

CHAPTER ONE

The Phantom Project Returning

The Passing (On) of the Still Incomplete Project of Modernity

There is no more hope for meaning. And without a doubt this is a good thing: meaning is mortal. But that on which it has imposed its ephemeral reign, what it hoped to liquidate in order to impose the reign of the Enlightenment, that is, appearances, they, are immortal, invulnerable to the nihilism of meaning or of non-meaning itself.

—Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*

(*Marcellus*: “What, ha’s this thing appear’d againe tonight?” Then: *Enter the Ghost, Exit the Ghost, Enter the Ghost, as before*). A question of repetition: a specter is always a *revenant*. One cannot control its comings and goings because it *begins by coming back*.

—Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*

CONCIERGE: What is it? Will there be more?

RAY: Sir, what you had there is what we refer to as a focused, non-terminal repeating phantasm, or a Class-5 full-roaming vapor. Real nasty one too.

—Ivan Reitman, *Ghostbusters*

Introduction

“Let’s just say it: it’s over” (*Politics* 166). Postmodernism, that is. Or so Linda Hutcheon claims. For Hutcheon, “the postmodern moment has *passed*, even if its discursive strategies and its ideological critique

continue to live on—as do those of modernism—in our contemporary twenty-first century world” (*Politics* 181, my emphasis). Hutcheon’s announcement rings—and I imagine this is her intention—like a death knell, the final word. Indeed, the entire epilogue to the second edition of *The Politics of Postmodernism* reads like an epistemological obituary.¹ Hutcheon employs phrasing that is usually reserved for funerals, or extended periods of mourning: postmodernism has “passed.” Of course, Hutcheon *really* means “passed” in a temporal sense, that the postmodern moment is now *in the past*. Yet it is difficult, if not impossible, to ignore the metaphysical connotations of “passing.” So, let’s just say it: postmodernism is, according to critics like Hutcheon, dead. It has *passed*. It has, in other words, *given up the ghost*. Such phrasing, though, resounds with ambiguity, inviting a number of questions: What ghost? Given? Passed on?—where?, to whom? When, or where, did this passing/giving begin? Is this ghost that postmodernism has “given up,” is this thing that has “passed on,” that which Hutcheon claims continues to “live on?” Is it the same thing that lived on after modernism, and therefore lived on (in) postmodernism? This seems to be, then, a question of the paranormal, of possession. What is this thing that lives on, moving from host to host? But I have already generated more questions than I can, at this point, possibly answer. What is important to note, for now, is that the death of postmodernism (like all deaths) can also be viewed as a passing, a giving over of a certain inheritance, that this death (like all deaths) is also a living on, a passing on.

Perhaps the fall of George W. Bush’s cynical administration (with its reliance on tenuous truth claims and its blind support of neo-colonial capitalism) and the massively popular rise of Barack Obama’s overtly “sincere” administration (with its renewed faith in global ethics and transparent communication) finally signals the culmination of a grand epochal transition, but one thing is clear: Hutcheon (in 2002) is already quite late in arriving at the deathbed of postmodernism.² The deathwatch began, one could argue, as early as the mid-1980s. In 1983, the British Journal, *Granta*, published an issue entitled “Dirty Realism: New Writing in America.” Introduced by Bill Buford, this “new” realism was presented as an initial step beyond the pretensions of postmodernism. This revival of some type of “realism” was further solidified by the American writer Tom Wolfe in his 1989 “literary manifesto for a new social novel.” In fact, by 1989, the demise of postmodernism was, for most, an inevitability. With the First Stuttgart Seminar in Cultural Studies—“The End of Postmodernism: New Directions”—the fate of postmodernism seemed sealed. By the mid-1990s, the phrase “after (or beyond) postmodern” could be found on the cover of any number of critical works.³ In other words, since the end of the 1980s an

increasing number of literary critics and theorists have announced, or simply assumed, the end of postmodernism. The race is on to define an emergent period that seems to have arrived *after* the end of history.

