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### Popular modernism: representations of modernist literature in popular culture

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## Introduction

The main object is the critical business of making sense of some of the radical ways of making sense of the world.

Frank Kermode (1967: 29).

“High art” is part of popular culture.

Mieke Bal (1991: 7).

Before I elaborate on the motivation and questions that inform this work, I wish to mention that this study is a product of fascination and passion: passion for literary writing in general and a particular fascination with the works of a number of authors, who have never ceased to inspire me to continue thinking, questioning and rereading. Let me open this introduction by saying something about these works from the oeuvres of four canonical modernist novelists: Marcel Proust, Virginia Woolf, William Faulkner and Franz Kafka.

The novels are written in a period when writers were reshaping literary fiction, leaving behind the goals of literary realism.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, each of the novels also deals with questions of writing and of what literature should be. In this study, I focus on this self-reflexivity, on the author’s eye that turns inwards, striving to describe personal impressions and perceptions as well as the processes of perceiving and writing. I deploy modernist literature as a means to analyze the role and function of literary writing in general in contemporary western society. Towards that end, I analyze the reappearances of the novels of these authors in contemporary western culture. I have chosen to select modernist novels, excluding other modernist art forms, because I am especially interested in the role of writing in present-day society: the increasing interest in

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<sup>1</sup> Still, as Jeff Wallace argues with regard to Virginia Woolf’s perspective on writing, the goal “is clearly not simply for modernist fiction to repudiate realism, but to achieve a more authentic engagement with the real than realism, so called, could possibly attain”(2007: 19).

memoir writing, book clubs, the booming sales of autobiographic literature and the celebrity status of the author.

While in the beginning, modernist literature was promoted by an elitist group of critics, today modernist authors are presented in Oprah's Book Club, self-help literature, Hollywood movies and tourist guides. The title of my study, *Popular Modernism*, refers to this continuous popularity of modernist literature. In this, I endorse the assumption formulated by Mieke Bal: "'High art' is part of popular culture" (1991: 7). This assumption is, however, not as unambiguous as it might appear: to claim that high art is part of popular culture does not imply that there is no distinction between them. Instead of trying to define on what ground the one can be distinguished from the other, I attempt to deconstruct the assumed hierarchy by dealing with questions such as: What does the incorporation of modernist literature in popular media teach us about the framing of western literature and about our categorization of high and low culture? What do these works mean to today's culture? I discuss the ways in which the image of modernist literature transforms, in which it travels through time, discourses and contexts .

Modernist literature has served as the paradigmatic example of brilliant literary writing ever since it was published. It even survived, or rather escaped, the postmodernist critique of the canons of western prose. Whereas postmodernist thinkers knocked nearly all cultural authorities and canonical texts from their pedestals, postmodernists largely supported modernist authors, because modernist literature already is self-reflexive and critical of literary conventions.<sup>2</sup> In Roland Barthes's famous anti-authorial essay "The Death of the Author" (1989), Barthes presents Mallarmé, Valéry and Proust's works as ground-breaking. Accepting them as the examples of authors who destabilized the author's empire, Barthes reaffirms the authority of those modernist texts. Maurice Blanchot, Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Derrida also support the status of modernist authors by engaging with Franz Kafka's, Samuel Beckett's and Proust's work, showing how these texts inspire or anticipate their philosophies.

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<sup>2</sup> See Thomas Vaessens's *De revanche van de roman* (2009) for a critical account of postmodernist perspectives and the contemporary relativist position in Dutch literary criticism.

It is not surprising that poststructuralist thinkers engage with modernist works. After all, modernist literature always also is about writing itself, as it presents a view of the relation between language and world. This also explains my tendency to engage philosophers like Roland Barthes, Maurice Blanchot, Judith Butler, Fredric Jameson, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Julia Kristeva and Edward W. Said. These philosophers and theorists are largely preoccupied with language, literature and the ways in which linguistic conventions shape our thoughts.<sup>3</sup> In studying novels by modernist icons, as well as popular representations of these novels, I attempt to analyze what modernist literature represents today. Furthermore, by bringing philosophical analyses of literature into dialogue with popular culture phenomena like self-help writing books, I endeavor to provide insight into the sociocultural development of the increasing amount of people who wish to become writers.

