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The Name and Nature of Modernism

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'Unlike dates, periods are not facts. They are retrospective conceptions that we form about past events, useful to focus discussion, but very often leading historical thought astray.'

G. M. Trevelyan

I

CULTURAL seismology – the attempt to record the shifts and displacements of sensibility that regularly occur in the history of art and literature and thought – habitually distinguishes three separate orders of magnitude. At one end of the scale are those tremors of fashion that seem to come and go in rhythm with the changing generations, the decade being the right unit for measuring the curves that run from first shock to peak activity and on to the dying rumbles of derivative *Epigemitium*. To a second order of magnitude belong those larger displacements whose effects go deeper and last longer, forming those extended periods of style and sensibility which are usefully measured in centuries. This leaves a third category for those overwhelming dislocations, those cataclysmic upheavals of culture, those fundamental convulsions of the creative human spirit that seem to topple even the most solid and substantial of our beliefs and assumptions, leave great areas of the past in ruins (noble ruins, we tell ourselves for reassurance), question an entire civilization or culture, and stimulate frenzied rebuilding. That the twentieth century brought us a new art is undeniable, and it is the purpose of this volume to explore some of its crucial manifestations. But we have also increasingly come to believe

that this new art comes from, or is, an upheaval of the third and cataclysmic order.

This view is not surprising; one of the features of the age we are talking about is that it is remarkably historicist, disposed to apocalyptic, crisis-centred views of history. So familiar is the view that it needs only brief exemplification. Herbert Read, for instance, writing in 1933, puts the point succinctly:

There have been revolutions in the history of art before today. There is a revolution with every new generation, and periodically, every century or so, we get a wider or deeper change of sensibility which is recognized as a period – the Trecento, the Quattro Cento, the Baroque, the Rococo, the Romantic, the Impressionist and so on. But I do think we can already discern a difference in kind in the contemporary revolution: it is not so much a revolution, which implies a turning over, even a turning back, but rather a break-up, a devolution, some would say a dissolution. Its character is catastrophic.

Contemplating the impact first of Gauguin and Van Gogh, then of Picasso, Read claimed that 'we are now concerned, not with a logical development of the art of painting in Europe, not even with a development for which there is any historical parallel, but with an abrupt break with all tradition . . . The aim of five centuries of European effort is openly abandoned.'¹ The late C. S. Lewis constructed his inaugural lecture at Cambridge in 1954, *De Descriptivae Temporum*, on a similar notion. In his view, the greatest of all divisions in the entire history of western man – greater than that which divides Antiquity from the Dark Ages, or the Dark from the Middle Ages – is that separating the present from the age of Jane Austen and Walter Scott. In politics, religion, social values, art and literature, a chasm lies between:

I do not think that any previous age produced work which was, in its own time, as shatteringly and bewilderingly new as that of the Cubists, the Dadaists, the Surrealists, and Picasso has been in ours. And I am quite sure this is true . . . of poetry . . . I do not see how anyone can doubt that modern poetry is not only a greater novelty than any other 'new poetry' but new in a new way, almost in a new dimension.²

Latterly there have been attempts to locate the Great Divide even more precisely: the French critic Roland Barthes identifies it with the

pluralization of world-views deriving from the evolution of new classes and communications and puts it at mid-century: 'Around 1850 . . . classical writing therefore disintegrated, and the whole of literature, from Flaubert to the present day, became the problematic of language.'³

As a general article of belief – before the fretful details are reached and the character and causes analysed – the idea of a Great Divide between past and present, art before and art now, has drawn much allegiance. But it is also a fact that about the nature of the modern situation, and the consequences for that situation on the form and character of art, there is less than unanimity. 'Il faut être absolument moderne' ('It is necessary to be absolutely modern'): Rimbaud's exhortation has a particular appeal to our temper, but it is subject to many interpretations. And the stylistic plurality of twentieth-century art – a plurality so great that André Malraux speaks, in *Les voix du silence* (*The Voices of Silence*), of the 'imaginary museum' of stylistic heterodoxy that marks our age – reminds us how variously it has been interpreted, by writers and artists themselves, and of course by the critics and commentators. There is an abundance of accounts of the condition of modern art, and a wealth of explanation of its character and causes. Most of these views are apocalyptic; though one is that our art is not totally divorced from tradition and humanism, and that there is nothing especially singular and novel about our art and situation at all. In the present state of artistic and critical opinion – a highly fluid state marked by sharp differences of view – then perhaps the most any account can offer is a personal or at least partial version of an overwhelmingly complex phenomenon, an individual selection from the infinity of detail, which may in time compost down with other views into that sifted and resolved thing, a critical concept.

But if about the phenomenon there is much variety and conflict of opinion, there is, alas, growing agreement about its name. Clearly the world of criticism has settled for some variant or collocation of the word 'modern' to identify the arts of its time, or if not all of them, then some part of them. So the Modern Movement; the Modern Tradition; the Modern Age; the Modern Century; the Modern Temper; Modernism; or – to all appearances a Germanic neologism, though presumably by analogy with labels like the Renaissance and the Enlightenment – simply The Modern, *tout court*. One's regret at the

choice is not only that it predetermines the nature of our view of modern literature; it also comes from the inappropriateness of applying so semantically mobile and indeed febrile a term to a historical phenomenon we now wish to root in time. Modernity, in normal usage, is something that progresses in company with and at the speed of the years, like the bow-wave of a ship; last year's modern is not this year's. Apt as it is to the sensibility of the age to prefer such terms, to insist on the association with time and history, matters have now reached the point where we wish to fix and stabilize the modern. When an extra-historical dimension is admitted, when – following G. S. Fraser or the editors of *The Modern Tradition*⁴ – one claims as 'modern' Catullus (but not Virgil), Villon (but not Ronsard), Donne (but not Spenser), Clough (but not Tennyson), and when one does the same for one's own time (Courrad, but not Galsworthy), the semantic instability of the term becomes obvious. Modernity is a crucial word for us, but it is tied up with definitions of our situation which are subject to change. The notion of the 'modern' undergoes semantic shift much faster than similar terms of comparable function, like 'romantic' or 'neo-classical'; indeed, as Lionel Trilling says, it can swing round in meaning until it is facing in the opposite direction.⁵ We use the term historically to locate a distinct stylistic phase which is ceasing or has ceased (hence the current circulation of counters like Proto-Modernism, Palaeo-Modernism, Neo-Modernism and Post-Modernism). We also use it to sum up a permanent modernizing state of affairs and the state of mind and view of man it engenders – that 'type of consciousness frequent in the modern world, obsessed by a compulsion to keep up, reduced to despair by the steadily increasing speed of the total movement'.⁶ Yet the word retains its force because of its association with a characteristic contemporary feeling: the historicist feeling that we live in totally novel times, that contemporary history is the source of our significance, that we are derivatives not of the past but of the surrounding and enfolding environment or scenario, that modernity is a new consciousness, a fresh condition of the human mind – a condition which modern art has explored, felt through, sometimes reacted against.

The name, then, is clear; the nature of the movement or movements – the where, when, why and what of it – is much less so. And equally unclear is the status of the stylistic claim we are making. We have

noted that few ages have been more multiple, more promiscuous in artistic style; to distil from the multiplicity an overall style or mannerism is a difficult, perhaps even an impossible, task. We can describe eighteenth-century literature in western countries as 'Neo-Classical', nineteenth-century literature in even more countries as 'Romantic'; though the labels paper over innumerable cracks, we can suggest a general drift in most of the significant arts among most of the significant artists we are dealing with in those periods. A. O. Lovejoy has pointed out that we use the term 'romanticism' to mean not only a wide variety of different things but a wide variety of contradictory things.⁷ So we do; and the quest for definition is now raging again. But Romanticism has a recognizable general meaning and serves as a broad stylistic description of a whole era. What, though, is so striking about the modern period is that there is no word we can use in quite that same way. Modernism has been used, from time to time, analogously to Romanticism, to suggest the general temper of the twentieth-century arts; it has equally been appropriated by those who wish to distinguish and isolate one current at one particular time... a powerful movement, certainly, and an international one, reaching, like Romanticism, through the western cultures. It has been urged that Modernism is our inevitable art – as Gertrude Stein put it, the 'only composition' appropriate to the new composition in which we live, the new dispositions of space and time. But it has also been seen as a form of late bourgeois aestheticism, especially by Marxist critics like Lukács who see the characteristic, the truly self-realizing modern art as a species of Realism.⁸ The term has been used to cover a wide variety of movements subversive of the romantic impulse and disposed towards abstraction (Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, Expressionism, Cubism, Futurism, Symbolism, Imagism, Vorticism, Dadaism, Surrealism); but even these are not, as we shall see, all movements of one kind, and some are radical reactions against others. In some nations Modernism has seemed central to the evolution of the literary and artistic tradition; in others it has seemed simply to visit and then go away again. Modernism does indeed exist; acknowledgement can no longer sensibly be withheld; the movements and experiments of modern writers have come right to the forefront of artistic attention. But on what scale, at what time, and with what character?