As I suggested above, the critics who participate in this theorization of the end typically highlight a recent shift in contemporary narrative that is marked by the growing dominance of a type of neo-(or, “dirty”)-realism, and by an increased theoretical interest in the issues of community and ethical responsibility. Indeed, the recent shift in stylistic privilege—from ostentatious works of postmodern metafiction to more grounded, or “responsible,” works of neo-realism—seems to echo the recent ethico-political “turn” in critical theory, a turn that is perhaps most obvious in Jacques Derrida’s late work on Marxism, friendship, hospitality, and forgiveness. In line with this theoretical turn, and in the *wake of postmodernism*, a growing body of cultural and literary criticism has dedicated itself to the recovery of various “logocentric” assumptions. The recent collection of essays edited by Jennifer Geddes, *Evil after Postmodernism: History, Narratives, Ethics*, might stand for the moment as an example of this shift in critical concern.⁴ In terms of narrative production, then (and as I demonstrate in chapter 3), the suggestion we get from those critics and writers who seem to have arrived *after postmodernism* is that the stylistic elements that have been typically read as emanations of (what most writers and critics now view) as a subversive and nihilistic epistemological trend have been undermined by a new discourse that is no longer overtly concerned with the impossibility of the subject and/or author and the need to avoid a grounded, or situated, commitment to the political. However, as Klaus Stierstorfer points out in his introduction to *Beyond Postmodernism: Reassessments in Literature, Theory, and Culture*, this return to seemingly prepostmodern ideologies has been somehow tempered by the lessons of postmodernism:

Whether it is the more universal interest in the possible foundations of a general or literary ethics in a world of globalisation, or the more specific and local issues of identities, scholars and writers alike nevertheless continue to find themselves in the dilemma of facing the deconstructive gestures inherent in postmodernist thought while at the same time requiring some common ground on which ethical agreements can be based. Hence some form of referentiality, even some kind of essentialism is called for. (9–10)

In terms of the apparent shift to a type of neo-realism, we might say that some form of mimesis is called for—that is, some type of renewed

faith in the possibility of what postmodernism narrative has repeatedly identified as impossible: meaning, truth, representational accuracy. But as Stierstorfer notes, this shift to some type of (what I call in later chapters) “renewalism” is not simply a backlash in response to postmodern narrative production; it is neither a reactionary return to the ethical imperatives of modernism nor a revival of the traditional forms of realism that proliferated in the nineteenth century. Postmodernism, to a certain degree, persists. Consequently, this seemingly progressive movement *out of* postmodernism is confronted at the outset by two pressing questions: has postmodernism, as Linda Hutcheon claims, finally “passed?”; and, if so, what is or can be *after* postmodernism? With these increasingly focal questions as a point of departure, I will consider the possibility that, while heralding the close of a moment in cultural and epistemological history, the current discussion ironically highlights the inevitable *persistence* of postmodernism. That said, I am not interested in arguing simply that what comes after postmodernism remains informed by postmodernism; this is, obviously, and as I demonstrate throughout, the case. I am interested in demonstrating that the current epistemological, or cultural, reconfiguration—a reconfiguration that maintains many postmodern “traits”—betrays the inevitable persistence of what Jacques Derrida might refer to as the “inheritance,” or “specter,” that animated postmodernism in the first place.

Functioning primarily as a cultural critique (or, rather, as a critique of contemporary cultural critique), the following chapters will thus approach the issue of postmodernism’s passing in a manner that recalls Jacques Derrida’s analysis of Marxism in *Specters of Marx*. In line with the theoretical mode Derrida assumes in order to locate in both Marxism and deconstruction a past revenant, or ghost, of “emancipatory and *messianic* affirmation, a certain experience of the promise” (*Specters* 89), my study of the death of postmodernism will function as a type of two-pronged “spectro-analysis,” or “spectrology.” What I would like to suggest is that postmodernism (as a privileged epistemological “configuration,” or cultural dominant, encompassing both narrative and theoretical discourse) was *haunted* by a certain teleological aporia, a promise of the end represented by a type of humanism, a certain faith in historical progress, a sense of justice and/or meaning. The recent critical identification, or attempt to theorize, the end of postmodernism seems to speak to the fact that this aporia, or specter, necessarily continues to persist, even in the wake of the recent abandonment of postmodernism’s formal characteristics. A certain necessarily persistent specter—what Fredric Jameson seems to identify as both the “return of the repressed” and the “utopian impulse” in *Postmodernism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, and which is ostensibly at work in

all epistemological reconfigurations—compels movement, even if that movement is a narrative or theoretical attempt to exorcise what haunts and compels. Still, I do not intend to deny the reality of what we might tentatively refer to as a type of epistemic break with the postmodern; rather, I am interested in the way in which this current “break” recalls, or reenacts, the postmodern break with modernism—that is, the way in which any such break, or epistemic rupture, can be viewed ironically as both complete and partial.