*By the way*

The reason for my fascination, and the passion that I mentioned earlier, finds its source in my own occupation as a literary writer. While working on this study I completed one volume of poetry and two novels. This not only means that writing is an essential part of my everyday life that I could not do without, but also that I went through the extended processes of writing, publishing and receiving reviews and media attention while working on my thesis. I have been working as a literary critic as well: I wrote reviews about novels, poetry books and philosophical publications for, amongst others, the Dutch newspaper *de Volkskrant* and the journal *De Groene Amsterdammer*.

Hence, my research has always been self-reflexive in this way, too. Still, I have only taken my own authorship as a point of departure and not as direct

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<sup>3</sup> Since Plato, who in his *Republic* describes the poet as a manipulator of feelings, far removed from any sense of truth or reason, there has been a rather strange competition between literature and philosophy. Perhaps this competition is mainly fought by philosophers who fear that their profession will not be taken completely seriously. In *Beckett, Derrida and the Event of Literature* (2004), Asja Szafraniec writes that Derrida scholars often feel the urge “to separate his thought from this part of his interest, from what he himself, amused, addresses as the risk of being relegated to a ‘department of rhetoric or literature’” (17). Szafraniec argues that, in fact, rather than competing with each other, philosophy and literature have always been engaged in a productive exchange, even if this exchange consisted of a “gesture of self-defense against literature” or the “modern notion of literature establishing itself in response to philosophy” (20).

research material. When writing about the role of the author or, for instance, publicity material that focuses on women authors, I may have used my own experiences indirectly, but I never refer to my personal observations in this study. An academic scholar, as opposed to a literary writer, is not supposed to draw on intimate observations in her attempt to define aspects of contemporary society. Hence, I do not ostentatiously incorporate my own struggle with writer's blocks, anxiety, fear of failure, or the way in which critics respond to my work or personal background, although, of course, they are inevitably part and parcel of this study.

### *What is modernism?*

Opinions differ about who coined the term "modernism." Rabaté writes: "Chateaubriand is often invoked for having coined the term *modernité*, although in a negative sense, when he employs it in [his] *Memoirs* to describe an ugly building" (1996: 2). Marshall Berman, however, argues that "Rousseau was the first to use the word *moderniste* in the ways in which the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries will use it" (1982: 17). Others point to Jonathan Swift who coined the word "modernisms" (in plural) in a letter to Alexander Pope on July 23<sup>rd</sup> 1837. Fredric Jameson writes that

"modernity" as a concept is so often associated with modernity that it comes as something of a shock to find the word "modern" in use as far back as the fifth century AD. In the usage of Pope Gelasius I (494/5) it simply distinguishes the contemporaries from the older period of Church fathers (2002: 17).

Comparatively, many scholars have tried to determine when literary modernism precisely started, when it ended, which artists belong to the core of modernist art, and who move in the periphery. Some distinguish different stages of modernism, as does Tyrus Miller in *Late Modernism* (1999). According to Miller, early modernist writers specialized in formal mastery; late modernists distinguished themselves by their random gathering of material. Miller sees Gertrude Stein, Djuna Barnes and Samuel Beckett as late modernists. Other

distinctions are made between European literature, of which the crucial years lie between the two World Wars, American modernism, Latin-American modernism, as well as International modernism, written only in English, and so forth.<sup>4</sup> While I discuss distinctions between modernist and postmodernist literature, bringing into play arguments by Brian McHale and Fredric Jameson, I should make clear that I do not endeavor to map the historical period or re-establish a new modernist canon. Nevertheless, because I respond to theories about modernism as well as to representations of modernist novels, the making and development of the modernist canon is an implicit topic throughout my work.<sup>5</sup>

