolf, “waves are vibrations, shifting borderlines inscribed on the plain of consistency as so many abstractions.”\(^{58}\)

While “Time Passes” forces the novel’s characters into objective time, the two longer framing sections do the opposite: as noted above, their diagetic scope, reduced to one day each, allows Woolf to develop the “luminous halo” of description that is always

\(^{57}\) See, for instance, Wallace Stevens’s “Anecdote of the Jar” for a similar poetic effect.

\(^{58}\) Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (252)
necessarily facilitated through personalized temporalities of the characters. This is time as perception; and present, rather than being a “passage” of time, is made via a simultaneous co-presence of many temporalities. Indeed, “The Window” may be read as an attempt, on the part of the characters, to achieve a kind of multiple unity, a memory that effectively scrambles time. Here, Woolf’s writing refuses to name, to give final shape, or final meaning; it resists arresting remembrance “objectively,” as it were. In “The Window,” descriptions are elusive, the meanings multiple, perhaps almost oppressively so: when the Ramsay children seek their rooms after dinner early in the novel, it is to escape the complexity of “anything, everything; Tansley’s tie; the passing of the Reform Bill; sea birds and butterflies; people.”59 The escape is necessary because to be in the middle of it, for the children, makes it impossible to see it all, to wade through the conflation of objects that together make the meaning in the house. The list is also fascinating for its patent disregard of proper hierarchies of topics: the sentence flattens birds, people, ties, and reforms into one big “everything.” Mrs. Ramsay’s immediate complaint that “strife, divisions, difference of opinion, prejudices twisted into the very fibre of being,”60 apart from a mild reproach to her children, can be read as an indictment of the subject as well, since Mrs. Ramsay herself, as well as every other character in the novel, will likewise reveal similar contradictions, similar failures to be “one thing.”

In fact, of the many sections in the novel that thus undercut the conventional conceptions of “being” and “identity,” the dinner party scene is exemplary. This section

59 Woolf, To the Lighthouse (8)

60 Ibid (8)
of “The Window” is interesting because, more than perhaps any other part of the novel, it works to disturb the binary reading of the characters: perspectives shift, characters change with lightning speed, or seem to be many different things at once. But it is also a great bringing together. In fact, if the bringing off of the successful dinner is Mrs. Ramsay’s great accomplishment, it is achieved against heavy odds. Early in the scene, this fusion of people and things seems impossible as she assesses the situation: “The room (she looked around it) looked very shabby. There was no beauty anywhere. She forbore to look at Mr. Tansley. Nothing seemed to have merged. They all sat separate. And the whole of the effort of merging and flowing and creating rested on her.” 61 Aside from the strange and dubious transitiveness of the three verbs used in the above sentence (not simply the arranger of the party, Mrs. Ramsay herself appears to a liquid, shifting subject both mediator and operator of the flowing effect that she desires to bring off in the form of the dinner), the passage indicates that no inherent beauty exists, and that only through the combination of disparate elements, and by their setting in relation to one another in some larger duration, can such beauty be created. Later in the scene, as the eight candles are lighted, they draw “with them into visibility the long table entire,” 62 and the different ways of being, and of seeing, become united into a whole. While Mrs. Ramsay contemplates Augustus Carmichael’s way of looking, she understands that their ways are different from each other, but “that looking together united them.” 63 The table

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61 Ibid (83)
62 Ibid (96-97)
63 Ibid (97)
itself, with its candles and its varied perspectives, becomes a playing-out of the total halo of experience:

Now all the candles were lit up, and the faces on both sides of the table were brought nearer by the candlelight, and composed, as they had not been in the twilight, into a party round a table, for the night was now shut off by panes of glass, which, far from giving any accurate view of the outside world, rippled it so strangely that here, inside the room, seemed to be order and dry land; there, outside, a reflection in which things wavered and vanished, waterily.\(^{64}\)

Aside from the island, water, and wave imagery to which I will return later, the passage is remarkable for its depiction of the becoming-party of the “faces” surrounding the table, as if the gig-lamps of the candles and the faces fade to instead allow for the totality of the experience of the dinner to emerge. This depiction is clear despite the fact that it reads as the opposite of clarity: a rippling effect underlines this moment’s instability and fleetingness, yet at the same time its nowness, a sort of real, if anexact, essence of the proceedings.

The same can be said of the *boeuf en daube*, the centerpiece of the dinner, and the emotional centerpiece of this part of the novel, if not of the entire novel. It is not important that Mrs. Ramsay herself did not prepare it, since “the cook had spent three

\(^{64}\) Ibid (97)
days over that dish." What is crucial is the way the dish, when brought out, further brings the gathering together:

   And she [Mrs. Ramsay] peered into the dish, with its shiny walls and its confusion of savoury brown and yellow meats and its bay leaves and its wine, and thought. This will celebrate the occasion – a curious sense rising in her, at once freakish and tender, of celebrating a festival…

But what could be the occasion? While the passage allows for the possibility that that Mrs. Ramsay considers the dish to be a celebration of what she sees as Paul and Minta’s upcoming nuptials, the text seems to imply that it is much more than that. The stew is a transcendent “triumph” because it brings about a connection among the diners, who suddenly somehow become more than the sum of their constituent parts; the boeuf en daube, for the moment, continues the work of the candles and functions as Mrs. Ramsay’s device for completely uniting the gathering. Certainly, this is Mrs. Ramsay’s triumph, as Mr. Bankes points out, because not only is it perfectly cooked (though she did not cook it), but because it inspires in the diners a sort of reverent love that before simply was not working within the gathering. The dish can certainly be read as an objective correlative metaphor for this coming together of disparate people; certainly, because it is a stew, it functions as a physical instantiation of parts melting together into a whole. But it is also a physical rhizome, since around this dish (as well as in it) the gathering becomes something that is not defined by its elements, and involves all the guests, the
cook, the beef, and the vegetables. It is a haecceity, a becoming-stew. It allows Woolf to get at a radical idea of temporal individuation: one that is not subjectivation, defined by lack, but a creative intermixing of many elements drawn into time, and re-written in terms of their capacity to endure in time. In those rare moments when a Woolf party really comes together, there is a possibility of joyful being, a new kind of temporality, both uniquely modern and yet radically profuse. Finally, it is the physical center of the novel because here, a flattening of hierarchies occurs (characters = food = language and so on), and the rhizome becomes literally incarnated. In other words, the scene seems to function counter to its earlier construction of doubled indeterminacies. The perspectival lability of the dinner party as a whole, mobile though it is, has until the appearance of the boeuf en daube been restricted to binary oppositions (for example, Lily’s apparent oscillation between a would-be radical feminism and polite conventions of Victorian society when she ponders whether to be nice to Mr. Tansley); after the entrée of the stew, all binaries seem to collapse, as if the scene momentarily achieves a multiple unity?.

Indeed, one useful way to account for Woolf’s treatment of gender in the novel as a whole may be the Bergsonian distinction of duration versus time, or intuition versus logic, for example: here is the distrust of the dialectic which allows critics to this day to argue for either the one or the other way of seeing (the judgment, so to speak, is not present). This conflict within the novel, and, indeed, much of Woolf’s other work, may be seen as purely Bergsonian in nature. In the women, especially Lily Briscoe and Mrs. Ramsay, the use of intuition as method seems to clearly show itself, especially when juxtaposed with the description of Mr. Ramsay as someone engaged in a plodding
intellectual quest rendered metaphorically as a journey through the alphabet – an incredibly prosaic quest:

For if thought is like the keyboard of a piano, divided into so many notes, or like the alphabet is ranged in twenty-six letters all in order, then his splendid mind had no sort of difficulty in running over those letters one by one, firmly and accurately, until it had reached, say, the letter Q.\(^{67}\)

There’s a certain Woolfian irony at play in this passage: “a splendid mind” surely needs no accolades for going two-thirds of the way through the modern Latin alphabet, or playing the scales. However, the linearity of Mr. Ramsay’s thought also suggests a one-at-a-time quality, as if it were incapable of skipping, or considering things in groups. In a passage a bit later, the linear metaphor morphs into something similar: Mr. Ramsay becomes a kind of a Shackleton figure whose “qualities that in a desolate expedition across the icy solitudes of the Polar region would have made him the leader, the guide, the counsellor, whose temper, neither sanguine nor despondent, surveys with equanimity what is to be and faces it, came to his help again. R –.”\(^{68}\) Again, the irony is there: Mr. Ramsay cuts, at best, a suspicious polar explorer figure, and his inability to get past R – the first letter of his own surname – suggests a dangerous lack of self-awareness.

However, Woolf complicates matters by echoing the variable notation of the ordinary syllogism from Alfred Whitehead’s and Bertrand Russell’s *Principia Mathematica*: all P

\(^{67}\) Ibid (33)

\(^{68}\) Ibid (34)
are Q, R is P, therefore R is Q.\textsuperscript{69} Similarly, metaphorically turning Mr. Ramsay into an explorer, while strange at first, becomes less so when he quixotically soldiers on to the lighthouse even after his wife dies. Irony aside, Woolf’s rendering of a character based by all accounts on her own father, Leslie Stephen, a prominent intellectual and mountaineer, in terms of formal logic and heroic adventurism, necessarily retains some trace of praise. In other words, while it might be tempting to read these passages as a subtle condemnation, they contain certain ambiguities that trouble such uniform interpretation.

Indeed, the descriptions of Mr. Ramsay’s intelligence have long served the novel’s critics as a starting point for gender-related readings, suggesting questions of preference asked of Woolf herself: is she promoting one kind of intelligence while discounting the other? Is the husband’s stolid persevering mind to be preferred to the wife’s flighty and fanciful disregard for such logic? This difficulty with the text has resulted in considerable body of interpretive work. For example, James Hafley argues in 1954 that “To the Lighthouse is really the story of a contest between two kinds of truth – Mr. Ramsay’s and Mrs. Ramsay’s. For him, truth is factual truth; for her, truth is the movement toward truth: since truth is always being made, the struggle for the truth is the truth itself.”\textsuperscript{70} This assessment largely echoes critical consensus to follow: the novel’s project, repeatedly, is estimated as a staging of a conflict of logic versus intuition, male versus female, linear identity versus halo-like haecceity.\textsuperscript{71} Whether accusing Mr. Ramsay

\textsuperscript{69} Whitehead and Russell (28)

\textsuperscript{70} Hafley (138)

\textsuperscript{71} For example, see Burt’s discussion of the novel’s treatment of thought.
of rigidity or Mrs. Ramsay of change-blindness, readings of these poles of the binary have remained relatively polar; it may be tempting to do something similar with a Bergsonian binary. However, I would like to suggest that the Ramsays, as two halves of Woolf’s familial unit, function somewhat differently: Mrs. Ramsay’s intuitive mind suggests the method, while her husband’s modality of being reflects the Bergsonian being as temporality. To put it another way, the “female” mind is virtual, while the “male” one is constantly actualizing, moving from object to object in time. Mr. Ramsay’s mind, then, exists as duration, and his self-forgetting, rather than constituting a flaw of intelligence, becomes its modus operandi, since “the greater part of the time we live outside ourselves, hardly perceiving anything of ourselves but our own ghost, a colourless shadow which pure duration projects into homogeneous space.”72 The couple, in essence, seems to be working out the dual problem of writing memory in a modernist by presenting writing as both material and intuition. Considered together as a unitary character construction, the Ramsays suggest a new relationship an individual has with both time and matter: individuation, for Woolf, occurs in intuitive durational (or relational) transition from the virtual to the actual; the movement of the transition supersedes identity, upsetting the very notion of a family portrait as hermetically contained memory. Thus, Woolf’s technique of writing memory into her writing represents a radical departure from historical tradition. While it is true that, on some level, this is a response to the shock and trauma of modernity. However, and more importantly, what makes Woolf’s modernism special is that it envisions memory as essentially creative, arising from a rejection not

72 Bergson, *Time and Free Will* (231)
simply of older novelistic forms, but of the constraints of both daily time and official
historical time. She is still writing novels, to be sure, but they are pushing the boundaries
of linearity, thus introducing a new writerly temporality on the level of the process of
writing along with similar changes on the level of narration and characterization.

Unlike Woolf, a borderline figure whose refigurations of memory are still largely
encased in the novelistic form, Gertrude Stein offers a radical, and, in many ways, unique
formal production. While Woolf reworks memory to complicate and destabilize the past-
present-future model, Stein seems more interested in excising the past completely,
making her work live stubbornly in the present tense. She destroys traditional
temporality in favor of new kind of being-in-time. Her “difficulty” is legendary; her
artistic project, if it may be considered as such, has caused critics headaches as varied as
the critics themselves. Joyce, even in his monumental “dreamtext” *Finnegans Wake*,
provides readers and critics with concrete morsels for consumption; Stein, especially in
her post-*Three Lives* middle period, does not similarly oblige. As William Gass puts it,
art “must be able to invite the dogs. It must furnish bones for the understanding.”

Stein’s work, often, seems obstinately interested in the refusal of precisely this kind of
invitation to the feast; while her literary persona lies squarely in the thick of the early-20th
century modernist scene, her literary work seems to “lie beside the mass of modern
literature like a straight line by a maze and give no hold to the critic bent on
explication.” Despite of this apparent problem, much of work on Stein, from

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73 Gass, “Gertrude Stein: Her Escape from Protective Language” (111)
74 Ibid (110-11)
contemporary responses to recent criticism, has concerned itself with explicating not so much the texts themselves (though this has certainly been done as well) but of the very strangeness of her oeuvre. In order to both continue and augment this tradition, I would like to suggest a way to read her project as a radical reimagining of the way writing temporally prosthetizes memory and thereby changes the constitution of the modernist self through anti-identitarian becoming: it is about nothing less than individuation as radical contemporaneity to the consumed text.

To trace Stein’s engagement with the problem of temporal memory, it might be useful to consider the psychological and philosophical context from which her writing arose. Through her early engagement with the work of William James at Radcliffe, her automatic writing experiments under James and Hugo Münsterberg, and her later discovery of Bergson, the central concern, for Stein, seemed to have been the examination of consciousness: its nature, procedures, and recordings. This is not to suggest that her entire body of work must necessarily have been influenced by these contemporary movements; rather, I would like to propose a certain high level of cooperation between these fields and the creative impulse of her modernism. Although the somewhat dehistoricized psychoanalytic theory of the unconscious would later come to dominate interpretations of this literary production, the psychological atmosphere, at least at the time of the production, coagulated around questions of consciousness itself. Indeed, one way to understand and interpret Stein’s strangeness is to think of her writing as largely devoid of subconscious content. The attention, rather, focused on the conscious

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75 For a sampling of such responses in their full diversity, see Copeland, Hoffman, Sutherland, Brinnin, and Reid, among many others.
processes of production and consumption of the text, the words and sentences themselves becoming their own time and creating multiple durations. For this work, the estrangement of the subject from her unconscious is not even necessary; it suffices that the consciousness itself necessarily makes her a stranger to herself and her self strange. For James at his most neo-Heraclitian, the problem formulates itself in the following way: “If there were no passing states of consciousness, then indeed, we might suppose an abiding principle, absolutely one with itself, to be ceaseless thinker in each of us. But if the states of consciousness be accorded as realities, no such ‘substantial identity in the thinker need be supposed.’”

What this suggests for the thinker and for writer is that consciousness is not a passive register of impressions (here, Woolf’s mind as receiver of impressions comes to mind) but rather an active process which is always the immediately in-the-now engagement with the world. In other words, passing states of consciousness are the ceaseless nows of being which destroy the idea of identity of the thinker as such: consciousness is like the proverbial “same river” into which one cannot only not step twice, but even once. This realization began to dawn on James in the mid-90s, even as Stein conducted her experiments in automatic writing: we must discontinue discussing consciousness as entity, and commence doing so as relation. The importance of this transition is paramount: it indicates the gradual problematization of thinking consciousness as an entity, and the beginning of thinking it as a relation. Although James’s writing in 1890’s Principles of Psychology still seems, at times, to hold on to the

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76 James, Essential Writings (99)
former position, there are already moments of crisis as his thought attempts to unshackle itself from rationalist constrictions: “The passing Thought then seems to be the Thinker; and though there may be another non-phenomenal Thinker behind that, so far we do not seem to need him to express the facts.” The author’s emphasis on “may” and the repetition of “seems” suggests that the thinker as such makes best sense as thought itself. Here, James is in the midst of reformulating consciousness as thought; the distinction is small but important precisely because the latter term suggests activity – while the conscious mind is impressed, the thinking one does the impressing through its interaction with matter. It is a beginning, for James, of a decade-long work on Pragmatism and an increasing movement toward Bergson, whose duration and élan vital become, at the same time, the primary tools to reconsider individuation at the fin-de-siècle.

The amazing fertility of this philosophical context no doubt played a role in Stein’s interests at the time; while it may be difficult, and, indeed, unnecessary to argue for influence, at the very least the congruence of ideas about thought, identity, temporality, and memory in psychology, philosophy, and art is impossible to ignore. In fact, Stein herself embodied this congruence through her work at Radcliffe: to consider Stein’s own experiments in automatic writing as an important precursor to her creative work, one need only observe many marked similarities between the formal appearances of both types of writing. Automatic writing, interestingly, tends to retain a certain level of grammaticality that, while not completely decipherable, nevertheless conveys meaning that is always multiple, fragmented, and unresolved. In her analysis of Stein’s creative

77 Ibid (110)
writing after 1911, Marianne DeKoven suggests that one way to understand the affect of such writing might be through Chomsky’s “degrees of grammaticalness”: while the first degree is a conventional grammatical sentence and the third is complete lack of grammatical structure, the second is “semigrammatical,” which retains certain structuration principles of the sentence while disrupting its subject-verb meaning-generating engine.\(^78\) The reader, in other words, feels the organizing principle beneath the writing but there is a disturbance underneath, as it were: the synchronic production of meaning is reworked through a new unfamiliar diachrony, severing ties to the conventional sense of language as that which can pick out objects and relationships in lived reality. It is a new language thus suddenly stripped of the tethers of the past, rendering on the page a continuous present.

The affect for the producer of automatic writing suggests something similar: the writer is aware, while writing, that writing is taking place, but it is always in the present. When Stein and Leon M. Solomons published their findings on the experiments, they described the experience as “alternation without memory”\(^79\) – the writer is at all times aware that she is writing, and feels conscious of every word written. While there is “memory of some kind”\(^80\) clearly involved (the subject of the experiment is clearly conscious and thus, presumably, able to remember something of herself and her condition), it is not the memory of what is written; automatic writing can be said to create

\(^{78}\) DeKoven (88)

\(^{79}\) Solomons and Stein (501)

\(^{80}\) Ibid (501)
consciousness without memory. As far as the actual written production: it was found to
have “a marked tendency for repetition,”\textsuperscript{81} with a particular phrase persisting for hours or
even days and recurring again and again, often in unexpected places in the sentences.
Most importantly, “the stuff written was grammatical, and the words and phrases fitted
together all right, but there was not much connected thought. The unconsciousness was
broken into every six or seven words by flashes of consciousness.”\textsuperscript{82} The writing
produced by the experiment certainly resembles Stein’s later work; “hence there is no
possible way of avoiding what I have spoken of, and if this is not believed by the people
of whom you have spoken, then it is not possible to prevent the people of whom you have
spoken so glibly”\textsuperscript{83} from the experiments resembles more than a little the language of
portraits, as in the following from “Picasso”: “some were certainly following and were
certain that the one they were then following was one working and was one bringing out
of himself then something.”\textsuperscript{84} This is fascinating.

It is not my goal here, however, to suggest that this automatism is precisely the
kind of writing she would do later; even in the report’s formulation of the alternations
between consciousness and unconsciousness one senses a confusion between the two.
Stein herself, in \textit{Everybody’s Autobiography}, attempts to separate herself from at least the
academic write-up of the experiment, claiming that she, as the chief writer, always knew

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid (506)
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid (506)
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid (506)
\textsuperscript{84} Stein, \textit{Writings} (282)
what she was doing, thus throwing in question the precise level of unconsciousness that
she and Solomons were able to achieve.\textsuperscript{85} The point of importance is the grammaticality,
or semigrammaticality of such writing, and the effort, on the part of the writer, to make
the conscious mind announce itself by its flashes, writing consciously in the present,
forsaking the notion of memory as such. While it is impossible to ascertain the exact level
of distraction experiment-subject Stein was able to apply to her own writing process,
what seems clear is the level of destruction this process created: destruction of the
complex referentiality of her words, of conventional chronological connections of written
texts, and of any normal sense of memory in these texts. Her later writing that emulated
automaticity (and which by all accounts was crafted meticulously, deliberately, and
consciously) created a reading time that conjured characters that are neither static nor
developing (as they might be in a bildungsroman, for example), but recurring, in a sense
that everything there is of a character is always present at every moment, without the
unnecessary trappings of plot developments. Writing about this thrust in Stein’s work in
\textit{The Making of Americans} and \textit{Three Lives}, Donald Sutherland argues that “this leads
naturally to repetition, the constantly new assertion and realization of the same thing, an
existence with its typical qualities, not an event.”\textsuperscript{86} So, while conventional writing
recreates stasis and recapitulates development through easy backward-looking stagings of
memory as mementos of things past, it cannot really address the thought of the present,
the finding-itself-now moment to which the past is certainly prologue but only in a vague,

\textsuperscript{85} Stein, \textit{Everyone’s Autobiography} (266)

\textsuperscript{86} Sutherland (11)
unresolved way. By the time Stein gets to *Tender Buttons* and *Portraits*, her writing attempts this both by discarding most conventional subject matter and remapping the sentence itself.

At the same time as James was turning his own philosophical work toward Bergson, Stein evolved her style in ways that increasingly positioned her at odds with most of her contemporaries. In 1908, she herself attended a series of lectures Bergson gave in Paris. The extent of the effect this encounter had on the marked formal shift of her writing in *Portraits* which she began soon after is unclear, but, as Allegra Stewart argues, Bergson’s intuition as method bears strong resemblance to the method present in these compositions.87 Their form is debatable: whether considered as poetry or prose, they present a significant challenge to categorization. What is perhaps most notable about these “portraits” is that they do not portray – at least not in any normal sense of the word. Rather, they leave out representational description in order to create a kind of mind-movement image. They are impressionistic in the sense that they are momentary and transient snapshots of the movement of consciousness, presumably Stein’s own, and presumably during her contemplation of the portrait’s subject. Not surprisingly, these compositions have been met, and continue to be met, with both amusement and consternation, but without recognition in the conventional sense; it seems easy to say of her work that it is “doing impressionism with words,” as several adoring contemporaries and critics have done, but much harder, if not impossible, to explain precisely what the

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87 Stewart (74)
fleeting impression given might be. Stewart tries the following formulation of the problem:

Stein attempted […] to record the time of duration in herself and in others as always the same, yet always different – the same because it is always present, different because it is filled with the fleeting stream of its own contents and the flux of things in chronological time.  

Again, here is Stein’s time, or time in Stein: her project depends on the perpetual present of perception, even if this perception remains the writer’s own and not, as Stewart suggests, that of others. The distinction must be drawn between writing and reading time, because the portraits surely prostheticize the producer’s and the receiver’s memory differently. As tempting as it might be to consider the various descriptions of Stein’s writing process, whether her own repeated commentary on it, or Solomons’s pseudo-scientific analysis, or Mabel Dodge’s romanticized accounts, the author cannot be revived for her durational assessment (it is, after all, personal). Nevertheless, commonality between the two types of duration exists, if only insofar as they have laid aside chronological spatial time. In any case, the text is made contemporaneous to its consumption: it comes to be “text” in the reading, automnemonic in the sense that its only memory is of its own workings – “contemporary” art par excellence.

To take this point further: the reading of Stein’s texts of this kind constitutes an instantiation of procedural memory – that which is responsible for performing certain

\[88\] Ibid (67)

\[89\] Dodge (28)
tasks often associated with automatism. That is, the reader knows how to read and does so, reinforcing this knowledge with every word read. However, it is also an amnesiac reading in the anterograde sense of the disorder – while the reader certainly brings to the process the standard memories associated with language, the normal formation of short-term reading memory is disrupted. This effect, in Stein, is both frustrating and exhilarating, often at once: while we know what the words ought to mean in the world, we nevertheless are forced by the text to reevaluate and recreate its meanings with every new word and sentence. As Bryony Randall suggests, this re-creation becomes at once both the recreational and work-like nature of reading here, a “redistribution of value among the conventionally ‘serious’ work and conversely ‘frivolous’ recreation.”90 In Stein, the work of reading is equally frivolous because of its sense of disconnectedness from the reader’s episodic memory, while the recreation is often quite serious because the life of the text literally depends on it. In terms of modernist form, this is not nearly as paradoxical as it seems.

To examine this process at work, let us consider the monumental opening sentence to “Matisse,” in many ways characteristic of Stein’s writing around 1910:91

One was quite certain that for a long part of his being one being living he had been trying to be certain that he was wrong in doing what he was doing and then when he could not come to be certain that he had been

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90 Randall (94)

91 For this discussion, I will concentrate on the artist portraits “Matisse,” “Picasso,” and “Orta or One Dancing,” both because they are representative and extreme examples of largely noun-less language.
wrong in doing what he had been doing, when he had completely
certained himself that he would not come to be certain that he had been
wrong in doing what he had been doing he was really certain then that he
was a great one and he certainly was a great one.92

The passage is spectacularly bland, by literary standards: there are no nouns at all, and
the verbs appear entirely in the progressive tenses, grammatically making the passage’s
“nowness” central while also slowing down the pace of the reading. Subject positions are
occupied by pronouns, mostly “he/his” and “one.” The depersonalizing effect of these
choices cuts the reader off immediately from the way English normally relates to its
history – noun-generating morphemes. This historicity, for Stein, is the problem of
writing: “I have said that a noun is a name of anything by definition that is what it is and
a name of anything is not interesting because once you know its name the enjoyment of
naming it is over.”93 This is why she “completely caresses and addresses” her nouns, and
this is why the passage feels unsure of its own meaning, but the root morpheme “certain,”
sometimes by itself and sometimes as an adverb, shows up six times: it is as if the
sentence, stripped of past meanings, is working to establish some sense of security about
its own purpose. For the reader, the repetition of “certain” amidst the uncertainty and
amnesia of the reading becomes in itself a paradox: the conflict of the portrait, at the most
basic level, is between the simplicity of its morphological contents and the profound
difficulty of forming meaning in spite of this simplicity.

92 Stein, Writings (278)

93 Stein, Writing and Lectures (136)
Through this conflict, nevertheless, a certain meaning emerges. If a reader, retroactively, applies a certain mathematical method to the sentence by reducing two elements from each side of the syntactic equation, a shorter sentence frame could be detected. Designating, by default, the single middle comma as the equal sign and reducing main sentence elements (disregarding articles as we tend to do anyway), we might end up with something like: “quite for a long part of his being being living trying to be wrong in and when could in doing what had been doing, when he had completely convinced himself would in really a great a great.” What stands out is the doubling of “being” and “a great” which, it may be argued, is the predominant sense of the passage. The title, “Matisse,” still functions as the subject of the subjectless sentence, thus rendering the point as something akin to “Matisse being a great.”

This, of course, is not the point; nor is the kind of algebraic reductionism suggested above a real reading method that anyone in Stein’s audience is likely to practice. However, the overall effect is similar; the reader retains the information provided by the words themselves only in repeating them while they remain nonreferential, but mere handrails for the hands of the consciousness. “Being being living trying” are all similar taken separately and almost negational altogether: it is as though the reading consciousness is picking up and immediately laying aside tools helpfully strewn along the way to sentence’s end. Is Matisse “wrong” about being “a great”? Trying to be “wrong” while being “a great?” Both are possibilities. In its reduced form, the sentence’s opening “quite for a long part of his being” seems remarkably lucid. Ultimately, however, all of these fragmentary units of meaning, along with the
morphemes themselves, appear fleetingly in the mind of the reader only to rearrange themselves, forwards and backwards, with other units, and to disappear. The point is, even if the reductionist exercise could get the prose down to some basic skeletal substructure (which it cannot), it would reveal nothing because the purpose of such text is reduction’s exact opposite: the proliferation of present possibilities and the continual denial, to the reader, of a sustained past even within a single sentence.