When we speak of the style of an age, we can mean two very different things. We can mean that 'general form of the forms of thought', of which Alfred North Whitehead spoke, which affects all a period's writing and is 'so translucent . . . that only by extreme effort can we become aware of it'.⁹ But we can also mean a conscious mannerism, elected by some writers and artists though not by all, which expresses 'a prevailing, dominant, or authentically contemporary view of the world by those artists who have most successfully intuited the quality of the human experience peculiar to their day and who are able to phrase this experience in a form deeply congenial to the thought, science, and technology which are part of that experience'.¹⁰ The term 'Modernism' can hardly be taken in the former sense; for in any working definition of it we shall have to see in it a quality of abstraction and highly conscious artifice, taking us behind familiar reality, breaking away from familiar functions of language and conventions of form. It could be said that this is simply its initial shock, stage one of a movement that leads us all into Modernism. And one can argue, to a point, that in graphics, architecture, design, and especially in the conventions of media like film and television, Modernism has become an invisibly communal style. Yet in some ways this is to defeat Modernism's presumptions; the shock, the violation of expected continuities, the element of de-creation and crisis, is a crucial element of the style. It has more commonly been urged that Modernism is our style in the second sense; these are the artistic forms consequent on modern thought, modern experience, and hence the Modernist writers and artists express the highest distillation of twentieth-century artistic potential. But many twentieth-century artists have rejected the label and the associated aesthetics, the modes of abstraction, discontinuity, and shock. And it can be well argued that the twentieth-century artistic tradition is made up, not of one essential strand, but of two - roughly antithetical, though meeting from time to time. This, for instance, is the view of Stephen Spender, who, in his book *The Struggle of the Modern*, sees two streams: the 'moderns' and the 'contemporaries'.¹¹

The case for Modernism's total dominance has often been put and

is easy to see. One of the word's associations is with the coming of a new era of high aesthetic self-consciousness and non-representationalism, in which art turns from realism and humanistic representation towards style, technique, and spatial form in pursuit of a deeper penetration of life. 'No artist tolerates reality,' Nietzsche tells us; the task of art is its own self-realization, outside and beyond established orders, in a world of abnormally drawn perspectives. 'What strikes me as beautiful, what I should like to do, is a book about nothing, a book without external attachments, which would hold itself together by itself through the internal force of its style' - this Flaubertian dream of an order in art independent of or else transcending the humanistic, the material, the *real*, has been crucially important to a whole segment of the modern arts. And what such artists have achieved can be considered - has been considered - the ultimate achievement of artistic possibility in the twentieth century, part of the progress and evolution of the arts towards sophistication and completion. The art that makes life, the drama of the artist's consciousness, the structure that lies beyond time, history, character or visible reality, the moral imperative of technique; are not these the basis of a great aesthetic revolution into literary possibilities greater than ever dreamt of? Hence Virginia Woolf, holding that the modern stylistic revolution came from the historical opportunity for change in human relationships and human character, and that modern art therefore had a social and epistemological cause, nonetheless believed in the aesthetic nature of the opportunity; it set the artist free to be more himself, let him move beyond the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of light. Now human consciousness and especially artistic consciousness could become more intuitive, more poetic; art could now fulfil itself. It was free to catch at the manifold - the atoms as they fall - and create significant harmony not in the universe but within itself (like the painting which Lily Briscoe completes at the end of *To the Lighthouse*). The world, reality, is discontinuous till art comes along, which may be a modern crisis for the world; but within art all becomes vital, discontinuous, yes, but within an aesthetic system of positioning. Or, as Wallace Stevens puts it, the poet must be able to abstract reality 'which he does by placing it in his imagination', by giving it the substance or meaning of a fiction. There may be a poverty in the universe and a trauma in man, but the artist has

the means to transcend both history and reality by the dispositions of his technique, creating Joyce's 'luminous silent stasis of aesthetic pleasure'.

The movement towards sophistication and mannerism, towards introversion, technical display, internal self-scepticism, has often been taken as a common base for a definition of Modernism. Certainly, a number of technical features do reappear from movement to movement even when these are radically at odds in other ways: anti-representationalism in painting, atonalism in music, *vers libre* in poetry, stream-of-consciousness narrative in the novel. And certainly, as Ortega y Gasset has said, the aesthetic refinement involves a dehumanization of art, the 'progressive elimination of the human, all too human, elements predominant in romantic and naturalistic production'.¹² This has meant, though, not only radical remarking of form, but also, as Frank Kermode says, the tendency to bring it closer to chaos, so producing a sense of 'formal desperation'.¹³ This, in turn, suggests that Modernism might mean not only a new mode or mannerism in the arts, but a certain magnificent disaster for them. In short, experimentalism does not simply suggest the presence of sophistication, difficulty and novelty in art; it also suggests bleakness, darkness, alienation, disintegration. Indeed Modernism would seem to be the point at which the idea of the radical and innovating arts, the experimental, technical, aesthetic ideal that had been growing forward from Romanticism, reaches formal crisis - in which myth, structure and organization in a traditional sense collapse, and not only for formal reasons. The crisis is a crisis of culture; it often involves an unhappy view of history - so that the Modernist writer is not simply the artist set free, but the artist under specific, apparently historical strain. If Modernism is the imaginative power in the chamber of consciousness that, as James puts it, 'converts the very pulses of the air into revelations', it is also often an awareness of contingency as a disaster in the world of time: Yeats's 'Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold.' If it is an art of metamorphosis, a Daedalus voyage into unknown arts,¹⁴ it is also a sense of disorientation and nightmare, feeling the dangerous, deathly magic in the creative impulse explored by Thomas Mann. If it takes the modern as a release from old dependencies, it also sees the immense panorama of futility and anarchy that Eliot saw in *Ulysses*.¹⁵ And if an aesthetic

devotion runs deep in it, it is capable of dispensing with that abruptly and outrageously, as in the auto-destructive dimension of Dada or Surrealism.

This leads us toward another kind of account as to why Modernism is our art; it is the one art that responds to the scenario of our chaos. It is the art consequent on Heisenberg's 'Uncertainty principle', of the destruction of civilization and reason in the First World War, of the world changed and reinterpreted by Marx, Freud and Darwin, of capitalism and constant industrial acceleration, of existential exposure to meaninglessness or absurdity. It is the literature of communal reality and is the art consequent on the dis-establishing of communal reality and conventional notions of causality, on the destruction of traditional notions of the wholeness of individual character, on the linguistic chaos that ensues when public notions of language have been discredited and when all realities have become subjective fictions. Modernism is then the art of modernization - however stark the separation of the artist from society may have been, however oblique the artistic gesture he has made. Thus, to the Expressionist or the Surrealist for instance, it is the anti-art which decomposes old frames of reference and carries the anarchy of men's evolving desire, the expressive form of human evolution in energetic release. By this view, Modernism is not art's freedom, but art's necessity. The communal universe of reality and culture on which nineteenth-century art had depended was over; and the explosively lyrical, or else the ironic and fictive modes, modes which included large elements not only of creation but of de-creation, were inevitable. The assumption that the age demands a certain kind of art, and that Modernism is the art that it demands, has been fervently held by those who see in the modern human condition a crisis of reality, an apocalypse of cultural community. What, though, is clear is that not all artists have believed this to be so - that, indeed, ours has been a century not only of de-realization but of realism, not only of ironic but of expansive modes.

The paradox of Modernism lies in the relationship between these two very different explanations of and justifications for it; indeed one can distinguish, in the difference between (say) Symbolism and Surrealism, two Modernisms. On the one hand, modernism has been an arcane and a private art: as Ortega y Gasset says in *The Dehumanization of Art*, it tends to divide its audience aristocratically into two

groups - those who understand it and those who do not, those trained in and acquiescent to its techniques and premises, and those who find it not only incomprehensible but hostile. Thus its main qualities - which Ortega sees as a view of art as 'play' or 'delightful fraud'; an aversion to the traditional; a tendency towards self-hate or irony; a self-diminishing quality, or belief that art has few consequences other than that of being itself - are not simply *avant-garde* but represent a privation and a hoarding of the artistic powers against the populace and the claims of time and history. On the other hand, specialism and experimentalism can be held to have great social meaning; the arts are *avant-garde* because they are revolutionary probes into future human consciousness. Then we could indeed say that the Modernist tendency is that which saw most deeply and truthfully into the situation of the arts and of man in our time, securing us a worthy art in an age which seemed not to grant us one; that most of our important writers have been of its tendency, and that its implications are inescapable for all other artists. By this view, Modernism, while not our total style, becomes the movement which has expressed our modern consciousness, created in its works the nature of modern experience at its fullest. It may not be the only stream, but it is the *main* stream. Like Romanticism, it originated with historical neatness about the beginning of a century, in a period of deep intellectual reappraisal and social and intellectual change, and has come increasingly to dominate the sensibility, aesthetics and mind of the hard core of our greatest writers, and to become the essential and appropriate vision to our most sensitive readers. Like Romanticism, it is a revolutionary movement, capitalizing on a vast intellectual readjustment and radical dissatisfaction with the artistic past - a movement that is international in character and marked by a flow of major ideas, forms and values that spread from country to country and developed into the main line of the western tradition.