The formation of a canon is subject to historical developments in art, fashion and politics. Simultaneously, the making of a canon often seems arbitrary. In *Mazes* (1989), Kenner for instance argues that, in the nineteen-thirties, F.R. Leavis included writers in the modernist canon who now are hardly known. Leavis found that Ezra Pound only wrote one good poem and dismissed William Butler Yeats as a poet who only wrote about his Irish life, and neither could Leavis make anything of Marianne Moore's poetry (30-31). Kenner himself also makes distinctions that are subjective, for example, his division between writers belonging to International Modernism and writers like Virginia Woolf or William Faulkner, who, according to Kenner, were not more than voices from a certain province (40). He also contends that International Modernist literature is written in English, thereby dismissing Robert Musil or Marcel Proust.<sup>6</sup>

In the introduction to the anthology *The Gender of Modernism* (1990), Bonnie Kime Scott, in turn, mentions Kenner as one of the critics that gendered modernism masculine. For instance, he named the modernist era after Ezra Pound: *The Pound Era*. Scott shows that, for a long time, the modernist canon was

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<sup>4</sup> On early modernism see among others Peter Brooker; on late modernism Richard Begam and Tyrus Miller; on International Modernism Hugh Kenner; on European modernism Douwe Fokkema and Elrud Ibsch; on the division of early and late modernism Ernst van Alphen.

<sup>5</sup> Morag Shiach rightly argues in her introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to the Modernist Novel* (2007) that modernism is "a critical term that refers to cultural works from a variety of different national traditions, each of which has its own requirements and constraints of periodization. The key moments will be understood differently within different national traditions, and translation is not always helpful here. Modernist architecture in Britain, for example, with its functional disdain of the decorative, has only selected point of contact with the colorful exuberance of the *modernisme* associated with an architect such as Gaudí ..." (7).

<sup>6</sup> The randomness of Kenner's arguments is well illustrated by his defense of James Joyce as an International Modernist: the fact that most of Joyce's works take place in Dublin suddenly does not matter, since in his books he refer to all kinds of world literature.

dominated by male authors. Scott argues that “much of what these select men had to say about the crisis in gender identification that underlies much of modernist literature was left out or read from a limited perspective” (2). Though I would have liked to argue for including authors who have been neglected, as, for instance, Jean Rhys or Nella Larsen, my research largely focuses on literature composed at the beginning of the twentieth century, written by the small group of modernist icons.<sup>7</sup> The choice for these authors is the result of my research into representations of modernist literature in popular culture, in which a small group of authors is overrepresented. James Joyce might be called the king of modernist heroes.<sup>8</sup>

Rather than arguing for or against authors that belong to the canon, I am interested in the way in which Marcel Proust, Virginia Woolf, William Faulkner and Franz Kafka are represented as famous writers now; in *how* they are established as such, time and again. They have been granted the status of unprecedentedly gifted, multilayered, innovating and genuine writers. I am not interested in the question if this image is truthful or not; instead, I study in what way the icons of modernist literature are re-established in various discursive frameworks.

In *Realism in our Time* (1962), Georg Lukács warns us: “What we must avoid at all costs is the approach generally adopted by bourgeois-modernist critics themselves: that exaggerated concern with formal criteria, with questions of style and literary technique” (17). I agree with Lukács that the singular focus on style and literary techniques is a limited approach. Matters of style are intrinsically connected to content, as the *way* in which something is said or written pertains to *what* is said or written. Lukács is right that many critics, in the wake of New Criticism, defended modernism as the highest of high art precisely because it is “purist,” emphasizing its formal virtues. However, in my

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<sup>7</sup> There are, of course, exceptions that are written earlier, like for instance most of Henry James’s novels, André Gide’s *Paludes* (1895) or Paul Valéry’s *La Soirée avec Monsieur Teste* (1896), which in my opinion can be defined as modernist works as well.

