

UNIVERZITA KARLOVA V PRAZE
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Ústav anglofonních literatur a kultur
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**THE AVANT-POSTMAN: JAMES JOYCE,
THE AVANT-GARDE & POSTMODERNISM**

**AVANT-POSTMAN: JAMES JOYCE,
AVANTGARDA A POSTMODERNISMUS**

David VICHNAR

Vedoucí práce

Louis Armand, Ph.D. (Univerzita Karlova v Praze)

Prof. Jean Bessière (Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle Paris III)

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THE AIM OF THE THESIS AND LITERARY MATERIAL EXPLORED

The present work picks up the task set by Richard Ellmann—"to become Joyce's contemporary" (*JJ*, 3)—by charting the development of post-war writing that followed in the footsteps of Joyce's "revolution of the word," his exploration of the materiality of language and the aesthetic autonomy of fiction. Joyce's *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, the latter propagated and interpreted by Eugene Jolas and the group around his *transition* magazine (1929-37), are a joint starting point from which genealogical lines of development or constellations of concepts are drawn and formed. The argument traces the many departures from Joyce's materialist poetics in post-war Anglo-American and French literature that came to be dubbed, by their adherents and detractors alike, "experimental," or "avant-garde." The timeframe is, roughly speaking, the last four decades of the 20th century, with a few post-2000 enjambments that bring the entire genealogy into the present. The material is divided into eight chapters, two for Great Britain (from Johnson via Brooke-Rose to Sinclair), two for the U.S. (from Burroughs and Gass to Acker and Sorrentino) and three for France (the *nouveau roman*, Oulipo, and the *Tel Quel* group). Chapter Eight traces the Joycean heritage within the literature after 2000 of the three national literary spaces.

Jolas' avant-garde undertaking was marked by certain belatedness: by the publication of *transition*'s first number in 1927, the historical avant-garde had been on the wane if not defunct, and so *transition* gained another, retrogressive dimension: that of the archive. Jolas himself conceived of *transition* as a "documentary organ" dedicated to presenting what he referred to later as "pan-romanticism." More literally, the reception of *Finnegans Wake* was a belated one for reasons of historical contingency: its 1939 publication on the eve of World War II, and the reaction—for most of the 1950s—against experiment in favour of a socially oriented and politically engaged art production, effectively turned Joyce's last work into a symbolic end of an old era rather than an opening of a new one. Thus, there is a second sense in which *transition* is a useful starting point for the genealogical lines charted in this thesis: its notion of functioning as a "documentary organ" of the historical avant-garde is applicable to those post-war avant-garde groups, schools, or movements that chose to "perpetuate Joyce's creation," themselves becoming "documentary organs" of the effects of his poetics. All three principal avant-garde groupings in the post-1960 British, American, and French fiction—centred around B.S. Johnson's experimentalism, the Surfictionist group around Raymond Federman, and the ensemble of literary theorists and practitioners around the *Tel Quel* magazine, respectively—have fulfilled this function. Last but not least, *transition*—in Jolas' conception of it—was not only "a workshop of the intercontinental spirit"—and it is its internationalism and threefold focus on America, Britain and France that the present work also re-enacts—but also "a laboratory for poetic experiment."

Taken together, *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* bring about a change in the conception of what writing can and should do, issuing forth from their sustained examination of language as material and their avant-garde conception of aesthetic autonomy. They launch a series of effects for which the

post-war (neo-)avant-garde functions as a type of “documentary organ.” These effects can be roughly divided into three groups:

- 1) concrete writing, the conception of words as traces disseminated in the materiality of the book; the typographical foregrounding of letters, signs and words as distinct objects; what has come to be termed “metatextuality” or “liberature”;
- 2) writing as plagiarism, the forgery of fiction, the word as always belonging to the other and in need of appropriation; writing as parodic subversion of established discourses and styles; the Joycean “True Sentence” as always embedded in an ascertainable voice, always bearing a signature;
- 3) destabilisation of the signifier as vehicle of established univocal meaning by means of multilingual punning and the technique of the portmanteau, a treatment of words as composite objects themselves, as machines generating polyvocal ever-shifting conglomerates of meanings; what Donald Theall terms a Joycean “techno-poetics.”