As for the fluid rearrangement possibilities: the full sentence as Stein wrote it begins with “One was quite certain that for a long part of his being one” – and everything is fine so far. First problem follows: “being living.” The reader must decide her own course here: is there a stutter in the sentence, as Stein’s syntax discards “one” and picks up “living” in its stead? Perhaps it must be combined thus: “being one being,” a turn that seems to throw into question “his” (Matisse’s?) ability to be one self, which is a genuine Jamesian moment no doubt simultaneously reflecting the impossibility of the reader’s position. The lines demand commitment to one of at least two paths, and the reader, like some wood walker out of Robert Frost, can “not travel both/ And be one traveler,”94 or put some combination together. This, of course, is only one of the chores Stein’s lines present here: whichever combination the reader selects becomes supplemented, as the sentence goes on, with other grammatical baggage, collecting relative clauses like a bottom of a boat collects mollusk shells and seaweed, except that even this metaphor works poorly since the baggage can and often does suddenly outweigh the original vessel

94 Frost (105)
of meaning to swing the sentence out of balance around the suddenly-appearing fulcrum of the relative pronoun “that.”

These swings create a kind of a delicate flow of multiple possibilities of reading: the duration of the reader meets the sentence elements, advancing and retreating, while never leaving the present – a very particular rhythm of perception. Ultimately, while we may grasp that Picasso was “charming” and had “something coming out of him,” Matisse “expressed some thing,” and Isadora Duncan was “doing dancing,” and while these may be the portraits’ accomplishments for some, the major lesson here is that rhythm of meaning-making: the flat surface of the sentence, traversed this way and that, always new. Stein uses rhythm to deliver and render an alternative kind of portrait, one that does not seek to visually “name” but rather creates portraits as rhythmic compositions in time. In Tender Buttons, Stein’s prose poems of domestic work, the nouns return, reiterating the lessons of the portraits ever more strangely, like zombies risen from the dead who have brought something strange back with them. These are not your Socratics’ nouns, as Gass argues:

In the first place, nouns are full of remembrance since they represent collections of past experience, and although it may seem reasonable to encounter the present well-padded by the past, this tends to give to every meeting of bell and clapper a dull clonk…So we must rid ourselves of the old titles and properties, recover a tutored innocence, and then, fresh as a new-scrubbed Adam, reword the world.95

95 Gass, World Within the Word (80)
And so, to avoid the padded encounter, to get away from “real” people the portraits purport to portray, *Tender Buttons* offers us things instead. Or seems to: it would be a leap to suppose that Stein is playing fair and that these descriptions, if they are descriptions, are of things. The buttons are, first and foremost, descriptive of their own being: the language is the thing, and its supposed ability to denote items and experiences in the world gets overturned for the body of the text, as the reading consciousness reanimates it in uncanny ways, swinging back and forth on the shifting movable pulley system of the sentence. The buttons demonstrate the understanding that the words need not be hidden because “it is not the appearance of a word that matters but the manner of its reappearance, and that an unspecifiable number of absolutely unique sentences can in this way be composed.” The words, ordered building blocks of solid boring structures in the old language economy, become tools in the new one. With them, thought is made and remade in new ways; they are its prostheses. The nouns, banished from portraits, are back, but they do not name.

How does *Tender Buttons* create the perpetual present time of reading while eradicating the memory of language? While it continues, in many ways, the grammatical gymnastics discussed above, there is a new important element: fake naming. That is, the moves of the text feign a certain familiar task: describing objects, food, and rooms. The second section’s titles are most recognizable: the reader may well feel the present time of reading by the rumbling of her stomach while consuming “roastbeef,” “mutton,” “sugar,” “milk” (twice), “single fish,” “potatoes” (three times), a lot of “chicken,” and many other

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96 Ibid (112)
victuals. However, even a most cursory examination reveals that things are less palatable than they appear. As the final line of the first button suggests, “the difference is spreading” between things and language, between process and meaning. That is, the language seems concerned with real referents, and this appearance may account for one of the chief tantalizing qualities of the text: we see the things “beneath” the words but when we reach for them, they disappear.

There is little surprise, then, that *Tender Buttons* has spawned myriad interpretations, some of which try to solve, some to map, and all to explain the process whereby the work can consumed by an audience. Ultimately, the critical consensus seems to be that all attempts to discover the “real” underneath the buttons are destined to miss the point. Sutherland voices this concern in the following way:

> It would be rather like an exhibition of the original table tops, guitars, pipes, and people which were the subject matter of cubist paintings. The original subject matter is or was of importance to the painter as a source of sensations, relations, ideas even, but it is not after all the beholder’s business. The beholder’s business is the picture in front of him, which is a new reality and something else, which does not add up to the normal subject matter.

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97 Edmund Wilson’s *The Shores of Light* and Stewart’s *Gertrude Stein and the Present* are two excellent examples of book-length engagements with “Tender Buttons”; numerous other books and essays argue for particular thematic, structural, and theoretical readings.

98 Sutherland (77)
Putting aside, for the moment, the potentially problematic comparison to the cubists and other modern artists that Stein is frequently made heir to, what remains is the problem similar to that of portraits. The reader and critic have been faked out; the new meaning made by the buttons is not at all dependent upon the original things which served as their basis. The point, then, is the composition of the reading subject’s duration against the words in the buttons. The “real” world is, once again, stripped of both history and futurity: as Michael Kaufmann argues, Stein “writes not of things in words but of words as things, things with outsides and insides and histories and futures.”\(^{99}\) These are not, therefore, the histories and futures of the reader – the text embodies and carries its own structure and relationships while the reader remembers nothing but the time of the text. Strange history indeed: the buttons that fasten their language to specific nodes, to some more or less meaningful nouns, disrupt complete “historical” relationships. According to Sarah J. Ford,

[t]his particular staging of modern consciousness, then, is an attempt to resist the most conventional grounding of language, to open language up to a less rigid state in which it might be more responsive to multiple meanings, associations, relationships, and to that which has been historically devalued over and over again at any given moment of perception, of any moment of coming to self.\(^{100}\)

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\(^{99}\) Kaufmann (54)

\(^{100}\) Ford (65)
Perception of a consciousness of itself reading, then, is the point: Stein’s work, contained in the well-structured sections, buttons, or boxes, becomes literally the stuff of memory as it is made and remade, always in the present. Not only that, but they are, strictly speaking, diagrammatic containers, like oversized microchips of some archaic Turing machine, against which our thought forms. They are, finally, replicas of textual bodies because a text can, often, be a nebulous concept which is here made substantive: “To make language “show forth,” to make it visible, Stein must make the conventions of print and of the book visible.”¹⁰¹ Titles that are not titles, food that is not food, things that are not things are all such exposed conventions, consciously and immediately uncanny for the adventurous reader. In her search for the present time of the mind, Stein suppresses all subject matter as such on behalf of this on-going inner movement, without interposing any conscious purpose between her mind and its object – the word – excluding both memory and conceptual forms. It is in the present moment that the mind is free to act creatively and to ‘make’ out of a ‘given’ subject matter new objects that have no causal connections with the course of events in the external world. According to Stewart, “Gertrude Stein attempted in many different ways to record the time of duration in herself and in others as always the same, yet always different – the same because it is always present, different because it is filled with the fleeting stream of its own contents and the flux of things in chronological time.”¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Kaufmann (61)
¹⁰² Stewart (67)
Chapter 3
Future Beyond Sense: Absurd Theatrics of Mechanized Memory

The actor or actress represents, but what he or she represents is always still in the future and already in the past, whereas his or her representation is impassible and divided, unfolded without being ruptured, neither acting nor being acted upon. It is in this sense that there is an actor’s paradox; the actor maintains himself in the instant in order to act out something perpetually anticipated and delayed, hoped for and recalled.

– Gilles Deleuze, The Logic of Sense

The untangling of the mystery at the heart of David Lynch’s 2001 Mulholland Dr. begins after an early morning trip to the theater: when the amnesiac Rita awakens from a nightmare next to her plucky champion/detective/lover Betty, she insists on an immediate drive down detritus-strewn streets of Los Angeles toward Club Silencio. There, the couple experiences a strange cabaret. The two women, who at this point in the film have begun to resemble each other (Rita has donned a blond wig that imitates Betty’s bob and covers her own dark hair) huddle in the darkened parterre as Bondar, a Mephistophelian emcee, framed by the red curtain of the arch, explains the rules. In Club Silencio, he announces, “no hay banda”: there is no band, and all the sound of the performance is previously recorded. We see the women see a trumpet player who mimes playing his
trumpet; the synchronicity manages to surprise the women even as it manages to surprise the audience. The emcee’s speech is in English, Spanish, and French, the languages interchanging with no apparent pattern. The orchestra, which we are told is not there, never ceases playing, and certain instrumental tones detach themselves from the hum—though we have been told that there is no clarinet, no trombone, no trombone con sordino, no muted trumpet. We do not know, in fact, whether the emcee’s very voice, low and vaguely menacing, is there either. His refrain of “no hay banda” is finished by three phrases: “it is a recording,” “it is a tape,” and “it is an illusion.” For Rita and Betty, the latter somehow seems the least threatening. After the trumpet pantomime, Bondar thrusts his hands up toward the ceiling with the air of a conjurer (the last word “illusion” adds to this impression) and makes a gesture. The darkness of the theater comes suddenly alight with bluish electricity, and Betty, as if her very physical body were somehow connected with the staged performance, begins to convulse. Rita holds her close, attempting to still the shaking, as the emcee stares down the women and vanishes in a puff of smoke while blue unsteady light continues to illuminate the stage. A new emcee enters the stage, announcing a new performer: Rebekah Del Rio. As the singer saunters unsteadily onto the stage, the women settle in. Del Rio (playing herself) wears heavy stylized makeup: her pallor is offset by bright red eyes and an appliqué teardrop under the right one. The tear is appropriate since the song she performs (on the recording) and lip-synchs (on stage) is “Llorando,” an a cappella Spanish version of Roy Orbison’s “Crying.” Captivated by the performance, Rita and Betty are on the verge of tears themselves when the singer stops her pantomime (which it has been all along) and faints on stage. The
recorded song continues its final refrain of “llorando”, pitch soaring, and the two women at last join by shedding tears. This scene of crying, then, tears the last semblance of conventionality the film has: identities of the characters, already destabilized by the stylized and imitative visual and narrative structure, come apart. Nobody and nothing is what we or they thought they were, and somehow Silencio is the center around which the Möbius strip of the film twists and unravels. The staging of the club in the defunct Tower Theater, one of L.A.’s golden age cinema palaces suggests a palimpsestic layering of film history, historical memory buried under staged memory.

The theatrical performance Club Silencio stages relies at least partly on the innovations of Brechtian epic theater because it treats “man as a process” and the human being as “the object of inquiry”\textsuperscript{103}: that is, both the performers and the viewers very status of being must be examined as a direct result of the performance. It also deploys theatrical “montage,” or a separation of elements for the precise purpose of later rearranging them in new significant ways. Most importantly, by alienating the spectators from the spectacle, that is, by forcefully removing them from any illusion of involvement with the production, the play’s effect is that the spectators are “made to face something”\textsuperscript{104} – in this case, the quickly unraveling sense of self that Betty has and has constructed for blank-slate Rita, the collective mystery of their “case.” The performance is also part Artaudian theater of cruelty: “It turns words into incantations. It extends the voice. It utilizes vibrations and qualities of the voice. It wildly stamps in rhythms. It pile-drives

\textsuperscript{103} Brecht (37)

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid (37)
That is, the strange sonic qualities of the performance appear to extend beyond Brechtian “gestus” into a “unique language halfway between gesture and thought,” becoming a dangerous exorcism for the characters, bewildered both by the violence of the show and their own disintegrating selves because here, “it is through the skin that metaphysics will be made to reenter [their] minds.” The communication here is not perceptual in the Bergsonian sense, nor dependent on prior knowledge or experience: “the sense of the gestures is not given, but understood, that is, recaptured by an act on the spectator’s part […] It is as if the other person’s intention inhabited my body and mine his.” Finally, the performance owes much to Meyerholdian biomechanics: because the aural performance is entirely recorded, the physical performance of the actors becomes, by default, part of the technically mediated whole: the “singer”, made up like a Commedia dell’Arte Colombina, moves like that genre’s marionette precursor, affecting a shaky automaticity and even requiring handlers to gather her after she collapses.

The idea of puppetry and automatism is important here. Cinema, which Deleuze describes as “automatism become spiritual art,” confronts automata fundamentally because it constructs a man-machine assemblage which “varies from case to case, but

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105 Artaud (243)
106 Ibid (242)
107 Ibid (251)
108 Merleu-Ponty (215)
always with the intention of posing the question of the future.” Thus, the cinematic body is not merely phenomenological, but prosthetic. By removing the voice from the body, or the ghost from the machine, Silencio thus challenges the very notion of a conventional self: the content of both the performer and the performance must now be sought without the biomechanical body and is at the same time made secondary, in a paradoxical move that destroys both interiority and exteriority. The body is prosthetic because it “acts” secondarily and automatically; the voice is prosthetic because “it is all a tape.” We, along with the film’s heroes, must grapple with the unsettling sense that if one part is mechanical, then the entire operational assemblage must be as well; the search for a “primary” location of selfhood on stage is fatally undercut, mirroring a similarly ill-fated effort on the part of Betty and Rita, the audience in the theater.

Considered especially in light of this theatrical pedigree, this scene is crucial to the film in several ways. Like several Lynch films, Mulholland Dr. relies for its mystery on a plot that could contain several meanings, or could supply several (often dual) exegetic readings with plenty of evidentiary material. We know that Rita could be anyone, and that her very name, taken by Betty from a Gilda poster, is temporary and in itself fake, not only because it does not “denote” the real person known as “Rita” but because it is based on a nostalgic Hollywood-of-yesteryear image, Rita Hayworth, pin-up girl extraordinaire. Interestingly, instead of naming the amnesiac Gilda after King Vidor’s vamp, Betty chooses the actress’s name, drawing attention to the very

109 Deleuze, Cinema 2 (263)

110 For example, Lost Highway and Inland Empire feature similar structuring devices.
assumption of identity taking place. Betty herself is “playing” her part: the film’s powerful revelation that this perky ingénue is actually a formidable actress somehow disturbs the iconic reality created by much of acting style and dialogue. All identities, however solid or fleeting, are borrowed. Furthermore, the Silencio scene becomes the point of unraveling of even these tenuous identities: Rita is “identified” as the true star, Camilla; Betty “becomes” Diane, the sorry hanger-on; the Hollywood dream seems to fall apart. The film turns in on itself; or, this is its major turn, to be sure, but it has been turning all along, looking for its memory, seemingly failing to find the proper relationship between its images and their significations. Betty and Rita and Diane and Camilla are real in the present, they exist but they do not “mean” in the way that we want them to, and as a result the we end up feeling like the two Lynchian detectives who appear early in the film and then are never seen again. The game might be afoot, but it is not the kind of game we anticipated: there will not be a successful decoding because the possibility of a concrete solution is always already barred by the strange and disruptive work of the film’s images as competing and irreconcilable modes of memory. Daniel Coffeen argues that “Mulholland Dr. is nothing but events, events without characters, nothing but the relentless assembling of signs.”

Because these are events without cause and hence without effect, they do not signify normally: the film images have their own logic, their own sense. What they lack is clearly attributable memory, unless that memory is a virtual collective of film itself, of its technical, visual, and performative conventions. Or, more accurately, they are conflicting modes of memory. Club Silencio is

\[\text{\textsuperscript{111} Coffeen}\]
crucial because it a historical memory of early cinema reception: the modes of memory at work here are those of movie production (Betty/Diane as aspiring starlet, and the violences of aspiring to succeed in a historically misogynist industry) and those of reception (the historical movie theater). Diane’s panic attack clearly marks the moment when these two modes become irreconcilable. In other words, the shift from prosthesis to phenomenology occurs when the performance can no longer defer the very mechanisms of exhibition.

After all, the ingénue, the damsel in distress, the star, and the stalker are all essentially stock characters; so is the setting of the film which at times feels like a strange version of Nathanael West’s *The Day of the Locust*, itself a macabre Gothicized version of Hollywood with its vaudevillian past and cowboy-extra present. Interestingly, *Mulholland Dr.* engages with this history explicitly by bringing a strange “cowboy” onto the scene as well as a large assortment of types we vaguely associate with the pictures.\(^{112}\)

The film likewise has some fun with “medium” conventionality since it manages to be both episodic television and film at the same time, thanks to its strange production history: Lynch originally began filming the movie as a pilot for an ABC series that was rejected as too dark and sinister.\(^{113}\) As a result, the first half of the film bears unmistakable hallmarks of a television program, albeit tinged with a Lynchian spirit so familiar to viewers of *Twin Peaks*. Characters are introduced at a leisurely pace, and plot strands take time to develop and to entwine; only the second half, by now a film,

\(^{112}\) Lynch’s film is filled with such film-referentiality; see, for example, former ingénue Ann Miller’s turn as Coco Lenoix, the befuddled mother-hen to Watts’s Betty.

\(^{113}\) Taubin (51)
intimates that there will be no untangling of the various strands. Finally, the film uses and explores genre conventions: *Mulholland Dr.* is film noir, a “star is born”—type musical, a Western, a horror film, and a mafia movie,\(^{114}\) by turns and at the same time. Thus, it functions, taken broadly as a film about the conventions of film, or rather made “out of” conventions of film: its formal aesthetic suggests homage on the one hand and an unsettling point of view on the other – neither subjective (since there are no looking subjects) nor objective omniscient. Lynch is known to affect an uncanny camera position that creates a sense of uneasiness in his films: it is as if here, as Coffeen suggests, the “film is the totality of cinema, its history, its formal limits and freedoms, its texture, its syntactics.”\(^{115}\) The film is watching. That is, *Mulholland Dr.* is a virtual engine, or what Deleuze terms “a spiritual automaton”\(^{116}\) *par excellence*, producing actualizations that use the historical memory of the images while never relying upon them to represent identity. If this is a dream world with a dream logic, then there is no “outside” to this logic – only the logic of the filmic image as such.

How, then, does the overtly theatrical performance at Club Silencio function as a pivot-fulcrum of the film? Why, in the middle of invoking the history of cinema, does Lynch invoke the history of theater as well? In a film the faux-mystery of which revolves around lost memory to be recovered, the mnemonic implications of the scene must be considered: if the performance in some way facilitates Betty’s ultimate dissolution and

\(^{114}\) For a full list of genre types and specific film references in *Mulholland Dr.*, see Shostak.

\(^{115}\) Coffeen

\(^{116}\) Deleuze, *Cinema 2* (262)
the appearance of Diane, if it at the same time turns Rita into the calculating and cold Camilla Rhodes, does it somehow constitute a recovery of memory? Is it a remembrance of times to come, since, in the chrono-logical diegesis of the film? Ultimately, I would like to suggest that while the filmic images comment both on their own historicity and on such historicity’s inability to confer real signification, the theatrical performance “stages” the problem of memory as a mechanical prosthesis. “It is a tape” after all: the celluloid of Lynch’s film, the celluloid of other films enunciated through it, and the recording of the orchestra and the song are always the embodiment of memory that is always outside the supposed subject.

Indeed, the fact that both the film and the performance are overdetermined – the former with material from elsewhere and the latter through doubling and tripling of verbal signification – would suggest a triumph of meaning, a cornucopia of understanding, and yet offers none. The performance is absurd, within the larger structure of the film, because it reveals nothing about memory and identity despite of the promise of such revelation: to reveal answers would also threaten to reveal the potential wrong answers. According to Deleuze, “for this reason, the condition of truth is not opposed to the false, but to the absurd: that which is without signification and that which may be neither true nor false.”117 To put it another way, the sense of the performance has nothing to do with signification, thus allowing all memory to be brought to bear on the spectacle, or none. Because the performance exists in the present time, but also represents its own past and future (past recordings, future bodily destinies), because it lays bare the

117 Deleuze, The Logic of Sense (14-15)
workings of a memory machine that enunciates nothing despite its multiple attempts to
do so – the club is “silencio,” after all – it must be read as instantiation of the general
problem of recordability of memory. That is, absurd theatrics of modernity have nothing
but technics to rely upon for recall of self, just as film images have nothing but
themselves to mean since there is nothing to represent.

There is, however, a significant difference: while the film as a whole is an
endlessly productive engine that cannot stop “meaning,” the theatrical performance,
because of its overt technical prostheticity, invokes the main problem of memory as
prosthesis. For Stiegler, the prosthetization of memory is the self’s fall into temporality
and thus into death. That is, temporalized memory always implies a temporalized future,
which is always death – hence, technology always being a thanatology. The recording of
the performance makes past, future, and death; the frightening thing is not that the
Cartesian ghost outlasts the machine, but that the ghost has never been of this machine in
the first place. It is the Being that exceeds, presupposes, and includes our being. The
recording could be read either as an aural *memento mori* or as a univocal being from
which all enunciations arise, or perhaps as both at once, precisely because it is itself
encapsulated in the larger virtual machine of the film. For Lynch, *Mulholland Dr.* and its
theater centerpiece highlight the untenable notion of memory as recorded and
representable while at the same time commenting on the complex history of memory’s
prosthetic performativity, through both staged theater and film, as the only way toward a
future. In a very real sense, then, the film is more than just an exhibition of cinema’s
prosthetic body; it is also a distant echo, a memory, of earlier attempts at theatricalizing
exhibition as prosthesis.

A similar treatment of recorded memory takes center stage in Samuel Beckett’s
Krapp’s Last Tape (1957), without the framing structure of Lynch’s film. The play,
which in recent years has achieved an increasing critical valence in Beckettian circles\textsuperscript{118},
stages a prosthetic performance: Krapp, the title character, is joined on stage by Tape, his
own recorded voice qua memory, in an examination of memory as temporal prosthesis
and performance. Having used Lynch to illustrate the importance of thus examining
memory and theatricality, I will return to Beckett’s later in the chapter, when it will
discuss the so-called end of modernity as a mnemonic phenomenon. First, though, it is
necessary to offer a historical (and historicizing) reading of the development of modernist
poetics through futurism and onto absurd theater as a development of a mnemonic
technology. As I plan to show, the staging of technical memory functions as a way out of
a dead-end modernist poetics trapped always in the present, and involves its increasing
de-textualization and mechanization. Ultimately, I hope to suggest a new way to
understand the unfurling of literary modernism: as the texts become increasingly
entangled with the search for forth-dimensional time and increased contemporaneity with
themselves, the aesthetic necessarily leaves the textual realm. That is, it leaves it
destroyed by increased formal innovation (one might even consider this revolutionary
terrorism) while leaving it behind for the increasingly rhythmic and gestural world of
performance: a kind of prosthetic atavism.

\textsuperscript{118} Ben-Zvi (9)
In the previous chapter, I concluded the discussion of the amnesiac text in Gertrude Stein with her transition from reading time to listening time: understanding her lectures and resultant celebrity in this way suggests that even at this early stage, the value of performance begins to transcend the value of the text. This would continue to be a persistent problem for modernism throughout twentieth century. For example, for Joyce, one of the towering figures of canonical modernism, *Ulysses* remained a crowning achievement of modernist textual virtuosity, while *Finnegans Wake* would become a violent end of a literary era, or a complete textual revolution.\(^{119}\) As I have tried to show above, Stein’s poetics of immemory already previsions this direction in the century’s first two decades. Even as she was working on crafting work that foregrounded reading time, or the contemporaneity of the text to itself and its own consumption, the various Futurist movements were, in effect, going after the same goals while arriving there by different, and often circuitous routes. In what may appear as direct contrast to Stein’s ostensibly quiet literary enterprise, F.T. Marinetti’s violent assault on the art-consuming public in 1909 with the publication of “The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism” in the Parisian newspaper *Le Figaro* ushered in a new era of modernism: that of heavy contestation for the goals, methods, and stakes of the movement.

Of course, the apparent dissimilarities between the two aesthetics are not as broad as it may seem at first especially if we read futurism as yet another distinct performance of the “modern consciousness”: while Marinetti’s movement veered explicitly into

\(^{119}\) While critics often discuss *Finnegans Wake* as both the last modernist text and the first postmodernist one, the important consensus seems to center around its role as the culmination of an aesthetic.
fascism after a few years, Stein’s own relationship with the eventual Vichy government has recently become an unpleasant side note as well. Likewise, the actual artistic goals of the two tendencies may be seen as at least contiguous if not related outright. While Stein was after the immediacy of the textual experience and the always-present time, Marinetti called for a syntactical destruction, or, at the very least, its radical refuguration:

One must destroy syntax and scatter one’s nouns at random, just as they are born[...]One should use infinitives, because they adapt themselves elastically to nouns and don’t subordinate themselves to the writer’s I that observes or imagines. Alone, the infinitive can provide a sense of the continuity of life and the elasticity of the intuition that perceives it.

For Marinetti, then, the destruction of syntactical convention also means the destruction of “all psychology” in the text as well as its increased mathematicity. The writer’s I, or the psychological memory of representation, must be rooted out of text using syntax-become-math; Marinetti’s own experimental *Zang Tumb Tumb*, part sound poem and part concrete poem which appeared between 1912 and 1914, exemplifies this approach by using nouns punctuated by mathematical signs to denote the relationships within the text. The kind of violence being done to the structure of poetry here may be seen clearly in his 1914 manifesto, “Geometric and Mechanical Splendor and the Numerical Sensibility,” which both explicitly champions the mechanical and the numerical and compares the futurist poem to a hole made by a howitzer: “We systematically destroy the literary I in

120 See Janet Malcolm’s *Two Lives: Gertrude and Alice* and Barbara Will’s *Unlikely Collaboration: Gertrude Stein, Bernard Faÿ, and the Vichy Dilemma*.

121 Marinetti, *Let’s Murder the Moonshine* (92)
order to scatter it into the universal vibration and reach the point of expressing the infinitely small and the vibrations of molecules.”\textsuperscript{122} We may easily note here the insistence, reminiscent of Stein, on the immediate moment of reading and a rejection of a linear time supposedly representable by a textual work. For Marinetti and other Italian futurists, the new aesthetic was to be, first and foremost, one of speed, which implied a transformation that simply rendered the old temporality obsolete: they claimed to “have almost abolished the concept of space and notably diminished the concept of time” and to be “thus preparing the ubiquity of multiplied man” which would lead inevitably “at the abolition of the year, the day, and the hour.”\textsuperscript{123}

Other similarities lie in the very subject matter for both authors. In the previous chapter, I discussed Stein’s fascination, particularly in works like Tender Buttons, with rearranging and reimagining the representation of domestic objects, especially food. Indeed, the daily ritual of its preparation and consumption is an important domestic practice that becomes transfigured through the amnesiac poetics Stein deploys for its rendering. While Marinetti eschewed domesticity as such in his works, he treats food directly in The Futurist Cookbook, what Leslie Chamberlain calls “an extended artistic joke”\textsuperscript{124} collected over the first few decades of the century and published in 1932. In it, Marinetti collected recipes, decrees for meal preparations, and manifestos of new food revolution that attempted to use such daily objects of consumption as meat, fruits, and

\textsuperscript{122} Ibid (106)

\textsuperscript{123} Ibid (89)

\textsuperscript{124} Chamberlain (7)
especially spaghetti for a purpose that would be both provocative and evocative: that is, provocative of a new daily non-domesticity and evocative of the futurist aesthetic. While Stein’s work with food is primarily syntactic, Marinetti’s recipes retain a rather conventional grammaticality while at the same time combining unexpected elements of technics, art, and victuals proper. For example, the “heroic winter dinner” includes “drum roll of colonial fish” and “raw meat torn by trumpet blasts” – the latter prepared, in part, by passing “an electric current through it”¹²⁵ – while the “official dinner” treats guests to “The Solid Treaty’: a multi-coloured castle of nougat with, inside, very tiny nitro-glycerine bombs which explode now and then perfuming the room with the typical smell of battle.”¹²⁶ While Woolf explodes the description of dinner by adding disparate elements of a haecceity and Stein explodes dinner items by radically reorganizing the geography of the sentence and restructuring the temporality of reading, Marinetti proposes to explode dinner, literally. The real body and its sustenance become less and less relevant: the recipes annihilate so that the prosthetic body is all that is left.