Today it must surely seem to us that the truth lies somewhere between the view that Modernism is the supreme modern expression and the view that it is of marginal importance. Modernism is, clearly, more than an aesthetic event, and some of the conditions that lie behind it are discernible and clear. Yet it contains a highly aesthetic response, one which turns on the assumption that the registering of modern consciousness or experience was not a problem in representa-

tion but a profound cultural and aesthetic ~~crux~~ ~~problem~~ in the making of structures, the employment of language, the uniting of form, finally in the social meaning of the artist himself. The search for a style and a typology becomes a self-conscious element in the Modernist's literary production; he is perpetually engaged in a profound and ceaseless journey through the means and integrity of art. In this sense, Modernism is less a style than a search for a style in a highly individualistic sense; and indeed the style of one work is no guarantee for the next. This, perhaps, is what Irving Howe means when he remarks that 'modernism does not establish a prevalent style of its own; or if it does, it denies itself, thereby ceasing to be modern'.¹⁶ The qualities which we associate with painters like Matisse, Picasso and Braque, with musicians like Stravinsky and Schoenberg, novelists like Henry James, Mann, Conrad, Proust, Svevo, Joyce, Gide, Kafka, Musil, Hesse and Faulkner, poets like Mallarmé, Valéry, Eliot, Pound, Rilke, Lorca, Apollinaire, Breton and Stevens, with dramatists like Strindberg, Pirandello and Wedekind, are indeed their remarkably high degree of self-signature, their quality of sustaining each work with a structure appropriate only to that work. The condition for the style of the work is a presumed absence of style for the age; and each work is a once-and-for-all creation, subsisting less for its referential than its autotelic constituents, the order and rhythm made for itself and submerged by itself. Modernism in this sense is indeed an international tendency, and we can predicate origins and causes for it and reflect on its significance. But it is hard to convert it into a universal style or tradition, despite the fact that its environment is not simply the work of individuals but of broader movements and tendencies. It is indeed a part of our modern art, not all of it. Yet there seems to be a discernible centre to it: a certain loose but distinguishable group of assumptions, founded on a broadly symbolist aesthetic, an *avant-garde* view of the artist, and a notion of a relationship of crisis between art and history. To this extent, one would also want to argue that there is an historical 'peak', where impulses from many varied sources begin to coalesce, and come through in a particular core of moments, out from which run many variant and diverse versions of the primary impulse.

Perhaps the oblique nature of Modernism explains why critics have found it so hard a movement to find a clear place or date for. For the potential of Modernism was long present in the development of literature; it is possible to discern its origins long before we see its fruition. If Modernism is movements, then movements had been coming in increasing waves right through the nineteenth century. If the movements have to be bohemian or *avant-garde*, then bohemia was active in Paris from the 1830s; and the theory of the artist as a futurist, an agent free and loose in the realm of dangerous knowledge, was active throughout romantic thought. If an explicit aesthetic of experimentalism is required, then Émile Zola published *Le Roman expérimental* in 1880 (though he used the word in a scientific or laboratory sense). The crucial idea of the modern as a special imperative and a special state of exposure exists in Nietzsche. If Modernism means the ruffling of the hard naturalistic surface by a state of multiplicity of consciousness, then Walter Pater in the 1870s in England and other thinkers in Europe were talking of 'quickened, multiplied consciousness'. If Modernism means a response of the imagination to an urbanized, *Gesellschaft* world, then Baudelaire spoke of the unreal city and the need for the imagination to produce 'the sensation of newness'. As for other aspects of Modernism - its use of anti-form or desecration of established conventions; its use of the hard, resonant and 'witty' image and its dependence on 'associated sensibility'; its sense of anguish and its dependence on what Lionel Trilling calls an 'adversary culture' - then we can trace these back through the western tradition, to Sterne, or Donne, or Villon. Modernism was indeed an international movement and a focus of many varied forces which reached their peak in various countries at various times. In some it seemed to stay for a long period; in others, to function as a temporary disturbance and then go away again. In some it seemed to do great violence to the received tradition - of Romanticism or Victorianism, Realism or Impressionism - and in others it seems a logical development of it. Indeed Modernism can look surprisingly different depending on where one finds the centre, in which capital (or province) one happens to stand. Just as 'modern' in the England

of today can mean something very different from what it meant a century ago for Matthew Arnold, so it can also be observed varying significantly from country to country, from language to language. Because the essence of Modernism is its international character - one critic, indeed, has argued that 'Modernism, in short, is synonymous with internationalism'¹⁷ - and because, lexically, the term 'modern' is itself internationally recognizable at sight and without translation, it is prudent to look briefly at these international connotations first.

Let us begin with one familiar version of the tendency. The title and sub-title of Cyril Connolly's 1965 book provide a usefully laconic definition: *The Modern Movement: One Hundred Key Books from England, France and America, 1880-1950*. Here, France is clearly identified as the source from which Anglo-American Modernism drew strength: 'The French fathered the Modern Movement, which slowly moved beyond the Channel and then across the Irish Sea until the Americans finally took it over, bringing to it their own demonic energy, extremism and taste for the colossal.'¹⁸ Although, as Connolly is very ready to admit, it is impossible to fix on any one particular time as the start of the Modern movement, 1880 is taken as the point where the Enlightenment's 'critical intelligence' had combined with Romanticism's 'exploring sensibility' to stimulate the work of the first generation of truly modern writers, all owing something to Flaubert and Baudelaire - James, Mallarmé, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Huysmans, and 'the mysterious Lautréamont'. Thereafter followed wave after wave of writers, artists and musicians contributing to a very modern sensibility - Debussy, Yeats, Gide, Proust and Valéry; followed by Eliot, Pound, Lawrence and Joyce; Virginia Woolf, Edith Sitwell and Marianne Moore; Hemingway, Cummings, Faulkner, Malraux, Huxley and Graves; and thus to the present day. Within the outside limits of 1880 and 1950, it is clear that as Connolly sees it the high season was somewhere between 1910 and 1925. Somewhat similar views are to be found in Edmund Wilson's seminal book *Axel's Castle*, which relates the English and American modern movement to Symbolism, and in Maurice Bowra, who includes a great part of modern literature as a Symbolist heritage.¹⁹ And though Graham Hough believes that English literature never really had a Symbolist movement proper, that what happened about the time of the First World War was at most 'symbolism without the

magic', and that the nativist line predominated in England even if not in America, his basic interpretation of events is close to Connolly's.²⁰

A more catholic Anglo-American view informed another book published in the same year as Connolly's: *The Modern Tradition*, the anthology of Modernist items edited by Richard Ellmann and Charles Feidelson. Not only do the editors acknowledge by their choice of items that there were key books in languages other than French and English, which Connolly, for stated (and honourable) reasons, does not; they extend their inquiry beyond the confines of literature as it is narrowly understood and into the wider realms of the imagination and the intellect; and they also embody in their book an awareness of 'a modern tradition that reaches well back into the romantic era and beyond'.²¹ The outside limits, the envelope of their Modernism, assume a much more expansive shape; and their items range in kind and time, from Vico to Sartre, from Blake and Wordsworth to Camus and Robbe-Grillet, from Blake to Picasso. Nevertheless, when they begin to focus upon the period of high intensity, they too give their closest attention to what is roughly the first quarter of the twentieth century, to Yeats and Joyce and Eliot and Lawrence and to their Continental coevals, Proust, Valéry and Gide, Mann, Rilke and Kafka. And if to other Anglo-American critics one turns with the two blunt interrogatives - who? and when? - to get a rough outline of their sense of Modernism, similar pictures emerge. Who is to be included in our identification parade of the Modernist spirit? Which are seen as the years of gathering force, of breakthrough, of concentrated change? A. Alvarez thinks that he who goes looking for Modernism must seek it in the first thirty years or so of this century, and that at the epicentre of the change will be found Pound and Eliot, Joyce and Kafka. For Frank Kermode the nineties are certainly forerunners of Modernism, but he claims that nevertheless 'anybody who thinks about what modernism now means will rightly look more closely at the period between 1907 and, say, 1925'. Neither Stephen Spender nor Graham Hough would seriously disagree with these chronological limits, though they further detect within them a period of enhanced intensity between about 1910 and the beginning of the First World War - years which, in Graham Hough's view, witnessed 'a revolution in the literature of the English language as momentous as the Romantic

one'. As for personalities, because he recognizes that the Anglo-American developments were part of a larger European affair, he would set beside the names of Yeats, Joyce, Eliot and Pound also those of Gide, Valéry, and Thomas Mann, and perhaps also of Proust and Rilke.²²