These, then, constitute the Joycean avant-garde “signature” in solicitation of a counter-signature. As avant-gardists to the extent to which Joyce never quite fitted the bill, the writers dealt with in the thesis are considered as both practitioners and theorists of fiction, as formulators of their own fiction programmes. Their critical work is therefore examined as indicative of their attitude toward, and re-use of, the Joycean materialist poetics. Explicit commentary on Joyce’s treatment of language or his technical and stylistic advances is taken as a starting point in evaluating the writers’ position within the lineage issuing from his writing. The fiction is treated from two major viewpoints: the “textual” and the “conceptual.” By “textual” is meant both an overt acknowledgement of Joyce’s writing in passing, an allusion or quotation, oftentimes of parodic purpose, as well as the more subtle way of establishing a link through a type of similarity, whether stylistic or thematic. In the present context, symptomatic of a Joycean presence within the work of fiction under scrutiny is the employment of a meta-narrative grid or scheme resultant in multiplication of styles (after *Ulysses*), and the enhancement of the expressive potential of language through verbal complexification, deformation, recreation (à la *Finnegans Wake*). Throughout, however, *influence* is understood as no mere borrowing or passive imitation, but active transformation of the Joycean exploration of the materiality of language and the effects achieved through experimentation with the stylistic reservoir of language.

THEORETICAL PRELIMINARIES

Joyce, the originator of the genealogy mapped out in the present work, is a writer whose continuous and ever-expanding examination of the materiality of language challenge most of the simplistic dichotomies, as medium and his sublimation of structure were, in the last phase of his career, drafted in service of a specific avant-garde theory and programme, which in turn begat the following genealogy. This is the only sort of genealogy worth mapping, the only one keeping Joyce’s modernist/avant-gardist signature valid and relevant. It is also the Joyce whose after-life this thesis sets out to examine, the post-life of Joyce the avant-gardist, Joyce the avant-postman.

Writing described as “avant-garde” is understood along the lines of Renato Poggioli’s seminal study on *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Here, avant-garde writing is marked by its concentration on linguistic creativity as “a necessary reaction to the flat, opaque, and prosaic nature of our public speech, where the practical end of quantitative communication spoils the quality of expressive means.” This reaction has an essentially social task in that it functions as “at once cathartic and therapeutic in respect to the degeneration afflicting common language through conventional habits.”¹ Hence, avant-garde writing is one whose “cult of novelty and even of the strange” has definable historical and social causes in the “tensions of our bourgeois, capitalistic, and technological society.”² Conversely, the notion of belatedness, of having one’s present moment already defined by a past that somehow pre-programmes it, with little left to do for the present beyond re-enacting, repeating or forging the past’s originary actions and statements, resonates within the common detraction of post-war neo-avant-gardes in canonical criticism.³ Peter Bürger’s famous re-contextualisation of Poggioli’s argument within a broader historico-philosophical framework entails an insistence on the inherence of the historical avant-garde praxis to its proper historical context:

In a changed context, the resumption of avant-garde intentions with the means of avant-gardism can no longer even have the limited effectiveness the historical avant-gardes achieved. To the extent that the means by which the avant-gardistes hoped to bring about the sublation of art have attained the status of works of art, the claim that the praxis of life is to be renewed can no longer be legitimately connected with their employment. To formulate more pointedly: the neo-avant-garde institutionalizes the *avant-garde as art* and thus negates genuinely avant-gardiste intentions. [...] Neo-avant-gardiste art is autonomous art in the full sense of the term, which means that it negates the avant-gardiste intention of returning art to the praxis of life.⁴

As becomes gradually clear, one of the reasons for basing a “Joycean avant-garde” on his close alliance with the *transition* magazine is that of sidestepping the avant-garde vs. neo-avant-garde dichotomy in favour of a programme of writing which serves “cathartic and therapeutic” functions in respect to “the degeneration afflicting common language through conventional habits” (à la Poggioli’s avant-garde) but at the same time remains “autonomous” in its insistence on “the disintegration of words and their subsequent reconstruction on other planes,” and in its disparagement toward “the plain reader”⁵ (à la Bürger’s neo-avant-garde).