There are, of course, other significant differences in the two approaches: Stein’s work was deeply concerned with a reevaluation of dailiness, not its complete destruction. Also, despite of Marinetti’s bold plans, it seems clear that Stein’s actual literary innovation went much further in refiguring grammaticality of modernist poetics. In fact, while Stein grasped the importance of composition as paramount to the temporal sense of her texts, Marinetti wanted to rely on the sheer power of words, especially of nouns, to

¹²⁵ Marinetti, *Cookbook* (102)

¹²⁶ Ibid (110)
carry the weight of themselves only, without depending on their history. In fact, this
treatment of language largely mirrored the futurists’ conception of their own position
within modernism, their origins and destinations. According to Peter Nicholls,
the Futurists know only those beginnings in which the self emerges new-
born, without father, mother, past. The triumph of the technical over the
natural thus encapsulates the capacity of the modern subject to experience
himself as pure origin, as uncontaminated by tradition.

The suggestion here is that within this framework, the fetishization of the ostensibly
“mechanical” aesthetic and the diminishment of the “natural” one are inextricably tied
with the question of time, and therefore, with memory, thus connecting the modern
mnemonic crisis with the artwork’s mechanical reproduction.

Before discussing the questions of technical reproducibility of art and its
sociopolitical implications, it is important to note another crucial move performed by the
futurists that mirrors a similar move by Stein discussed in the previous chapter – the
move away from textual toward performative art. Just as if it was for Stein, for Marinetti
the move became a necessity out of the relative stagnancy of his “properly” creative
works. This is the chief problem with Italian futurism: even its fascistic attributes aside,
Marinetti, as a spokesperson for the new poetics, wasn’t much of a poet. What he was, on
the other hand, was a captivating performer; according to Marjorie Perloff, “as what we
now call a conceptual artist, Marinetti was incomparable, the strategies of his manifestos,

127 For a comprehensive analysis of influences, similarities, and differences between Stein and
Marinetti, see Perloff’s “‘Grammar in Use’: Wittgenstein / Gertrude Stein / Marinetti.”

128 Nicholls (85-86)
performances, recitations, and fictions being to transform politics into a kind of lyric theater.” In fact, the movement’s original manifesto seems to preview the kind of theatricality that this chapter will ultimately discuss: Marinetti’s goal, even at the outset, was to incite a strange performance of the future: “Let’s break out of the horrible shell of wisdom and throw ourselves like pride-ripened fruit into the wide, contorted mouth of the wind! Let’s give ourselves utterly to the Unknown, not in desperation but only to replenish the deep wells of the Absurd!” The absurd, here, suggests again that which must follow from discourse that is barely denotational and inherently asignonifying: the sense of futurism is not based on real lived time, but on one beyond common sense. This is one key modernist tendency for dealing with radical temporality: the construction and seeming primacy of prosthetic bodies.

It is not surprising, then, that futurism depends on technics in two related, but distinct ways: on the one hand, taking cues from the technical changes around them, artists come to rely increasingly on machinic metaphors and a mechanical aesthetic for their artistic production. Therefore, the perception of art changes, because, according to Benjamin’s famous essay, “The manner in which human sense perception is organized, the medium in which it is accomplished, is determined not only by nature but by historical circumstances as well.” That is, the form of the artwork fundamentally rearranges the way we perceive sense, including temporal sense, and the sense in which

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129 Perloff, *The Futurist Moment* (84)
130 Marinetti, *Let’s Murder the Moonsine* (40)
131 Benjamin (222)
we interact with our own past and future. On the other hand, and more importantly, as the historical circumstances of increasing industrialization of labor and the mechanical horror of the Great War add to the wonders of new artistic media, the artwork continues to lose its aura, which may be understood as a slipping from a particular time and place. As a result of this, the work itself ceases to be based on ritual, and must instead be based on politics. The problem with this, and hence the danger, as he argues in his polemic against the Italian futurists, is that “[mankind’s] self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order. This is the situation of politics which Fascism is rendering aesthetic.”132 In any case, the particular labor dynamics within each socius become an integral part in the way such art may be produced and consumed differently. Benjamin attempts to redeem the Communist approach to futurist art, no doubt considering the developments of Russian futurism as exemplars of such an approach.

It would be an oversimplification, however, to ascribe the alternative development of Russian futurism to this difference alone. In fact, early near its inception, the shared concerns of the two movements perhaps outweighed their eventual and significant disagreements. While Marinetti took his inspiration from the military machine directly, the Russian prior to the revolution followed theosophical leads of writers like H. P. Blavatsky and especially P.D. Ouspensky. While there is some basic correlative truth to this genealogy, theosophy’s influence on Russian futurism was no more than incidental, and centered, above all else, by both movements’ attempts to theorize the fourth

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132 Ibid (242)
dimension of time. For instance, Meyerhold’s experiments in theatrical temporality began as early as 1906, and his diagrammatic biomechanics would become important to Eisenstein, who would later write “The Filmic Fourth Dimension.” Thus, just like the Italians and like Stein and other canonical modernists, the Russians were really after a way to re-imagine time in non-spatial terms. This again, of course, is a basic paradox of modernity: the contemporaneous understanding that spatiality of time is an illusion and art’s inability to articulate time other than prosthetically, or spatially. Memory is similarly implicated in the paradox: because it is temporal, it becomes as unrepresentable as time itself, and must be extemporized through the prosthetic body of the theater.

It is in its attempt to resolve the paradox that authors of the loose Moscow-based futurist union known as Hylaea relied on the work of Ouspensky, who, originally a mathematician, became interested in addressing what he saw as the Kantian problem of spatialized time through non-Euclidian geometry. In his opus *Tertium Organum*, Ouspensky took on time-as-space by formulating the problem of temporality in the following way: “Reality is continuous and constant, but in order to make possible the perception of it, we must dissever it into separate moments; imagine it as an infinite series of separate moments out of which there exists for us only one.”133 That is, time is related to reality, but only known and expressible according to the three-dimensional model that modern science and mathematics have already rendered obsolete. Just as Bergson performed work on memory explicitly informed and inspired by quantum physics, Ouspensky’s project is similarly related to Riemannian geometry (and, by

133 Ouspensky (39)
retroactive extension, the Russian Lobachevsky’s earlier work that made Riemann’s discoveries possible). In a search that ultimately sought spiritualist transcendence, Ouspensky nevertheless relied on Riemann to conclude that “extension in time is extension into unknown space, and therefore time is the fourth dimension of space.”  

While this is not quite a Bergsonian refuguration of time and memory because it cannot quite get away from thinking space, it introduces an “unknown space,” certainly space that is radically new and has an unfamiliar relationship with time, is time, and contains a new kind of memory that is no longer linear in the commonly understandable sense: Riemann’s discovery had to do with straight lines’ strange behavior, after all.

In fact, the search for the elusive fourth dimension became, for practitioner of modern art, something of a common goal. That is, the ideas permeating culture from the spheres of mathematics and science continued to trouble artistic production as well to such an extent that it had to respond in order to become contemporary to its own age. Linda Dalrymple Henderson’s comprehensive study of these mutual influences details the ways in which the Russian avant-garde becomes heavily invested in these issues from around the turn of the century to shortly after the revolution. Many of the Hylaean came to reject Ouspensky’s ideas in the second decade of the century, and though Ouspensky

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134 Ibid (47)

135 Riemannian geometry, a non-Euclidian branch that took as its point of departure the long-contested Fifth Axiom of Euclid, or the Parallel Postulate – one of whose best-known converses is that two parallel lines can never converge – became crucial for Einstein’s relativity, Bergson’s work on duration and simultaneity, and, later, Deleuze’s conception of multiplicity.
himself later criticized the Futurists,\textsuperscript{136} this did not cause the complete rejection of the “belief in the fourth dimension that had been such a strong support for Malevich, Matyushin, Kruchonykh,\textsuperscript{137} and their circle during the preceding years.”\textsuperscript{138} Interestingly, among the continued proponents of Ouspensky, two were visual artists, who worked primarily in “space”; Henderson’s inclusion of Kruchonykh here suggests that these relationships of influenced continued to be hotly contested for some time. In post-revolutionary Russia, however, “‘the fourth dimension’ was generally redefined as time in the space-time world of Einsteinian Relativity. Nevertheless, artists who had been deeply immersed in the earlier interpretation[…]also retained certain earlier attitudes and approaches toward the fourth dimension of space.”\textsuperscript{139}

For the poets of Russian futurism, however, the problems of fourth-dimensionality, aspatial temporality, and futurist poetics took a distinctive form. Similarly to Marinetti, Hylaeans handled poetry with a two-pronged approach. On the one hand, they began concentrating on the inherent power of words by exploring the very sense of sound, or its \textit{zaum} – a term that is itself a Russian neologism that has been translated alternatively as “beyonsense,” “transreason,” and “transrationalism.” All of

\textsuperscript{136} These differences ranged from philosophical, artistic, and political in nature: Ouspensky eventually came to represent that flipside hobgoblin of futurism – reactionary fascistic tendencies – that so hobbled the Russians’ relationship with the Italians as well.

\textsuperscript{137} Kazimir Malevich achieved great fame as both a theoretician of modernism, founder of Suprematism, and artist; Mikhail Matyushin was an avant-garde painter and composer; and Alexei Kruchonykh, together with David Burlyuk and Velimir Khlebnikov, formed the core of the Futurist poetry circle.

\textsuperscript{138} Henderson (290)

\textsuperscript{139} Ibid (299)
the translations concentrate on the term’s prefix *za-* which means past, beyond, or outside. *Um*, the Russian word that means mind, intelligence, wit, and consciousness, is the second crucial component, suggesting that the effects sought by the movement were to be affected not in these conventional seats of understanding. That is, in order to disambiguate themselves from their Italian counterparts, the Russians focused on etymology of their linguistic material and the effects such etymology could have on understanding that took place somewhere outside of the understanding subject. ¹⁴⁰ That is, governing the new approach was the idea that words, and especially words considered as compositional morphemes, had positive value in and of themselves.

This position, at first glance, may seem at odds with the roughly-contemporary revolution of structural linguistics. In his 1916 *Course in General Linguistics*, de Saussure famously attempts to get away from what he considers “mistakes in our terminology,” where we tend to think of words as “naming” things or concepts, preferring to think of language in terms of linguistic signs that primarily work together as a structure of difference. Thus, a sign is “concept/sound image” taken together, or signified over signifier. In other words, meaning is derived not from a process whereby sound-images pick out concepts in reality, but in their difference from other signs. This leads Saussure to propose that not only is the sign arbitrary, buy that it works along two important axes: axis of successions and axis of simultaneities. Because the sound-image unfolds in time, it has a certain duration. Because it signifies multiple possibilities at once, it has a certain depth. That is, each sign works both diachronically (as a span) and

¹⁴⁰ For a more comprehensive overview of the conflicts between Italian and Russian futurisms, see Nicholls and Perloff.
synchronously (as a simultaneity). For de Saussure, then, “in language, there are only differences. Even more importantly, a difference generally implies positive terms between which the difference is set up; but in language there are only differences without positive terms.” This is perhaps most clearly the approach to signification taken by Stein, and even, to a certain degree, by Marinetti and his followers: composition and arrangement change the meaning of language, not some inherent denotability. However, the insight of zaum is also decidedly astructural in the sense that it deploys language not strictly for its denotative functionality, but as affective power. Finally, because of the suggestion that morphology must become the study of sense “beyond the mind”, this new poetics takes on a decided tinge of constitutive technical phenomenology – that is, the idea that meanings of words are found elsewhere, that words are equivalent to matter, and that, through zaum language, the reader becomes temporalized as through technics. Thus, with a seemingly old-fashioned idea that words can “mean” things, the Russian futurists undertake an assault on the very notion of the word, which demands, crucially, its reimagining as memory prosthesis. Is the word the prosthetic body of the force of time in language, then? Etc.

It was Velimir Khlebnikov who became, along with Kruchonykh, the main standard-bearer for the movement, its main theoretist and most prominent poet, at least until Vladimir Mayakovsky’s later arrival on the scene. In his manifestos, published in the second decade of the twentieth century, Khlebnikov’s concern with elusive fourth-

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141 De Saussure (70)

142 For comprehensive biographical and critical comments, see Cooke and Vroon.
dimensionality of time and the importance of time’s very reformulation take center stage. Writing in 1913 in “The Word as Such,” the key document of Russian futurism he co-authored with Kruchonykh, Khlebnikov insisted on the paramount importance of the word. While the document itself can be read largely as a polemic against the Italians in an attempt to establish ideological if not chronological primacy, it is at the same time an indictment against exegesis of linguistic production: “All Talmuds are equally destructive for the word-worker; he remains face to face, always and ultimately, with the word (itself) alone.”\(^{143}\) To be one with the word, to be in a direct relationship with its inner workings, was the goal; the futurists thus saw that their “approximation was the machine: impassive, passionate.”\(^{144}\) Here, then, lies the dual aesthetic of the movement: the machinic and the primal together. Time, as a result, is the relationship between the diminishment of the solid identity of the word-worker and the word which contains the only memory there is: to that effect, in another manifesto which he signed “The King of Time,” Khlebnikov proclaimed this goal: “We intend to refurrow the human brain and to give this puppy dog a fourth leg – namely, the axis of TIME.”\(^{145}\) Here, the clear echo of Ouspensky coexists, again, with an almost-Bergsonian notion of a personal time. This is why in “K,” a strange pseudo-science-fictional meditation on language and time travel, Khlebnikov is able to claim that “consciousness[…]brings together moments of time like

\(^{143}\) Khlebnikov, *The King of Time* (120)

\(^{144}\) Ibid (119)

\(^{145}\) Ibid (126)
chairs in a living room.”¹⁴⁶ That is, consciousness temporalizes itself through its interaction with the furniture of the room, or the words on a page. When the story’s narrator interacts with a scientist from the year 2222, the latter reminds us that “language[…] is the everlasting source of knowledge. What is the relationship between gravity and time?[...] The very soul of your language shows us that weight and time are different absorptions of the same force.”¹⁴⁷ In other words, if the mind does reconstruct time through its interaction with language, then morphemes, those smallest semantic units in any language, must contain the knowledge, or the memory, of such apparently disparate concepts as gravitational force and time. For Khlebnikov, language memory explains all.

A few years later, he would put this notion to the test in his numerical opus Zakony Vremeni – usually translated as The Tables of Destiny but more accurately meaning “laws of time.” Having become convinced of time’s presence which included both history and future in the very stuff of poetry as its archival dimension, Khlebnikov starts similarly testing other fields, seeing whether mathematical patterns could be sussed out by the consciousness that “reads” through the universe as one reads through a poem. In a move not unlike those performed by Stein and Marinetti, he makes bizarre mathematical (or numerological, more accurately) equations with famous dates, especially of battles, in order to understand these underlying patterns that may lead to a peaceful world. Socio-politically, it is difficult not to understand this work, written from

¹⁴⁶ Ibid (85)
¹⁴⁷ Ibid (87)
1914 to 1916, as a direct expression of Russia’s traumatic and disastrous war decade between its crushing defeat in Russo-Japanese War’s Battle of Tsushima and its equally painful and ill-fated involvement in the Great War. Artistically, however, this work represents, once again, the dual direction of futurism: its forward-looking encounter with the future while at the same time reconstructing a new way of understanding the past. Apart from these prose efforts, Khlebnikov conceived of his poetry as the conduit from such past into the future, as he asked: “Isn’t the nature of a poem to be found in its withdrawal from itself, from its point of contact with everyday reality? Is a poem not a flight from the I?”

It is precisely through his poetry that we can trace this new furrowing of consciousness’s temporality. Khlebnikov’s legacy, perhaps unfairly, remains muddled: he is a poet’s poet, discussed but not read, even, according to Mayakovsky himself, “impossible to read.” While this may be true to some extent about his epic poem Zangezi, a sverhpovyst’ (“trans-tale” or “supersaga”) combined largely of completely neologized human and bird speech, much of his earlier poetic production has unquestionable value to the reader. Its avant-garde aesthetic resembles language cubism: according to Nicholls, “just as Picasso dismembered the classical body in order to discover new spaces, so the Russian Futurists disarticulated language, breaking it down into even smaller units of meaning and rhythm.”

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148 Ibid (153)
149 This line is from Mayakovsky’s obituary to Khlebnikov, qtd. in Cooke (1)
150 Nicholls (128)
re-discover, in this way, an earlier moment of language’s mnemonic investment: strip the words down to morphemes, and those to phonemes, to mere letters even, and you will discover the earlier moment of humanization as becoming-memorable, or gain access to the meaning of this becoming. Ironically, for zaumniks, the quest for futurity, faced with the impossible memory of the present, became an exercise in primitivism, or a regression to the past. While similar, on the one hand, to a kind of fetishistic primitivism found in Marinetti’s repeated references to a mothering African nurse, Khlebnikov’s quest has more in common with the search for Enlightenment’s bon sauvage, but always stopping just short of the “pure man” notion itself, because it is in the linguistic form that the man remembers and becomes man. In Khlebnikov’s best poetry, there is a combination of sensitive though often fanciful etymological work and this primitivist subject matter, “the crudeness and rough vitality of the living peasant past, primitive, alogical, full of rituals and taboos.”

His often-cited “Zaklyatie na Smekh” or “Incantation by Laughter” is one example: the poem takes the root morpheme smekh, or “laugh,” and develops a complicated chant around, deploying the root as the basis for other words in the poem whether or not they historically have anything to do with laughter. The poetic goal, ostensibly, is to reinvigorate the root by on the one hand stripping it of any extraneous elements while on the other inserting it into new unfamiliar contexts. This is not, as is often suggested, strictly a sound poem, but one that takes the memory of the word and

151 Paul Gauguin’s painting might be another well-known example of this modernistic turn.
152 Douglas (3)
builds a world around it, properly futural. In the following section of the Paul Schmidt translation, the impression is not simply aural but carries an unexpected sense of the composition, even though nearly every word is a neologism:

Hlahla! Ufhlofan, laulfings!
Hlahla! Ufhlofan, laulfings!
Who lawghen with lafe, who hlachen lewchly,
Hlahla! Ufhlofan hlouly!
Hlahla! Hloufish laulfings lafe uf beloght lauchalorum!
Hlahla! Loufenish laulfings lafe, hlohan utlaufly!\(^{153}\)

The words of the poem do incant, or induce, which might be a better translation of the Russian zaklyatie (incantation, curse, and exhortation all at once) and this is the predominant tone of the composition, but at the same time Khlebnikov’s grammatical innovation achieves a different effect – that of a radical reconsideration, on the part of the reader, of the very way words contain meaning. The inventiveness, in other words, is similar to that of the portmanteaus famously used by Dodgson and then later by Joyce in Finnegans Wake: morphemes, transported into unexpected places and thrust into new relationships with other morphemes and grammatical structures, render the language new and primal at the same time while the sense they produce is always in present tense, negotiated by accumulation of meanings of “laugh.”

Schmidt’s version is in fact stranger than the Russian original, mainly because English imposes on the poet greater restriction of word order and a less schematic

\(^{153}\) Khlebnikov (20)
morphology – Russian words are usually built around the root morpheme with a fairly rigid system of prefixes and suffixes that finish the final determined meaning, while English’s greater vocabulary forces words to stand on their own. Thus, Khlebnikov’s opening line “O rassmeites’, smekhachi!” is fairly clear: rassmeites’ actually is one proper form of the plural imperative mood of the verb smeyatsa, or “to laugh.” Smekhachi, something like “laughers”, however, begins the strangeness, which only continues to build as the poem progresses as the neologic level grows. That is, while the basic conceit of the composition is the same throughout the poem, the new and strange combinations of familiar roots with familiar bound morphemes. This is radical ostranenie on the morphological level; while Marinetti’s Zang Tumb Tumb mathematizes verse, Khlebnikov’s mathematicity, like Stein’s, inheres in the words and structure of the verse itself. The above translation captures this sense of the original: while none of the words here are recognizably English (with the possible exception of “lauflings”), the combinational effect is retained in words like “ufhlofan” with carries within it a sense of “laugh” while containing two new bound morphemes – the prefix “uf” in which contains the faintest shadow of laughter and the suffix “an” which intimates a command. Ultimately, the translation is illustrative of one particular lean of zaum poetics – toward nonsense – while retaining the morphological and syntactical operations that generate its radical newness. For an example more accessible in translation, we might consider a fragment the following untitled poem roughly contemporary to “Incantation”:

We chant and enchant,

Oh charming enchantment!
No raving, no ranting,

No canting enchantment!

This ranting enchantress

Has cast her enchantment –

We see what her chant meant!\textsuperscript{154}

Here, Schmidt has made a more conservative choice: the rigid sentence structure which in Russian one does not need because of extensive declension options but which is required of English has been imposed in the poem, thus rendering the poem very readable. The visual and aural repetition of “c(h)ant” creates an onomatopoic effect where one would not expect one. However, perhaps the greatest effect is that each word, considered as part of the overall poetic structure, is perforce redeemed and re-examined as if for the first time: “chant” at the heart of “enchantment” is something new and surprising, like an unfolding of an etymological mystery, and therefore something old too, in the sense that the uncanny is old. The rhythmic alliterative pattern which relies on such undressing of the words presents them to the reader unfettered, unburdened, yet at the same time vaguely familiar, to be made sense of in the reading itself.

It is this lesson, first and foremost, that Vladimir Mayakovsky, the \textit{enfant terrible} of Russian revolutionary letters, took from the futurists while adding his own monumental rhythmic force. His strange and ambiguous relationship with the movement

\textsuperscript{154} Ibid (20)
Mayakovsky became keenly aware, as his Khlebnikov obituary suggests, that the problem of such radical modernisms as were practiced by the zaumniks lay precisely in their dangerous veering toward incomprehensibility. At stake was the very viability of the poetic revolution: Russian futurists, writing explicitly against the Symbolist school (just as their European counterparts were writing against the late-Victorian conventionality) revolutionized the very form of Russian speech in their poetics, and Mayakovsky, while artistically like-minded, began a personal double shift. On the one hand, while for Khlebnikov the ostensible positive power of morphemes was paramount, Mayakovsky continued using them in his wildly inventive rhyme schemes but at the same time began shifting focus to radical rhythmic inventions in his syntax. On the other, from the early days of the movement, Mayakovsky realized, much like Stein had, that the eventual power of the new poetic form would become multiplied and democratized in its performative incarnation. That is, the radical temporality and immemory of futurism would overcome its limitations of difficulty and inaccessibility precisely in its transfer from reading to performed time. According to Shklovsky,

Poets had concentrated all their efforts on minor changes in shades of meaning; they had already worked with rhythmic-syntactical segments which they kept transposing. All this was destroyed by Mayakovsky, who broke through the solid ice field of words and built a new, perceptible

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155 Much has been written about Mayakovsky’s involvement and eventual break with the futurists: for a sampling, see Shklovsky, Blake, Nicholls, and Perloff.
poetry based on Khlebnikov’s vast experience, on folksong and on oratory.156

Crucially, the new “perceptibility” of this poetry was unmistakable, as were its rhythmic and oratorical components. This assessment is far from hyperbolic – for an entire generation of cultural consumers, he make the breakthrough of achieving futurity via antiquity: by limiting his use of coordinate clauses, he turned to parallelism, which made the verse sound “as though he were returning to the archaic sphere of solemn ancient Russian prose”157 – almost an alliterative revival, stringing his sentences together into a syntactic Jacob’s ladder. The language itself is declarative and performative while the rhymes often resemble Khlebnikov’s etymological excavations, and, as a result, the poetics feels reinvigorated as “words refuse to form those artificial ranks, and internally keep renewing and changing their meaning in relation to one another.”158

Thematically, Mayakovsky’s poetry is deeply personal but not introspective: the subject matter is frequently the poet himself but rendered through striking urban and machinic imagery. In a characteristic passage, a prologue to an early long poem The Backbone-Flute (1915), it comes together as the speaker takes himself apart bodily while summoning memory already rendered as staging:

For all of you,

who once pleased or still may please,

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156 Shklovsky (127)

157 Ibid (131)

158 Ibid (131)
guarded by icons in the catacomb of the soul,

I shall raise, like a goblet of wine

at a festive board, a skull brimful of verse.

[…]

Memory!

Gather into the hall from my brain

the inexhaustible ranks of my loves.

Pour laughter from eye to eye.

Festoon the night with weddings past.

Pour out joy from body to body.

Let no one forget this night.

On this occasion I shall play the flute.

Play on my own backbone.\textsuperscript{159}

The problems of translating Mayakovsky, in some ways, are greater than those of translating Khlebnikov: the former ostensible difficulty excuses the translator somewhat while the former’s clarity taxes the capacity of the languages’ congruence itself. Thus, the above retains the rhythm but not the rhyme of the original; the virtuoso combination of \textit{peshchere} and \textit{cherep} (“catacomb” and “skull”), clearly reminiscent of \textit{zaum} verse, is only replicated palely in the translation with “skull/brimful” and “festoon/past.” The rhyming generally, for Mayakovsky, was a process of endless invention: slant rhymes, assonances, consonances, feminine rhymes, and puns were all usual weapons in his

\textsuperscript{159} Mayakovsky, \textit{Bedbug} (111)
arsenal, thus making the finished effect akin to what a rhyming Whitman might sound like. What does get across is Mayakovsky’s sense of poetry as biophysical stagecraft: the spine becomes the flute, the skull – a goblet, all the while memory assumes the role of a theater director.

Of course, already two years earlier, Mayakovsky literally made himself a play with the 1913 production of *Vladimir Mayakovsky: A Tragedy*. In terms of content, the play is an extended celebration of the poet, tragic insofar as his apotheosis is recognized with difficulty by the multiple minor characters which include an “old man with scrawny black cats” and assorted amputees (“man with one ear”, “man with one arm”, etc.) and criers (in the literal tearful and the figurative occupational sense). The rabble accosting the prophet-poet may represent both the misery of the times, the inability or unwillingness of the people – here both actors and audience for the Mayakovsky himself – to see the rise of the new aesthetic. In terms of form, it contains all of the elements that would become hallmarks of Mayakovsky’s work for years to come: the forceful rhythms, inventive rhymes (though arguably this is not the young poet’s best work in this regard), and grandiose aspirations of oratory. However, it is in the early insistence on the necessary staging of this kind of poetry that the play feels most remarkable: it is not, as might be suggested, a play in verse, but rather a staged poem. Mayakovsky wrote and directed the play himself, usually playing the part of Mayakovsky, and sometimes others. His first appearances on stage in this capacity were at St. Petersburg Luna Park Theater, and he was still known little in the cultural circles beyond his acquaintance with Hylaean

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160 Mayakovsky himself admitted Walt Whitman’s influence on his work.
David Burlyuk. After the play’s run, the poet had gained *bona fide* celebrity status, thus accomplishing the goal of “becoming” the Mayakovsky of the play, a role that he would perform in one form or another for the rest of his life.\(^\text{161}\)

But more specifically, the staging accomplished an important goal of both making this poetry accessible and treating the poet as non-spatial consciousness whose “true habitation is not the word but Time, which buries all things in its capacious belly.”\(^\text{162}\) All of the characters on stage are, in one form or another, representations of the central voice of the play: thus fragmenting himself, Mayakovskiy is able to speak polivocally while at the same time projecting an impassive unity of expression. Thus, time becomes both arrested and split: memory of the past comes back unrecognizable and useless, as the Man with One Eye and One Leg articulates in horror:

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Old-timers went numb when they saw the snouts
of the years that came crawling out;
on the foreheads of cities
anger swelled up into rivers
of thousand-mile-long veins.
Slowly,
in terror,
arrows of hair
rose up on the bald pate of Time.
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\(^{161}\) Payne (5)

\(^{162}\) Ibid (4)
Suddenly,

all things went rushing by, ripping

their voices,

and casting off tatters of outworn names.\textsuperscript{163}

It is the crisis of memory itself that is being staged here; the undead or verminous time imagery underscores the poet’s charge, in the play, to solve the horror of “pastness” as useless and possibly predatory by forging a new futurity that is not dependent on dead names. The poet as actor, then, must produce a new understanding of the present moment while at the same time accomplish a futural prophecy not based on the useless past but out of a totality of being through present action. To put it another way, to make a future, the poetry must enact itself in the performative present. In Russia in the years between the revolutions, this mode of expression became increasingly pertinent both because of its ability to reach and affect larger audiences and its greater democraticity qua comprehensibility. And, quite simply, the problem of the print medium, its necessity to always be produced and distributed outside of the sphere of the text’s production and consumption, could be overcome in this way; as Stein discovered, often “to be printed was out of the question, but one could always make a speech.”\textsuperscript{164} Of course, it is precisely the false liveness of the performance, notwithstanding a visceral reaction to it, that necessitates prosthesis as the central condition of such performance.