As the focus narrows and there is pressure to identify the really crucial event, the wholly significant work, the *annus mirabilis*, so the phrases grow in audacity. Tamping down an enormous cultural change into a brief moment in time, Virginia Woolf saw a quite explosive event: 'On or about December 1910 human nature changed . . . All human relations shifted - those between masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children. And when human relations change there is at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics, and literature.'²³ The year of the death of King Edward and the first Post-Impressionist Exhibition was doubtless crucial, though D. H. Lawrence used an equally apocalyptic assumption for a different year and with a different interpretation: 'It was in 1915 the old world ended,' he wrote in *Kangaroo*. Such comments confirm the contemporary sense of participating in a profound transition; and the Anglo-American focus on these years just before the war is utterly understandable, since - as later essays in this volume suggest - there is a sharpening of the claims of the new, manifest in literary texts and literary groupings, over this period. But there have been efforts to push things earlier; Richard Ellmann, for example, says that if a moment must be found for human character to have changed, 'I should suggest that 1900 is both more convenient and more accurate than Virginia Woolf's 1910', since the modernist theme sounds through the Edwardian period.²⁴ Other critics have transferred this point of intensity to the years after the First World War; Harry Levin, for instance, if pressed to identify the Modernist year, would rather want to point to the miraculous yield of 1922: the year of *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land*, of Rilke's *Duineser Elegien* (*Duino Elegies*) and *Die Sonette an Orpheus* (*Sonnets to Orpheus*), of Brecht's first play *Baal*, of Lawrence's *Sonnet's Aaron's Rod* and Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room*, of Proust's *Sodom et Gomorrah* (*Sodom and Gomorrah*) and Eugene O'Neill's *Anna Christie*. Nor, he adds, would it be difficult to compile a list of comparable quality for the year 1924, and thus discover a peak of intensity in the early twenties²⁵ - a period

which certain other critics would however regard as one in which the Modernist impulse was reaching a point of exhaustion. An even later emphasis may be found among those critics who would argue that Modernism, far from becoming exhausted, has continued as our essential art right to the present, and who see the entire inter-war period as the main phase of Modernist evolution – like Harold Rosenberg, who focuses particularly on the Paris of this period, 'the only spot where . . . it was possible to shake up such "modern" doses as Viennese psychology, African sculpture, American detective stories, Russian music, neo-Catholicism, German technique, Italian desperation'.²⁶ The argument depends, in part, upon essential definitions about what characterizes Modernism, and also about whether the tendency has sustained itself, particularly via the surrealist line, through into post-war art.

For if there is an argument about when Modernism began, and hence, implicitly, about what its causes and character are, then there is also one about whether it has yet ended. We have now amassed, on the basis of the art or anti-art of the post-war period – which at first appeared to be moving away from Modernism in the direction of realism and linearity – a new entity, called Post-Modernism. The term is acquiring high currency now to talk about a compound of that art of chance or minimalization, that 'literature of silence', in which, as in Beckett or Borges, the idea of absurd creation, random method, parody or self-exhausting fictionality is paramount; of the new *chiosisme*, which expands to include not only the *nouveau roman* in France but the non-fiction novel in Germany and the States, where facts, objects or historical events are placed in the context of questioning narrative; of multi-media forms, like the happening or the street theatre; and of the anti-rationalistic anti-art of psychedelics, pornography, and revolutionary outrage.²⁷ Various aspects of this can be seen as continuous with the logic and the modes of Modernism – especially that part of it concerned with evolutionary psychic exploration, like Dada and Surrealism, or with romantic self-immersion, like Hermann Hesse, or with the revolution of the word, like Gertrude Stein or the later Joyce. The overall case for continuity has been forcibly put in the essay 'Modernisms' by Frank Kermode, which has appeared in several places, including the volume *Innovations*, where it is set against opposite views. Kermode holds that the

contemporary art of the random – the squaring out of a piece of space or time, the specifying and signing of an environment, as in Cage or Burroughs – is blood-cousin to the earlier tendencies, though he draws a line across to distinguish early Modernism, which was much more formalist, or devoted to the paradoxes of form, from later or Neo-Modernism, which is anti-formalist, though compelled to use form to subvert it. The use of loose structure or aleatory art (i.e. art based on chance), as in Cage or Tinguely or the happening, or the art of conscious fictiveness, as in Nabokov, Borges, or Barthelme, is not outrightly at odds with its predecessors; it is a new disposition of old forces. Thus what Kermode calls Neo-Modernism and others have chosen to call Post-Modernism involves a change in what Harold Rosenberg calls the 'tradition of the new' – a change falling perhaps around Dada – but it is still that same tradition. But other critics in *Innovations* dissent; if there is now a new *avant-garde* and a new aesthetic or group of aesthetics – based, say, on Cage, Burroughs, Beckett and Borges, concrete poetry and the *nouveau roman*, but also on the happening, drugs, the counter-culture, and *négritude* – this is no longer simply a style; it is a form of post-cultural *action*, a politics.²⁸ The *avant-garde* has entered the streets, and become instinctive or radical behaviour; and we are in a new stylistic age, in which that enterprise of humanism and civilization Modernism attempted desperately to reinstate by its subversions of form is over. Anarchism and revolutionary subjectivism predominate; the uniqueness of the work vanishes; the cults of impersonality and pure form are done; art is either action, outrage, or play. In a spectacular essay called 'POSTmodernISM', Ihab Hassan has explored some of the continuities and the discontinuities, stressing that the new mood assumes a totally technological and dehumanized universe; and he argues that the newer developments must at least force us to reconsider Modernism and distinguish the obviously continuous elements in it.²⁹ Something of the same revisionism inhabits the new stress being put on the surrealist wing of Modernism, and Modernism's affiliations with Romanticism. In short, the argument around Post-Modernism now adds to the abundance of versions of Modernism.

But what is clear is that there is in nearly all of these versions a sense of Modernism as an historical evolution coupled with a notion of crisis and a notion of a point of culmination. And, for most Anglo-American critics, that culmination falls in the first part of the twentieth century. Although the reports vary increasingly in their detail, as the lore begins to shift, they have in common an emphasis on the Anglo-American achievement following on from the innovations of French symbolism, behind which again stand two prime initiators, Flaubert and Baudelaire. The stress may then fall on the new classicism, or else on the continuation of Romanticism. But the period of highest intensity is seen by and large as the first quarter of the twentieth century, within which are two peaks: the years immediately preceding, and the years immediately following the First World War. Such is the concept of Modernism as it is commonly viewed from a New York-London-Paris axis. But what is not always adequately acknowledged is that Modernism or the Modern, when viewed, say, from Berlin, or Vienna, or Copenhagen, or Prague, or St Petersburg, is a thing with a quite different chronological profile, with a rather different set of representative figures and influential precursors, with a very different group of origins. Even if our task is less to make Modernism fit into line with contemporary experimentalism and radical attitudes than to straighten and clarify the record, which is the primary aim of this volume, this is something that deserves our best attention. This is not only because any account of Modernism that seeks to be genuinely synoptic and international must accommodate this sort of awareness, but also because these other manifestations of Modernism provide a broader, a thicker base for the generalizations to which all investigations like the present one are prone.

Let us try, then, to illuminate the conventional history of the tendency from the standpoint of Germanic Modernism. It would be convenient if Germanic Modernism could stand for the combined and conflated literature of Germany, Austria, and Scandinavia over these years; unfortunately, here too, such tidy simplifications will not quite fit. Berlin as it was in the nineties, especially the early nineties,

may by its cultural and intellectual clamour draw attention to itself; but it would be a great mistake to allow Berlin to represent Germany in its totality at a time when Munich and Darmstadt and other provincial German cities were important and lively centres of literary activity. There is also the complex and ambiguous role of Vienna in these late-Hapsburg years, a multifarious role appropriate to a capital so influentially placed by history, geography and ethnic mix between north and south, east and west, past and present. In Vienna the modern ferment was strong; indeed, George Steiner tells us, 'from the eighteen-nineties until its enthusiastic swoon into Hitler's arms in 1938, Vienna was the foremost generator of our current sensibility'.³⁰ And there can be no doubt that the city of Karl Kraus, Freud, the Vienna Circle, Schoenberg and Wittgenstein was alive with Modernist perspectives. And then Scandinavia, with Ibsen, the age's most European figure of all, and Strindberg, whose influence was growing fast, made its own striking and peculiar contribution, had its own distinctive if Nietzschean passions of desperation and joy. Still, if from this complicated scene some identifiable range of phenomena that might approximately be designated as Germanic Modernism can be separated out, then the first and most striking thing is that it is in its most significant manifestations - a good generation earlier than the Anglo-American Modernist upswing located by Connolly, Kermode and Hough. In Scandinavia, in Germany, and to a substantial extent in Austria, it was the eighties, nineties and early 1900s that witnessed a debate about the nature and name of Modernism of quite unparalleled passion and vehemence - years with, for the Germanic north, a much higher degree of self-consciousness, of articulateness, of documentation than perhaps any other part of Europe.