The only major book-length treatise on literary response to *Finnegans Wake* and an attempt at conceptualising a tradition “in its wake,” the only precursor to the present undertaking, is Hayman and Anderson’s co-edited work *In the Wake of the Wake*, combining critical essays with interviews and excerpts from the works taken as representatives of this tradition. In Hayman’s introduction, the post-*Wake* novel tradition is conceptualised as “growing out of tendencies central to the *Wake* rather than directly out of the *Wake* itself,” and Hayman is careful to limit his case for both influence and impact to “writers who have actually read and studied Joyce” – hence his two excellent interviews

¹ Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Gerald Fitzgerald (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968) 37.

² Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 80; 107.

³ Also, one encounters this awareness of belatedness vis-à-vis Joyce everywhere in Joycean scholarship, which ever so often finds itself *already in the text*, coming not from the outside, but somehow generated from, solicited by, the Joyce text which always already includes, as it were, its own theory. Cf. David Vichnar, *Joyce Against Theory* (Prague: Litteraria Pragensia Books, 2010), in view of whose overall argument, the criticism of Joyce appears as a discourse centred around a few governing notions and operations already “at work” in Joyce’s text.

⁴ Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: Minneapolis University Press, 1984) 58.

⁵ Eugene Jolas, “The Revolution of Language and James Joyce,” *Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress: A Symposium*, ed. Samuel Beckett (New York: New Directions, 1929) 79-80.

with Maurice Roche and Philippe Sollers, as well as the inclusion of an essay by Haroldo de Campos on "The *Wake* in Brazil and Hispanic America," documenting Hayman's conviction that "to date, most of the work in this "tradition" has been done by writers in languages other than English."⁶ Accordingly, his further examples include Hélène Cixous, Michel Butor, Raymond Queneau, the Brazilian Noigandres group of concrete poetry (Augusto and Haroldo de Campos), and the German experimentalist Arno Schmidt. Writers from the Anglo-American cultural space include Christine Brooke-Rose, Anthony Burgess, Raymond Federman and John Barth. Hayman's collection is a survey, and with the exception of the two interviews, he does not detail just how exactly these writers "have actually read and studied Joyce" – even though the degree of familiarity with Joyce's *Wake* varies greatly between, say, Burgess and Brooke-Rose or Butor and Federman. Moreover, Michael Finney's essay on "Eugene Jolas, *Transition* and the Revolution of the Word," fails to bring forth the essential points of connection between Jolas' revolutionary project and Joyce's *Wakean* poetics, settling instead for a philological critique of some of the more controversial of *transition's* linguistic theories. Despite these blind spots, Hayman's collection (and his introduction) is useful in systematising the possible modes of the *Wake's* impact into four categories: the use of "language as a medium, the preoccupation with the process of saying as doing"; "the refusal of plot" in favour of approximating "a portable infinity" in which "meanings proliferate amid a welter of effects"; "the increased attention to universals, the generalizing or [...] "epic" tendency"; and finally a tendency "to sublimate (not destroy) structure, harmony, and radiance in order to avoid the appearance, if not the fact, of aesthetic control."⁷ But, failing to engage with the writers' own theory of fiction or pronouncements regarding the tradition that had come to inform their work, Hayman still remains faced with the question of impact "inevitably mingl[ing] with that of fashions, and one may ask, Would the same thing not have occurred without Joyce?"⁸

The obvious paradox entailed in positing the centrality of James Joyce for the literature of the post-war period is its challenge to, if not undermining of, most conceptualisations of what came to be called literary "postmodernism," which, at least in its application as a period-marker, is ever so often characterised as replacement of, or successor to, modernism. This despite the fact that one of its inaugural formalisations, Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, is based within a "future/anterior" temporality not dissimilar to that of Bürger's conception of the post-ness of the neo-avant-garde, or the present construction of the Joycean avant-garde and its aftereffects:

A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by pre-established rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgement, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for. The artist and writer, then, are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what *will have been done*. [...] *Post modern* would have to be understood according to the paradox of the future (*post*) anterior (*modo*).⁹

⁶ Hayman, "Some Writers in the Wake of the *Wake*," 4-5.