To a certain extent, and in the same way that a work like Jameson’s *Postmodernism* is interested in postmodernism as a unique stage in what is, ultimately, a much larger historical progression, the following discussion is interested in postmodernism and its apparent passing insofar as it is indicative of a certain spectrologically induced pattern of epochal “shifts,” or “breaks.” Postmodernism is viewed here as a unique epistemological configuration that is defined by the way in which it attempts to “deal with” a certain ineffaceable and transhistorical specter. Via a focus on the passing of postmodernism, then, I want to suggest that it is possible to understand cultural shifts in aesthetic and theoretical discourse/production as “epistemological reconfigurations.” Rather than employing a rhetoric of complete epistemic ruptures—that is, a rhetoric of epochal breaks that, *à la* Foucault, conceives of seismic epistemological upheavals that leave no residual traces of a previous “archive of knowledge”—it is, I would argue, more useful to view each identifiable epochal, or epistemic, shift as *another* configuration, as another epistemological attempt to deal with a certain persistent and ineffaceable specter, a certain persistent and ineffaceable teleological aporia. From this perspective, an epoch remains understandably definable (or, perhaps, to a certain degree, synchronically exclusive) while also remaining quite understandably partial, an inevitable continuation of the past. Each epistemic break is always, or *only*, a reconfiguration because its formation is necessarily contingent upon the fact that something (a specter) always and necessarily passes on. Of course, before we can attempt to relocate this specter in the current, or emergent, period *after* postmodernism, it is necessary to first locate it within the postmodern itself. For this reason, each of the following chapters begins by first establishing the specter’s (non)presence in canonical works of postmodern theory and narrative. Only by first observing the specter at work in postmodernism can we begin to map its trajectory across the “great epistemological divide” that defines this epoch that has arrived *after* postmodernism.

However, in order to establish the exact theoretical framework that will inform the subsequent discussion, it is necessary to inspect, or spectro-analyze, the original theorization of what we have come

to accept as postmodern. In what ways was the theorization of the term “postmodern” influenced by the very specter I propose to locate and relocate? In what ways does the logic of the original postmodern debate inevitably realize, or announce, this specter? This chapter functions as a spectrological recuperation of that debate. By re-approaching a number of the significant “accounts” of postmodernism, my goal is to track the specter in question through as well as *in* a number of different perspectives, or theoretical positions. So, while it may at times look the part, what follows is not simply or only a review of what has come before concerning the problem of postmodernism and historical shifts. My purpose in the following sections is to provide, rather, a type of “spectral genealogy” of the various attempts to theorize postmodernism. By locating the ostensible specter of postmodernism within the various and seemingly conflicting theories articulated about and during the postmodern period, this genealogy should go a long way in terms of establishing the fact that a specific spectral impulse *effects* certain recurring discursive formulations in a given episteme. What follows is thus both a cursive survey of the postmodern debate (as it occurred within, and as an effect of, the postmodern episteme) as well as an articulation, and initial employment of, the spectrological framework that will inform the following chapters.

Before I begin, though, a final word on method. While I am interested in the discussion surrounding, and the reality of, a “postmodern break,” this is not an attempt to finalize the debate concerning that break, or shift; I am not concerned here with definitive dates marking the beginning or the end of postmodernism. Obviously, dates will be important to any discussion of historical periodizations—and I will certainly make suggestions concerning the moments of reconfiguration here discussed—but this is an attempt to theorize the way in which the general concept of such ruptures is undermined by a specific spectral persistence. Ultimately, I am not interested in the exact moments of epistemological change. As I explain below, these epistemological configurations seem to recede gradually as new and emergent configurations become dominant. In other words, the spectral reconfigurations identified in the following pages are better understood via Raymond Williams’ concept of residual, emergent, and dominant periods than they are via the Foucaultian sense of spatially conceived epistemes that exist entirely independent of one another.⁵ The specter I propose to examine can be said to persist simultaneously in several distinct epistemological configurations (although, at any given time, a specific epistemic configuration might be in a position of “dominance”). This will make more sense as we move, finally, into a discussion of the postmodern debate as it occurred up to postmodernism’s apparent *end*.