<sup>8</sup> Woolf is precise about the moment at which a change took place in the arts, as well as in life, which we could now define as the beginning of modernism. “In or about December, 1910, human nature changed” she writes in “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” (1966: 320). In *Partial Magic* (1975), Robert Alter links this year to the first “London exhibition of Post-Impressionist paintings organized ... by Roger Fry and Desmond McCarthy. More generally, it has been associated with the signal innovations in psychology, philosophy, anthropology, physics, and most immediately, the shift in sexual morality” (138).

opinion, Lukács's emphasis on the underlying ideology or *Weltanschauung* in fiction is partial as well. For instance, it makes him characterize Thomas Mann's fiction as "fruitful critical realism," while he describes Franz Kafka's work as "aesthetically appealing, but decadent modernism" (92).<sup>9</sup>

Considering this example, I follow Theodor Adorno, who defends practically the opposite of Lukács's opinion. In Adorno's point of view, as he expresses it in *Aesthetic Theory*, the power of Kafka's fiction lies precisely in its "negative sense of reality" (28). Adorno argues that art is not social because of its content, but "primarily because it stands opposed to society" (321). Yet, as Astradur Eysteinnsson makes clear in his thorough study *The Concept of Modernism* (1994), "Adorno's complex dialectics, by no means rests on one-sided purism, for the qualities of art that promote its 'autonomy' also arrange themselves in such a way that they reflect social conditions" (41).

Several theorists, such as Marshall Berman or Sjef Houppermans, emphasize the engaged, political character of modernist literature. They take André Gide as their protagonist for his critique of colonialism and the taboo on homosexuality, in comparison to which Proust's work might appear as exclusively aesthetic. However, while the beauty of Proust's meandering sentences might divert from the engaged character of his work, it is not non-existent. In *Axel's Castle* (1959), Edmund Wilson points out that Proust critiques the social hierarchies of his time. In *Proust Among the Stars* (1998), Malcolm Bowie also dedicates a chapter to politics in Proust's work; in *Stuck in a Revolving Door* (2006), Yolande Jansen analyses Proust's criticism and irony regarding the expected assimilation of the Jews in France.

Eysteinnsson keenly remarks that the analogy between a novel and its sociocultural circumstances can reduce modernist art to a "unilaterally reproductive or symbolic act." He continues: "The latter tendency, in fact, is clearly exemplified by critics who see in the formal fervor of modernism a reflection of fascist discipline or totalitarian ideologies" (21). It is not my intention here to defend either one of these interpretations. On the contrary, I am interested precisely in the Janus-faced character of the discourse on modernism,

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<sup>9</sup> Lukács: "The distinctions that concern us are not those between stylistic 'techniques' in the formalistic sense. It is the view of the world, the ideology or *Weltanschauung* underlying a writer's work, that counts" (19).

“looking simultaneously inwards, towards form and language, and outwards, towards the changing material circumstances in which fiction was being produced and consumed,” as Wallace phrases it (15).<sup>10</sup>

Around the turn of the nineteenth century discussions about the reinvention of art bloomed. Artists gathered, wrote manifestos and pamphlets; new movements arose such as the Surrealists, Expressionists, Dada-ists or Futurists. Discussions were stirred up by social changes, the war, the defeat of old protestant morality, but also by the increase of factories, industrialization of production and by technical developments, such as new forms of transportation, fast cars, airplanes, as well as the commodification of the telephone and discoveries like Röntgen’s rays or the advance of photography and film. The writers that we today call modernists each in their own way respond to these developments. Although they did not gather as a movement, this does not mean that they were less self-conscious about the developments in art and literature.<sup>11</sup>

In *The Ghosts of Modernity* (1996), Jean-Michel Rabaté argues that modernism is haunted by history, by loss and the repressed, and is therefore not a-historical. At the same time, his book is evidence of how modernism haunts theorists still today, or to put it otherwise: how *we* continue haunting modernism. That is exactly my topic here: the enduring and yet expanding fascination with modernist literature, articulated by theorists as well as popular media. Rabaté’s approach of ghostliness refers to Derrida’s hauntology that he develops in his book *Spectres de Marx* (1993), arguing against the priority of being and presence, for which the ghost forms the ultimate alternative; being neither present nor absent, neither dead nor alive.