\textsuperscript{163} Ibid (30)

\textsuperscript{164} Shklovsky (39)
After 1917’s October Revolution, Mayakovsky continued what may be broadly seen as “spreading modernism to the masses” by embracing the avenues provided by the nascent state to combined performative poetics with politics in powerful ways. The relationship between Mayakovsky and the Soviet state apparatus is a notoriously complex one: both sides used the opportunities provided by the other. The state’s eventual canonization of Mayakovsky the personality while simultaneously erasing Mayakovsky the avant-garde poet is clearly presaged in Lenin’s reaction to the publication of the ostensibly pro-Bolshevik poem *150 Million*: in a letter to Soviet Comissar of Enlightenment Anatoly Lunacharsky, he described it as “absurd, stupid, monstrously absurd, and pretentious,” suggesting that it was only fit for “libraries and eccentrics.” Still, in at least one example of apparent cooperation, on the first anniversary of the revolution, Mayakovsky wrote and collaborated with Vsevolod Meyerhold and Kazimir Malevich on *Mystery-Bouffe*, a parodic mystery play and opera buffa combination that attempted to turn established formats to new ends: namely, the celebration of the proletariat through a new proletarian aesthetic. In this way, at least in the early days of the revolution, the simultaneous backward and forward currents of futurism could be deployed as the present-time temporality of theatrical performance.

Meyerhold and Mayakovsky, despite some creative differences on the production, came together aesthetically and philosophically in several ways. Mayakovsky’s continued celebration of mechanistic futurity – for example, the old man

\[165\] Qtd. in Almereyda (159)

\[166\] According to Braun, the friction arose mainly because of Malevich’s “painter’s approach to the production” (158).
with scrawny black cats of *Mayakovsky: A Tragedy* represented literally the archaic method of producing electricity by rubbing cats – finally met an acting method that attempted, at least on the surface level, something similar. Meyerhold’s project, and perhaps his lasting impact on theater, was his biomechanical method. Theatrical biomechanics, while far from a completely cohesive acting methodology, sought to combine such modern advances as industrial Taylorism and Jamesian notions of objectivity and reflexology.\(^\text{167}\) Taylorism, an early twentieth-century scientific management theory of the workplace that attempted to synthesize workflows of human laborers and production machinery, depended on the increased mechanicity of the worker – or, in the case of theater, the actor.\(^\text{168}\) Ironically, both Lenin and Trotsky were early proponents of this theory despite the fact that it seemed, at least in the humanist view, to place the newly-liberated worker into a new circuit with the machine itself. But this technique allowed Meyerhold, who embraced the revolution, to create the effect of breaking down the fourth wall via gestural mechanicity’s ability to express, in his productions, character interiority through the bodily interactions of the actors with their physical surroundings. While Stanislavsky, the other great Russian theater innovator, worked on the psychological method (whereby actors had to tap into personal experiences to approximate and assume the emotional life of the characters they were playing), Meyerhold’s method relied on the movement of the machinic body to both create the inner performance and to affectively express the performance to the audience.

\(^{167}\) Law (34-37)

\(^{168}\) This turn is brilliantly satirized in the factory scenes in Chaplin’s *Modern Times* (1936).
While Meyerhold was not, in any real sense, a futurist (nor was Mayakovsky by 1918), he was strongly influenced by the possibilities of the machinic aesthetic developed by the movement, particularly the Italians. Though, as we saw earlier, the connection between the Russian school and Marinetti was complex and quite strained during the latter’s visit to Russia is 1914, Meyerhold himself met Marinetti and attended his lecture in Paris; while it is difficult to establish the exact amount or kind of influence such meeting generated for the director, it is also interesting that Meyerhold became deeply concerned with the way performative temporality was able to convey the so-called objective, or historical time that may be seen as the provenance of conventional theater; as Braun suggests, Thus, this combination of biomechanics and performative temporality created, for Meyerhold and Mayakovsky, what might be termed operational temporality – the time of the performance machine. The play boasted large numbers of characters, transparent anti-bourgeois themes, and the new dramatic style that Mayakovsky already introduced with his earlier play and was to become, in the following decade, the dramatic aesthetic du jour for the entire agitprop movement in Soviet Russia.

However, even though the initial audience response to Mystery-Bouffe is hard to ascertain (it was generally considered a failure in its initial run of three performances) and even though it did not really become fully realized until its expanded staging in 1922, the moment of this collaboration suggests important ramifications not just for new theater as radical temporality and thus radical enactment of temporal memory but for the general

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169 Law (23)

170 Braun (159)
development of this operational temporality. Sergei Eisenstein, at roughly this time, was a member of Meyerhold’s acting workshops, and the play very likely had a strong influence on his later career. Critics have long commented on Mayakovsky’s influence of such cinematic pioneers as Eisenstein and Vertov: Shklovsky argues that without Mayakovsky, “there would not have been such a phenomenon as Eisenstein,” while more recently, Michael Almereyda suggests that his “mobile points of view, rapid-fire editing rhythms, startling transitions, an urge to find cosmic connections in factual, physical detail” showed a current “flowing between Mayakovsky’s poems and the brains and editing rooms of Dziga Vertov, Sergei Eisenstein, Alexander Dovzhenko.”

Similarly, recent criticism compares the poet to contemporary hip-hop artists like Eminem, whose “internally and multisyllabically rhymed, often mechanical anapests sound like rhythmic by-products, syllables sticking out like gear teeth.” Indeed, if Mayakovsky saw himself as a rhyming performing machine, it is in the temporal machine of *Mystery-Bouffe* that he found the machine’s expression.

Meyerhold would continue to develop biomechanics and attempt its implementation in his productions against the ever-increasing resistance from the Soviet sensors throughout the 1920s. The most crucial blows came in 1930, when his production of Mayakovski’s play *The Bed Bug* was both panned by critics and received coolly by

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171 Shklovsky (172)
172 Almereyda (130-31)
173 Ibid (199)
audiences, and when Nikolai Erdman’s play *The Suicide*, on the heels of Mayakovski’s actual suicide in 1930, was unequivocally rejected by Soviet apparatchik Lazar Kaganovich. Meyerhold continued to struggle against the increasingly brutal Stalinist regime until his arrest and execution in 1940 at the height of pre-WWII purges. I would like to suggest that at least one important legacy of Meyerhold’s larger body of work and his collaboration with Mayakovsky was the introduction of absurd theatricality into the Soviet cultural sphere that was, in significant ways, resultant from the inevitable development of Futurism: by destroying the old historical time and conventional memory and introducing operational temporality into the modernist poetics, the movement eventually had to embrace the absurd as the final rejection of these old logics. Martin Esslin, in his seminal study of absurd theater, argues that it “has renounced arguing about the absurdity of the human condition; it merely presents it in being – that is, in terms of concrete stage images” and that it tends toward anti-literariness by devaluing language as such by increasingly privileging precisely this operational temporality that is increasingly mobile and gestural.

It is no coincidence, then, that the last Russian avant-garde developed in 1930s around the absurd. According to Neil Cornwell, there was already a long precedent in the country of this direction in literary production, and he identifies Gogol as “an exponent par excellence of stylistic absurdism, with Sternean quirks, digressions, snatches of zany dialogue, narrative and syntactic non sequiturs, superfluous detail and irrelevancies, non-

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174 The play’s grotesque absurdity centers around an ersatz suicide who is implored by various post-revolutionary malcontents to indict the Soviet state on their behalf.

175 Esslin (25)
appearing characters and other forms of redundancy.” Combining this tradition with the scientific-philosophic upheavals discussed in this and earlier chapters (namely non-Euclidian geometry, Gödel’s Incompleteness Theorems, general relativity, quantum mechanics, and various metaphysical philosophies that attempt, in one way or another, to describe the new uncertain realities) with a particularly unstable and increasingly dangerous realities of Stalinist Soviet Union created an even more fertile ground for absurd art; finally, the problem of immemory in modernist writing necessarily demanded absurdism as its own strange future. Cornwell perceptively traces the beginnings of what would become understood as the absurd literature of the twentieth century precisely in Futurism; I would like to suggest that while some of the aesthetic elements present in Futurism are, in fact, also found in absurdism, but the main shift takes place in the way the new aesthetic begins to extricate itself from earlier era’s ebullience of experimentation with a kind of wary resignation to the fact that even these innovations are empty. While Esslin suggests that “the hallmark of this attitude is its sense that the certitudes and unshakable basic assumptions of former ages have been swept away, that they have been tested and found wanting, that they have been discredited as cheap and somewhat childish illusions”, it seems just as likely that the practitioners of the absurd considered earlier modernistic gestures to be similarly useless. The ostensible self-contemporaneity of early modernisms, in other words, had to be reworked into a

176 Cornwell (45)
177 Ibid (74-78)
178 Esslin (23)
workable operationality of the theatrical event as such. Stein’s and Mayakovsky’s turn to performance, then, must be seen as coextensive with the absurd turn.

In the Soviet Union, the absurd became the last paroxysm of modernism before Stalinist purges destroyed the powerful avant-garde movement completely. It is perhaps best represented by Daniil Kharms, a founding member of the literary group OBERIU, the name of which is an absurd acronym for Union of Real Art. Started in the late 1920s in Leningrad, on the heels of Moscow futurism, the group gained immediate notoriety for what was called literary hooliganism, a series of staged plays with strange stunts, scientific-philosophical themes, and a general sense of nonsense. Much of Kharms’s work consisted of poems that borrowed heavily from some of Khlebnikov’s innovations; short vignettes that often involved sudden outbreaks of violence, deaths, and disappearances; and plays that frequently involved characters losing body parts and having them replaced by mechanical components like clock weights. While it is tempting to simply add this work to the pantheon of absurdism, as Esslin and Cornwell have done, there is one important difference with those classical absurd theatrics to come: for Kharms, absurd life was also daily life, the banality of everyday events intermixed with the bizarre. While his earlier poems echoed the futurist impulse to produce artifacts against which memory could be forged anew, later ones reflected the concerns that the present was dangerously unstable, and that Bergsonian duration was no longer a possible temporality because of the increasing hostility of the regime toward leftist art collectives.
In the following poem, Kharms stages one such characteristic disappearance involving his favorite philosopher:

Petrov walked into the woods.
Walked and walked and soon was gone.
“Well well now,” observed Bergson,
“Am I dreaming? No, I’m not.”
He looked around, saw a ditch
Where Pertov was sitting down.
And Bergson went climbing down.
Climbed and climbed and soon was gone.
This surprised Petrov, of course:
“I am getting sick, or worse.
I just saw Bergson disappear.
Am I dreaming? No, I’m not.”

What is particularly fascinating about this poem and its double disappearances is that they highlight the radical instability of the present, suggesting the tenuousness of presence in the present. Bergson appears not simply as a tragic character who vanishes for no good reason, but also as a failure: the attempt to perceive the present that has ceased to make sense is doomed to precisely this kind of problem. Also, the poem

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179 Prophetically, Kharms’s work anticipated the disappearances and deaths of many fellow writers, as well as his own eventual arrests by NKVD and tragic death by starvation in a Leningrad prison.

180 Kharms (283)
represents a movement “toward a radical devaluation of language”\textsuperscript{181} – while the poem rhymes in the original Russian, it lacks the most basic poetical elements. Already, Kharms is more interested in gesture, movement, and performance: his plays, which were never produced after the late 1920s, continue the exercise of memory as a performative act. Still, despite even the inability to perform his work – a common problem for those Soviet playwrights who did not subscribe to the practice of Social Realism – Kharms continued to walk the streets of Leningrad, all the way up to his arrest, always in costume. For Russian absurdists, life itself became a performance. If this is the beginning of the Theater of the Absurd, this is because it has “renounced arguing about the absurdity of the human condition; it merely presents it in being – that is, in terms of concrete stage images.”\textsuperscript{182}

Returning to Beckett’s 1958 \textit{Krapp’s Last Tape}, we may see the logical culmination of the absurdist turn. The central problem of the play, I would argue, is that of memory: it embodies memory and prostheticizes it at the same time. It is once again the double problem of the ever-changing self and our ability to capture this self not through the living experience of memory as duration but as an audience of “listeners to our own memories.”\textsuperscript{183} If, as Esslin suggests, “Beckett found a graphic expression for the problem of ever-changing identity of the self,”\textsuperscript{184} it is because the play establishes a

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{181} Esslin (26)

\textsuperscript{182} Ibid (25)

\textsuperscript{183} Beckerman (158)

\textsuperscript{184} Esslin (79)
\end{flushleft}
negotiation between two “versions of self – Krapp, the banana eating body; and Krapp the memory box.” In fact, the memory box is crucially not-Krapp, since it is located outside of him, however boxed up in may be. Much has been written in the use of recording technology in the play, as well as other temporal prostheses like Krapp’s ledgers and the red ball he contemplates taking as a memento of his mother’s death. Instead, it is the body that I would like to concentrate on, since it appears that this body is only capable of eating bananas and listening. It is also a clownish body, white-faced, purple-nosed, and hugely shod. He is not necessary – rendered in the play almost exclusively as a sort of mime, the current Krapp speaks very little, with most of the talking done by the Krapp of thirty years earlier. However, this is still not accurate: it is a disembodied voice that speaks through the machine, a prosthetic body of the recorder. Thus, the tape becomes memory – and language is revealed as a prosthetic device that can function as an externalization of memory and time, giving the subject the only coherence he will get. Krapp is ultimately available to the audience through these mediated recordings of the past, but, more significantly, this is also the way he is available to himself (otherwise, he is merely a drinking, banana eating entity with an unknown inner life).

However, he is also a failure as a real body. The play’s scatological humor highlights this function, or dysfunction, of the character: apart from his name, he is constantly constipated, which explains the bananas, a natural laxative. Still, Krapp is not even good at crap. The play suggests that the body breaks down while the recorded

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185 Malkin (25)
memory persists. In a moment toward the end of the play, Krapp is recording a new tape, then stops talking, realizes that he is recording silence, and stops. As a functioning self, he realizes, just as we do, that nothing happens in the play, literally, that is not recorded. The only temporal memory here is prosthetic; everything else is pantomime. The only actions Krapp performs on stage – drinking, eating, etc. – are also the actions that are described on the tapes. For a variety of reasons, the play presents a negotiation between living and memory, and living loses. In his final attempt to record the present impressions, Krapp fails, allowing himself to be augmented by memory. The tapes represent discreet states of development, specific ages; they provide, via prosthesis, the only available illusion of the fluid self that is always a mirage.
Chapter 4

The Limits of Control: Ethics of Virtual and Cybernetic Memory in Nabokov’s Novels

*The evolution of the living being, like that of the embryo, implies a continual recording of duration, a persistence of the past in the present, and so an appearance, at least, of organic memory.*

–Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*

*The information received by the automaton need not be used at once but may be delayed or stored so as to become available at some future point. This is the analogue of memory.*

–Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics*

Vladimir Nabokov’s fame as a naturalist received a not-unexpected boost in December 2010, when Matthew L. Forister, Zachariah Gompert, James A. Fordyce, and Chris C. Nice published an article in *Biology Letters* vindicating Nabokov’s theories on speciation and evolution in the *Polyommatus* blue butterfly group. This aspect of the great writer’s work, while largely ignored during the years when *Lolita* elevated him to a status of literary celebrity, had already been revived during the 1990s by Kurt Johnson, Steve Coates, Zsolt Balint, and Dubi Benyamini, a group of entomologists and lepidopterists who discovered that Nabokov’s “leps,” as they are known in the parlance
of experts (and of Ada Veen in *Ada*), have been described by the writer in 1945 with a meticulous attention to the amazing diversity of their mimetic characteristics and genital structures.\(^{186}\) In their reevaluation of Nabokov’s naturalism published in *Nabokov’s Blues*, the scientists marveled not only at the quality of Nabokov’s science as contribution to taxonomic knowledge, but at his imaginative and unique notions of how species were likely to be related and to evolve.

In his studies of butterflies, Nabokov paid an almost unprecedented level of attention to details such as macule distribution (the arrangement of spots and lines on the wing) – or the seemingly endless mimetic variations in his subjects – and as a result, argued against the primacy of the “biological” definition of speciation, which relied largely on the study of interbreeding of individuals, whether real or theoretical, in favor of morphology – what he considered to be the true test of an individual’s identity.\(^{187}\)

There is a clear reason behind this: for Nabokov, science based exclusively on the description of a behavior of a few individuals provided an unacceptably static view of evolution. This likewise caused his skepticism regarding natural selection as the final explanation of evolutionary processes: while this Darwinian principle accounted for the control and selection of life’s forms, it said nothing about what his studies and philosophical leanings suggested to be a fundamentally creative process of evolution. This is not to suggest, of course, that Nabokov should be lumped into the cluster of the pseudo-religious movement of today known as Intelligent Design, because its kind of

\(^{186}\) Johnson and Coates (24)

\(^{187}\) Blackwell (25)
deterministic teleology had nothing to do with the what Nabokov was really after: while natural selection provided the mechanism for life’s march, its essence, the actualizing force of life itself, remained a mystery. Never concerned with the cause of the effect, Nabokov rather aimed his work to describe life as becoming, or Being becoming being, individuation of the self in the Heideggerian sense. That is, the focus may be described as the process of individuation, or that becoming whereby individuals extricate themselves from the flux of Being and endure as individuals.

Thus, a picture emerges of Nabokov as metaphysician, at least insofar as his scientific approach to the field of entomology, as well as his understanding of physics and other “hard” sciences, are concerned. The modern scientific method, as we tend to understand it through the figures of Francis Bacon, Newton, and Kant, seems to concern itself little with the metaphysical dimension of its postulations, privileging its explanatory expertise in the experimental playfields of laboratories, silent but acquiescent equipment (see my discussion of Latour in Chapter 1). What this method lacks most clearly is a proving prowess in those fields where experimentation or even observation are extremely difficult to arrange in such a controlled environment. Butterflies must be caught, and even caught in the act of copulation, in order to prove with any evidentiary certainty not just their classification, but their very identities and relationships to other Lepidoptera. Similarly, Nabokov grew to mistrust the conventional wisdom of a strictly causal explanation of mimicry in the animal world, arguing that the sheer non-utilitarian proliferation of mimetic devices greatly exceeded any presumed visual acuity on the part of the putative predator: as he put it in the Lepidoptera section of Speak, Memory,
“‘natural selection,’ in the Darwinian sense, could not explain the miraculous coincidence of imitative aspect and imitative behavior, nor could one appeal to the theory of ‘the struggle for life’ when a protective device was carried to the point of mimetic subtlety, exuberance, and luxury far in excess of a predator’s power of appreciation.”

Although this particular scientific theory of creative mimesis has not proven to be quite correct, it suggests a keen interest, on the part of the entomologist, in natural mechanism that are not merely chance or causal but creative. Here, the necessity of a metaphysics for the sciences becomes clear, even if such a metaphysics is somewhat flawed in its application. When a particular testable situation is simply not available, an epistemological quest of either a scientist or an artist must rely on two simultaneously applied techniques: observational description of utmost accuracy and creative intuition that steps outside the laboratory to draw such conclusions as are reasonably available. Thus, even though his conclusions on mimesis proved incorrect, Nabokov’s evolutionary theories on the Polyommatus blue arrived at by this strange method justify the method: when actual observation of physical characteristics was caught by genetic sequencing not available in the 1940s, he was finally vindicated not just as an astute describer of the material world, but as a shrewd metaphysical theorist as well.

This dual approach suggests a general philosophical structure to Nabokov’s thought: namely, complex negotiation between an idealist immanent metaphysics and a limited materialism which, while concerned with matter and its proper evaluation, stopped short of what was, for Nabokov, the mistaken overconfidence of science that felt

188 Nabokov, Speak, Memory (125)
it could explain away the mystery of being; he argued that because of science’s shortcomings, “we shall never know the origin of life, or the meaning of life, or the nature of space and time, or the nature of nature, or the nature of thought.” While this distinct metaphysical strain has been linked, by recent scholarship, to a transcendentalism of the Ouspensky vein, there seems to be little evidence in Nabokov’s own writing to support these claims, possibly because of his reticence to respond directly to questions regarding religious matters. In any case, his work in entomology suggests a much stronger interest in the metaphysics of immanence – that is, of the way life perpetuates itself and the methods in which beings cohere and endure as such. It is this drive, this admission of mystery behind becoming, that drives him to wonder, as an autobiographer, at his own quiddity: “The individual mystery remains to tantalize the memoirist. Neither in the environment nor in heredity can I find the exact instrument that fashioned me, the anonymous roller that pressed upon my life a certain intricate watermark whose unique design becomes visible when the lamp of art is made to shine through life foolscap.”

And while there is an admitted chance for transcendence, it is accomplished through intense application of consciousness, the paying of attention: “It is certainly […] when one is awake […] on the highest terrace of consciousness, that mortality has a chance to peer beyond its own limits, from the mast, from the past and its castle tower.”

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189 Nabokov, *Strong Opinions* (45)
190 See, for example, Alexandrov and Zimmer.
191 Nabokov, *Speak, Memory* (25)
192 Ibid (50)
It is by necessity that this metaphysics represents, on a significant level, a forceful resistance to materialism, especially as formulated by the Marxist theories of the nineteenth century and their early-twentieth century transmutations in the hands of Lenin in the Russia of Nabokov’s childhood. Nabokov family history is at least partly responsible for this antipathy: his father, a leading member of the Kadet party, after being imprisoned by Tsar’s police for promoting parliamentary democratic agenda, became after the 1917 October revolution one of the main targets of the Bolshevik regime.193 This particular materialism in its socialist interpretation, in its subordination of all human endeavors, including art and science, to the requirements of the state, went against the core of Nabokov’s nascent philosophy: “what he opposed to the Bolsheviks’ ideology of positivist certainty, teleology, mass conformity and control was an artistic and scientific program based on individuality, curiosity, beauty, and the unknown,”194 giving his work and life a particularly anti-materialist tinge.

As a result of this resistance, Nabokov developed an epistemological approach to both science and art that attempted, as its basic goal, to account for what he saw as numerous shortcomings of deterministic materialism of the kind he perceived in the works Marx, Darwin, and Freud. Because of inherent limits in knowledge as recognized by philosophers like Hume and Kant, Nabokov’s works negotiate a delicate balance between observable and recordable information (in the quest for which he was meticulously detail-oriented) and the development and creativity (and, by extension,

193 Field (18)
194 Blackwell (6)
misrecognitions) of the observer/recorder’s own consciousness. This conflict, I would like to suggest, lies at the heart of Nabokov’s artistic quest, or what may be termed the problem of recreating (internal, subjective) memory through (external) writing: on the one hand, a careful and sometimes esoteric preservation of detail counterbalanced with fanciful, always-evolving creative engine of consciousness on the other.

Traces of this dual approach to memory could also be traced to Nabokov’s early engagements with both literary scholarship and literary production. Although even his early work demonstrates significant stylistic differences from earlier symbolism of late-nineteenth century Russia, he rejected the significant aesthetics developments of experimental modernism discussed in previous chapters. He expressly disdained what he saw as the primitivist tinge of futurism\(^{195}\), and rather spent his own creative efforts subordinating old forms to new ends. This is often one of the reasons why Nabokov, in the canon of contemporary literary scholarship, finds himself outside of the dominant discussions of modernism. While the movement, as I have suggested in earlier chapters, increasingly relied on defamiliarization, formal experimentation, and what may be broadly termed difficulty, Nabokov’s work seemed to stand ostensibly as a foil to these innovations because of its apparent readability, which at times may have suggested conventionality, almost a throwback to late-nineteenth century symbolist poetics of Nabokov’s European youth. The author’s own appreciation of the Flaubertian quest for the *mot juste*, as well as criticism such as Yevtushenko’s comparison of Nabokovian

\(^{195}\) Not surprisingly, Nabokov chose to ignore the work of the Russian avant-garde at least in part for political reasons, while his relationship with Anglophone and Francophone avant-gardes was at best ambiguous.
prose to “the clatter of surgical tools” and Nabokov’s public disdain for many leading figures of modernism, have rendered his place in modernism problematic, at the very least. However, I would like to propose a way to read Nabokov’s work, and especially some of his late novels (for the purposes of this chapter, I will concentrate on *Pale Fire* and *Ada*), as a direct engagement with many of the same concerns that earlier “modernisms” have at their core: namely, the problems of immemory, temporal prostheticization, and individuation as they are expressed, explored, and staged in modern literary production.

We may usefully conceive Nabokov’s literary project, then, in the same terms as his scientific project: namely, as a hybrid of creative evolution and epistemophilia, with a simultaneous mistrust of and desire for absolute empirical knowledge. While scientific research is capable – and indeed does, in Nabokov’s hands – of providing astonishingly detailed information about the world, it never exhausts all of reality, “it is not and cannot be all-encompassing.” However, it is at the same time epistemophilic in its intense desire to know, and to shore up endlessly proliferating information and control over its subjects. As described by Freud in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, epistemophilia, the desire to know, is one of the component instincts in childhood (along with scopophilia, the urge to look) and takes root as a result of curiosity about

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196 Yevtushenko (105)

197 For example, Nabokov famously criticized Conrad, Pound, Eliot, and Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*; however, he insisted that *Ulysses* was the greatest novel of the twentieth century.

198 Blackwell (7-8)
sexuality.\textsuperscript{199} While Freud himself mostly relates the concept to the question of childhood sexuality, it is not limited to this stage in psychic development. And, as Freud's case study of the Rat Man suggests, “epistemophilia can in some people become something far more obsessive and desperate than normal intellectual endeavor.”\textsuperscript{200} To put it another way, instead of a “normal” pursuit on intellectual – or, in the case of the Rat Man and Nabokov – linguistic mastery, epistemophilia may cross dangerously into the realm of paranoia.

To suggest such an ostensibly Freudian underpinning to Nabokov’s artistic quest may be problematic both because of the author’s own constant and forceful disavowal of psychoanalysis and many of critics’, notably Andrew Field’s, attempt to explain his artistic genesis by the loss of that other mother – the motherland – and his subsequent attempts to recapture the mastery of a lost origin as similar to the efforts of a child’s travails through psychosexual development. For the purposes of this argument, I would like to eschew the more expressly psychoanalytic implications of epistemophilia for the crisis of memory, in both modernism’s ambiguous relationship with it and its efforts to reconstruct it differently. If, as I have been suggesting so far, the movement of modernism can be seen and interpreted primarily in these mnemonic terms, then Nabokov’s art, in its dual approach to recording, reproducing, and re-envisioning temporal memory, conflates two distinct conceptions of memory: memory as cybernetic prosthesis and memory as duration and creative evolution. This combination represents a

\textsuperscript{199} Freud (50)

\textsuperscript{200} Nicol (44)
radically new kind of memory, one reflected and informed not only by the philosophical developments of early modernity discussed in previous chapters, but also by the reactions and reincorporations caused by these developments in the emerging field of cybernetics. That is, I propose to read Nabokov’s project as a kind of textual cybernetic memory that all the while struggles with Bergsonian perceptual memory of duration and attempts, together with the field of cybernetics proper, to combine the two distinct understandings of what memory at the blurry border between modernism and postmodernism might mean.