⁷ Hayman, "Some Writers in the Wake of the *Wake*," 35-6.

⁸ Hayman, "Some Writers in the Wake of the *Wake*," 35.

⁹ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington & Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991) 81.

The Conclusion parallels the Introduction's construction of a Joycean avant-garde by formulating (and challenging) a Joycean postmodernity, uniting the "avant-" and the "post-" from the title. Lyotard's further conceptualisation of this paradoxical temporality poses a challenge to the whole notion of modernist/postmodernist sequentiality: "a work can only become modern if it is first post-modern. Postmodernism thus understood is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and this state is constant."¹⁰ So long as the postmodern and modern co-exist simultaneously in any culture at any time, their difference is not temporal, but conceptual – and here Lyotard resorts to the notion of the sublime, marking both as different from the realist mimesis whose task is to depict the world "from a point of view that would give it a recognisable meaning" in order that its audience can "decode images and sequences rapidly" and thereby "protect [their] consciousness from doubt."¹¹ The sublime, characterised as a disturbance of everyday sense-making (thus strongly reminiscent of Poggioli's concept of the avant-gardist project), consists in "presenting the existence of something unrepresentable. Showing that there is something we can conceive of that we can neither see nor show."¹² The difference, then, between the modern and the postmodern, for Lyotard, lies in their different employment of this unrepresentable sublime – in the modern, the unrepresentable is "invoked only as absent content, while the form, thanks to its recognisable consistency, continues to offer the reader material for consolation or pleasure," while the postmodern

would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable.¹³

Remarkably for the present overall argument, when providing two contrastive examples, Lyotard pits against the modernist Proust and his *À la Recherche du temps perdu* none other than Joyce and his *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* which deploy allusions, intertexts, puns and distorted language to disrupt readers' perceptions about what a novel—or text, or language, for that matter—should be and do. A challenge, then, to "postmodernism" in its application as a period-marker, distinguishing between the modernist and postmodernist phases of 20th-century literature and culture, is inherent to one of its canonical formulations. Still, this challenge entailed in Lyotard argument, put forth in 1979, did not prevent two other highly influential conceptualisations of the postmodern from subscribing to a periodising impetus. Ihab Hassan's 1982 revision of his *Dismemberment of Orpheus* (1971) includes the notorious list of binary oppositions in which to capture the modern/postmodern divide, e.g. form (conjunctive, closed) vs. antiform (disjunctive, open); purpose vs. play; design vs. chance; hierarchy vs. anarchy; presence vs. absence; metaphor vs. metonymy, metaphysics vs. irony, etc.,¹⁴ where the former is evidently supplanted and revised by the latter.¹⁵ Brian McHale's *Postmodernist Fiction* (1987)

¹⁰ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington & Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991) 79.

¹¹ Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 70.

¹² Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 74.

¹³ Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 81.

¹⁴ Ihab Hassan, *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature*, 2nd edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982) 267-8.

¹⁵ Even though even Hassan himself is careful to voice a caveat: "Yet the dichotomies this table represents remain insecure, equivocal. For differences shift, defer, even collapse; concepts in one vertical column are not all equivalent; and inversions and exceptions, in both modernism and postmodernism, abound" (Hassan, *The Dismemberment of Orpheus*, 269).

argues that the move from modern to postmodern fiction is one from a focus on epistemological issues to an exploration of ontological questions. Thus, whereas the modern is concerned with questions of truth, knowledge and interpretation, the postmodern asks about the following: "What is a world? What kinds of world are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ? What happens when different kinds of world are placed in confrontation, or when boundaries between worlds are isolated?"¹⁶ Again, a clear progression from the former to the latter is implied, even though no definite lines of division are drawn. The particular interest in exposing these arguments here lies in how both Hassan and McHale, when later on dealing with Joyce's work, enlist his *Ulysses* (McHale) and *Finnegans Wake* (Hassan) for their postmodernist cause.