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<sup>10</sup> There are also theorists that recognize the engaged character in the formal or aesthetic representation without having to defend the importance of either one of the sides of modernist literature. Marshall Berman, for instance, argues that modernist literature mirrors social modernization, of which the first phase, according to Berman, should be located in the sixteenth century. Also, in the article “Notes toward and Anatomy of ‘Modernism’” (1982), Kenner shows that new transportation forms and industrial sounds did not only influence the content of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, but also influenced the formal side of the novel, the structure and rhythm of his writing. Eysteinnsson points out that the influence of urban rhythms and sounds also can be found in Döblin’s *Berlin Alexanderplatz* or Dos Passos’s *Manhattan Transfer*.

<sup>11</sup> According to Douwe Fokkema and Elrud Ibsch, the modernists were too “intellectualist” to identify with unilateral manifestos (1984:10-11). However, instead of being too intellectualist compared to other writers, in my opinion, it seems more likely that the modernists were too individualist to organize themselves in groups.

In addition to the concepts of ghosts, ghostliness and hauntology, I look at modernists works as a form of afterlife.<sup>12</sup> Especially in the last chapter, I connect the issue of ending to that of “afterlife.” The appropriation of Kafka by the Prague tourism industry can be read as granting him and his work an afterlife in the shape of mass-produced souvenirs and the walking tours to his former lodgings and the places that supposedly figure in his work. In the first chapter, however, I rather complicate *pre-* and *post-* by making use of Mieke Bal’s concept of “preposterous history” (1999: 6-7).

While the title of my dissertation might raise the expectation that I will analyze the simultaneous development of popular culture and modernism in the beginning of the twentieth century, this is not my main focus. I study the representation of modernist literature *today*. Thus, my point of departure is different from that of Juan A. Suárez’s fascinating *Pop Modernism: Noise and the Reinvention of the Everyday* (2007). Suárez studies the “structural similarities between modernism and mass culture” in the early years of the twentieth century. He reveals how “modernism often arose from a selective appropriation of popular expressive forms” (3). Suárez, like Michel de Certeau, focuses on the practice of the everyday, arguing that “modernism is a form of everyday practice parallel to that of anonymous consumers everywhere” (6).

What my dissertation adds to the studies on the relation between modernism and mass culture is that it deals with the interactions between present-day popular culture and modernist novel. This allows me to reach conclusions about the role of literature in contemporary western culture. With regard to Rembrandt’s paintings, Bal writes: “These works may be part of the elitist culture, but the responses they elicit are not” (7). The same could be said about modernist novels. Moreover, one can come to similar conclusion about the different periods to which the works belong: the novels may be part of modernism, but the responses they continue to elicit are not. The responses I study are part of contemporary cultural phenomena, such as films, self-help books and literary tourism.

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<sup>12</sup>Afterlife – *Nachleben* – is a term that Aby Warburg uses for the continuity of images and motives.