Ruptures and Specters

Employed loosely in Arnold Toynbee's multivolume *Study of History* (eight volumes of which were published between 1934 and 1954), the term "postmodern," written "post-Modern," was used to describe a late-nineteenth-century epochal shift: the end of a "modern" bourgeois ruling class and the growing dominance of an industrial working class. I do not wish to get lost in the early history of the term, but Toynbee's initial theorizing of a "post-Modern" period of Western civilization is a useful point of departure; it inaugurates a long tradition of viewing the postmodern as an ultimately unsuccessful break with the motivating assumptions of (a) modernity. According to Perry Anderson in *The Origins of Postmodernity* (perhaps the most recent and most comprehensive history of the term), Toynbee "was scathing of the hubristic illusions of the late imperial West" (6), which saw the culmination of the Victorian period as the end of history itself. For Toynbee, "the Modern Age of Western history had been wound up only to inaugurate a post-Modern Age pregnant with imminent experiences that were to be at least as tragic as any tragedies yet on record" (Vol. 9, 421). The Western world—which, for Toynbee, primarily included France, Britain, Germany, and America—had come to believe that "a sane, safe, satisfactory Modern life had miraculously come to stay as a timeless present. 'History is now at an end' was the inaudible slogan of the celebrations of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in A.D. 1887" (421). What is interesting about Toynbee's discussion of a post-Modern period is his willingness to chastise the assumptions of such a period. Toynbee ultimately demonstrates that the very conception of an "end of history" is ironically animated by a desire for an as yet unrealized end of history. The end of history is only possible, Toynbee seems to suggest (in a manner that will echo in the following discussion of Derridean spectrality), because it is never fully actualized in any real sense. As Toynbee points out, the desire for an end of history necessarily persisted even as the Western ruling class announced, or assumed, the arrival of a finally posthistoric epoch:

German, British, and North American bourgeoisie were nursing national grievances and national aspirations which did not permit them to acquiesce in a comfortable belief that "History" was "at an end"; indeed they could not have continued, as they did continue, to keep alight the flickering flame of a forlorn hope if they had succumbed to a *Weltanschauung* which, for them, would have spelled, not security, but despair. (423)

A far cry from the current, now virtually institutionalized, parameters of the term, Toynbee's concept of a post-Modern introduces an issue that has never ceased to inform the modern/postmodern debate: the issue of historical breaks and the culmination of history itself. Toynbee seems to anticipate the recent claim that postmodernism has been as unsuccessful as modernism in terms of heralding, or representing, a final break with the past. Of course, Toynbee's modern/postmodern periodizations are essentially equivalent to what literary critics conventionally identify as Victorian/modern (or what, in economic terms, someone like Jameson, following Ernest Mandel, might associate with market/monopoly stages of capitalism). After all, Toynbee marks the postmodern epoch as beginning with the Franco-Prussian war. Nevertheless, his discussion of a post-Modern is of considerable interest. The attempt to theorize a postcontemporary moment that is, in some regard, an unsuccessful or incomplete break with the ideology of a past modernity or historical trajectory is a useful segue to a discussion of the specter that informed modernism long before it was inherited by postmodernism. In fact, Toynbee's discussion of a post-Modern period can be neatly tied to the current understanding of modernism. In a manner that recalls the typically accepted date for a postmodern break with modernism, Toynbee seems to mark the 1950s as the end of a distinctly post-Modern period. Not only does Toynbee seemingly view the "Modern and postmodern chapters of Western history" as now past, he suggests that, by "A.D. 1950, the expansion of the Western Society and the radiation of the Western culture had brought all other extant civilizations and all extant primitive societies within a world-encompassing Western Civilization's ambit" (413–14). Pointing to the reality of an apparently emergent multinational period of cultural and economic growth—that is, a period of unprecedented globalization—Toynbee argues that "perhaps for the first time in the history of the Human race, all Mankind's eggs are gathered into one precious yet precarious basket as a consequence of the Western Civilization's worldwide expansion" (415). Simply put, Toynbee's understanding of a post-Modern period can be usefully employed as way of understanding the modern episteme, in our contemporary sense of the period, and its subsequent "passing." Moreover, Toynbee's use of the terms Modern and post-Modern to describe the shift from a period still marked by its explicit faith in the assumptions of the Enlightenment to a period that defined itself as the end of progress itself, highlights the inherent connection between (what we consider today as) modernism and postmodernism, while also giving us an interesting framework within which to view the current epochal shift.