CONCLUSION

The genealogy drawn within the PhD thesis documents the highly sceptical, if not hostile, attitude toward the postmodernist label in many various instances and with the most variegated writers. Anthony Burgess never tired of stressing the liveliness of Joyce's heritage for the literature of his day: "We should all now be writing novels like *Finnegans Wake*, not necessarily so obscure or so large, but starting on the way Joyce has shown in exploring the resources of the language," he observed in 1964.¹⁷ Many years later, his view was quite the same: "We've got a hell of a long way to go with modernism. Some people think *Finnegans Wake* is the end of modernism [... but] I think we're still in a modernist phase."¹⁸ A whole section of Brooke-Rose's *A Rhetoric of the Unreal* is devoted to addressing the question, "Postmodernism – what is it?", and presenting Brooke-Rose's view. Both the terms, i.e. "modern" and "postmodern," are found "peculiarly unimaginative for a criticism that purports to deal with phenomena of which the most striking feature is imagination," this for three reasons: "They are purely historical, period words, and in that sense traditional," second, "they are self-cancelling terms, and this may be particularly apt for an art continually described as self-cancelling," and finally, "by way of corollary, the terms are simply lazy, inadequate."¹⁹ A consequent problem arises, then, with any attempt at defining the notions in terms of canon: "[If] we are going to put D.H. Lawrence [...] and Hemingway and Proust and Kafka and Pound and Yeats and Eliot and Faulkner and Mann and Gide and Musil and Stevens and Virginia Woolf and Joyce etc. into the same modernist ragbag, the term becomes meaningless except as a purely period term, itself obsolescent since modern by definition means now." Conversely, when Ihab Hassan includes within the group of "antecedents of postmodernism" writers as divergent and variegated as "Sterne, Sade, Blake, Lautréamont, Rimbaud, Jarry, Tzara, Hoffmannstahl, Gertrude Stein, the later Joyce, the later Pound, Duchamp, Artaud, Roussel, Broch, Queneau and Kafka," he has, to Brooke-Rose's mind merely "reinvented our ancestors," as one "always shall,"²⁰ yet it is precisely this "always" that makes Hassan's label too general for it to be applicable. Hassan is critiqued by Brooke-Rose as prone to

¹⁶ Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (London: Methuen, 1987) 10.

¹⁷ Anthony Burgess, "Speaking of Writing—VIII," *Times* (16 January, 1964): 13.

¹⁸ Samuel Coale, "An Interview with Anthony Burgess," *Modern Fiction Studies* 27 (Autumn, 1981): 444.

¹⁹ Christine Brooke-Rose, *A Rhetoric of the Unreal: Studies in Narrative and Structure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) 344.

²⁰ Brooke-Rose, *A Rhetoric of the Unreal*, 344-5

sweeping generalisations even when focused on the postmodernism of one text – again, the *Wake*.²¹ Alasdair Gray, another frequent exemplar of Hassan's or McHale's postmodernist accounts, himself averred in an interview that "I have never found a definition of postmodernism that gives me a distinct idea of it. If the main characteristic is an author who describes himself as a character in his work, then Dante, Chaucer, Langland, and Wordsworth are as postmodern as James Joyce, who is merely modern."²² John Barth's 1980 essay, "Literature of Replenishment," was written as "a companion and corrective" to his 1967 "Literature of Exhaustion." Its most striking difference is its engagement with critical theorisations of so-called postmodernism, a term which Barth finds useless and subjects to mockery:

while some of the writers labeled as postmodernists, myself included, may happen to take the label with some seriousness, a principal activity of postmodernist critics [...], writing in postmodernist journal or speaking at postmodernist symposia, consists in disagreeing about what postmodernism is or ought to be, and thus about who should be admitted to the club—or clubbed into admission.²³