In trying to pin Modernism down - tentatively and crudely - in terms of men, books and years, attention is first drawn to Scandinavia: to the publication in 1883 of a series of critical essays by the Danish critic Georg Brandes with the significant title of *Men of the Modern Breakthrough* (*Det moderne Gjenbryds Mænd*). In no time at all - conceivably by virtue of the stature Brandes had achieved throughout the Germanic world - the epithet 'modern' became a rallying slogan of quite irresistible drawing power. One is, incidentally, struck by the contrast between this near-obsessive concern for the term 'modern' and the comparative disregard of it during these same years in

England, where between Meredith's *Modern Love* of 1862 and Michael Roberts's anthology *The Faber Book of Modern Verse* in 1936, the term is rarely used in any programmatic way. Though one might argue that its function, in English, is served by the word 'new': 'The range of the adjective [new] spread,' notes Holbrook Jackson, 'until it embraced the ideas of the whole period [the eighteen nineties], and we find innumerable references to the "New Spirit", the "New Humour", the "New Hedonism", the "New Drama", the "New Unionism", the "New Party", and the "New Woman".'³¹

In Germany, the anthology with which the new generation of iconoclastic poets announced their *credo* in 1885 was given the title *Moderne Dichterihrakere (Modern Poet Characters)*.³² The introductions to it, written by Conrad and Henckell, constituted a manifesto in which were defined the objectives for what was proudly called the 'modern' lyric – a manifesto, the programmatic urgency of which carried over into the poems themselves. Conspicuous is that poem by Arno Holz, one of the chief theorists of this Germanic age, which insisted:

'Modern sei der Poet,
modern vom Scheitel bis zur Sohle.'³³

From this moment on, and over the following decade, there were few writers in German who did not take some opportunity to discuss with rare vehemence the aims and ideals of so-called 'modern' literature. One of the most influential periodicals of the day, *Die Gesellschaft*, which began publication in 1885, was defined by its editor as 'ein Organ der modernen Bewegung in der Literatur' ('an organ of the modern movement in literature'). In 1886 came the invention of that bewildering and disturbing term 'The Modern'; Eugen Wolff, in an address to the Berlin literary circle known as *Durch* ('Through') – in which there might well be an echo of Brandes's concept of 'The Modern Breakthrough' – invented and launched the term 'Die Moderne', 'the Modern', later elaborated and more widely disseminated in his article of 1888 entitled 'Die jüngste deutsche Literaturströmung und das Prinzip der Moderne' ('The most recent German literary currents and the principle of the Modern').³³ Articles with

³¹'Let the poet be modern,
Modern from head to toe.'

titles that announced their interest in 'Charles Darwin and the modern aesthetic', 'Truth in the modern novel', 'The significance of literature for the modern world', and so on, are conspicuous in these years.

The years 1890 and 1891 in Germany, as in Vienna, Oslo and to a lesser extent Zürich, witnessed a preoccupation with the concept of Modernism that approached the dimensions of a fever. There was a whole new range of 'modern' periodicals: *Freie Bühne für modernes Leben*, *Moderne Blätter* or even quite simply *Die Moderne*. Their pages were full of 'modern' contributions: 'Die Sozialdemokratie und die Moderne' ('Social democracy and the Modern') (1891); 'Moderne Wahrheitsdichtung' ('Modern poetry of truth') (1891); 'Moderne Bestrebungen' ('Modern aspirations') (1892); 'Der moderne Roman' ('The modern novel') or, more than once, 'Die Moderne'. Any bibliography of nineteenth literature in German would reveal an extraordinarily high concentration of titles making explicit reference to Modernism and the concept of the Modern, many of them crucial for an understanding of this decade: Hermann Bahr's *Zur Kritik der Moderne (On the Criticism of the Modern)* (Zürich 1890), Leo Berg's *Das sexuelle Problem in der modernen Literatur (The Sexual Problem in Modern Literature)* (Berlin 1891) and *Der Übermensch in der modernen Literatur (The Superman in Modern Literature)* (Leipzig 1897), and Eugen Dühring's *Die Gassen der modernen Literatur (The Great of Modern Literature)* (Leipzig 1893).

The flame of controversy burned bright, consuming a large part of the intellectual fuel of the writers and critics of these years. But it took its toll. By the time Samuel Lublinski drew up the pros and cons of these developments in his *Die Bilanz der Moderne (Balance Sheet of the Modern)* (Berlin 1904), the issue had become a spent force; having run its turbulent course for well over twenty years, it finally lost impetus. Five years later, its 'exit' was announced by the title of Lublinski's follow-up study, *Der Ausgang der Moderne (The Exit of the Modern)* (Dresden 1909): the literary world of Germany was surfeited and sickened by the term. 'The Modern', even the adjective 'modern', had become the sign of all that was old-fashioned and bourgeois, a term the connotations of which suggested nothing so much as exhaustion and decay. For the brave new generation of First World War writers in Germany, the term was something positively to be

repudiated. The Expressionists went out of their way to declare how 'unmodern' they were – an irony surely not lost upon those whose view of Modernism is largely Anglo-French. The very moment of the Germanic repudiation of the Modern as a valid term marks the start of Anglo-American Modernism as it is currently understood; any comprehensive account of European Modernism must have as one of its major tasks the resolution of this discrepancy.

5

But it would not do to leave the impression that this Germanic 'Modern' was a simple, undifferentiated thing which grew predictably from its origins in the 1880s through to maturity and thence to inevitable decline in the early years of this century. For somewhere along the line of the semantic development of the term there was, not a break, not a rupture, not a reversal or revolution, but an abrupt change of direction, a realignment of thought. Something in its nature is not unlike the notion of the *Wendepunkt* (turning point), familiar to those acquainted with Tieck's theory of the *Novelle* – a point at which there is an unexpected yet in retrospect not unmotivated turn of events, a reorientation which one can see now is not only wholly consistent but logical and possibly even inevitable. It might be argued that it is precisely this same phenomenon, which, in the French-English-American line, constitutes that element of distinctiveness that the critics have sought for. But what is striking about this development in the Germanic Modern – and to place it somewhere about the year 1890 would not be far wrong – is that, because the moment was so unusually self-conscious and articulate, it is particularly well-documented and therefore accessible to investigation, like some *dy* by *dx* of a much larger configuration of change within which is contained the larger meaning of Modernism.

Some sense of the nature of this event is perhaps possible if we return to Lionel Trilling's comments on the modern. Trilling entitles his essay of 1961 'On the Modern Element in Modern Literature'; his title alludes to an event of over a century before – Matthew Arnold's lecture of 1857, called 'On the Modern Element in Literature'. Arnold was among those Victorians who had an active sense of

modernity and change, and felt this generated new claims upon mind and art. The connotations of the term 'modern' were central to him; but they are connotations totally different from those of our day. They were substantially classical: the modern element was repose, confidence, tolerance, the free activity of the mind winning new ideas in conditions of material well-being; it involved the willingness to judge by reason and search for the laws of things. If Arnold felt, as we know he did, the power of unreason, chaos, deep personal depression, a strong sense of social anarchy, he did not see these as the essential characteristics of the modern element. Yet, as Trilling says, Arnold sees – it is nihilism, a 'bitter line of hostility to civilization', a 'disenchantment with culture itself'.³⁴ Somewhere in the sequence – Trilling notes the importance here of Nietzsche, Freud, Conrad, and Sir James Frazer's anthropology – a radical alteration takes place to give us the intellectual conventions of Plight, Alienation, and Nihilism; the idea of the modern is bound up with consciousness of disorder, despair, and anarchy. So words like 'modern' can alter suddenly in content; a body of sensibility can recede and another grow without the terms changing. Imagine then such a cycle of development focused and concentrated into a brief span of time – a few months, at most a year or two – and one begins to sense the nature of our *Wendepunkt*.

Suffusing the entire 1880s sense of the modern was a confident faith in social advance; a readiness to believe that to expose abuses was to invite their annihilation, that to repudiate the conventional past was to clear the way for a healthy moral growth, for welcome ideas. Hard work, clear vision, courage, purposefulness – these were the keys to the future, to the evolution of new types of men, of society, of art. In Eugen Wolff's article of 1888 in which he first enunciated and defined the concept of the modern – a concept the detail of which one can find expressed in the Anglo-American line, too – he invents a spokesman who explains how that concept might be expressed in plastic, sculptural terms:

As a woman, a modern woman, filled with the modern spirit, and at the same time a typical figure, a working woman, who is nevertheless saturated with beauty, and full of ideals, returning from her material work to the service of goodness and nobility, as though returning home to her beloved child – for she is no young virgin, silly and ignorant of

her destiny; she is an experienced but pure woman, in rapid movement like the spirit of the age, with fluttering garments and streaming hair, striding forward... That is our new divine image: the Modern.³⁵

But this salutary ikon was not to remain such for long. A few brief years, and the modern was associated with a very different set of images. An earlier ally of Wolff's, M. G. Conrad, writing in 1892, could not repress the scorn and bitterness he felt for the spirit of transformation that was coming over the Modern and its representatives; and in a welter of mixed metaphors he abused the new literary leaders:

The only true poetry now is the virtuoso art of the nerves, that which feeds us with the most outrageous sensations, which titillates us with techniques gathered from literary clinics all over the world, all tested for refinement; and it is with these that we are to march at the head of the cultural movement in Europe, we immoralists by the grace of Nietzsche, we magicians of the hypererotic sporting world, we mystics of the international passing show, we raging Rolands blessed by impotence and foolishness... For the healthy-minded man of today it is a matter of complete indifference what alien cuckoo's eggs the more extreme specialists of the Modern hatch out in their little *fin-de-siècle* chapels and brothels, wagging their little 'isms' like tails behind them: symbolism, satanism, neo-idealism, hallucinism... Give things a few years, and no cocks will crow for any of this ultra-modern charlatanism practised by these comic turns of literature and art.³⁶

Conrad's statement, despite its own comic aspects, thus confronts a spectacle that was to complicate the revolt of the 1890s and is much more familiar to us in the observations of Max Nordau: the crossing of the 'modern' spirit with the spirit of Decadence and Aestheticism.