We have already discussed the way Bergson conceived of memory as the virtual which is actualized in duration. The consciousness endures through this process, in the moment of choice, or the movement back into memory before springing toward matter. The constant for Bergson is change, and the consciousness is therefore not located in space, but in time: it is “the paying of attention” in the virtual before actualizing itself.

After laying the groundwork for this relationship between virtual memory and duration in Matter and Memory, Bergson develops this idea further by suggesting, in Creative Evolution, that the evolution of a single consciousness is in fact similar to, and part of, the evolution process as a whole – memory as a continuous recording. It is important to note that this is not, for Bergson, a programmatic view: what is being recorded is not information, but duration itself, or, according to Deleuze, “a cosmic Memory, that actualizes all the levels at the same time, that liberates man from the plane or the level that is proper to him, to make him a creator, adequate to the whole movement of
That duration, evolution, and by extension, memory, are ultimately creative is a necessity of Bergson’s method, because in order to be actualized, the virtual cannot proceed by elimination or limitation, but must create its own lines of actualization on positive acts. The reason for this is simple: while the real is in the image and likeness of the possible that it realizes, the actual, on the other hand, does not resemble the virtual it embodies. It is difference that is primary in the process of actualization, the difference between the virtual from which we begin and the actuals at which we arrive.202

This, then, is one type of memory that is crucial to Nabokov’s work, both as writer and lepidopterist: the creative virtual engine. The difficulty, however, arises when we consider the other type: one primarily associated with technological mechanism of control. While Nabokov clearly engages with the Bergsonian conception of memory, there is, throughout his oeuvre, a sense that in the perfect world, mnemonic information would be archived “in those blessed libraries where old newspapers are microfilmed, as all our memories should be.”203 It is precisely the impossibility of such archiving that creates the tension between creation and storage, retrieval and invention. It is also precisely the difficulty that began, in the twentieth century, to challenge emerging

201 Deleuze, Bergsonism (111)

202 Ibid (97)

203 Nabokov, Speak, Memory (15)
scientific fields of computational technology and cybernetics to grapple with memory as virtual duration.

Notably, in his 1948 work *Cybernetics: or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine*, Norbert Wiener attempted to overcome these apparent difficulties by postulating a cybernetic memory system as not opposed to, but congruent with, Bergsonian time. While Bergson’s project, concurrent as it was with upheavals in the field of physics, attempted to imagine a metaphysics worthy of the new sciences by announcing the end to Newtonian time and one-way linear temporal phenomena, Wiener’s work invests heavily in rehabilitating Bergson by suggesting that Newton’s model was, for the purposes of verisimilitude to real lived experience of the sciences, always already insufficient and incomplete. That is, time as an extraneous, reversible, and purely descriptive attribute of matter, as Newtonian physics would have it, does not work because of temporality’s inextricable connection to the physicality of being itself, and, as Wiener points out, “there is not a single science which conforms precisely to the strict Newtonian pattern.” This can be seen in the examples of such diverse fields as astronomy, meteorology, and geology. In fact, even the biological sciences certainly have their full share of one-way phenomena, including evolution on both the macro and the micro scales. The point, for Wiener, is that cybernetics, the study of communication between the animate and inanimate, already accounts for the way durational memory functions: in such a theory, automata are not merely coupled to the external world by their energy flow and their metabolism, “but also by a flow of impressions, of incoming

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204 Wiener (36)
messages, and of the actions of outgoing messages. The organs by which impressions are received are the equivalents of the human and animal sense organs.” Thus, in cybernetics, technical prosthetic memory is imagined not as the opposite of, but as a key component to the understanding of duration as creative actualization:

the modern automaton exists in the same sort of Bergsonian time as does the living organism; and hence there is no reason in Bergson’s considerations why the essential mode of functioning of the living organism should not be the same as that of the automaton of this type […]

In fact, the whole mechanist-vitalist controversy has been relegated to the limbo of badly posed questions.  

For Bergson, badly posed questions are those that fail to use intuition as method and confuse differences in degree with differences in kind. Even though he insists that duration represents the relationship of genuine differences in kind, of the virtual and the actual, of memory and matter, Wiener attempts to position cybernetics, despite of its insistence on materiality of memory, within the durational metaphysics. Virtual memory of the individual, related to such memory in a people, becomes conflated with material memory as archive: “not all the information which is available to the race at one time is accessible without special effort. There is a well-known tendency of libraries to become clogged by their own volume.”

205 Ibid (43)
206 Ibid (44)
207 Ibid (158)
Wiener’s work is symptomatic of the way cybernetics and computational theory take on the problems of memory as it relates to storage, retrieval, and, ultimately, the possibility of machine intelligence. Turing’s “Computing Machinery and Intelligence,” discussed in an earlier chapter, suggests as much; we may also consider Vannevar Bush’s seminal 1945 essay “As We May Think” in similar terms. Revising his own earlier work on mechanization and its effects on recording of information, Bush proposed a hypertextual model for computing machinery that was to mirror, in his estimation, the actual cognitive and mnemonic processes of the human mind. Thus, as the fields of computational technology and informatics were emerging in middle of the twentieth century, their practitioners needed to bring increasingly specific attention to the modality of human memory and its relationship to archival technology of information.

While Wiener, Bush, and Turing\textsuperscript{208} grappled with the practical implications of technics on memory, philosophers of technics attempted to come to grips with ontological questions of the human and the machine that have been insistently posed by the rise of cybernetics. In particular, Gilbert Simondon, a French philosopher whose theories of individuation significantly influenced Deleuze’s work in \textit{The Logic of Sense} and, perhaps more importantly, Bernard Stiegler’s later work on technics as that pre-individual milieu that constitutes the individual, attempted to bridge Bergson and cybernetics by combining individuation and information, replacing with the latter the

\textsuperscript{208} As I suggested earlier, Turing’s work may be read as not simply practical or even theoretical, but philosophical as well: “Computing Machinery and Intelligence” argues that thought and memory possess a variable materiality and are therefore virtual not in spite of, but because of, possible machinic substantialization.
outdated notion of Form. Specifically, “the notion of information must not be associated
with that of signals or supports or vehicles of information, as the technological theory of
information tends to do.” That is, matter is where information inheres, but not,
crucially, as form as proscribed by the reductive use of the term by the hylomorphic
schema of ancient philosophers like Aristotle. Simondon’s philosophy, then, is
attempting to bring together Bergson’s virtuality and Wiener’s cybernetics, critiquing the
former for its too-abstract view of technology and the latter’s too-specific classification
of technical objects according to established genera, privileging those machines that have
a pronounced feedback loop. In his analysis of Simondon as reader of Bergson, Pascal
Chabot summarizes:

For Bergson, all is actual in matter. For Simondon, matter is more
complex. There is also a process of individuation that creates new kinds of
structures. Matter is able to develop in fantastic new ways. For Simondon,
matter can create something like what Bergson calls, speaking about spirit
and not about nature, de “l’imprévisible nouveauté”, or “unforeseeable
novelty.”

In the sense of attempting to reconcile a Bergsonist understanding of time with a
cybernetic notion of information, then, Simondon’s view may be seen as comparable to
Wiener’s. And yet, despite of the perceived shortcomings of the apparent dualism in
Bergson, there is still the problem in cybernetics’ lack of intuition applied in science in

209 Simondon (316)
210 Chabot (106)
technology. Deleuze will later attempt to think through this apparent problem in Bergson via Simondon by formulating individuation as distinguishable into form and sense, existing at the junction of memory with matter, as it adapt to matter which gives it its form, but which keeps its sense at the point of greatest contraction, on the plane of immanence. Stiegler, on the other hand, will take up Simondon’s general phenomenology of machines in order to formulate his theory of technical temporalization. In any case, Simondon’s work, emerging in the 1950s during the rise of cybernetics, further symptomatizes the transitions in the modern ontology of memory, begun earlier in the century and suddenly reaching a new ontological crisis: a new immemory on the borderline between late modernity and nascent postmodern techno- and cyberculture.

To connect these technological developments to writing in general and to Nabokov’s work in particular, I would like to suggest reading the literary production of the 50s and 60s as the beginning of the literature of information multiplicity, what John Johnston envisions as “a restructuring process that can be […] described as an artifactual space created when information restructures modern or traditional culture in order to make it a better habitat for information.”211 While primarily concerned with such conventionally-postmodern authors as Thomas Pynchon and Don DeLillo, Johnston usefully describes the formal and thematic shifts of postmodernism in terms of information and, by extension, memory, since the two ideas may be viewed as synonymous in post-cybernetic culture. Taking the modernist idea of subjectival decentering to its logical conclusion, the novels of information multiplicity “engage us with various kinds of multiplicity, both by

211 Johnston (3)
registering the world as a multiplicity and by articulating new multiplicities through novel orderings and narrativisations of heterogeneous kinds of information."\textsuperscript{212} As one result of this shift, forms of subjectivity as usually understood are displaced and redistributed throughout the entire machinic activity that writing and reading these novels entails, and the works belonging to this group become most directly and acutely concerned with the awesome power of contemporary technology and social organization to elicit, or call up, and reproduce new forms of individuation in the zones of intensity produced by ‘missing’ information or its excess. More specifically, they are concerned with what may be called the conditions of a contemporary psychic apparatus and with problems stemming from the textualization of memory and perception."\textsuperscript{213}

For the purposes of our discussion, Johnston’s argument clarifies how the treatment of memory in and of the texts was not only always already defined by the media technics contemporary to these texts, but further, how such medial changes must push the crisis of memory into new territory. The modernist aesthetic in literature and its correlative immemory arose in an era defined by shifts in the physical, cognitive, and mechanical sciences as well as the appearance of new recording and storage media; on the other hand, the early postmodern writing can be defined by the very change in the condition of mediality of the works themselves. Thus, the transition can be understood as “a shift from

\textsuperscript{212} Ibid (3)

\textsuperscript{213} Ibid (6)
the novelistic depiction of the movements of a complex consciousness to an investigation of the interactions among scriptive systems, various media, and information technologies.”

What this suggests, then, is that the novel of information multiplicity tracks and interrogates the ability, of both the culture overall and the individual specifically, to produce and store memory, while at the same time reinventing the very circuits through which memory is routed. Perhaps even more importantly, this type of text questions the ontology of both the author and the reader it produces. Because the modern transformations of the subject are inscribed and indeed formed by concurrent machinic transformations, they must be considered together as a discursive assemblage facilitated by various strategies of modern writing. As these assemblages began to change to include new mediational possibilities, the writing changed as well, but so did the reception of earlier texts: “for the postmodern reader, in short, modern consciousness no longer conveys the idea of a necessarily prior state of which writing would be the expression but rather a conglomerate of effects (sensation, memory, fugue states, etc.,) produced by the new machinic assemblages themselves.

Although Johnston discusses the expression of the sum of effects rather than memory alone, here I would like to privilege memory because of the central role it plays in actualization in the Bergsonian sense as well as in cybernetics because of the way theorists like Wiener imagine information as “the analogue of memory.” The importance of this formulation, in other words, lies in the way it is able to precisely capture the

\[214\] Ibid (13)
\[215\] Ibid (34)
mnemonic duality of late modernism and its interpretation of temporality and immemory.

To further consider its implications for Nabokov, whom I would like to position as an early pioneer and a pivotal figure at the transition to postmodern technics of memory in literature, this problematic was always central not only for his strictly scientific endeavors, as I suggested above, but also for his art. In two works in particular, I would like to suggest, he became entangled in first one, then the other extreme: his literal and controversial scholarly translation of Alexander Pushkin’s verse novel *Eugene Onegin* represents the handling of memory qua extreme control, while his lauded autobiography *Speak, Memory* attempts the opposite approach. Nabokov worked on his Pushkin translation for roughly fourteen years, beginning it around 1951 and finally publishing the mammoth four-volume work in 1964, while *Speak, Memory*, begun as serially published *Conclusive Evidence* in the early 50s, has only a slightly shorter birth. Not coincidentally, the beginning of both projects marked the beginning of the cyber-epoch; also, not coincidentally, both represented the extremes of Nabokov’s memory project.

*Onegin*’s ostensible faithfulness to the original, both in sense and structure, suggests a translator more concerned with preservation than beauty; its ever-expanding feedback loop, finally appearing in the published version as a five-parted foreword, a seven-parted introduction, a commentary that dwarfed the actual novel in size roughly four to one, and an index which contained often secondary and tertiary comments on the commentary, indicates a translation that became, to paraphrase Wiener, “clogged by its own volume.” This is, in other words, bad cybernetics, but cybernetics nonetheless because of the insistence, on the part of the translator, to supply the memory of the text
that, to him, seemed simply unavailable to the common reader. Leading up to his work on *Onegin*, Nabokov bemoaned the perceived inadequacies of existing translations: their inability to convey Pushkin’s meaning properly, failures to capture his Russian language fully, and unwillingness to supply what, for Nabokov, was necessary background for a proper appreciation of the text that is rightly considered foundational to modern Russian literature. Positioning himself as the rightful source of all of these types of information, he began a project that ultimately, according to critical consensus, overwhelmed the original work of art.\(^{216}\) Nabokov’s fierce defense of the project, in spite of the predominantly negative reception, often boiled down to attacking his critics for failure to understand Russian prosody, history, or, indeed, Russian language itself; this defiant stance suggested the translator’s complete unwillingness to concede authority of, and access to, the extensive informational archives that he had assembled within his own memory and attached to Pushkin’s novel.

Indeed, the extent of the failure of the translation goes further: Nabokov, in his self-appointed role as the bringer of Pushkin to the American academy, attempted to wrestle control from Pushkin himself under the guise of protecting the legend from those academic critics who would deign to create their own cybernetic memory loops in their own misguided (as Nabokov inevitably saw them) readings. Justifying his authority, he argued that “an artist should ruthlessly destroy his manuscripts after publication, lest they mislead academic mediocrities into thinking that it is possible to unravel the mysteries of

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\(^{216}\) Notably, Edmund Wilson’s “The Strange Case of Pushkin and Nabokov,” published in *The New York Review of Books*, offered a scathing critique of the translation which was largely responsible for irreparably damaging the relationship between the two writers.
genius by studying cancelled readings. In art, purpose and plan are nothing; only the result counts.”

There is obvious irony in this justification: in order to protect Pushkin from the vagaries of academic mediocrities presumably engaged in something like genetic criticism, Nabokov favors a rigid prescription for the kinds of memory prostheses should be allowed to be used in the project. And, by denouncing the scholarly possibilities afforded by Pushkin’s own drafts in favor of his own more or less esoteric textual control structures, the translator unwittingly supplants the author while at the same time claiming to protect him. While it is not the purpose of this chapter to evaluate the relative effectiveness of Nabokov’s scholarship or the poetic merits of the translation itself, it is evident that its problems, both critical and artistic, indicate a kind of crisis of immemory. It is as though Nabokov, in a quixotic quest to forget nothing, supplemented Pushkin’s work with the entire history of modern Russian literature, its French and English influences, his own prosodic theories that in their incredible specificity and attention to details resemble his unique recording of Lepidoptera, and personal vendettas against writers great and small disguised as criticism. Because of his desire for newness in this fundamental reimagining of the very art of translation, he insisted on neologistic transliterations and borrowings, arcane lexicographical revisions, and increasingly

217 Nabokov, Onegin (15)

218 Indeed, the sheer scope and breadth of the supplementary material in the Onegin translation makes it one of the most comprehensive works of its kind.

219 In this regard, Wilson criticizes Nabokov’s inescapable “instinct to take digs at great reputations” which is usually relegated to the index, or the third level cyberstructural level of the translation.
inventive, but also increasingly useless, for the common reader, explanatory systems. For a writer who valued control, who once proudly described his characters as “galley slaves,” the translation of Eugene Onegin represents both the dangers of overreliance on such control and, ultimately, its limits.

Simultaneously to the lengthy Onegin project, Nabokov worked on a more personal project: his own memoir. Speak, Memory, before going to become perhaps the most important autobiography of the mid-twentieth century, started out as Conclusive Evidence because it was to be, as the author explained, “conclusive evidence of my having existed.” Though this early title suggests a kind of systematic accumulation of data seen in his butterfly studies, it was evident early in the project that this work would be something quite different in both structure and affect. Eschewing the rigid framework of hard facts affixed to the track of chronology in favor of flowing torrents of reminiscence, Nabokov hoped to infuse a novelistic freedom into biographer’s art, indicated by his promise that “this will be a new kind of autobiography, or rather a new hybrid between that and a novel […] Various strata of personal past will form as it were the banks between which will flow the torrent of physical and mental adventure.”

Indeed, in its forceful insistence on the creative rather than the factual basis for the work, Nabokov became concerned not with cybernetics, as he was in Onegin, but with the

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220 Gold (197)

221 Nabokov, Speak, Memory (11)

222 Nabokov, Selected Letters (69)
durational flux of memory, splitting his mnemonic project on the 50s into two distinct methods.

The demonstrative disavowal of chronological temporality in favor of durational begins early; Nabokov almost goes so far as to deny the very existence of time, when he writes: “I confess I do not believe in time. I like to fold my magic carpet, after use, in such a way as to superimpose one part of the pattern upon another.” 223 Time, then, is that in which virtual memory actualizes itself; to fall into time is a kind of folly, an ambiguous felix culpa which is best exemplified by the anecdote of a young chronophobiac offered early in the book, which recounts the sudden fear a child may experience at having not existed in time before birth, or, indeed, of the nothingness that precedes consciousness that should, by rights, be as frightening as the nothingness that follows it, but is usually not. It is especially interesting that for the chronophobiac, the scariest thing is a photographic image of a normal childhood prosthesis – a perambulator: “but what particularly frightened him was the sight of a brand-new baby carriage standing there on the porch, with the smug, encroaching air of a coffin; even that was empty, as if, in the reverse course of events, his very bones had disintegrated.” 224

Understanding that technics equals memory, memory equals time, and time equals death, Nabokov develops his autobiography as an antidote to chronology in favor of creative “mnemology,” a kind of Proustian search with a palpably Nabokovian scientificity. Because a child is at first unaware that time, “so boundless at first blush,” turns out to be

223 Nabokov, Speak, Memory (139)
224 Ibid (19)
a prison – presumably one in which we have all been given a death sentence – the understanding of temporality and memory must coincide: “all this is as it should be according to the theory of recapitulation: the beginning of reflexive consciousness in the brain of our remotest ancestor must surely have coincided with the dawning of the sense of time.”

For the normal child, then, the realization does not bring the fear of non-existence, of not having existed; rather it brings the intuition of having existed without knowing it, in the mobile medium where consciousness becomes reflexive only with the developed sense of one’s own discreteness.

Thus, the dawning of reflexivity qua memory inaugurates the process of individuation. In other words, the non-phobic plunge into temporality, for Nabokov, resembles a joining of other durational fluxes in one common flux of time; he describes this experience in precisely these terms, following the aquatic metaphor:

I felt myself plunged abruptly into a radiant and mobile medium that was none other than the pure element of time. One shared it – just as excited bathers share shining seawater – with creatures that were not oneself but that were joined to one by time’s common flow, an environment quite different from the spatial world, which not only man but apes and butterflies can perceive.

\[225\] Ibid (20-21)

\[226\] Toker (138)

\[227\] Ibid (21-22)
This way of imagining time is purely Bergsonian\textsuperscript{228}, as Deleuze explains it, “there is only one time, although there is an infinity of actual fluxes (generalized pluralism) that necessarily participate in the same virtual whole (limited pluralism).”\textsuperscript{229} It is this kind of limited-pluralistic metaphysics that pervaded Nabokov’s work on memory here; hence, it is represented well by “an infant’s first journey into the next dimension, the newly established nexus between eye and reachable object, which the career boys in biometrics or in the rat-maze racket think they can explain.”\textsuperscript{230}

*Speak, Memory* is certainly a collection of reminiscences; as I suggested earlier, Nabokov’s unique epistemophilic drive ensures that things are preserved textually and therefore mnemonically that otherwise would continue to be unavailable. Speculating on the particularities of his émigré experience, he suggests that in regard to the power of hoarding up impressions, “Russian children of [his] generation passed through a period of genius, as if destiny were loyally trying what it could for them by giving them more than their share, in view of the cataclysm that was to remove completely the world they had known.”\textsuperscript{231} But perhaps more importantly, the book is meta-autobiographical in the way it attempts to justify the very method of memory as it is presented within: as mnemonic performance or a creative actualization. Though “one is always at home in one’s past,”\textsuperscript{232}

\textsuperscript{228} For further reading on Nabokov’s Bergsonian influences, see Toker and Glynn.

\textsuperscript{229} Deleuze, *Bergsonism* (82)

\textsuperscript{230} Nabokov, *Speak, Memory* (298)

\textsuperscript{231} Ibid (25)

\textsuperscript{232} Ibid (116)
this home must be actualized to remain standing, as it were, which is a fact that Nabokov has learned from supplying his fictional character with elements of his past only to see “houses [that] have crumbled in [his] memory as soundlessly as they did in the mute films of yore […] now that [they are] engulfed in the description of a childhood entirely unrelated to [his] own.” Thus, memory must exist in its actual performance, as in the metaphor of the “traveling players [who] carry with them everywhere, while they still remember their lines, a windy heath, a misty castle, an enchanted island,” and though it uses actual signs as its matter, the signs themselves become part of the anti-chronological mnemonic design because “the following of such thematic designs through one’s life should be […] the true purpose of autobiography.” Memory is recording, in this pivotal work, but memory is also imagination, as Nabokov explains later:

I would say that imagination is a form of memory […] An image depends on the power of association, and association is supplied and prompted by memory. When we speak of a vivid individual recollection we are paying a compliment not to our capacity of retention but to Mnemosyne’s mysterious foresight in having store up this or that element which creative imagination may want to use when combining it with later recollections

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233 Ibid (95)

234 Ibid (50)

235 Ibid (27)
and inventions. In this sense, both memory and imagination are a negation of time.\textsuperscript{236} Thus, \textit{Speak, Memory} represents Nabokov’s early attempt to grapple with this duality of memory. John Burt Foster, Jr., discussing the apparent conflict between its two types of memory, on the one hand scientific and precisely controlled and on the other creatively propelled, suggests that “this formula, like the implication of sworn testimony in the title,"\textsuperscript{237} gives priority to exactness of recollection. Yet it concludes with a denial whose very force suggests a nagging awareness that artistic motives may well continue to shape this account of the author’s past."\textsuperscript{238} In the final analysis of \textit{Speak, Memory}, then, even if Nabokov stages this conflict, memory as creative actualization appears to prevail. Finally, even as the author’s penchant for taking a hammer to his theoretical enemies such as psychoanalytic conceptions of sexuality, the unconscious, the role of myth, and the very desirability of theory is on full display, he nevertheless “strongly endorses Bergson’s concern with the lived experience of time, the enriching effects of memory, and the importance of creativity.”\textsuperscript{239}

If we can imagine \textit{Eugene Onegin} and \textit{Speak, Memory} together as Nabokov’s crisis and turning point, then \textit{Pale Fire} stands undoubtedly as a triumph. Conceived as combination of cybernetic and creative memory, it succeeds brilliantly because of its

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Nabokov, \textit{Strong Opinions} (78)
\item Here, Foster refers to the original legalese title \textit{Conclusive Evidence}.
\item Foster (179)
\item Ibid (14)
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
dual-narrative structure and plural, and ultimately open, reading possibilities. While finishing his monumental translation and incessantly revising his autobiography, he was all the while at work on the project that was to be, in key ways, an incorporation of both of these experiences. Published in 1962, *Pale Fire* immediately became a critical sensation and a critical conundrum. While some called the novel unreadable, Mary McCarthy, in her seminal review published in *The New Republic*, famously called it “a Jack-in-the-box, a Faberge gem, a clockwork toy, a chess problem, an infernal machine, a trap to catch reviewers, a cat-and-mouse game, a do-it-yourself novel.” It is a centauro work – half poem, half prose – that demands from the reader a particular kind of involvement: we must make choices along the scale of authorial control, to go along completely with the arranger’s plan, or to completely ignore it, or to read somewhere between these poles of control and anarchy. And, as we read, the dual memories of the text jockey for position, impossible to pin down, while the perfect cyberstructure holds them in place and allows them to shift, making the work, paradoxically, free-flowing and static at the same time.

The novel pretends to be a scholarly edition of a long poem by the fictional John Shade – a kind of Houseman-Frost hybrid with a dash of Pope thrown in for good measure (the poem is, after all, in heroic couplets). The scholar responsible for the edition is Charles Kinbote, a professor of fictional Zemblan language in the also fictional Wordsmith College in New Wye, Appalachia, a former friend of the poet who, as we find out early in the novel, was killed immediately after finishing the draft of the poem, also

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240 McCarthy
titled “Pale Fire.” As the novel progresses, the reader becomes gradually aware that
Kinbote may not be what he seems: his scholarship is at best erratic and at worst
fraudulent, his reliability as both commentator and narrator of his own work is extremely
shaky, and his identity and sanity are both suspect. Very early in text, Kinbote begins to
reveal that he is in fact King Charles II of Zembla, exiled from his homeland and hiding
out in the halls of academe as Kinbote. However, the strangeness of the novel goes much
deeper. Indeed, there is a strong possibility that there is no Kinbote/Charles at all, that the
person who took hold of Shade’s poem may be one V. Botkin, a deranged Russian
scholar who may have invented Kinbote/Charles and the land of Zembla itself. Because
the commentary to the poem begins to take on increasingly fantastical, narcissistic, and
megalomaniacal qualities, there is a risk of the poem itself becoming drowned out by
Kinbote’s excesses. Taking these discoveries to the logical conclusion, the reader may
also suppose that Shade and his poem are likewise the inventions of the author of the
critical apparatus, since the fantastical fictionality of the Zemblan narrative is only
marginally more fictional than the United States of the poem, which contains states like
Appalachia.\textsuperscript{241} Depending on how one reads, one may experience the dizzying levels of
convolution as either revelatory, befuddling, or both, often at the same time.

The chief difficulty of \textit{Pale Fire}, then, is one of reading strategies. For instance,
we have the choice suggested by the conventions of the book form itself – simply
reading Nabokov’s work from beginning to end – which offers an increasingly confusing,
but nonetheless rewarding, journey of discovery of the different levels available in the

\textsuperscript{241} To complicate matters, according to the introduction, Kinbote composes his commentary in
Cedarn, Utana, a fantastical conflation of Utah and Montana.
diegesis. There is also the choice offered by the mad scholar: although the commentary notes follow the poem proper, “the reader is advised to consult them first and then study the poem with their help, rereading them of course as he goes through its text, and perhaps, after having done with the poem, consulting them a third time so as to complete the picture.” The patent absurdity of this option, coupled with Kinbote’s suggestion that two copies of the volume be purchased and held side by side, one turned to the poem and the other to the commentary, suggests that this is perhaps the choice to be resisted, at least if we are to be given the chance to appreciate Shade’s work fully. Finally, there is the option of following the design of the arranger – in this case, a strange combination of Nabokov the author and Kinbote the annotator – since there are additional pathways between the poem and the commentary that open through this approach. The text of the commentary is, in the novel, unconnected to the text of the poem; in other words, there are no insistent markers of departure from Shade’s words to those of Kinbote, and therefore the reader must rely on the commentary’s esoteric self-referentiality – from note to note – as well as the order of these references as arranged by Nabokov. This is the method suggested by Brian Boyd, for example, who argues that in order to fully appreciate and thereby unravel the mysteries of the novel, we should trust the guidance of the overseeing structure provided through its arrangement. The problem with this approach, however, is the assumption that the control of the arranger must be honored, and that even if it is, the resultant readings will be the same in any real sense.