Barth approaches the modernist/postmodernist relation via a consciously Joycean simile: "one is reminded," he writes, "of the early James Joyce's fascination with the word *gnomon* in its negative geometric sense: the figure that remains when a parallelogram has been removed from a similar but larger parallelogram with which it shares a common corner."²⁴ This inferiority of postmodernism vis-à-vis modernism, in turn, calls for a (re)definition of modernism itself, for the "post-"ness implies that modernism is over and consummated and, as such, estimable. On the one hand, Barth agrees that the "adversary reaction called modernist art," aimed against "the rigidities and other limitations of nineteenth-century bourgeois realism," is one which nowadays has nothing to react against as "these nineteenth-century rigidities are virtually no more." As such, "it *belongs* to the first half of our century" and "the present reaction against it is perfectly understandable," both "because the modernist coinages are by now more or less debased common currency and because we really don't *need* more *Finnegans Wake* and *Pisan Cantos*, each with its staff of tenured professors to explain it to us."²⁵

With Joyce, argues Donald Barthelme, "fiction altered its placement in the world in a movement so radical that its consequences have yet to be assimilated." Departing from the well-known dictum of Beckett's essay on the "Work in Progress," Barthelme notes that the consequences of creating literary "objects" as "worlds" in themselves present a "stunning strategic gain for the writer. He has in fact removed himself from the work, just as Joyce instructed him to do." What is further characteristic of the object is

that it does not declare itself at once, in a rush of pleasant naiveté. Joyce enforces the way in which *Finnegans Wake* is to be read. He conceived the reading to be a lifetime project, the book remaining always *there*, like the landscape surrounding the reader's home or the buildings bounding the reader's apartment. The book remains problematic, unexhausted.²⁶

²¹ "Later Hassan does give us some more specific 'modern forms' arising, directly or indirectly, out of Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, the structure of which is 'both structurally over-determined and semantically under-determined,' but with coincidence as structural principle (identity as accident, recurrence and divergence), as well as the gratuitousness of every creative act" (Brooke-Rose, *A Rhetoric of the Unreal*, 349).

²² Mark Axelrod, "An Epistolary Interview, Mostly with Alasdair Gray," *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 15.2 (Summer 1995): 113.

²³ John Barth, *The Friday Book – Essays and Other Nonfiction* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1984) 194.

²⁴ Barth, *The Friday Book*, 196.

²⁵ Barth, *The Friday Book*, 202.

²⁶ Donald Barthelme, *Not-Knowing: The Essays and Interviews of Donald Barthelme*, ed. Kim Herzinger, intro. John Barth (New York: Random House, 1997) 4.

To these writers' theoretical concerns can be added many other examples of so-called postmodernist practice aligning itself, in a Lyotardian fashion, with some quintessential modernist/avant-gardist projects. To take but the example of the collage, speaking of Brion Gysin's discovery and his own application of the cut-up method, Burroughs notes how the modernist heritage present in Eliot's phrase, "Who is the third who walks always beside you?," was adopted by Burroughs and Gysin "to designate the collaborative consciousness which could be generated by the cut-up method: a third mind free of the restrictions of context, culture, and subjectivity."²⁷ In many respects Burroughs' heir, Iain Sinclair states (some forty years later) that his use of Watkins' psycho-geographical concept is a means to an aesthetic end steeped in modernist poetics of juxtaposition and collage:

All of it to be digested, absorbed, fed into the great work. Wasn't that the essence of the modernist contract? Multi-voiced lyric seizures countered by drifts of unadorned fact, naked source material spliced into domesticated trivia, anecdotes, borrowings, found footage. Redundant. As much use as a whale carved from margarine, unless there is intervention by that other; unless some unpredicted element takes control, overrides the pre-planned structure, tells you what you don't know. Willed possession.²⁸

To these can be added all three French post-war avant-gardes in their entirety the New Novelist movement's challenge to the accepted, yet highly problematic, division of 20th-century literature into modernist and postmodernist periods, sometimes seeming to unite them, sometimes seen as standing between them, but mostly simply bypassing the division altogether: the reason why Robbe-Grillet or Butor or Queneau or Sollers left no explicit address of these questions, unlike their Anglo-American contemporaries.