## *Narration*

Perhaps I could have included modernist poetry among my objects of study; yet, the thread that connects the separate questions in my thesis pertains to issues of fiction and narration. As Stephen Dowden writes, “the novel is European modernity’s most characteristic narrative medium” (1986: 5). He continues:

[I]t has risen to its place of prominence for two main reasons. The first reason is the ascendancy of the bourgeoisie, a broad social class with the education, leisure time, and financial wherewithal necessary to make use of the books that the relatively new craft of printing had made available. The second precondition of the novel’s widespread popularity is its characteristically “realist” mode. The genre began by distinguishing its themes and forms from fantasies and mannerisms of courtly romance. In contradiction to romance, the novel emphasizes the individuality of plausible characters and events, and abandons the standardized plots, settings and figures of the chivalric world (5).<sup>13</sup>

Dowden mentions several of the early aspects of literary writing that I address separately in the chapters. For example, I address the question of the realist mode with regard to Michael Cunningham’s novel *The Hours* (1999), for which Cunningham took Woolf’s life as well as her novel *Mrs Dalloway* (1992 [1925]) as a source of inspiration. Furthermore, I connect the question of individuality to concepts like authenticity, originality and the initial moment of writing by studying Marcel Proust’s prose and the film *Adaptation* (Spike Jonze, 2002). I also reread Proust’s work through the framework of contemporary self-help literature that deals with the ambition of becoming a writer.

According to publishers, who receive stacks of manuscripts daily, a rapidly growing number of people cherish the hope to get their work published. In the Netherlands alone, hundreds thousands of people quietly work on their novels, plays, poetry or memoirs.<sup>14</sup> People are aware of the competition and attempt to write the perfect book by reading self-help writing books, by visiting

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<sup>13</sup> See also Ian Watt, *Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (1967).

<sup>14</sup> See Arie Storm, *De X-Files van de literatuur* (2005: 12).

websites that advise them in successful publishing, or by following creative writing courses or workshops. The growing interest in writing and publishing is something of which Walter Benjamin observed the start at the beginning of the twentieth century. In his seminal essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” he writes:

For centuries a small number of writers were confronted by many thousands of readers. This changed toward the end of the last century. With the increasing extension of the press, which kept placing new political, religious, scientific, professional, and local organs before the readers, an increasing number of readers became writers – at first, occasional ones. It began with the daily press opening to its readers space for “letters to the editor.” And today there is hardly a gainfully employed European who could not, in principle, find an opportunity to publish somewhere or other comments on his work, grievances, documentary reports, or that sort of thing (1985: 231-232).

The development that Benjamin observes is continued in blogs and other forms of writing today, which largely take place on the Internet. This development is related to other changing social circumstances, such as increasing literacy and leisure time, which Dowden also mentions. Nowadays, in the western world, almost everyone can read and write. Compulsory education was introduced around 1900 in most western countries.<sup>15</sup>

The writer has become an exalted figure: someone who is intelligent, gifted, original and famous. The role and function of the author, as well as the various perspectives on what an author is, forms the topic of the third chapter, in which I study how the modernist idea of the irrelevance of the author’s

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<sup>15</sup> Walter Benjamin is famous for his extensive use of footnotes. In footnote number 13 to “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” he writes: “For every page of print and pictures published a century ago, twenty or perhaps even a hundred pages are published today. But for every man of talent then living, there are now only two men of talent. It may be of course that, thanks to universal education, many potential talents which in the past would have been stillborn are now enabled to realize themselves. Let us assume, then, that there are now three or even four men of talent to every one of earlier times. It still remains true to say that the consumption of reading – and seeing – matter has far outstripped the natural production of gifted writers and draughtsmen (248).

biography relates to the famous texts by Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes, as well as to the recent literary hoax of the author JT LeRoy. JT LeRoy's work was initially believed to offer a truthful representation of the author's life and only later had to be reconsidered as fiction. Many readers felt deceived when the fictional status of the author JT LeRoy was revealed.

Why people prefer true stories above fictional stories is a difficult question to answer, but the fact that books or films that are based on a true story sell easier is undeniable. The book by James Frey, *A Million Little Pieces*, which caused much turbulence when the author admitted that large parts of it were fabricated, was originally envisioned as fiction, but according to Frey's publisher, it was unable to sell as a novel. Kathleen Rooney writes, "thus, ... Frey had bowed to market pressure to bill the book as a memoir" (2005: 216). This case shows that the artistic criteria are less demanding when it concerns a "true" story.