To get at the quality of this change, it is useful once again to take a roll-call. When, in the early 1880s, Georg Brandes wrote of the 'modern minds', as he called them, of the men of the Modern Breakthrough, of whom did he speak? Of Ibsen and Bjornson, of Jacobsen and Drachman, of Flaubert, Renan, John Stuart Mill. But particularly of Ibsen. When the German writers of the late 1880s thought of 'modern' literature, of whom did *they* think? Of Ibsen, of Zola and Tolstoy, Daudet, Bret Harte, and Whitman. But particularly, again, of Ibsen. When, however, the 1890s generation of critics - often the same men as before - looked for specifically 'modern' qualities, to whom did *they* turn? To Strindberg and Nietzsche, Büchner and

Kierkegaard, Bourget and Hamsun and Maeterlinck. But especially to Strindberg. This is a sharp change, and nowhere is it more dramatically revealed than in two successive articles by the Viennese critic, Hermann Bahr - one of 1890, in the first of his series of studies called *Zur Kritik der Moderne (In Criticism of the Modern)*, and the other of 1891, in the second series.³⁷ In the former he defined the task of 'modern' literature as that of achieving a synthesis of naturalism and romanticism, and urged the example of Ibsen as the supreme exponent. Within a year he speaks of 'the wild frenzy of the galloping development' that had so exceeded expectation that things half-anticipated for the end of the century had arrived after no more than six months; he points to Strindberg and the group of Scandinavians gathered about him - Ola Hansson and Arne Garborg, for example - as the most modernistic literature of the day. And here, in this brief timespan, one gets a sense both of the displacement and of the nonetheless essential *continuity* of events. The Ibsen vogue and the Strindberg vogue in Germany - and indeed throughout Europe - might be traced to one chief source, Georg Brandes: the Ibsen vogue to Brandes' elaboration of the concept of the Modern Breakthrough, and the Strindberg vogue to the seminal lectures given by Brandes in Copenhagen in 1888, which stimulated not only Strindberg but the whole German nation (which had hitherto virtually ignored him) to discovery of Nietzsche, and spread his importance right through Europe and into England and the United States.

This same crossover point, which (in crude terms) comes when something happens to the fortunes of realism and naturalism, themselves modern but not quite Modernist movements, can be seen elsewhere. In 1891, when the Parisian journalist Jules Huret enlisted from Paul Alexis, the novelist and Zola-disciple, what must be the classic literary telegram - 'Naturalism not dead,' it said, 'letter follows' - he stirred the hornets' nest; out of its buzz Modernism derives. Alexis, in the letter that did indeed follow, defended the claims of the naturalists to be *the* movement of the modern: it was not a school but a mode of knowledge, and its scientizing, rationalizing, democratizing tendency would bring into the domain of literature for the twentieth century 'the broad general current which carries our age toward more science, more truth, and no doubt more happiness'. As for the tendencies toward symbolism, decadence and psychology

in art, he found these out of date and 'merely comical'. Yet it is precisely in the breaking up of the naturalistic surface and its spirit of positivism that one senses the growth of Modernism; as H. Stuart Hughes points out, 'nearly all students of the last years of the nineteenth century have sensed in some form or another a profound psychological change'³⁸ - a reaction against positivism, toward a fascination with irrational or unconscious forces. But, looking at the two Germanic Modernisms, early (before 1890) and late (after 1890), one can see clearly in this context - something that the more confused events elsewhere perhaps disguise - the one *growing out* of the other. That one might then, with some expectation of reward, polarize Modernism along an Ibsen-Strindberg axis is a natural consequence; especially since during the years about 1890 Scandinavian leadership in ~~European~~ Germanic drama coincided so provocatively with such ferment in Germanic cultural life, and reached elsewhere as well - to, for instance, those very different modern talents Shaw and Joyce. It is almost symbolic that scarcely had Ibsen left Germany in 1891, after long years of residence there, to return to his native Norway than Strindberg himself arrived at Berlin to shock and provoke its cultural world with his and his associates' goings-on at the Black Boar tavern. It is equally appropriate that in the closing years of a century which had been gradually accumulating a body of apocalyptic, historicist, Nietzschean and indeed Dionysian aesthetic theories and presumptions, increasing in proportion as the modern age was seen as historically novel and distinct, one should sense, right across the European countries, not simply an extension but a bifurcation of the impulse to be modern.

6

The reader who has followed our exercise in Modernist revisionism thus far is now likely to ask the obvious question: what follows from such recognitions? Perhaps what follows first is that the suspicion, already strong, of current nomenclature as a guide to events is further reinforced. It is clear that many of the standard labels - Naturalism, Impressionism, Symbolism, Imagism, Futurism, Expressionism, to go no further - were forbiddingly intertwined and overlapped,

producing a doubtful synthesis of many movements radically different in kind and degree. What is clear is that Modernism, whether used as a term within the sequence or a term to describe the sequence, is no exception, and is subject to extreme semantic confusion. But what is equally clear is that the terminological confusion should not be used as an excuse to disguise some of our difficulties. It is tempting to suppose that Anglo-American Modernism and the Germanic Modernisms were two quite different things, happening at different times, which just happened to acquire cognate labels. And so, if we are looking for significant similarities, we might cast our eyes across and try to equate Anglo-American Modernism of the early twentieth century with the contemporary movement in the German tradition, which would be Expressionism. In fact the notion that the common factor among Modernisms is, precisely, Expressionism has been advanced by R. P. Blackmur.³⁹ However, Graham Hough has pointed up some of the dangers of this generalization and comparison:

Mr Blackmur has referred to the whole European movement, with which the English one belongs, as Expressionism. I should not be very happy with this as far as our domestic affair is concerned. Expressionism in art has Germanic connotations, and the literature we are considering is Anglo-American profoundly influenced by France. And Expressionism is a name for a kind of critical doctrine, a doctrine of personality and self-expression, that is precisely the one *not* held by our twentieth-century school.⁴⁰

Hough, therefore, is talking about one obvious bifurcation within Modernism, and he is referring, of course, to the doctrines of impersonality and classicism that mark much Anglo-American Modernist thought, and especially that vein in it that concentrates into Imagism, which becomes in every sense the hard core of the Anglo-American tendency.

What this shows us is that there are severe difficulties within any standard chronology of events (which sees the same things as happening at the same time in different countries), and that many of the basic ideas and motifs of Modernism were distilled over an extended time-span in a variety of different circumstances. But there is a further complication: divergence between Expressionism and Imagism is not the whole story either. Briefly looking at it from the Anglo-American end for a moment, we can now see that there are links between

that the intense subjectivity of the Romantic spirit remains central to the modern arts.⁴² And an even more elaborate case has been put by recent scholars of Romanticism like Geoffrey Hartman, Harold Bloom, Robert Langbaum, Morse Peckham and, with more qualifications, Hillis Miller, who in various ways propose a continuity into Modernism of the primary Romantic concerns with consciousness, with self-object relationships, and with intensified experience.⁴³ But most of these arguments do have to recognize an element of discontinuity hidden somewhere in the sequence; as Hillis Miller puts it, 'a new kind of poetry has appeared in our day, a poetry which grows out of romanticism, but goes beyond it'.⁴⁴ And an examination of the period between 1880 and the turn of the century, both in the Germanic and the Anglo-American line, should bring home the fact that we are concerned with more than a swing back to the spirit of Romanticism. For if anything distinguishes these decades and gives them their intellectual and historical character it is a fascination with evolving consciousness: consciousness aesthetic, psychological, and historical. And the preoccupation arises under the pressure of history, the push of modern times, that carry with them new evolutionary hopes and desires, and new underlying forces, psychic and social. The new registers of consciousness alter our sense of history, and our sense of the stability of consciousness itself, taking us into new concepts of mental and emotional association. 'Since they are modern characters', says Strindberg of his people in *Miss Julie* (1888), 'living in an age of transition more urgently hysterical at any rate than the age that preceded it, I have drawn them as split and vacillating . . . conglomerations of past and present . . . scraps from books and newspapers . . .'.⁴⁵ This is much the sort of comment that might have been made by any Modernist writer between the 1880s and the 1930s; and, in its consonance between fragmentation, discontinuity, and the modern age of transition, it is itself modern.

It is one of the larger commonplaces of cultural history that we can distinguish a kind of oscillation in style over periods of time, an ebb and flow between a predominantly rational world-view (Neoclassicism, Enlightenment, Realism) and alternate spasms of irrational or subjective endeavour (Baroque, *Sturm und Drang*, Romanticism). The resultant temptation is to regard ages as being identifiably one or the other: head or heart is in command, reason or emotion domin-

various Germanic developments and various phases of Anglo-American experiment. The impact of Ibsen and Nietzsche has long been known in both England and America. But there is also growing evidence of links between D. H. Lawrence and the early phases of Expressionism, through his wife Frieda; of strong Expressionist elements in John Dos Passos and Eugene O'Neill; and so on. Similarly Futurist developments, which tended to share with Expressionism a buoyant acceptance of the modern city, the modern machine, the sense of contingency, clearly pass on into English-language experimentalism. The Anglo-American line is not single, as becomes clear when we look at the differences between a Lawrence poem and a Pound poem in an Imagist anthology, or note the way in which poets like William Carlos Williams and Hart Crane could, while respecting *The Waste Land*, believe that it had, by virtue of its nihilism and despair, set poetry back twenty years.⁴¹ In short, Modernism was in most countries an extraordinary compound of the futuristic and the nihilistic, the revolutionary and the conservative, the naturalistic and the symbolistic, the romantic and the classical. It was a celebration of a technological age and a condemnation of it; an excited acceptance of the belief that the old régimes of culture were over, and a deep despairing in the face of that fear; a mixture of convictions that the new forms were escapes from historicism and the pressures of the time with convictions that they were, precisely, the living expressions of these things. And in most of these countries the fermenting decade was the eighteen nineties.