Nabokov, *Pale Fire* (28)

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Indeed, the openness of the reading experience is what causes Espen Aarseth to prominently mention *Pale Fire* in *Cybertext*, a work that examines various texts’ varying levels of cybertextuality. While Johnston’s work described above is primarily concerned with the thematic implications and representations of information multiplicity, Aarseth defines cybertext as a text with an information feedback loop; in other words, he proposes that texts may be, and increasingly are, in the age of digital technics, precisely such machines. Furthermore, for Aarseth, to contend that such cybertextuality is always already implied in text is to miss the significant shifts in the way interactivity (and play) have grown in the last half of the twentieth century. Cybertexts are read ergodically, by which Aarseth means that the work done by the reader is substantially different from such work in traditional texts: namely, this is a change similar to that from an observer of a sport to a participant. It is not enough, therefore, to simply describe a cybertext as labyrinthine, since the very definition of labyrinth is subject to various interpretations. The increased ergodicity of cybertexts rather depend on the precise reading shift described above: one from unicursality to multicursality. Aarseth considers *Pale Fire* a cybertext insofar as it functions as “a limit text between uni- and multicursality,” much as it often functions for critics as a limit between modernism and postmodernism. The feedback loop structure of Nabokov’s novel clearly fits the criteria for cybertextuality; in order to assess the its cursality, Aarseth chooses to concentrate on the footnote structure, which is a

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243 Aarseth (8)
typical example of a structure that can be seen as both uni- and multicursal. It creates a bivium, or choice of expansion, but should we decide to take this path (reading the footnote), the footnote itself returns us to the main track immediately afterward. Perhaps a footnoted text can be described as multicursal on the micro level and unicursal on the macro level.²⁴⁴

Aarseth perceptively points out that *Pale Fire* leaves the mode of cursality up to the reader, thus leaving its textual topology largely undetermined. However, his description ignores several unique elements of the novel. For instance, the notes often risk taking the reader to other notes and thus out of the poem proper, and often refer to the Index, which complicates the reading process further. Also, the footnote is only one element of the cyberstructure in the novel, as the two halves, Shade’s and Kinbote’s, relate to each other in other complex ways: for instance, Kinbote’s Zemblan fantasies begin, over time, to uncannily resemble certain elements of Shade’s poem, while it could also be argued that the poem, at times, seems to anticipate the notes even though it has no logical way to do so. In other words, the very notion of the footnote’s secondariness implied in Aarseth’s analysis is problematic because it is impossible to establish the poem as the primary body of the novel; as Nabokov himself suggested, in a letter, “the commentary is the novel.”²⁴⁵ Thus, the crucial conflict in *Pale Fire* seems to lie not between Shade and his assassin Jacob Gradus, or between Kinbote and everyone else in the novel, but rather between the

²⁴⁴ Ibid (7-8)

²⁴⁵ Nabokov, *Selected Letters* (332)
poem and the commentary; the footnotes do not simply add interpretational pathways which supply additional information, but instead compete for control of the text.

It is precisely this conflict that has caused, since the novel’s publication, a critical debate aimed at establishing, once and for all, the true primacy of fictional authorship. The debate is frequently framed by two basic factions: the Shadeans and the Kinboteans.\footnote{246 For an excellent overview and history of this debate, see Boyd’s \textit{Nabokov’s Pale Fire}.} The former insist that not only is Shade primary to the novel, but that because of his primacy, the logical conclusion must be that his is the only authorship in the novel: he is both the poet and the annotator. The opposite camp argues that if the commentary is the novel, the Kinbote must be seen as its central figure, since he is almost entirely absent from the poem, and must thus be interpreted as the sole author of both parts. While there are significant arguments to be made for both of these interpretations and various middle versions, the important point for the book is to keep both possibilities suspended in constant friction without letting either drop. This is not simply the case of a poem and some footnotes, but rather cyberstructural indeterminacy that, while creating the extra loops, throws doubt upon the very possibility of such cyberstructuring. In other words, while Nabokov exploits the possibilities afforded him by cybertext, he is simultaneously critiquing and parodying its capabilities.

There is good reason to suspect a self-parodying vein in \textit{Pale Fire}. As I already suggested, the basic structure of novel – an introduction, a poem, a commentary, and an index – parallels exactly Nabokov’s own project on \textit{Onegin}. It is as though the author, already conscious of the mounting troubles of the translation, began a self-reflexive
examination of cybertextual memory in the novel. In fact, Nabokov admitted this much, suggesting that at least partially, his translating persona was responsible for the novel’s deranged annotator: “This in a way is what I tried to do in retwisting my own experience when inventing Kinbote.”247 Indeed, it may be tempting to see Shade as a representation of proper creative impulse while imagining Kinbote as a usurping presence, strangling the poet’s creativity with needless superstructures. To understand Shade as a Bergsonian, we need only to look at the poem’s fourth canto, which is occupied, ostensibly, with the poet’s creative process itself, or, more specifically, with the difference between

Two methods of composing: A, the kind
Which goes on solely in the poet’s mind,
A testing of performing words, while he
Is soaping a third time one leg, and B,
The other kind, much more decorous, when
He’s in his study writing with a pen.248

This is an example of Nabokov commenting specifically about the creative process as memory substantialization; that is, memory exists in the mind as virtual until the moment of its commitment to literary prosthesis – in Nabokov’s and Shade’s case, a series of index cards – when it becomes the memory of the text. There is also, in the canto, a pervading fear that as the daily routine becomes actualized in verse, the real body of the

247 Nabokov, *Strong Opinions* (77)

248 Nabokov, *Pale Fire* (64)
poet is increasingly unable to contain his life, especially when Shade’s speaker discusses inspiration and creation during his morning toilet routine:

The more I weigh, the less secure my skin;
In places it’s ridiculously thin;
Thus near the mouth: the space between its wick
And my grimace, invites the wicked nick.
Or this dewlap: some day I must set free
The Newport Frill inveterate in me.
My Adam’s apple is a prickly pear:
Now I shall speak of evil and despair
As none have spoken.  

While Kinbote considers these lines “facile and revolting,” they represent, for Shade, the exact nature of the way life, with even such banal details as shaving, becomes poetry. Even as these mundane operations bespeak of the bodily waning of the author, they provide the material signposts for composition, and the verse receives them, arranges them in iambic pentameter rhymed couplets, and commemorates them in its structure. The present, similarly to the past, can be best understood here as “a constant accumulation of images, but our brain is not an ideal organ for constant retrospection and the best we can do is to pick out and try to retain those patches of rainbow light flitting

\footnote{Ibid (66)}

\footnote{Ibid (269)}
through memory.”

It is no coincidence that Shade considers “Man’s life as commentary to abstruse unfinished poem” as an alternative title to “Pale Fire”: the process of life’s capturing through writing is the way memory works, and Shade’s composition is the actualization process that always necessarily occurs against the real matter of his life. In this way, poetry becomes prosthesis while at the same time constituting the vague borders of a lived life; it is life’s reflection, a pale fire of the moon reflecting the sun’s light, but at least it is a fire at which we can gaze. This is what Nabokov means when discussing textual art’s prosthetic nature: “in a sense, all poetry is positional: to try to express one’s position in regard to the universe embraced by consciousness, is an immemorial urge.”

As much as Shade’s poem functions as an illustration on the kind of compositional technics Nabokov privileges, it also contains a larger commentary on modernism, or, more accurately, on modernism’s treatments of memory. In a key passage of Canto Two, Shade performs an admirable feat: narrating the life and eventual suicide of his daughter Hazel while commenting on the relative merits of the poetics of two key figures of modernism – Proust and Eliot. The latter is revealed in the parenthetical references to the Four Quartets as “some phony modern poem that was said/ In English Lit to be a document/ ‘Engazhay and compelling,’” while the former may be gleaned

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251 Nabokov, *Strong Opinions* (186)

252 Nabokov, *Pale Fire* (67)

253 Nabokov, *Speak, Memory* (218)

254 Nabokov, *Pale Fire* (46)
from a blink-and-you-miss-it reference to a spider in the description of Hazel’s word games.255 The importance of the spider and Eliot is underscored by Kinbote’s consternated note in which he expresses the belief that it was he, not Hazel, who told the poet that “‘spider’ in reverse is ‘redips’, and ‘T.S. Eliot,’ ‘toilest.’”256 While this section of the canto may be seen as critical of both writers, Shade’s very method rejects Eliot’s mysticism and fragmentariness in favor of Proust’s mnemonic search: as he recounts the details of Hazel’s life and sprinkles in allusions to the poets, he never loses sight of the narrative thrust of the poem which leads inexorably to the painful and personal suicide of an only daughter. In summarizing the canto’s effect after discussing at length Pale Fire’s engagement with Eliot and Proust and its preference for the latter, Foster suggests that rather than launching a wholesale critique of the modernist canon, the poem, and the novel as a whole, proposes a revisionary modernism:

As a last echo of this development, Pale Fire’s defense of aesthetic individualism against Eliot’s high modernism continues to express Nabokov’s main motives throughout his dealings with European modernism – to present memory as simultaneously personal and intertextual, to detach it from influential doctrines of the unconscious and

255 For a detailed discussion of Nabokov’s engagement with Proust and Eliot in Pale Fire, see Foster.

256 Nabokov, Pale Fire (93)
the mythic, and to uphold the essential modernity of an art devoted to recapturing the mnemonic image."

Thus, Shade becomes, in the novel, a kind of a paragon of proper memory textualization, or a solution to what in Eliot may be seen as the crisis of immemory. It is tempting, then, to see Kinbote’s parasitical appropriation of the poem only as cybernetics gone wrong, a controlling device that fails to “do” memory correctly. This interpretation, however, leads to a critical problem: if Kinbote is a parasite, why do his sections consistently feel just as alive – if not more so – than the poem itself? How do we interpret the monumental fancifulness of the commentary which, after all, is supposed to “be” the novel?

Certainly, Kinbote has his hilarious moments of pedantic scholarship: he dutifully supplies glosses he recognizes, fumbles at others he does not understand, and at times even adds his own literary allusions to the commentary. This, however, is clearly not the main attraction of his art: that distinction is reserved for the ever-expanding narrative of Zembla, the king, and Shade’s impending assassination. The notes increasingly become unhinged, as when Shade’s humble autobiographical line about his parents triggers a seven-page-long comment about Charles II’s genealogy, which suggests, self-referentially, that the very process of reconstructing this history demands great “mnemonic effort and eye strain.” In other words, Kinbote is much more than a pedantic annotator; he is as much an artist as Shade is, taking the poem and his

257 Foster (232)
258 Nabokov, *Pale Fire* (100-07)
surrounding and forming out of them a complex world of fantasy. What this suggests, then, is a complication of the illusion that Kinbote is simply a usurper, or that *Pale Fire* is a struggle between Shade the Bergsonian and Kinbote the Cyber-lunatic. Thus, Kinbote himself becomes a Bergsonian artist, making himself through the use of the poem, just as much as Shade uses his life matter to make his poem. This reframing of the novel’s conflict, then, suggests a necessary reframing of the problem of the two kinds of memory: if Shade and Kinbote are, in this respect, equals, or mirror images of each other, then in what sense does *Pale Fire* remain a cybertext?

To begin to answer this question, Maurice Couturier argues that one of the main challenges of the novel is not which of the two central figures has primacy but the fact that they both coexist in shifting, uncertain ways because of the inherent conflicts in the way the reading of the novel must be done. This is both the advantage and the problem of cybertext: an author forms a loop within the novel whereby information (or memory) is fed into the understanding of the main text (whatever we might take that to be), thereby creates a closed cycle in the diegesis while also building something of a mirror world between itself and the reader who is expected to still follow a certain path. Thus, Kinbote attempts and comically fails to control Shade’s poem which is in itself a creative process akin, while Nabokov similarly attempts and to some degree fails to control the reader. The main cybertextual conflict, then, is always between the text and the reader, or the

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259 For an excellent account of the way Kinbote creates his imagined world, including the use of his landlord’s family’s photos for the Zemblan royal family, see Boyd (1999).

260 Couturier (55)
arranger and the interpreter. Returning to writing as a Proustian quest for lost time, or a search for memory, we may usefully imagine the whole assemblage of the text and the reader as a machine, as Deleuze does when discussing the arranging function in Proust: “There is less a narrator than a machine of the Search, and less a hero than the arrangements by which the machine functions under one or another configuration, according to one or another articulation, for one or another purpose, for one or another production.” It is as though Kinbote accomplishes two things simultaneously: the creative impulse akin to Shade’s and the controlling impulse akin to the cybernetic machine of the text, because he is the “spider-body of the narrator, the spy, the policeman, the jealous lover, the interpreter – the madman.”

Aside from facilitating the creative becoming of memory, another important way in which cybertextuality functions in Pale Fire is as a ludology of memory: that is, memory as game. It is no secret that Nabokov valued games, especially chess problems, as an important part of his writing process. Indeed, when describing the composition of these problems, he drew a picture stunningly similar to his description of poetic production: “Inspiration of a quasi-musical, quasi-poetical, or to be quite exact, poetico-mathematical type, attends the process of thinking up a chess composition of that sort.” Also, analyzing Nabokov’s writing from the perspective of games in a well-established practice: in addition to McCarthy’s referring to Pale Fire as a “chess problem,” Carl

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261 Deleuze, Proust and Signs (181)

262 Ibid (182)

263 Nabokov, Speak, Memory (288)
Eichelberger discusses games as an integral part of much of his fiction, though the novel in question is certainly central in his analysis: “The spirit of play, in the various senses discussed by Johan Huizinga in *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*, pervades every thread of *Pale Fire*’s fictional fabric.”\(^{264}\) This is important to our current discussion because once the relationship between the narrative machine is established, one way to account for the effect and, indeed, the implications of play in the novel is to examine the way play itself changes with the cyberstructure of the ludic text. In a typical chess problem, the player is presented with a range of choices but usually one optimal solution, and *Pale Fire* has often attracted readers and critics with this lure, suggesting that if all moves are made correctly – that is, if the cybernetic circuits are followed in the proper order – then the solution will be found. The real experience of the novel, however, is something much more closely related to game theory’s Prisoner’s Dilemma, where two players must make choices independently from each other to arrive at a common result. If we conceive of the reader and the author (or the arranger) as the two players, then the game, rather than resembling a chess problem, becomes a game of nonsense: “there are no preexisting rules, each move invents its own rules; it bears upon its own rules.”\(^{265}\) Just as the two halves of the novel are held suspended by its structure, so too are two players, locked in an indeterminate position across the boundary the interface, the text itself. This, for Huizinga, is the defining quality of play: its fun which resists all analysis, all logical

\(^{264}\) Eichelberger (176)

\(^{265}\) Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense* (59)
interpretation. As a concept, it cannot be reduced to any other mental activity.” This is undoubtedly a key achievement of *Pale Fire*: the way that it shifts between its narratives, creating novel play possibilities, combining a “scientist’s penchant for systems [that] tends in the direction of play” with games of nonsense.

Before considering the larger implications of Nabokov’s games, I would like to turn to *Ada*, a novel published in 1969 that, in many ways, completes and perfects *Pale Fire*’s ostentations toward productive immemory. In many ways, *Ada* remains the most complex and the most controversial of Nabokov’s novels: its reception at the time of publication and thereafter has been at best mixed. While Alfred Appel, a Nabokov acolyte, hailed it as “an erotic masterpiece that explores the nature of time” and “a great work of art, a necessary book, radiant and rapturous, affirming the power of love and imagination,” Martin Amis described it as “a waterlogged corpse at the stage of maximal bloat.” *Ada* is perhaps both of these things, and much more besides, and for the purposes of this examination, I would like to consider how and why it might function as a combination of all of these attributes contained in its some six hundred pages. Nabokov has called this work a physics fiction: it takes place in Demonia, or Antiterra, a mirror universe that combines Russian and American cultures, strange technologies,

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266 Huizinga (3)

267 Ibid (204)

268 Appel

269 Amis

270 The term might be best understood as a disambiguation from science fiction, in the sense that there is precious little hard science in *Ada*: for instance, Nabokov considered Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* as a great example of physics fiction.
and inexplicable time-lag, where its main hero, narrator, and scientist Van Veen pursues a love affair with his sister Ada while composing philosophical treatises on the nature of time and exploring the alternative universe of Terra in which the readers may easily recognize our own world. It is distinguished by a convoluted and highly allusive style and strange temporal patterns: the book meanders its way through art, literature, science, and philosophy, expansive at first, then slowly becoming more compact. For example, the first section which recounts the beginnings of Van and Ada’s affair is a Tolstoy-inspired pastiche which takes up more than half of the novel’s volume, while the final section, in which the co-narrators – Van’s storytelling is frequently joined by Ada’s, in the form of inserted notes – quietly fade into the book to be replaced by Ronald Oranger, the editor, is a mere eighteen pages long. The structure’s effect, on a simple level, is to force an active engagement from the reader: in order to revitalize the bloated corpse, “the ideal reader of Ada does not simply read about time; he participates in it, voyages through it, along with Van and Ada.” In this way, the novel becomes the matter against which memory, both Van’s and the reader’s, is actualized.

If it is somewhat harder to locate cybertextuality in Ada than in Pale Fire, it is not because of its absence, but because of Nabokov’s efforts to hide the loops in order to create a deceptively smooth reading surface uninterrupted by external structures. Although the narratorial interruptions already suggest that this is not a unicursal narrative, the cyberpathways may be difficult to locate. However, they are insistently present, though the reader must work to untangle the interruptions. An excellent example

271 Rivers (149-50)
of this occurs halfway through Part One, when Van is forced to leave the edenic Ardis after the first flowering of his incestuous love affair. The scene of departure is first described thus:

Van’s black trunk and black suitcase, and black king-size dumbbells were heaved into the back of the family motorcar; Bouteillan put on a captain’s cap, too big for him, and grape-blue goggles; “*remouvez votre* bottom, I will drive,” said Van – and the summer of 1884 was over.272

As the car drives through the countryside, Van stops to have one last rendezvous with Ada in “the natural bower of aspens” where he plunges into the dense undergrowth wearing “a silk shirt, a velvet jacket, black breeches, riding boots with star spurs.”273

After the encounter, the following passage describes his return:

Stumbling on melons, fiercely beheading the tall arrogant fennels with his riding crop, Van returned to the Forest Fork. Morio, his favorite black horse, stood waiting for him, held by young Moore. He thanked the groom with a handful of stellas and galloped off, his gloves wet with tears.274

Aside from the increasingly romantic sartorial splendor of Van’s description of himself – we must remember that in spite of the third-person perspective, it is Van himself who narrates the novel – the immediate question that must be answered is what happens to the old butler Bouteillan and the family car? Why does Van suddenly wear spurs and carry a

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272 Nabokov, *Ada* (167-68)

273 Ibid (168)

274 Ibid (170)
riding crop on the car ride to the train station? Why are there melons, fennels, and stellas (whatever those might be) in the aspen wood? While the prose makes ostentations to continuity, and a casual reading of the chapter might feel rather linear if somewhat fanciful, a careful examination of this, and almost every section of the novel yields just such strange discontinuous stumbles. In *Nabokov’s Ada: A Place of Consciousness*, Brian Boyd suggests that inherent in this style of the novel is the author’s insistence on not simply adding such discontinuity, but “in pretense of bland persistence.” Nabokov does not change, but transform the black imagery of the earlier passage while adding allusions to Shakespeare, Rimbaud, and Marvell and setting up, at the very same time, the cyberstructural patterns that will elucidate many of the novel’s later mysteries because Van himself is not to be trusted. Here, Boyd attempts to outline Nabokov’s method through his style while tracing specific recurrences in the design of the novel to suggest some common problems of reading not just this novel, but Nabokov’s oeuvre in general: that is, the necessary separation between Van’s authorship and Nabokov’s design for the novel. While Van, as a Bergson follower he is revealed to be later in the text, turns his experience, his memory, and his considerable wealth of languages and texts into the objects that form the novelistic structure, the novel itself constructs elaborate patterns of control that allow the reader to evaluate, resist, and reinterpret Van’s art. This conflict again highlights the central conflict between Nabokov’s modes of memory, between the text’s cybernetics and Van’s creative self-actualization in the text, as text.

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275 Boyd, *Nabokov’s Ada* (6)

276 For a full examination of this section’s allusions and patterns, see Boyd, *Nabokov’s Ada* (3-45)
In order to see Van as a Bergsonian, one need only to look at *Ada’s* Part Four, which consists of a single chapter which at least partially appears to be a transcription of a tape-recording of Van’s lecture on “The Texture of Time” – partially because, in characteristic for *Ada* fashion, the chapter also includes a response to a heckler in the lecture hall, ruminations on memory while Van is driving to a long-awaited reunion with Ada, and the actual description of this reunion. Replete with references to Bergson, Proust, and *Pale Fire*’s own John Shade, this section stresses Van’s preference for “perceptual time,” or the kind of time that finally succeeds in self-disambiguating from the shackles of spatiality:

> Time is but memory in the making. In every individual life there goes on from cradle to deathbed the gradual shaping and strengthening of that *backbone of consciousness*, which is the Time of the strong. “To be” means to know one “has been.” “Not to be” implies the only “new” kind of (sham) time: the future. I dismiss it. Life, love, libraries, have no future. *(original emphasis)*

This is, in a nutshell, the novel’s metaphysics of time: in Van’s understanding of time as non-spatial and therefore non-linear, it comes to be, so to speak, through the workings of memory, which brings toward the present the increasingly compressed durationality of the virtual which is the past as it actualizes, through interaction with matter, in the present. Perhaps this is more Bergsonian than Veenian, but we should consider it as a reasonable facsimile of *durée* both for the purposes of understanding Nabokov’s (and

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277 Nabokov, *Ada* (595-96)
Van’s) dismissal of relativity and for the novel as a whole – in a formulation reminiscent of a kind of spruced-up Proust. It also underscores the prostheticity of archivization: life and love are lived, and libraries record this living, constituting the living subject as they do. Finally, it illustrates that in Ada, as elsewhere in Nabokov, voluntary and involuntary memory work in concert: “Nabokov challenges the reader to participate in these attempts to summon up the past – to become, in effect, a collaborator in Van’s and Ada’s exercises in memory and, by extension, a collaborator in the creation of the novel itself.” The fact that the novel’s narrators do not die, but fade gradually, first in the sheer volume of the words they produce, then literally disappearing into the book itself, suggests that the memory of the text, intricate and multicursal, ultimately holds primacy over the actualizing memories of its characters. Thus, in traditional Nabokovian fashion, the last word is left to Oranger, the editor, who summarizes the novel in language reminiscent of blurb-writing. Oranger, of course, is a strange name, phonetically similar to “arranger,” and the text relies on the arranging function to both provide some futurity to the characters and to throw suspicion on it because of the inherent banality of all such resolutions. Discussing the function of Oranger, Michael Wood argues that it is scrupulous of him not to tamper with the text, even when there are missing dates. But we do know by inference that Van and Ada, like Humbert Humbert, are dead by the time we read them, since their scheme was to

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278 Rivers (149)

279 We may see an earlier genesis of this figure in both John Ray Jr., PhD, of Lolita’s opening and, in a more complex way, Kinbote.
have the memoirs published only posthumously. Posterity gets its interview them, because it is posterity, but the text itself is very reluctant to let anyone die, or to die itself.280

Thus, Ada and Pale Fire, while combining two kinds of memory in their structures, manage to set up the key relationship between the reader and the text, providing both mnemonic cyberstructures and creative actualizing memory, setting up a kind of a screen between the surface of the text and the attention of the audience to form a complex memory machine. Reading across the surface of the interface, then, must be imagined as a kind of mirroring: the reader sees herself in the text, and text comes to be what it is in the reader. While we do have internal mirroring in both novels281 – Shade and Kinbote, Van and Ada – the main mirror remains the surface of the text itself. Mirrors are such an important device for Nabokov precisely because they allow for the play on memory construction. But perhaps even more important to the understanding of his project, they function not simply as technics of memory, but as its ethics.

In order to consider the ethical project of immemory in these, we must examine the rather typical aspect of critical reaction to much of Nabokov’s work which may be summarized as admiration for style mixed with suspicion of authorial sympathies. Why does he make his texts “like” Humbert and Kinbote? Does Ada have to feature a self-aggrandizing, incestuous blackguard for its entire beautiful but agonizing duration? This difficulty causes a faithful admirer like John Updike to ask of Van: “But is it intentional

280 Wood (204)

281 For a detailed account of the use of mirrors in these two novels, see Clark.
that the hero is such a brute?"²⁸² and wary Joyce Carol Oates to observe that Nabokov “assigns worth – which may seem to us quite exaggerated, even ludicrous, as in Ada, to a few selected human beings”²⁸³ while largely ignoring the welfare of the rest, like Ada’s sister Lucette who commits suicide after seeing her love for Van first callously titillated, then spurned. Richard Rorty’s insistence that “Nabokov's best novels are the ones which exhibit his inability to believe his own general ideas”²⁸⁴ – that is, that his ostensible high morals are repeatedly violated by his own works – misses the point that we must not mistake Nabokov for any of his would-be solipsists and sexual abberants like Hermann, Humbert, Kinbote, or Van. The ethical implications of the texts containing them are inextricably tied up with the technics of memory, which is never linearly simple, or simply fragmentary. Nabokov’s immemory as a solution to the modern crisis of memory is the combination of the creative and the structured, demanding in its playfulness, which must necessarily take place at the mirror interface inside the textual machine.

²⁸² Updike (70)
²⁸³ Oates (37)
²⁸⁴ Rorty (168)
I am convinced that Time is reversible. At any rate it does not go in a straight line.

-- Andrei Tarkovsky, *The Diaries*

It is obvious that without Time, memory cannot exist either.

-- Andrei Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*

Let me begin with the memory of the film: like many Soviets of my generation, I came to know Andrei Tarkovsky’s science-fiction masterpiece *Solaris* in late-evening television showings, my interest spurred by the excitement of my parents who intimated, mostly through innuendo, that this was not simply another movie. Another sign that designated it as a special and somewhat forbidden spectacle was it perpetually late broadcast time: the film ran after the evening news, and this required children to stay up past the customary nine o’clock bedtime. For Tarkovsky, our family made the exception, as I imagine did many other families. It was the mid-80s, with *perestroika* in full swing, and for me, the film became, after each broadcast, a strange and wonderful artifice: a memory of things past of which I had no real knowledge, and a sign of things to come.
These are some of the things I did not know: that Tarkovsky, widely regarded throughout the world as the greatest Russian filmmaker since Eisenstein, faced constant battles with Goskino, the Soviet State Committee for Cinematography; that his films received small releases (*Solaris* initially premiered on a tiny handful of screens across the USSR); that despite winning the Grand Prix Spécial du Jury and being nominated for the Palme d’Or at Cannes, achieving cult status at home, it remained relatively obscure for the mass public; and that by the time *glasnost* kids got to it and were indelibly changed by it, the maker of *Solaris* had already left his homeland, never to return again, probably already sick with lung cancer, possibly already dead (I was nine in 1986 when he went). The strange artifice worked on us as if detached from the milieu that spawned it, by itself, perpetuated by those late-night broadcasts, at once Russian and foreign, contemporary and archaic, technical and philosophical. In short, it was a prosthetic memory, a meditation on memory itself, becoming memory for a generation after the Cold War, the space race, and the arms race. But it was also prophecy of the world to come: a way to capture, evaluate, and warn against the computational universe then being developed for everyday, “personal” use. While the technical memory of computing resides at the edge of the film, virtual memory dominates it, and its central project becomes a depiction of this temporal memory while at the same time depicting time, both personal and technical.