Together with the growing interest in writing that manifests itself in various kinds of publications and of which Benjamin describes the beginning, the importance of language and literature in the constitution of social structures was recognized by the philosophers who were part of the "linguistic turn." Central to the different forms of what is understood as the linguistic turn – logical positivism, logical empiricism, structuralism, poststructuralism, postmodernism – is the belief that nothing can be known independently of language.<sup>16</sup> If all thought is determined by language, it is language we should analyze. As a consequence, the analysis of various phenomena becomes first of all an analysis of the language that belongs to these phenomena. For Martin Heidegger, and later also for Jacques Derrida or Michel Foucault, this often includes following etymological traces in the development of a word. The meaning of every word travels through time, surroundings, contexts and discursive frameworks. Yet, to conclude that one should rather analyze those contexts is not a solution either.

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<sup>16</sup> In the article "What Was the Linguistic Turn?" (2000), Kerwin Lee Klein writes that some hold that the linguistic turn was initiated in German philosophy already in the eighteenth century in the work of Johann Georg Hamann, Johann Gottfried von Herder, and Wilhelm von Humboldt, and that in the early years of the twentieth century it was further developed by Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer, whose influence extended to contemporary philosophers such as Karl-Otto Apel and Jürgen Habermas. According to others the linguistic turn was started by analytical philosophy, and first used as a term by Gustav Bergmann, who credited Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* with having initiated "a linguistic turn" in philosophy. Yet, for historiographers, the linguistic turn has largely meant French structuralism and poststructuralism as filtered through American literary criticism (80).

As Jacques Derrida convincingly argues in *Limited Inc* (1995), the context is no more stable or transparent than the intention or the meaning of an utterance. The conditions of a context are neither determinable.<sup>17</sup>

In *Framing the Sign* (1988), Jonathan Culler summarizes the problem with context as follows:

context is not fundamentally different from what it contextualizes; context is not given but produced; what belongs to a context is determined by interpretive strategies; contexts are just as much in need of elucidation as events; and the meaning of a context is determined by events (xiv).

Not just the context of a popular phenomenon changes the meaning of a modernist work, nor does that context singularly frame the work; the modernist novel reframes the popular culture phenomenon. Each interpretation or approach of the novel and its contemporary return frames the works from a different angle, by which it establishes a new relation between the two works and the viewer and/or reader.

### *Sightseeing*

In *The Tourist* (1999), Dean MacCannell argues that the tourist is a perfect model for modern man. “[S]ightseeing is ... a way of attempting to overcome the discontinuity of modernity, of incorporating its fragments into unified experience. Of course, it is doomed to eventual failure: even as it tries to construct totalities, it celebrates differentiation,” he explains (13). In my last

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<sup>17</sup> Martin Heidegger’s theories of language have been of significant importance to poststructuralist theory. In the lecture “Language,” given in 1950, Heidegger argues that man does not only, along with other faculties, possess the faculty of speech, but that “speech enables man to be the living being he is as man” (1975: 189). Heidegger calls language the “house” of being. In *Holzwege* (1977), he argues that we always live and move around in this house: we never leave this house. If we walk through a street, we move through the meaning of the word “street” (310). This is even the case if we do not consciously think of the word “street,” because, according to Heidegger, all human thought is governed by language. In *Hölderlins Hymne “Der Ister”* (1993), Heidegger amplifies this statement by explaining that man does not differ from plant or animal because s/he can say “I,” as Kant said – which proves that man is conscious of him/herself – but because man can say “is” (112). If we would not understand what is meant by the word “is,” or the verb “to be,” there would not just be a word less, but according to Heidegger there would be no language at all. Heidegger emphasizes that men can only say “I,” because men can say “is,” and not the other way around.

chapter, I analyze literary tourism in relation to Franz Kafka's work and the question of ending—or rather the impossibility of ending a literary text.