Modernism does have, then, its distinct phases and its distinct lines and traditions, but there is great profit in trying to relate and reconcile them. And, of the many reassessments and realignments that this salutary exercise brings in its train, we might note one of especially large order. For the earlier and the wider we push in our attempts to get at the roots of Modernism, the more we are likely to ask questions about the relationship between Modernism and two of the essential mental and artistic movements of the nineteenth century: Romanticism, and positivistic Naturalism. A number of critics have been tempted to see Modernism as a resurgence of Romanticism, though conceivably in a more extreme and strained form of pure irrationalism. Thus Frank Kermode and A. Alvarez, while taking the tendency as a whole, and recognizing the 'classical' elements within it, both suggest

ates, the cultural pattern is 'naïv' or 'sentimentalisch', Apollo or Dionysus claims allegiance. It may help us to understand Modernism if we recognize that these spirits can cross and interfuse. They are, arguably, not fixed poles between which the spirit oscillates, but are subject to the dynamism of change, moving on convergent paths. Suppose, then, that the period we are calling the Modern shows us not the mere rehabilitation of the irrational after a period of ordered Realism, or for that matter the reverse, a period of Classicism after a phase of Romanticism, but rather a compounding of all these potentials: the interpenetration, the reconciliation, the coalescence, the fusion – perhaps an appallingly explosive fusion – of reason and unreason, intellect and emotion, subjective and objective. Let us recall one of the central tenets of the Anglo-American Modern, the Imagist definition of Image, in the words of Ezra Pound: 'An image is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time.'⁴⁶ Pound is here talking about the juxtaposing of contradictions for resolution, and we may extend that notion of fusion into other areas of experience. Or consider Paul Klee, speaking of painting: 'Formerly we used to represent things visible on earth, things we either liked to look at or would have liked to see. Today . . . things appear to assume a broader and more diversified meaning, often seemingly contradicting the rational experience of yesterday. There is a striving to emphasize the essential character of the accidental.' Immediately, again, we recognize the quality common to many of the most characteristic events, discoveries and products of this modern age: in the concern to objectify the subjective, to make audible or perceptible the mind's inaudible conversations, to halt the flow, to irrationalize the rational, to defamiliarize and dehumanize the expected, to conventionalize the extraordinary and the eccentric, to define the psychopathology of *everyday* life, to intellectualize the emotional, to secularize the spiritual, to see space as a function of time, mass as a form of energy, and uncertainty as the only certain thing.

An explosive fusion, one might suppose, that destroyed the tidy categories of thought, that toppled linguistic systems, that disrupted formal grammar and the traditional links between words and words, words and things, inaugurating the power of ellipsis and parataxis and bringing in its train the task – to use Eliot's phrase – of making

new juxtapositions, new wholes; or, in Hofmannsthal's words, of creating 'from man and beast and dream and thing' an infinity of new relationships. And if, finally, one were to seek the precisely defining event, the supremely symbolical point, one would surely turn back to the nineties; and to, for instance, Strindberg's complete, desperate and protracted attention to alchemy, that unique fusion of reason and unreason, science and magic; or to Yeats's evolutionary cosmology, with its search for unity between time and the timeless, the dancer and the dance. One would turn to the intensifying discovery that the thrust of modern consciousness raised issues that were more than representational, were crucially aesthetic, problems in the making of structures and the employment of language and the social role of the artist himself. One would need to contemplate the uneasy awareness that the spirit of naturalism, with its implied optimistic scientific temper, its sense of political emancipation, must find some way of comprehending the strange pressures of unconscious forces and answer to those luminous, unpositivistic metamorphoses that art uniquely could produce. The great works of Modernism live amidst the tools of modern relativism, scepticism, and hope for secular change; but they balance on the sensibility of transition, often holding in suspension the forces that persist from the past and those that grow from the novel present. They turn on ambiguous images: the city as a new possibility and an unreal fragmentation; the machine, a novel vortex of energy, and a destructive implement; the apocalyptic moment itself, the blast or explosion which purges and destroys – images, like Forster's Marabar Caves, which are potentially a synthesis of all possible experiences, globally conceived, or of the empty multiplicity and anarchy of the world. It is the image of art holding transition and chaos, creation and de-creation, in suspension which gives the peculiar concentration and sensibility of Modernist art – gives it what one of the contributors in this volume calls its 'Janus-faced' quality.

It is perhaps, then, characteristic that Modernist writers tend to suppress certain features of modern sensibility – some of its optimism in history, science, evolution and progressive reason – while choosing to release others. The sequence of Modernism, we have said, is a very various sequence running through different subversions of the realist impulse: Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, Cubism, Vorticism,

Futurism, Expressionism, Dada and Surrealism. They are not all movements of the same kind and some are little more than coterie names; and writers tended to move in and out of them. But one feature that links the movements at the centre of sensibility we are discerning is that they tend to see history or human life not as a sequence, or history not as an evolving logic; art and the urgent now strike obliquely across. Modernist works frequently tend to be ordered, then, not on the sequence of historical time or the evolving sequence of character, from history or story, as in realism and naturalism; they tend to work spatially or through layers of consciousness, working towards a logic of metaphor or form. The symbol or image itself, whether romantic or classic, whether it be the translucent centre of energy, which is distilled from multiplicity, and impersonally and linguistically integrates it - helps to impose that synchronicity which is one of the staples of Modernist style. By such means can occur that compacting, that sense of generative distillation which can - to borrow Eliot's phrase about compacting contemporary and antiquity in *Ulysses* - 'make the modern world possible for art'. Hence there is a preservative element in Modernism, and a sense of primary epistemological difficulty; the task of art is to redeem, essentially or existentially, the formless universe of contingency. Reality is not a material given, and nor is it a positivistic historical sequence. The act of fictionality thus becomes the crucial act of imagining; and Modernism thus tends to have to do with the inter-section of an apocalyptic and modern time, and a timeless and transcendent symbol or a node of pure linguistic energy.

Now if these propositions about the complexity and nature of Modernism do have any validity, we can find nearly all the significant manifestations at dates much earlier than those points in the 1920s which some of our critics have seen as the heyday of it all. The significance of de-creating the given surface of reality; intersecting historical time with time according with the movement and rhythm of the subjective mind; the pursuit of the luminous image, or else of fictional order sustained against consecutive story; the belief in perception as plural, life as multiple, reality as insubstantial; these crucial notions form into a creative compound long before the First World War and are there in the last century, as symbolism and naturalism

cross and interfuse. One reason why the post-war period has seemed so crucial is that the war itself can be recognized as the apocalyptic moment of transition into the new. But in this matter we might better look at the significance of the turn of the century itself, a topic on which Frank Kermode writes brilliantly in *The Sense of an Ending*, a book which does much to distil the character of modern theories of fictionality and also the apocalyptic and historiographic features of Modernist sensibility.⁴⁷ Kermode suggests that the turning of a century has a strongly chiliastic effect; it helps distil men's millenarian disposition to think about crisis, to reflect on history as revolution or cycle, to consider, as so many *fin-de-siècle* and *au-be-siècle* minds did consider, the question of endings and beginnings, the going and coming of the world. The sensibility itself has, of course, an extended history, going deep into the Judaic tradition and the kind of importance we attach to secular time. What Modernism does is to raise in ferment the notion not only of form but also of significant time, and this is one reason why audacious attempts to discern a moment of transition (Henry Adams's 1900; Virginia Woolf's 1910; D. H. Lawrence's 1915) are themselves a feature of Modernist sensibility. The consequences of this apocalyptic ferment of order help explain much of Modernism. It illuminates the symbolist effort to transcend historical sequence by intersecting with it the timelessness of artistic revelation: the artist, like Scott Fitzgerald's Gatsby, tips back the clock on the mantelpiece and sees beauty, form, dream. It illuminates the desire to reappraise the structure and operation of mind: 'To appreciate the pagan manner of thought,' D. H. Lawrence tells us, 'we have to drop our own manner of on-and-on-and-on, from a start to a finish, and allow the mind to move in cycles, or to fit here and there over a cluster of images. Our idea of time as a continuity in an eternal, straight line has crippled our consciousness cruelly.'⁴⁸ It illuminates, too, that passion in Modernism to see the universe as contingent, poverty-stricken, demoted until it has been reimagined, its local virtues apprehended through the planes and conjunctions available to the fictionalizing mind.