Hence, the argument concludes on a paradox: it has applied a chronological approach to what essentially is posited as atemporal, non-linear, a cycle of returns, a "documentary archive" of the effects of Joyce's materialist poetics in post-war Anglo- and Francophone writing. If paradox it be, it was done so in order to argue for a lasting importance of these effects, for their continuous reverberation in the post-war experimental fiction well beyond 2000. The chronological approach, to be sure, is not without its pitfalls (the teleological fallacy, for example) and its inelegancies. There were, of course, other possible modes of ordering, across individual chapters, concept- or theme-based. For instance, the triad of the crucial Joyce-effects identified in the Introduction could have yielded the following genealogy:

- 1) concrete writing, "metatextual," "liberary": from B.S. Johnson to Alasdair Gray, from William Gass to Raymond Federman to Mark Z. Danielewski, from Michel Butor to Maurice Roche;
- 2) writing as plagiarism, forgery, parody and pastiche: from William Burroughs to Kathy Acker to Kenneth Goldsmith, from the early Christine Brooke-Rose and to Iain Sinclair; Raymond Queneau, Georges Perec, and most of Oulipo;
- 3) words as machines generating polyvocal ever-shifting conglomerates of meanings; "techno-poetics" – Anthony Burgess and Brigid Brophy, from Robert Pinget to Philippe Sollers, from Donald Barthelme to Gilbert Sorrentino;

²⁷ Qtd. in Robin Lydenberg (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987) 44-5.

²⁸ Iain Sinclair, *Landor's Tower: or The Imaginary Conversations* (London: Granta Books, 2002) 31.

If one were to pair up, in a quasi-Hassanian fashion, writers according to whether their Joyce is the Joyce of *Ulysses* or the *Wake*, one could point out to some of their crucial differences. The *Ulysses* vs. *Finnegans Wake* binary would rewrite the genealogy as follows: Johnson vs. Brophy, Pynchon vs. Barthelme, Mathews vs. Sukenick, Robbe-Grillet vs. Butor, Perec vs. Queneau, Roche vs. Sollers, Goldsmith vs. Danielewski, etc. Still other possible categorisations would present themselves if one were to focus on the personality of the authors, for “experiment” is related to “experience” not only in terms of etymology. One could draw lines of development in terms of female fiction (from Sarraute to Cixous; from Brooke-Rose, Brophy and Quin to Carter, Winterson and Acker); in terms of post-colonial experimentalism (from Brophy to Gray, from Simon to Cixous); one could single out believers-turned-heretics (Burgess and Quin, Butor and Sollers); one could examine the binary of writers-nomads (Brooke-Rose, Burroughs, Robbe-Grillet, or Butor) vs. writers recluses (Quin, Pynchon, Gaddis, or Pinget). One could zoom in on cross-national ties among these writers and groups (Federman in the U.S., Mathews in the Oulipo, Brooke-Rose at Paris-Vincennes, Burroughs in Paris and London, Butor in Manchester), or even more relevantly perhaps, on affinities in terms of their practice of fiction (Aldiss and Ballard as heirs to the *nouveau roman* and Burroughs; Brooke-Rose and Federman as affiliated with the *Tel Quel*, Queneau and Perec as inspired by their Anglophone predecessors), etc. If one did indeed attempt any of the above, one would easily have eked out meaningful lines of connection that fall by the wayside of a merely chronological arrangement. The rationale, ultimately, behind its deployment is that the chronological arrangement contains, however implicitly or potentially, all of the above, with the additional advantage of allowing for the least amount of distraction (conceptual, biographical, ideological, or other) from what ultimately matters most, i.e. the writing itself, what the Joycean avant-garde was founded upon and what its effects will have resonated through: what was at the beginning and what will have been at the end – the word.

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