I connect the question of ending a writing process with the ending of modernism. In *The Decline of Modernism* (1992), Peter Bürger writes that the waning of modernism is complemented by a change in the area of perception:

Among younger persons today one can often notice a way of dealing with literary works that can only be characterized as low-brow from Adorno's standpoint. I mean the widespread renunciation of any discussion of aesthetic form in favor of a discussion of the norms and patterns of behavior which are the basis of the actions of the characters portrayed. The questions which are asked of the work then do not read: How are the aesthetic form and content of the work communicated? but: Did this or that character act correctly in this situation? How would I have behaved in a comparable situation? (41).

The change in approach of literature that Bürger describes is apparent, for instance, in Oprah's Book Club, in which readers attempt to understand Faulkner's books through relating the motivations of the fictional characters to their own experiences. However, as Bürger also makes clear, this way of reading was already common when modernism just started. Bürger translates from a German appendix to Adorno's *Minima Moralia*: "The ultra-modern is already no longer modern, so his argument went, the stimuli which I was seeking had already become dull, the expressive figures which excited me belonged to an old-fashioned sentimentality" (33). It is perhaps the re-appearing search for universal criteria, norms and emotions that denies the scattered and fragmented experience and newness of modernism, and thus always already makes the distinction between high and low culture fluid.

Beckett and Kafka are often regarded as the writers whose texts announce the end of modernism. In *Mazes* (1989), Hugh Kenner calls Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* modernism's last masterpiece (34). In *Samuel Beckett and the End of Modernity* (1996), Richard Begam argues that Beckett's work anticipated and even helped shape some postmodern themes and ideas. Brian McHale also

characterizes Beckett as a writer who makes the “transition from modernist to postmodernist poetics” (12). For Begam, however, postmodernist ideas are not opposed to modernism; rather, they form an extension of what was started in modernity. Rabaté distinguishes Beckett from earlier modernism, at least from Joyce, who still thought he could master language, while Beckett “explains that he is looking to ‘discredit’ language and that, since he cannot eliminate it completely, he aims at boring it, at piercing it” (1996: 230). Rabaté translates a sentence from Beckett’s *Disjecta* (1983) as follows:

Bore a hole after the other in [language], until that which hides behind, whether it be something or nothing, begins to leak out – I cannot imagine a higher purpose for the writer today (230).

Even though it is unclear to Beckett what will seep out, something or nothing, the highest purpose of the writer should still consist of the attempt to bore a hole, to reach through language and forge a small space where language is no longer language, a hole through which something else can leak out.<sup>18</sup>

The hole pierces language, but it does not deny language, nor literature. After all, it is shaped by literature. It is neither the opposite of language, nor a form of muteness. The intention to pierce a hole in language and to escape it goes hand in hand with an obsession with language. Kafka’s work shares this obsession. Kafka, as much as Beckett, appears to deconstruct his own writing. In Kafka’s work, the narrator is aware of the ambiguity of the thoughts of the protagonists, as well as of the words they use. When trying to peel off layers of meaning, precisely this act of peeling off creates more layers. This process gives Kafka’s work a sense of endlessness. Modernism is endless in a similar sense. For as long as we continue analyzing the meaning of modernism – what it consists of,

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<sup>18</sup> In “This Strange Institution Called Literature,” an interview with Jacques Derrida, Derek Attridge asks Derrida why he never wrote about Beckett: “Is there a sense in which Beckett’s writing is already so ‘deconstructive,’ or ‘self-deconstructive,’ that there is not much left to do?” Derrida answers: “No doubt that’s true. ... [Beckett] is nihilist and he is not nihilist” (1992: 61). It is not completely clear what Derrida understands by this nihilism that is no nihilism, however, I interpret it as indicating the loss of objective morality in Beckett’s work, as well as each possible objective rule or logical standard that a fictional character believes in and that helps him/her to know which action should be preferred over another.

whether it is dead or not, how it transforms, what it means today – modernism survives.