This crucial compound persists until after the war, and certainly up to 1930. After that it seems that certain elements of Modernism seem to be reallocated, as history increasingly came back in for intellectuals, as, with the loss of purpose and social cohesion, and the

accelerating pace of technological change, modernity was a visible scene open to simple report, and as the world depression tends increasingly to bring back political and economic determinism into the intellectual ideologies. Our own concentration in this book is therefore on the period before 1930, even though the lines of demarcation here cannot be clear, for the broader view of Modernism we have offered must suggest an extraordinary range of continuities through into present art. There is a further reason for this concentration; for perhaps one of the most remarkable features of this period between 1890 and 1930 is the extraordinary galaxy of talent that we find there. Few historical phases contain such an extraordinary wealth of major writers – European, English, American – whose complexity of aesthetic inquiry, whose generative sense of style, whose sustaining and self-risking intelligence offers so much work worthy of detailed consideration. Modernism may be a stylistic abstraction, one exceptionally difficult to formulate. But it does catch under its loose but invigorating label a large number of writers who manifest art for us in a major way. It does not, as we have said, catch *all* the important writers of the twentieth century. But enough to make a volume devoted to Modernist experimentalism an exploration of some of the most interesting and essential literary creation to be found in our difficult century.

Notes

- 1 Herbert Read, *Art Now* (London, 1933; revised edition 1960).
- 2 C. S. Lewis, *De Descriptiōe Temporum: An Inaugural Lecture* (Cambridge 1955). The lecture is reprinted in his *They Asked for a Paper* (London 1962), pp. 9-25.
- 3 Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero* (*Le Degré zéro de l'écriture*), translated by Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (London 1967), p. 9.
- 4 G. S. Fraser, *The Modern Writer and His World* (London 1953); Richard Ellmann and Charles Feidelson (eds.), *The Modern Tradition: Backgrounds of Modern Literature* (New York and London 1965).
- 5 Lionel Trilling, 'On the Modern Element in Modern Literature', in *Beyond Culture: Essays in Literature and Learning* (London 1966).
- 6 Northrop Frye, *The Modern Century* (New York and London 1967), p. 23.

- 7 A. O. Lovejoy, 'On the Discrimination of Romanticisms' (1924), reprinted in M. H. Abrams (ed.), *English Romantic Poets: Modern Essays in Criticism* (New York 1960).
- 8 See especially Georg Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, translated by John and Necke Mander (London 1962).
- 9 Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (London 1927); quoted in Wylie Sypher, *From Rocco to Cubism in Art and Literature* (New York 1960).
- 10 Wylie Sypher, *From Rocco to Cubism in Art and Literature* (New York 1960), p. xix.
- 11 Stephen Spender, *The Struggle of the Modern* (London 1963).
- 12 Jose Ortega y Gasset, 'The Dehumanization of Art', in *The Dehumanization of Art, and Other Writings on Art and Culture* (Garden City, N.Y. 1956).
- 13 Frank Kermode, 'Modernisms', in *Modern Essays* (London 1971).
- 14 This is Harry Levin's interpretation of a primary characteristic of modernism in 'What Was Modernism?', in *Refractions: Essays in Comparative Literature* (New York and London 1966).
- 15 T. S. Eliot, 'Ulysses, Order, and Myth', *Dial*, no. 75 (New York 1923), pp. 480-83, reprinted in Richard Ellmann and Charles Feidelson (eds.), *The Modern Tradition: Backgrounds of Modern Literature* (New York and London 1965).
- 16 Irving Howe, 'Introduction to the Idea of the Modern', in Irving Howe (ed.), *Literary Modernism* (Greenwich, Conn. 1967), p. 13.
- 17 A. Alvarez, *Beyond All This Fiddle: Essays, 1955-1967* (London 1968).
- 18 Cyril Connolly, *The Modern Movement: One Hundred Key Books from England, France, and America, 1880-1950* (London 1965), p. 4.
- 19 Edmund Wilson, *Axel's Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870-1930* (New York 1931); C. M. Bowra, *Heritage of Symbolism* (London 1943).
- 20 Graham Hough, *Image and Experience: Studies in a Literary Revolution* (London 1966).
- 21 Richard Ellmann and Charles Feidelson (eds.), *The Modern Tradition: Backgrounds of Modern Literature* (New York and London 1965), p. vi.
- 22 A. Alvarez, *Beyond All This Fiddle: Essays, 1955-1967* (London 1968); Frank Kermode, 'Modernisms', in *Modern Essays* (London 1971); Stephen Spender, *The Struggle of the Modern* (London 1963); Graham Hough, *Image and Experience: Studies in a Literary Revolution* (London 1966).
- 23 Virginia Woolf, 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown' (1924), reprinted in *Collected Essays, volume 1* (London 1966), p. 321.
- 24 Richard Ellmann, 'The Two Faces of Edward', in R. Ellmann

- (introd.), *Edwardians and Late Victorians* (New York 1960); reprinted in his *Golden Codgers: Biographical Speculations* (New York and London 1973).
- 25 Harry Levin, 'What Was Modernism?', in *Refractions: Essays in Comparative Literature* (New York and London 1966).
- 26 Harold Rosenberg, *The Tradition of the New* (New York 1959, London 1962).
- 27 For useful comments on Post-Modernism, see Ihab Hassan, *The Literature of Silence: Henry Miller and Samuel Beckett* (New York 1967), and his *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature* (New York 1971). Also see George Steiner, *Language and Silence: Essays 1958-1966* (London 1967), and Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation and other Essays* (New York 1966).
- 28 Bernard Bergonzi (ed.), *Innovations: Essays on Art and Ideas* (London 1968). In addition to Kermode's essay, see that by Leslie Fiedler on 'The New Mutants' and that by Leonard B. Mayer on 'The End of the Renaissance?'
- 29 Ihab Hassan, 'POSTmodernISM', *New Literary History*, vol. III, no. 1 (Autumn 1971), pp. 5-30; reprinted in I. Hassan, *Paracriticism: Seven Speculations of the Times* (Urbana and London 1975). Other essays on the same topic are to be found in this issue. For a more critical view, see Gerald Graff, 'The Myth of the Postmodernist Breakthrough', *Tri-Quarterly*, no. 26 (Winter 1973), pp. 383-417. Other essays in this same special issue - especially that by Philip Stevick - are relevant.
- 30 George Steiner, 'From the Vienna Woods', *New Yorker* (23 July 1973), pp. 73-7.
- 31 Holbrook Jackson, *The Eighteen-Nineties* (London 1913; reprinted in Pelican Books, 1939). The quotation comes from p. 19 in the Pelican edition.
- 32 Wilhelm Arendt (ed.), *Moderne Dichtercharaktere* (Leipzig 1885).
- 33 In *Literarische Volkshefte*, vol. III (1888).
- 34 Lionel Trilling, 'On the Modern Element in Modern Literature', in *Beyond Culture: Essays in Literature and Learning* (London 1966).
- 35 Eugen Wolf, 'Die Moderne', reprinted in Erich Ruprecht (ed.), *Literarische Manifeste des Naturalismus, 1880-1892* (Stuttgart 1962), pp. 138-41.
- 36 M. G. Conrad, 'Moderne Bestrebungen', reprinted in Erich Ruprecht (ed.), *Literarische Manifeste des Naturalismus, 1880-1892* (Stuttgart 1962), pp. 254-6.
- 37 Hermann Bahr, *Zur Kritik der Moderne* (Zürich 1890); second series (Dresden 1891).

- 38 H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society: The Reorientation of European Social Thought, 1890-1930* (London 1959), p. 34.
- 39 R. P. Blackmur, *Ami Mirabiles, 1921-1925: Reason in the Madness of Letters* (Washington D.C. 1956).
- 40 Graham Hough, *Image and Experience: Studies in a Literary Revolution* (London 1960), p. 8.
- 41 Thus William Carlos Williams comments: 'I'd felt at once that it [*The Waste Land*] had set me back twenty years, and I'm sure it did. Critically Eliot returned us to the classroom just at the moment when I felt that we were on the point of an escape much closer to the essence of a new art form itself - rooted in the locality which should give it fruit ...' (William Carlos Williams, *Autobiography* (London 1968), p. 174).
- 42 Frank Kermode, *Romantic Image* (London 1957) and A. Alvarez, *Beyond All This Fiddle: Essays, 1955-1967* (London 1968).
- 43 Geoffrey Hartman, *Beyond Formalism: Literary Essays, 1958-1970* (New Haven 1970); Harold Bloom, *Romanticism and Consciousness: Essays in Criticism* (New York 1970); Robert Langbaum, *The Poetry of Experience* (New York 1963); and Morse Peckham, *Beyond the Tragic Vision: The Quest for Identity in the Nineteenth Century* (New York 1962). Also see the essays in David Thorburn and Geoffrey Hartman (eds.), *Romanticism: Vistas, Instances, Continuities* (Ithaca and London 1973).
- 44 J. Hillis Miller, *Poets of Reality* (Cambridge, Mass. 1965).
- 45 August Strindberg, 'Preface' to *Lady Julie* (1888).
- 46 Ezra Pound, 'A Retrospect' (1918), reprinted in T. S. Eliot (ed.), *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound* (London 1954), p. 4.
- 47 Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending* (London and New York 1966).
- 48 D. H. Lawrence, *Apocalypse* (London 1832), pp. 97-8.