The history of the film, as well as its place in a larger filmic history, is complicated by its source material, its relationship to other Soviet science fiction films, and the inevitable comparisons it draws to Stanley Kubrick’s roughly contemporary *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Rather than pick up the comparisons here, I will return to them
later in the chapter. However, the film’s complicated lineage vis-à-vis Stanislaw Lem’s eponymous 1961 novel bears further analysis. A masterpiece in its own right, Lem’s *Solaris* captures the horror of failed space and self-exploration arguably better than Tarkovsky does, partly because it is grounded so squarely in the critique of political, economic, and therefore technological imperialism. For a Polish author in the wake of World War II, it was nearly impossible to ignore the very real imperialist presence of the Soviet Union, and it permeates the futuristic technological diegesis. According to Christopher Murray, “the political context of the novel is central to any understanding of its significance. Being Polish, Lem well understood that the imperial and industrial ambitions of great powers often came at the expense of lesser nations.”

This context accounts for the novel’s ambivalence about a kind of utopian future of single-culture universal technological domination, an empire that is ambivalent as a worldview, as Istvan Csicsery-Ronay puts it, precisely because it is “simultaneously an ideological fiction and a way of experiencing the word.” The claim here is that science fiction, as a genre in general and in Lem’s particular case, functions as “an expression of the political-cultural transformation that originated in European imperialism and was inspired by the fantastic ideal of a single global technological regime.” Ultimately, while the novel balances both utopianism and empire, its technoscience owes more to the latter rather than the former. Lem’s work belongs squarely in the “genre of technological empire”

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285 Murray (97)

286 Csicsery-Ronay (131)

287 Ibid (130)
because “technoscientific projects expand, mesh with others, and gain power from grand-scale conflicts that inspire new resolutions, which then evolve into new mechanisms.”

Thus, the political roots of Tarkovsky’s film are always planted firmly in an anti-imperialist sentiment that Lem expressed, though the two texts accomplish this in slightly different ways. Both share a deeply felt skepticism about expansionism and empire qua space exploration. For Lem, this skepticism is largely a philosophical matter, a critique of the human inability to ever truly explore, to reach outside of the human sphere that is tied inextricably to the technological basis of such exploration. How can we deploy technics in order to reach other worlds, other civilizations, when we have yet to master the technics of our own self-knowledge? While technological empire makes the science-fiction plot of the novel possible, it simultaneously becomes the target of the plot’s criticism. The novel’s scientific issues related to space exploration, technological infrastructure, and academic bureaucracy reveal themselves to the reader and to its characters through that most ancient of philosophical problems: “the relation between matter and mind, and between mind and consciousness.” That is, the technological framing becomes crucial to the problem of memory, which is always, as I have suggested elsewhere, the problem of mind and matter, a metaphysics of becoming.

As a technological critique, Lem’s work is in many ways representative of other Soviet-era science fiction, both his own and written by others. It features an international cast of characters that simultaneously displaces the critique to a global milieu and saves

\[\text{Ibid (139)}\]

\[\text{Lem (24)}\]
the author from appearing overtly political, which is an approach that Lem himself will later use in his own Ijon Tichy books. Of course, many Eastern Bloc sci-fi writers grew adept, over the years of repressions and reprisals, in masking their own critiques of the regime this way. Texts that toed the line of social realism, the officially ordained artistic mode prevalent in the years after the revolution until Khrushchev’s thaw following Stalin’s death in 1953, were able to set their futuristic plots in essentially Soviet settings, populating them with characters that represented the heroic explorer-aviator ideal. For instance, the Strugatsky brothers, perhaps the best Soviet-era Russian science fiction writers, made the heroes of their Noon Universe novels, which primarily depicted scientism as a liberating and communizing force, easily recognizable neo-Komsomolians, the best and the brightest of what insipient communism had to offer. On the other hand, Strugatskys’ later work, especially the 1971 novella Roadside Picnic, on which Tarkovsky based his other sci-fi masterpiece Stalker, masks criticisms of Soviet European politics and prescient warnings against run-away nuclear proliferation by placing its action in an unnamed western country and giving its protagonist the vaguely German-sounding name Redrick Schuhart. By ostensibly suggesting, in many of their works, that the problems of Soviet scientific and technical imperialism could be located elsewhere, on the other side of the border, these writers were able to get covertly political without naming names and placing places.

See, for example, The Futurological Congress, Peace on Earth, Observation on the Spot, The Star Diaries, and Memoirs of a Space Traveller.

A notable exception is Strugatskys’ Monday Begins on Saturday, a 1964 satirical novel which is very Russian in both character and setting and which mercilessly lampoons Soviet scientific bureaucracy.
Lem does this in *Solaris* in several ways. The post-national utopianism of science is represented by what seems like a truly international cast of scientists. Solaristics as a field has no expressed connection to Russian space policy: apart from Tsiolkovsky’s ghost hovering over the annals of the science, it is dominated by names from across the national spectrum. Even the crew of the space station orbiting Solaris seems nationally varied: Kris Kelvin, the protagonist, seems non-specifically western-European; possibly British, if we consider the scientific allusion to Lord Kelvin. Others are Snaut, a probable German; Gibarian, an Armenian; and Sartorius, whose name is unidentifiably Latin. After divorcing the novel from its direct national implications, Lem further divorces it from both social realism and the exploration myth, depicting both the general failure of space exploration and a pessimistic view of such exploration by concentrating on the philosophical question at the heart of science. Its inability to study the world outside is really a matter of radical incommensurability of science and subject, not of imperialistic overreach: to study the sentient ocean as an anthropomorphized intelligence is ludicrous on its face, similar to applying microbiology to the study of large mammals.

Tarkovsky’s challenge with adapting the film for the screen presented challenges that were more significant. The film kept Lem’s international characters, but by casting the Lithuanian Donatas Banionis as Kelvin, the Estonian Jüri Järvet as Snaut, and the

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292 Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, widely regarded as the godfather of Russian rocketry and cosmonautics and a proponent of the philosophy that saw universe as a living organism, features in the background of both the novel and the film.

293 Interestingly, William Thomson, 1st Baron Kelvin, the Irish physicist best known for his work on the absolute temperature scale, was also a supporter of British Empire in his rejection of Irish Home Rule.
Armenian Sos Sargsyan, Tarkovsky drew attention to Soviet Union’s ineluctable imperialistic history that was merely implied in the novel; the actors themselves worked within the very system that circumvented the political and cultural independence of their states. Ironically, the international impulse of the casting and filming locations laid bare the oppressiveness of the state regime behind the project.

After years of struggles with Goskino, the director was embarking on a project that was likely to meet great political resistance. The material itself, while somewhat problematic in the ways discussed above, would not be as big of an issue as the fact that Tarkovsky would be filming a Soviet space epic, one certain to enter the world stage because of Tarkovsky’s stature as a filmmaker and the success of Kubrick’s film just a few years earlier.294 Indeed, Soviet science fiction film had a long political history; since Yakov Protazanov’s 1924 *Aelita: Queen of Mars*, “an effort […] had to be made to construct something other than technological – the Revolution itself as a kind of social machine, capable of powerfully propelling this world into the future.”295 Still, the semantics of social realism, post-WWII propaganda, and the cult of the aviator296 – based on such figures as Valery Chkalov297 and Alexey Maresyev298 – have changed the genre significantly by the late 1950s: “the myth of the aviation hero goes back to the Stalin era

294 According to Roger Ebert, Tarkovsky would have likely seen 2001: A Space Odyssey at the 1969 Moscow Film Festival.

295 Telotte (46)

296 See Bergman.

297 A Soviet test pilot and Hero of the Soviet Union.

298 A Soviet WWII fighter pilot and Hero of the Soviet Union immortalized in Boris Polevoy’s *Story of a Real Man* (1946).
when pilots [...] achieved a status of celebrity and served as important tools of state propaganda.” In other words, the publication of Lem’s novel and the production of Tarkovsky’s film spanned a decade when mainstream Soviet science fiction, by and large, idealized the intrepid space explorer and the mission of making the universe a now and future communist paradise. Films like *The Heavens Call* (1959), *The Silent Star* (1960), *Planet of the Storms* (1961), *Toward the Dream* (1962), *Andromeda Nebula* (1967), *Moscow-Cassiopeia* (1973), and *Teens of the Universe* (1974), to name a few, largely idealized space adventure in the service of the party line. Indeed, Tarkovsky visually references the language of those films in at least one section: the extended black and white sequence depicting the scientific inquest of the pilot Berton. In this part of the film, Berton, an earlier explorer of Solaris’s surface, reports the strange apparitions that will later provide the bulk of the film’s conflict to a panel of rumple-suited scientists qua bureaucratic apparatchiks, framed by typical Soviet space regalia, including stylized and idealized portraits of Tsiolkovsky, Sergei Korolev, and Yuri Gagarin. Keeping with Lem’s rather more abstract critique of science, Tarkovsky, in perhaps the film’s most ostensibly political segment, targets Soviet science and politics in particular, such that “a viewer in the Soviet Union would instantly have recognized Tarkovsky’s critique of Soviet bureaucracy [since] the Soviet viewer would associate the style of the meeting with that of the official communist party procedures of the time.”

299 Strukov (62-63)

300 Chief engineer and first cosmonaut of the Vostok program, respectively.

301 Strukov (60)
Indeed, these political difficulties resulted in typical, for Tarkovsky, challenges with the authorities\textsuperscript{302}; however, it is important to note that \textit{Solaris} became the director’s least troubled film since \textit{Ivan’s Childhood} (1962), both in its continued domestic screenings and international success. One of the film’s achievements is that while it is political, its subversive skepticism is couched in relaxed nonchalance about the scientific and explorative elements of the plot. This is perhaps the main reason for Lem’s disapproval of the finished film, in which, according to Vlad Strukov,

Tarkovsky shifts away from Lem’s technological romance and its philosophical implications, instead focusing on the themes of guilt, betrayal, and the function of memory and art […] Tarkovsky finds the retreat from techno-science, which has been fundamental to the West’s and Soviet outlook on life, in art, which functions as site of resistance to the subjugation of Being to theoretical knowledge.\textsuperscript{303}

To be sure, the romance in Lem is intermixed with existential horror, but it is true that Tarkovsky’s inward turn relegates techno-science to the margins of the film, working instead on the problems of memory, self-actualization, and virtual becoming. For Lem, these elements take on a nightmarish quality because of neither science nor human psychology can account for the apparitions. The externalization of past traumas is a divergence from normalcy; according to Snaut, these traumas “are things, situations, that no one has dared to externalize, but which the mind has produced by accident in a

\textsuperscript{302} For a full list of complaints against Goskino and Soviet cinema establishment, see Tarkovsky, \textit{The Diaries}.

\textsuperscript{303} Strukov (59)
moment of aberration, of madness, call it what you will. At the next stage, the idea becomes flesh and blood.”\textsuperscript{304} For Tarkovsky, on the other hand, the planet’s strange manifestations become something else: not so much aberration, but a natural extension of the virtualization of the past into present, or the transition of memory into matter made palpable by the very grammar of the film itself. The visitors are not quite virtual reality ghosts, or the nightmares of Lem’s Kelvin, since their simulacral modality “could be understood as disguised distinct categories of individuation disguising/masking the pre-individual, metastable state of the planet Solaris and its ocean.”\textsuperscript{305}

To consider the film in terms of virtual technics, it is necessary to define the concept of virtuality. As posited by Gilles Deleuze, virtuality has a reality in its own right: it is that reality from which actuality appears, and appears in terms of difference rather than in terms representation. The concept of the virtual, traced back to Henri Bergson, distinguishes the virtual from the actual as that which exists before matter (as image) is affected by the consciousness of the actor versus that which exists at the point of such interaction, or difference. Thus, memory as virtuality exists at the ever-advancing boundary between the past and the present, as a sort of a conduit between pure memory and pure matter, always at the intersection between the two. The present actualizes as duration, or virtuality in the process of becoming-actual: “The present is not; rather, it is pure becoming, always outside itself. It is not, but it acts. Its proper element is not being

\textsuperscript{304} Lem (71)  
\textsuperscript{305} Riley (54-55)
but the active or the useful. The past, on the other hand, has ceased to act or be useful”.

Virtuality, then, is not simply “almost” reality rendered through a medium, but a reality actualized from the virtual by a process of individuation. According to Laura Marks, this idea of memory temporalization

proffers an image of time as always splitting into two parts: the time that moves smoothly forward, or the “present that passes”; and the time that is seized and represented (if only mentally), or the “past that is preserved.”

What Deleuze, following Bergson, refers to as the actual image and the virtual image are the two aspects of time as it splits, the actual image corresponding to the present that passes, the virtual image to the past that is preserved.307

Bernard Stiegler likewise formulates memory as virtual by finding ways in which it is inscribed by and through technics – technics that is always already there before the subject, constituting the subject. Consequently, memory insofar as it pertains to the subject as a matter of technical inscription may be understood as prosthetic, and unique to the technicity pertinent to the individual creating and using the technics that constitutes them both, simultaneously: “this technical phenomenon is the relation of the human to its milieu”.308

Thus, while Deleuze via Bergson locates individuation at the boundary of memory and matter as the virtual becoming actualized, Stiegler complicates the issue by

306 Deleuze, Bergsonism (55)
307 Marks (40)
308 Stiegler (49)
considering what happens to such individuation when the matter in question, the Bergsonian aggregate of images, possesses a technicity, and thus a special scriptive and shaping faculty. These two understandings of memory suggest a dual and, at times, oppositional concept: arepresentational memory as such is virtual, but memory as inscription is prosthetic.

I read *Solaris* by deploying these two conceptions of memory, first and foremost, because like almost all of Tarkovsky’s films, it examines memory and meditates on the ways it constitutes its characters. His method is memory, broadly understood as a relationship between present actualization of the subject and the past out of which it becomes actual: “for Tarkovsky the approach of transforming facts into what is most commonly called ‘fiction’ is based on sophisticated reflections upon the relationship between history and the present”.*309* What is unique and tantalizing about *Solaris* within Tarkovsky’s oeuvre is that by using and subverting sci-fi conventions, it manages to consider memory in two separate but related ways (of course, *Stalker* also does this to a certain extent, but without such explicit trappings of genre and cinematic history briefly outlined above). In *Solaris*, it is both prosthetic and virtual: on the one hand, memory is inscribed in the technological apparatuses of cultural recording as well as those of space exploration and the sciences. On the other hand, the film’s central problem of memory as virtual becoming actual is explored through the sentient ocean of the title, which is responsible first for bringing to life certain memories and/or desires of its human explorers and then, in the baffling finale, recreating the very earthly milieu from which

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*309* Botz-Bornstein (1)
they came. By visually combining these two kinds of memory, Tarkovsky continues and extends Lem’s commentary on the inherent incommensurability of human sciences and a truly alien life form, but also comments more specifically on technics as the constitutive other of human memory pitted against the non-technical (and largely illogical, in human terms) virtual capacity of Solaris.

The film is primarily concerned with several scientists inhabiting a nearly abandoned space station orbiting Solaris, a planet-sized living ocean which, during the course of the film, is revealed as a sort of dream machine whose workings are experienced by these scientists, but most significantly by psychologist Kris Kelvin. Kelvin goes to Solaris in order to evaluate the mission’s progress and to determine whether the station should be closed for good: Solaristics as a science has reached an impasse, and he functions, early in the film, as a kind of bureaucratic presence who threatens to end the study of the inscrutable ocean. This scientific plot is perforce abandoned when, upon his arrival to the station, Kelvin discovers that aside from the human scientists, it is populated by occasional visitors who appear human but are not. Things become especially uncomfortable when he is confronted by the specter of his dead wife, Harey, though she is not really spectral but palpably material (it is discovered that the visitors are neutrino-based life forms).

While relatively faithful to the source novel, the film does depart from it in significant ways. The action on the space station is reproduced fairly faithfully; however, the long opening sequence on Earth depicting Kelvin before his departure, as well as the shorter final section, add new material to Lem’s work. This is part of the reason why the
author largely disavowed the film: to him, as well as to various critics, it seemed that Tarkovsky elided significant sections of the novel that dealt with Solaristics as science and treated scientific cognition with a particular sense of irony. Rather than maintaining the element of satire, the film concentrates on the deep examination of human morality, which, for Lem, was ostensibly irrelevant when applied to an incomprehensible alien intelligence. For example, according to Krzysztof Loska, Tarkovsky rethought the central issue of the text; for him, “it is a test of human behavior in inhumane circumstances that, from a broader perspective, forces us to consider a fundamental discrepancy between technological advancement and spiritual development; humanity seems to be morally unprepared for the consequences of technological progress.” Indeed, it is important to note that a critique of technological advancement is present in both versions: the central piece of the first Earth section of the film is concerned with the Berton tape, a recording of a scientific proceeding in which Berton, a pilot working on the station, is questioned by a committee of scientists who ultimately ignore his reports of unusual actualizations on the surface of Solaris. The scientific inquest is shot in stark black and white and conducted by humorless men in rumpled suits. The scene can be read as a critique of Soviet scientific bureaucracy and scientific totalitarianism and, in fact, of communist party proceedings of the time (this is by far the most politically charged moment of the film, and one that a contemporary Russian audience would likely recognize as such); in fact both the film and Lem’s work has been interpreted this way. For my purposes, however, it is important to note the specific cinematic devices Tarkovsky deploys: the

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310 Loska (162)
tape not only precludes creative thinking among the Solarists, but also similarly disrupts real human communication between Kelvin and Berton. Isolated and shamed by the spectacle of his trial, the old pilot drives away from the serene natural beauty of the country dacha in a nearly five-minute long scene that depicts nothing but forbidding labyrinthine freeway enclosures (Tarkovsky shot the “city of the future” sequence in Japan). The scene is remarkable for its oddity in an otherwise strange film: by returning the viewer to the black and white of the earlier inquisition scene, Tarkovsky draws attention to Berton’s continued alienation and humiliation. Almost the entire first minute of the sequence consists of a long POV take, presumably through a car windshield. As audience members, we are not sure where we are, or even who we are: while this shot is perhaps the film’s clearest representation of linearity, it is divorced from personal temporality, time as “a condition of the existence of our ‘I’.”311 The scene intercuts these long takes with three quarter shots of Berton from front, back, and side, seated in the back of the car, solemnly thinking. In the front shots, we see his face through an extra pane of glass, presumably separating the driver and the passengers. His son is with him as well, but farther back, in what appears to be a third row of seats, as if the inner space of the vehicle expands on demand. Even though they cling close to each other as ominous monoliths of the modern city flash by, we have a growing sense that this is not a genuine closeness but a defense. The father/son dynamic here foreshadows the film’s conclusion even as the scene gains color, the camera zooms out, and night falls on the city which becomes, visually, a dizzying dance of blinking lights. This is, for Solaris, as close as we

311 Tarkovsky. Sculpting in Time (57)
get to a visual journey into space; while many critics have pointed out that Tarkovsky chose to eschew depicting Kelvin’s flight, the city of the future sequence, both structurally and visually, works to connect the drive and the flight, uniting all technical elements into an ominous presence, from the inquest to the drive to the flight. Thus, in this part of the film, technoscience appears as a deeply alienating force, reflecting what J.P Telotte calls “the tension of distance and detachment” prevalent in science fiction films of the Machine Age, symptomatic of “a modern culture that is intensely aware of the problem of distance.”312 Here, the distance and detachment are not simply representative of modern “lostness” amid the machinery of the everyday, but a separation of the “I” from the memory of self, a kind of temporal amnesia reminiscent of Billy Pilgrim’s becoming “unstuck in time.” According to Tarkovsky, “falling out of time, [a person] is unable to seize his own link with the outside world – in other words, he is doomed to madness.”313

However, the film does not simply oppose technology and science to morality and spirituality through the use of such “natural” alternatives as nature and art as a matter of artistic or moral preference. Tarkovsky does concentrate heavily of both of these, and we can see it in his many long takes in which the camera lingers lovingly on trees, grasses, horses, and dogs, as well as repeated depictions of paintings, books, and sculptures. However, rather than focusing on the subject matter of these shots, I would like to concentrate on their formal elements, or those attributes that allow the director to create

312 Telotte (21)
313 Tarkovsky, Sculpting in Time (57-58)
memory as experiential temporality so unlike the alienating sequences discussed above. This is the quality of Tarkovsky’s work that allows Deleuze to use it in his discussion of the time-image in Cinema 2 to distinguish between montage proper, or the way film images are linked, and the way the image itself can show, since within every shot there is “a conflict between and object and its special nature or between an event and its temporal nature.”

For Deleuze, the way montage appears in the image itself is through the direct time-image, and Tarkovsky aims for and accomplishes precisely this in his images:

In [Sculpting in Time] Tarkovsky says that what is essential is the way time flows in the shot, its tension or rarefaction, “the pressure of time in the shot.” He appears to subscribe to the classical alternative, shot or montage, and to opt strongly for the shot (“the cinematographic figure only exists inside the shot”). But this is only a superficial appearance, because the force or pressure of time goes outside the limits of the shot, the montage itself works and lives in time. What Tarkovsky denies is that cinema is like a language working with units, even if these are relative and of different orders: montage is not a unit of higher order which exercises power over unit-shots and which would thereby endow movement-images with time as a new quality.

Most notably, the film’s opening shot, a close-up of the flowing weeds in the pond outside of Kelvin’s father’s dacha, functions as a representation of time within the shot.

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314 Botz-Bornstein (2)

315 Deleuze, Cinema 2 (42)
The weeds flow, and the pond’s currents flow, while Kelvin wanders the landscape to, as we learn later, say good-bye to it, his memories of his own past, and his father. The unity of time and image, briefly established here, is also indicative of a certain kind of attentive spectatorship that Tarkovsky develops between Kris and his surroundings as well as between the viewer and film, one largely based on attentive recognition. This is perception always grounded in memory and the virtual, since, in Bergsonian terms, “we do not ‘perceive’ an optical image purely in the cognitive sense, but rather our ‘attentive recognition’ comes into play, [or] the way a perceiver oscillates between seeing the object, recalling virtual images that it brings to memory, and comparing the virtual object thus created with the one before us.”316 The scene is also a good example of the way Tarkovsky’s cinema creates time-images; as Jennifer Barker puts it, “the wind in Tarkovsky’s trees carries a sense of a world greater than any individual but that subtends and makes possible all individual, embodied sensations and actions.”317

In his analysis of Tarkovsky through the work of Deleuze, Mark Riley sees duration in the director’s films as the fusion of the “pastness” of the recorded event and the “presentness” of its viewing as “the indivisible unity of virtual image and actual image. This understands the virtual as subjective or in the past – a ‘pure recollection’ that exists outside consciousness in time but somewhere in a temporal past, and which is still alive and ready to be recalled by the actual.”318 Thus, the film combines its formal

316 Marks (48)
317 Barker (153)
318 Riley (53)
manner and its subject matter: it is virtual memory in the way it is made and deals with virtual memory as strange material manifestations.

The sentient ocean is indeed responsible for the film’s strange actualizations, which are virtual becomings *par excellence*:

If matter were already an image in the sense of a fundamental appearing, it becomes luminous in that all that could be perceived would be already inherent as the replete state of the image. Deleuze refers to this condition as the ‘plane of immanence’ and this is essentially virtual to the extent that the requirements of the corporeal (the body) demand that the limits are put in place on what can actually be apprehended in matter.

The film concentrates on these actualizations, indeed builds its central conflict around them, both visually and philosophically. For Lem, the appearance of the guests generated by the ocean’s sentience was a similarly crucial, but by no means solitary way of dealing with virtual materializations. In the novel, aside from generating the visitors, the ocean produces two types of physical outgrowths: mimoids, which appear on its surface and whose appearance is based on actual objects, and symmetriads, giant four-dimensional constructions that have some relationship to Lobachevsky and Riemann because they can only be expressed in equations that “use a temporal symbolism expressed in the internal changes over a given period.”

Thus, these objects combine memory and matter in time.

The film retains these objects only in Berton’s narrative – he describes seeing landscapes

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319 Ibid (61)

320 Lem (119)
and a giant baby culled from the memories of Fechner, the lost pilot – and again, ambiguously, in the film’s final sequence. However, Tarkovsky manages to achieve a similar level of complexity through the situation of Kris and Harey, who is also, after all, an outgrowth of the ocean. The film only shows the ocean of Solaris from a distance, visually avoiding the mimoids and symmetriads that temporarily thrust themselves above the ocean, and that possess beauty but present an unknowable level of complexity. However, Harey is a similar mystery, whose appearance “finds the viewer asking what [she] knows, how does she understand her situation, what is the basis of her remarkable recovery and reduplicative processes.”

Before examining Harey in her filmic incarnation, however, I would like to consider the ocean itself as an important visual component and character in Solaris. Famously created with acetone, aluminum powder, and dyes, the ocean appears as a living thing through its real, living organic chemical reaction, roiling, coagulating, and forming shapes on screen in long takes that mirror those of the tarn weeds of the beginning. Although a relatively small percentage of the film is taken up by these shots, their undulations and crystallizations – the latter again occurs in the final scene when the tarn is frozen over – make the entire work feel filled with waves and crystals. The ocean ferments and hardens, and, before we have the film’s actual appearances of crystallized manifestations – before mimoids, symmetriads, and visitors – we have the ocean itself as a giant virtual engine out of which the eventual crystals arise: a world that, in Deleuze’s words, surrounds the images, giving their actuality a virtuality.

321 Miall (325)
In *Cinema 2*, Deleuze discusses cinema in terms of “crystals of time,” whose images have “two sides, actual and virtual.” The concept of the crystal is an important way to combine the different kinds of images present in cinema within time a kind of seed of expression:

> The crystal is expression. Expression moves from the mirror to the seed. It is the same circuit which passes through three figures, the actual and the virtual, the limpid and the opaque, the seed and the environment. In fact, the seed is on the one hand the virtual image which will crystallize an environment which is at present amorphous; but on the other hand the latter must have a structure which is virtually crystallizable, in relation to which the seed now plays the role of actual image.

The complex relationship between the virtual and actual, between that which preexists actualization and that which is actually, physically present as matter which is, after all, the aggregate of images, is captured by the crystal metaphor and reflected by Tarkovsky’s film. Solaris the ocean is the virtual engine that strangely produces the materially nonexistent but virtually real guests, while *Solaris* the film does the same with the virtual memory of the viewer, the search for past as memory. If the film is a failure, as Tarkovsky himself would later claim, it is not merely because it failed to avoid

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322 Deleuze, *Cinema 2* (68)

323 Ibid (74)

324 *Voyage in Time*
trappings of genre, but because, ultimately the search for the lost time, or reconciliation of image and memory, the virtual and the actual, never quite takes place:

Are we to believe that the soft planet Solaris gives a reply, and that it will reconcile the ocean and thought, the environment and the seed, at once designating the transparent face of the crystal (the rediscovered woman) and the crystallizable form of the universe (the rediscovered dwelling)?

*Solaris* does not open up this optimism.\(^{325}\)

In fact, the film ambiguity is a direct engagement with the problems explored by Lem, specifically the relationships between matter and consciousness, or, to paraphrase in Bergsonian/Deleuzean terms, of matter and memory. The problem of memory that no one could or dared externalize individuated as flesh and blood is thus explored by the film through contact with an alien creative becoming, an ocean that is no more a giant brain than, in the words of Snaut, “an elephant is a giant microbe.” Indeed, it is no coincidence that Snaut, the cybernetician, becomes the de-facto explainer for the kind of contact taking place on the space station. When he claims that “we need mirrors” and “we don’t know what to do with other worlds,” he is not simply championing a kind of humanistic isolationism: mirrors with images, or mirrors as images, are indeed needed, at the most basic level, for human individuation. In the film, the simple distinction of mirrors and worlds is complicated when another world is also a mirror, as are the human characters who inhabit it. This is one way to explain Tarkovsky’s visual insistence on specularity and reflection: according to Mark Le Fanu, “so much of the film is simply involved in

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\(^{325}\) Deleuze, *Cinema 2* (74)
looking, thinking, standing still – thought’s power sent out and bounded back, as it were.”

But of course, as I suggest above, the ocean is much more than just a mirror, or an image – it is also itself virtual memory; it also actualizes. In this creation, Lem found a perfect instantiation and a perfect metaphor of the virtual: a swirling mass that actualizes itself in strange ways. Its temporary forms – mimoids and symmetriads – function for the ocean in the same way that guest-Harey functions for Kelvin: they are projections on the surface of the planet that clearly respond to the scientists. Because it is a temporal engine, and because the film adopts something of an oceanic temporal rhythm, one of the accomplishments of Tarkovsky’s work becomes the increased problematization of time and space. While the film lacks science-fiction kineticism and directionality, it creates a dreamlike quality that suggests a subjective time:

On the one hand, Tarkovsky develops a systematic pattern of using extended sequence shots to create a sense of ‘real time’; these rarely last more two or three minutes[...] but are frequent enough to impose a certain measured and rhythmic pattern on the film. On the other hand, it soon becomes impossible to judge the progress of time on the space station.

Thus, by the time Kris experiences his fever and dreams extensively of Harey who has become indistinguishable from his mother, both he and the audience find it difficult to distinguish between fantasy and reality, or memory and reality. This section represents

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326 Le Fanu (57)

327 Johnson and Petrie (109-10)
Tarkovsky’s most overt psychological probing of his characters. Many critics have discussed this doubling of wife and mother, as well as the experiences of Harey herself, in order to understand Kelvin and the psychological implications of the film.\textsuperscript{328} Similarly, the film makes certain interesting choices by dialing down the obvious gendered, racial, and sexual dimensions the guests possess in the novel – for instance, Gibarian’s visitor in the novel is a “giant Negress” with “enormous breasts”\textsuperscript{329} and not the film’s blonde – which also suggest a kind of psychological fugue that envelops Kris and the other characters at the station. This “psychological” angle is a natural approach to the film’s mysteries, and, arguably, both the intention and ultimate failure of the 2002 Steven Soderbergh’s remake of \textit{Solaris}, which essentially places Harey (renamed Rheya) on Kelvin’s literal and metaphorical analytical couch. The film attempts to offer psychological answers which, as Lem and Tarkovsky both suggest, are not forthcoming – Kris, despite his qualifications, is largely powerless to understand his guest, and, consequently, himself.

This radical inability to understand is indeed the most important reason why Harey’s presence is so uncanny. She is certainly complex as a combined wife/mother figure, and like a good repressed memory, she is gone but not gone. But in a doubly uncanny turn, she is also not Harey but Kris individuated as not-Kris, transducting his memories, his pastness, into the present via another embodied state. Lem indicates this in his novel’s description of the initial appearance. Narrated by Kris in first-person, the

\textsuperscript{328} See, for example, J.M. Purcell’s “Tarkovsky's Film \textit{Solaris} (1972): A Freudian Slip?” in \textit{Extrapolations} (1978).

\textsuperscript{329} Lem (30)
dreamlike fugue that precedes the manifestation is clearly all about him internalizing what he thinks may have been the experiences of his dead wife: “It was as though, in my sleep, I tried to relive what she had gone through.” Tarkovsky’s audience also understands this problem relatively early in the film when, shortly after her appearance, Harey mentions Snaut, whom she could not have known from her earthly “human” experience. Solaris, with its neutrino-stabilizing power, becomes a kind of engine of the virtual – it is the image, or section of matter, toward which Kelvin actualizes in completely inhuman terms. Thus, it would be an oversimplification to suggest that Tarkovsky ignores the metaphysical dimension of the novel in favor of exploring guilt and human psychology – while Kelvin does experience feelings of guilt about his wife’s suicide, his connection to guest-Harey is just as much the result of a new and alien individuation which finally connects this isolated character to his own memory: “the visitors as simulacra could be understood as disguised distinct categories of individuation disguising/masking the pre-individual, metastable state of the planet Solaris and its ocean”; “Kelvin’s ‘visitor’ becomes a manifestation of an intensity of his memory and has no identity of its own. It is unable to exist except in proximity to him – relying on him to form its identity.” The identity of the visitors, who are outgrowths of the ocean but also new versions of the scientists themselves, remains the most challenging aspect of the film, and Tarkovsky’s insistence on avoiding spectrality for the sake of palpable

330 Ibid (55)
331 Riley (52-62)

physicality of the guests suggests that he is, in fact, very interested in the metaphysics of the virtual.

Guest-Harey’s appearance, both in the sense of *manifestation* and *looks*, is defined by a strange physical way of being. Tarkovsky follows Lem’s novel in explaining her presence through quantum physics: she is neutrino-based, not atomic but corpuscular, built from nothingness via a particular structure. She resembles Harey in every way save for tiny details: her macramé dress, a single symbol connecting her to Kelvin’s mother and the idyllic country aesthetic, looks exactly right but lacks one important element – an opening which could be used to put it on or take it off. This detail is important for Kris’s and our understanding of guest-Harey strangeness, but also creates a touching moment when, in a scene of uncharacteristic tenderness, he cuts her out of the dress, metaphorically liberating her from the untenable constraints of her terrestrial form. But this is only the most tender and innocuous moment of the film dealing with her troubling corporeality. Upon her arrival, Kris, initially confused and fearing for his own sanity, lures her into an escape pod, blasting her out into space in a scene dominated by flames. Twice after, guest-Harey attempts suicide mirroring the fate of real Harey, first by bursting through a metal door and later, by drinking liquid nitrogen. In each scene, Tarkovsky concentrates on the bodily damage being done to this creature of unknown origin: her appearances are always quiet, indeed stealthy, while her departures are filled with noise, violence, and clamorous refusal to go into that good night. Without question, these are the loudest parts of the film, which suggest the impossibility of relegating memory to the realm of non-being: the virtual engine producing them is non-technical, in
a strict sense, but it is nonetheless material, facilitating individuations that are unambiguously flesh.

The film’s intention, then, is to highlight the material nature of the ocean’s outgrowths. In the novel, the scientists explore not just the guests, but also the mimoids, those surface outgrowths that similarly recreate earthly scenes. Significantly, in Lem’s final scene takes place after Harey has been destroyed by Sartorius’s neutrino annihilator, Kelvin wanders the surface of the old mimoid on the planet’s surface hoping for new “cruel miracles.” Without using the old mimoid, Tarkovsky’s version of the ending achieves a similar effect. In his final scene, Kris appears to be back on Earth, approaching his father’s house as he did in the beginning of the film. There is the old tarn again, though its weeds are frozen in ice and therefore lack movement. This detail adds an uncanny feeling to the return, and this sense only grows as Kris approaches his father’s house. As Bach’s cantata from the opening plays, this time rendered eerily technical through composer Eduard Artemyev’s use of the ANS synthesizer, the scene becomes stranger when rain begins to fall indoors, inside of the father’s house. As the camera pans out upward, we realize that the dacha of the opening section is located on a mimoid, an island on the surface of the ocean.

The scene is fundamentally disconcerting because it deceives the viewer momentarily until the indoor rain gives away the secret that is confirmed by the final

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332 This may have been a simple continuity error, since Tarkovsky suggested in interviews that because of filming delays, the shooting of the return took place in winter and the tarn froze. Nevertheless, the detail’s ultimate inclusion in the film suggests that it offers an important variation to one of its central images.

333 Schmelz (260)
aerial pan-out: this is still Solaris. Kelvin has returned to his father’s home only to realize that this nostalgic past is only available as an actualization through the virtual engine of the ocean combined, in unexplained ways, with Kelvin’s memory. This is contact, a close encounter of the virtual kind, and the father whom Kris embraces is not his father, but this is the closest thing available to him. It is also ambiguous in the way it leaves the ultimate denouement of the film to uncertainty, made even more startling because it “forces a reconceptualization of the feelings and ideas experienced up until that point, a process whose necessity Tarkovsky signals by taking the viewer back to what appears to be the same place.”334 The wrongness of the rain and the freezing of the weeds in the tarn indicate that Kris is unable, on some level, to re-establish the easy connection with nature, family, and memory he may have had briefly at the opening of the film. Of course, the scene also forces us to re-examine whether there was ever any ease or comfort anywhere in the film, and if so, how much. And yet, as David Miall argues, the scene is also strangely life-affirming precisely because it recreates, incorporates, and transcends the tenuous serenity of the beginning: “The close of Solaris has an emotional logic, demonstrating the end point of Kris’ descent into himself initiated by the reappearance of Harey and the commitment she came to represent. Therefore, the final embrace of his father evokes what his conscience has enabled him to recognize.”335 The recognition, mainly self-recognition that reconciles the past and the present, while still ambiguous, is still reflective of Kris at his most introspective, most guilty, most nostalgic. This is, for

334 Miall (327)
335 Ibid (327)
Solaris, the ultimate boon, the only available triumph. Ultimately, Kris fails to individuate because he can only experience projections of phantoms from his past.

That final embrace between Kris and his father, an unmistakable tableau vivant imitating Rembrandt’s “The Return of the Prodigal Son,” suggests some hope for human reconciliation. However, more importantly, it also highlights the human need for prostheticization of memory. The ocean of Solaris, by functioning as a virtual engine, disrupts the normal modes of individuation, and this is both disturbing and fascinating: when the camera rises above the scene, it is no longer clear whose present we are watching. The father/son reunion can only happen at the intersection of the human/alien becoming; in human terms, all we get is representation via art. While critics have often commented on this aspect of the film to suggest that it speaks of the director’s preference for nature and art over science and technology, their role in the overall work is at least somewhat ambiguous. The audience may experience this supposed preference and appreciate the nostalgic beauty of nature or the way the camera slowly pans in close-up over Brueghel’s “Hunters in the Snow” during the library weightlessness scene. Indeed, as Johnson and Petrie argue, “Tarkovsky may be putting forward the claims of a more technological art (film/video) alongside more traditional ones, and an interesting subtheme of the film is the manner in which technology can, in its own way, create the ‘timelessness’ and the ‘immortality’ longed for by artists.”

Nevertheless, it is also clear that Kris himself is not actually moved by either nature or conventional art. The film

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336 Johnson and Petrie (109)
offers a strong sense that Tarkovsky, much as he did in earlier in *Andrei Rublev*, values art but does not trust its visual capacity for capturing memory. Again, the film’s failure, if we are to believe the filmmaker, must be ascribed to an ultimate doubt about its capacity to hold together recollections of the past to create the self: “*Solaris* offers a pessimistic view because it shows that Kris is able to re-live his past only because of the materialization of [Harey]; other media – film, video recording, oral story, literature – fail to augment him.”

Thus, rather than setting up an aesthetic and ethical opposition between technology and nature/art, the film explores the opposition of two kinds of memory – the techno-prosthetic and the virtual. While Berton’s inquest, the city of the future, and the run-down space station certainly all present a critique of the shortcomings of technoscience, failure of space exploration, and overall pessimistic view of such exploration, the recording and inscriptive artifacts used by Kelvin (for example, in the scene where he watches home movies he has brought to the station or the Cervantes he reads in the library) fair no better because they ultimately fail at helping him reconnect with his own past or to properly understand Solaris. It is pessimistic because it shows that Kris is able to re-live his past only because of the actualization of guest-Harey; other media – film, video recording, oral story, literature – continue to fail him.

To return fully to the way *Solaris* critiques, subverts, and resists technoscience, it is useful to consider it against Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Released in 1968, four

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337 In *Andrei Rublev*, ostensibly a biopic of the most important medieval Russian painter, there are no depictions of Rublev’s actual art until the end of the film.

338 Strukov (70)
years before Solaris, Kubrick’s film inevitable drew contemporary comparisons to Tarkovsky’s space epic. In the years since, critics have linked the two films not just because of their similar subject matter – the mysteries of space exploration – but for certain visual similarities as well. Perhaps even more importantly, both works at their heart seem concerned with examining the ways technologies, both alien and human, develop, constitute, and reflect the very nature of the human subject. However, Kubrick’s film revolutionary impact relies largely on the way it fictionalizes the actual contemporary experiences of space exploration. Its arrival eight years after Gagarin’s first manned space flight and three years after Leonov’s first space walk puts it squarely into the mythos of space of the 1960; it is as though Kubrick’s film became the instantiation of the very real hopes and fears of the world on the edge of contact. It is a natural follow-up to 1964’s Dr. Strangelove, an American response to what had largely been, up to that point, a Soviet adventure in space: the Apollo 11 moon landing would not happen for another year, and the film envisioned the small first step in lieu of actual correlative. By largely stripping the film of dialogue and insisting on technological verisimilitude of its space scenes, Kubrick seems to continue the earlier tradition of triumphant space epics of Soviet cinema, concentrating on the sheer visual awe of space, its rockets, and their gleaming interiors. This is not to suggest, of course, that 2001 is a triumphal propagandist celebration of space exploration: while David “Dave” Bowman (Keir Dullea) is certainly closer to the hero-aviator figure than Kelvin can ever hope to be, and while his Discovery spacecraft operates with surgical precision – with the important exception of HAL 9000 – Kubrick’s film often feels cold, sterile, and claustrophobic, both inside the capsules and
out. In other words, it would be false to read *2001* as a celebration of technoscience—though it is at the technical level of filming itself—and *Solaris* as its skeptical condemnation. Indeed, Kubrick’s film, while appearing to visually celebrate technology, questions its humanity and functionality, and it is no surprise that HAL malfunctions, kills the astronauts, and must be disabled.

These, then, are depictions of human technological becoming that bear comparison between between the two films. Though Tarkovsky elides Kelvin’s actual flight, the central section of the film takes place aboard the station which may as well be an older, more ruinous version of *Discovery* or the lunar orbiting station from the second chapter of *2001*; “the actual imagery of the computerized technology involved in spaceship living is[…] not so very different between the two movies.”339 The Solaris station is decrepit, wearing signs of years of misuse and desuetude that reflect Lem’s conception of Solaristics, the science that caused its existence and that slowly failed, making its physical component—the floating vessel—bear the visual signs of this failure. The walls have built-in control machinery and computer components that are disassembled, loose-wired, and covered by plastic, speaking not so much of the technology in and of it itself, but of its human use and usefulness. While HAL turns malignant and attacks the human astronauts aboard *Discovery*, it is the humans, in *Solaris*, who have forsaken the technological precisely because of its failure to help them understand the ocean and, consequently, themselves. To the extent that the films’ treatments of technology are similar, both present a view questions our overreliance on

339 Le Fanu (53)
spacecraft, computers, and technical sciences. Technological implements of space exploration, shiny and new in Kubrick’s case and worn out in Tarkovsky’s, both fail the humans involved.

The films are also similar in their concern with alien intelligences and their influences on humanity. Kubrick’s iconic black monoliths, presented as the unknowable technics of an alien, advanced, and unknowable civilization, dominate the film both visually and thematically. They spur human development recursively, teaching humanoid apes to use tools and ultimately turning Dave into a disembodied spirit-being, thus suggesting a new stage of evolution untethered from material existence. The figure of the monolith functions both as Leroi-Gourhan’s mnemonic ur-tool and as a pathway to a posthuman, postmaterial state: importantly, while human devices fail, alien ones do not. In fact, through the famous match cut of the thrown bone club and the orbiting spacecraft we are given to understand that these human devices are always already alien devices, reshapes and rematerialized. In Solaris, there is no such symbol: the ocean is a potent wasteland, powerful but always ultimately unknowable. It does not push the humans forward, but returns them back to earth, to their own memories. Murray’s summary suggests that despite of their similarities, “where Kubrick’s film was about technology shaping human evolution Tarkovsky’s was about loss, grief, and the human spirit, tied together with some very personal iconography, signaling his recurring interest in his own childhood memories, the history of the Russian people and the nature of art.”  

\[340\] Murray (100)
while *Solaris*, despite its melancholic aesthetic and, in the words of Pauline Kael, “depressive” view of the universe, affirms memory that is ultimately creative, virtual, and arepresentational in conventional terms. It is not scriptive; it stirs in the time-image of film, combining in unexpected ways with technical memory of prosthesis.

Because of this special dual quality of Tarkovsky’s film, it might be more usefully compared not with the technically pristine austerity of Kubrick, but with the work of Terrence Malick, another iconic American director. It is not simply that Malick’s works possess a certain visual quality that feels similar to Tarkovsky’s – though they do – but rather their ineffable insistence on meditative memory. And even though the resulting films feel similar, there are significant differences in the methods of each filmmaker. While Tarkovsky tests the audience with seemingly never-ending takes, Malick’s effect comes from editing-room work, especially in his later films, rendering the grand dramas of migrant labor (*Days of Heaven*), the Battle of Guadalcanal (*The Thin Red Line*), the conquest of the new world (*The New World*), and the history of the universe through a prism of Texan suburbia (*The Tree of Life*) “in fleeting, ambiguous vignettes. In *his* films, the relationship of each scene and shot to the narrative is frequently indeterminate; images, moments, and sequences don’t so much build as accumulate.”\(^{341}\) In each consecutive film, the length of takes Malick uses decreases, while he increasingly destabilizes the continuity and traditional straight-line temporality of his films by seemingly random intercutting and jump cuts that disrupt the very sense of time within specific sequences.

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\(^{341}\) Wisniewski
Still, the shots themselves contain that Tarkovskian “wind in the trees,” suggestive of generative spaces that contain both the crystal of expression and its virtual memory. In her famous not-quite-pan of *Days of Heaven*, Kael described it as an empty Christmas tree, going on to say that one is free to hang metaphors on it as one wishes. Of course, this is accurate in an important sense: Malick creates a canvas out of which images emerge; however, there is no need for metaphor when memory is involved, since metaphors are about representation, not actualization. A film like *Days of Heaven*, which on the page may have looked like a naturalist novel contemporary of its setting, reflects and embodies the memory of the filmmaker, the audience, and Linda (Linda Manz), the folksy and wise child-narrator of the film. For the girl, the film’s temporality, reversible and unreliable – note the oddly beautiful scene when snow falls on the Texas panhandle farm to momentarily interrupt the work sequences and then promptly disappear and be forgotten – creates a personal memory of her pseudo-family. For the audience, the film evokes a memory of a certain American moment in the early twentieth century when the vast prairie expanses ceased to be wild and machinery of trains and combine harvesters slowly took over. For Malick, the film may have been, on some level, a critique of the migrant worker system, its inequalities, or perhaps the perils of poverty and crime. However, these films ultimately work as virtual tapestries of American experience.

Malick, a Heideggerian scholar, is always concerned with the way being becomes actualized, and his cinema reflects this concern. Like Tarkovsky’s work in science fiction, it uses established genre – crime drama, western, romance, war film, and historical epic – to draw attention to the actualization within film itself. This is film itself
as memory of modernity, prosthetisizing the epoch that is its unique contemporary, an artform singularly born out of technological invention. In Tarkovsky’s view, film’s destined role was to fill, for its viewer, “that spiritual vacuum which has formed as a result of the specific conditions of his [sic] modern existence: constant activity, curtailment of human contact, and the materialist bent of modern education.”

In a modern world that has made it impossible to remember it, cinema provides “one aspect of our spiritual and emotional discovery of surrounding reality” – not its past, but its memory.

\[342\] Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time* (83)

\[343\] Ibid (82)
Conclusion
Memory 2.0: New Media, Technics, and Time

I remember that month of January in Tokyo – or rather I remember the images I filmed in that month of January in Tokyo. They have substituted themselves for my memory – they are my memory. I wonder how people remember things who don’t film, don’t photograph, don’t tape? How has mankind managed to remember? I know – the Bible. The new bible will be the eternal magnetic tape of a time that will have to re-read itself constantly just to know it existed.

--Chris Marker, Sans Soleil

Chris Marker made his multimedia work Immemory in 1998, during the last years before the fundamental shift to web-based media fulfilled the promise of consigning conventional – and less conventional – recorded media to the dustbin of history. Released on CD-ROM, an acronym the last part of which stands for “read-only memory,” the work appears to be positioning itself a culmination of sorts to a career spend considering memory through writing, shooting, filming, and narrating. Marker first made his mark with La Jetée, a 1962 short film that grapples with the aftermath of WWII, time travel, Hitchcock’s Vertigo, time, and memory. In fact, La Jetée is not a film in a conventional sense: it consists almost entirely of still images, and Marker himself calls it a photo-roman, literally a photo novel, but the moniker similarly invokes filmed comic strips popular in the 1950s and 60s. Regardless of its particular designation, it is a strange beast,
a dream-like science fiction narrative about a post-apocalyptic time traveler who must go back to the past in order to collect sustenance for a post-WWIII Paris now relocated entirely underground. The plot, if it is a plot, coils back on itself like a Möbius strip, combining past, present, and future into a single temporal dimension marked by photographs, the only nodes through which time travel is possible.

Marker’s own description of the film as “automatic writing” suggests that while he was filming a story that he did not completely understand – at least in terms of narrative structure – was attempting to grapple with issues of the way memory exists in two conflicting and intersecting ways: as personal temporality and as prosthetic mediation. This is also the problem of the nameless time traveler: he works with images that are not anywhere but in the film itself – we may assume that the pseudo-technical blindfold he wears when attempting his time jaunts functions as a kind of temporal prosthesis while the filmed images themselves function that way for the audience. Having already expressed skepticism about the very notion of automatic writing as such in a previous chapter, I would nevertheless like to draw attention to the way automatic image-taking, if we take Marker at his word, combines with the cinematic movement of montage so that this combination of photographic and cinematic images drifts “between objective and subjective functions,” or, put another way, between the archived memory of a medium and the living memory of the image’s perception by an observer. This begins to get at his view of history, which is “historical time [that] involves an index

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344 Douhaire and Rivoire
345 Warner (15)
which refers at once to a past moment of inscription and to a yet-to-come moment of readability." La Jetée, presenting us with atomized time that must be recombined in the process of the viewing, which creates a sense of personal motion, dramatizes the breakdown of time’s flow and our experience of duration simultaneously.

In Sans Soleil, Marker’s 1983 meta-documentary that continues this meditation on the relationship between time and memory, the director further suggests that mediated memories complicate human ability to recall both nuance and context, which disrupts both personal and global histories in significant ways. Again, the experimental nature of the film foregrounds these concerns: Sans Soleil is composed of stock footage and documentary recordings, all the while invoking other films such as La Jetée, Vertigo, and Tarkovsky’s Stalker. Perhaps the most challenging aspect of the film’s structure is its narrative position: while the images tell – or fail to tell – their stories, the voice-over, belonging to an unnamed female narrator, reads a series of letters from Sandor Krasna, a Marker alter-ego and a cameraman who is collecting the film’s images while traveling the globe. If these images are memories, then whose memories are they? This thrice-removal from the film’s author (the name “Marker” itself is a literal nom-de-plume – the artist had renamed himself after a pen) suggests a fundamental concern, grown more insistent in the twenty years since La Jetée, for the mnemonic crisis of contemporary life. The problem of the film, then, is not just that of remembering, but also of forgetting, since “Krasna is troubled by the increasing likelihood of total recall,” something that

346 Ibid
347 Ibid
threatens individual memory because of the uncontrollable rise of a new archive. How do we connect images of happiness to a collection of images dominated by horror? How do we revisit history through images gleaned from repositories, images that have uncertain origins? How can we remember ourselves in a world where all images are preserved and depersonalized?

Moving from analog to digital media in *Immemory*, Marker is concerned with these questions more than he is by the actual medial changes inherent in the move. While he saw CD-ROM as an ideal medium, it was not because of its technological attributes, but its “architecture, the tree-like branching.” The work continues the earlier concerns in his other works, offering a radical ambivalence about the possibilities of intermedial crossings. Just as, in an earlier moment of technological reproducibility, Walter Benjamin highlighted both the liberating possibilities and fascistic dangers of the new work of art, Marker attempts to capture the sense in which new media is “both a frontier of possibility and a wasteland of informatics.” It is important to note that at the moment when film, film photography, and analog texts seem to be threatened by the ongoing digital revolution, or what Anne Friedberg terms, somewhat ominously, “the end of cinema,” Marker has launched fully into the possibilities afforded by multimedia. Of course, while using the digital format, the text still largely connects its assorted images and texts “through simple ‘cuts’ and dissolves and digital effects which were far from the cutting

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348 Douhaire and Revoie

349 Warner (18)

350 Friedberg (914)
edge even at the time of the work’s completion. Marker, in his user introduction to the work, suggests that the navigational tools offered in the work are meager partly because “there is nothing in the recent past that really offers us models of what computer navigation on the theme of memory could be.” Navigation is crucial here because it is precisely the geography of memory that the work is after: and the virtual architecture of cyberspace offers the author “a more fruitful approach” to access this immemory – or discontinuous memory of the new media age – while at the same time “offering the visitor a chance for haphazard navigation.” In other words, Marker argues implicitly that the non-linear structure allowed by CD-ROM’s cyberstructures is better at two things: assembling the sheer volume of text and images inherent in any person’s immemory, whether that person is a photographer like Marker himself, and allowing for a personal search for memory in a way that is much closer to the natural processes of the human mind, especially in the age of media overload. This is the domain of a contemporary Proust, and Marker “claim[s] for the image the humility and powers of a madeleine.”

But even though this work wishes to celebrate a small triumph of new media as a greater approximation of contemporary memory, the fact remains that we find ourselves in a new technoculture that, at the end of the modern epoch, continues to struggle with

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351 Warner (19)
352 Marker, Immemory
353 Ibid
354 Ibid
some of the same issues discussed elsewhere in this work. *Immemory* – both as text and as concept – does, in fact, suggest that we may not imagine the computer-mediated modalities of this technoculture simply as fidelity to the way we work, or, in the words of Vannevar Bush, “as we may think.” Bush’s conception of memory is mechanical, and as a result, it gives rise to the idea that we may eventually achieve a technical equivalence in our media that will finally replicate the operations of the human brain. This conception is paradoxical because the brain interacts with the machine and vice versa: “in Bush’s vision, there is no room for the logic that technology also structures, rather than simply reflects, cognition – a serious flaw that is echoed in quite a few contemporary hypertext theories.”355 That is, to suggest that hypertextual and interactive software programs erase mediation, liberating the remembering subject to shrug off the constraints of conventional linear time is to forget both the shaping capabilities of scriptive technologies and the traumatic effect of amnesia. Marker’s work, while embracing the possibilities of new media memory, is also filled with mourning for a monumental loss. What is left is immemory, which is not quite memory.

All representation is based on memory, since the very term implies something that comes after the event, causing a chasm between experience and articulation. This fissure that opens up when a memory is created, according to Andreas Huyssen, “is unavoidable. Rather than lamenting or ignoring it, this split should be understood as a powerful stimulant for cultural and artistic creativity.”356 Looking back on twentieth century, we

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355 Van Dijck (152)
356 Huyssen (3)
must note that since the beginning of its frantic modernization, it has been characterized by a paradox of memory: on the one hand, an entire age seemingly unable to remember itself, and on the other, an age consumed and energized by issues of memory and temporality. To think of memory and its crisis together, then, rather than simply opposing them, suggests that this “mnemonic fever […] is caused by the virus of amnesia that at time threatens to consume memory itself.”\(^{357}\) At the beginning of the new century, temporal anchoring via cultural production becomes even more important, as the fissures of modernity transform into new fissures: intensifying processes of globalization, shifting labor and informational structures, and the destruction of established geo-political orders. We increasingly need cultural memory because it allows us to know who we are, to even attempt personal memories that resist the breakages of modernity and postmodernity in creative, generative ways.

This may be an impossibility now, just as it seemed like an impossibility in an earlier time, when Heidegger drew a sinister picture of Dasein in thrall of Gestell because of modern technics. Stiegler and Huyssen, at the close of the twentieth century, suggest that vital and energizing memory, instead of providing the antidote to this enthrallement, will now instead be an “attempt to slow down information processing, to resist the dissolution of time in the synchronicity of the archive, to recover a mode of contemplation outside the universe of simulation and fast-speed information and cable networks”\(^{358}\) – in other words, to resist the information overload of the cybernetic

\(^{357}\) Ibid (7)

\(^{358}\) Ibid (7)
systems that, having outstripped human time, seem to possess an autonomy beyond human agency. However, in the works traced and discussed in this project, I have attempted to account for some effective resistance to these dehumanizing conditions of modernity. These cultural artifacts, while responding to the pathologies of modern life and outdated discourses of no-longer-relevant histories, nevertheless manage to produce some modicum of exhilaration, freedom, and vitality: a creative memory.
Works Cited