About the time Toynbee was working out his epochal parameters, the term “post-modern” was more favorably applied to contemporary aesthetic developments by the American poet Charles Olson. In a text that Anderson seems to view as a “lapidary manifesto” of the post-modern, Olson begins by stating that “My shift is that I take it the present is the prologue, not the past” (250). What is ultimately a brief biographical introduction, this apparent “manifesto” concludes with Olson identifying a small group of “modern” writers who he believes prefigured the arrival of a distinctly postmodern period of aesthetic production (within which he locates himself):

I am an archeologist of morning. And the writing acts which I find bear on the present job are (I) from Homer back, not forward; and (II) from Melville on, particularly himself, Dostoevsky, Rimbaud, and Lawrence. These were the modern men who projected what we are and what we are in, who broke the spell. They put men forward into the post-modern, the post-humanist, the posthistoric, the going live present, the “Beautiful Thing.” (207)⁶

As Anderson explains, Olson’s becomes the first “affirmative conception of the postmodern” (Anderson 12).⁷ Obviously distinct from Toynbee’s earlier usage, Olson’s “post-modern” nevertheless echoes Toynbee’s in the sense that, as Hans Bertens somewhat begrudgingly notes (while discussing Michael Köhler’s take on Toynbee and Olson), it “indicates a new episteme—to use Foucault’s term—in the history of Western culture”⁸ (Bertens 11), while also implicitly calling our attention to a certain modernist revenant, a persistent drive (what Anderson calls a *Stimmung*, or mood) whose presence, at least from a certain post-modern perspective, is indicative of a failure to be wholly and finally POSTmodern. These initial occurrences of the term—occurrences that hardly affected later theorizing of a postmodern period—suggest that, whatever the final definition of the postmodern became, it, like modernism before it, was unable to escape a certain aporia that seemingly animated previous epochs. I am referring here to the contradictory impulse toward, or aporia surrounding, the possibility of a type of “final answer.” As I explain more fully below, this particular aporia that animates any given epoch is often, if not always, identified by, and seemingly confronted or resolved in, a succeeding epoch. This particular aporia is, we might posit tentatively at this point, what “passes on,” what is “given up”—the one essential ghost of an epistemological period, or what I will call here the specter of postmodernism.⁹

While most agree, Anderson included, that Toynbee and Olson are the first Anglophone critics to employ the term “post-modern”—and that, after them, “The referent of the postmodern lapses” (Anderson 12) and does not resurface until the late-1950s—Bertens, in “The Postmodern *Weltanschauung* and its Relation to Modernism,” discusses John Berryman’s reemployment of Randall Jarrell’s 1946 use of the term to describe the poetry of Robert Lowell. In an attempt to give Olson’s various and often unclear uses of the term more contemporary relevance, Bertens quotes Jerome Mazzoro’s *Postmodern American Poetry*, highlighting Mazzoro’s argument that Olson’s, like Jarrell’s, understanding of the postmodern can be easily identified with the term’s contemporary usage, even if such usage refers more typically to fiction than poetry.¹⁰ According to Mazzoro, both Jarrell and Olson ultimately conceive of the postmodern as a radical break from, what we might call today, modernism’s logocentric assumptions; while modernism attempts to bypass, or improve upon, language acts as the unstable mediator of reality, postmodernism refuses to differentiate between language and the reality it represents.¹¹ Whether or not this is an accurate definition of Olson’s, or even Jarrell’s, conception of the postmodern, Bertens is correct in one regard: Mazzoro’s interpretation of Olson’s definition(s) is remarkably similar to what will become the dominant understanding of postmodernism.¹² More importantly, Mazzoro’s ability to read Olson in such a way suggests that Olson’s struggle to employ the term is also a struggle with the very contradictions that will become the primary concern of the “postmodern debate.” On the one hand, Olson’s “post-modern” is unable to distance itself entirely from modernism and (I will propose tentatively here) the specter of an Enlightenment project that continued to haunt, and thus animate, the modern aesthetic sensibility. On the other, Olson’s “post-modern” is a complete and utter break with the motivating assumptions of what many would define today as modernism. It is this apparent contradiction that I want to continue highlighting, as it is—or, at least, this is what I want to suggest—the key to understanding postmodernism’s *passing*.

In the early 1960s, the postmodern became associated with a “fall” from modernism. Critics like Irving Howe and Harry Levin employed the term “post-modern” to describe what they saw as distinctly negative developments in contemporary literature. For this first “real” wave of postmodern critics, the postmodern is viewed as an aesthetic setback. Levin, for instance, describes the postmodern epoch as a distinctly reactionary and “anti-intellectual” trend, a lamentable return to ideologies that modernism had only recently demystified. Anticipating theorists like Habermas, Levin’s postmodern is a neo-conservative interruption of a distinctly modern—or, rather, *radical*—period of cultural produc-

tion: “This realignment corresponds with the usual transition from *enfant terrible*, who is naturally radical, to the elder statesman, who is normally conservative” (309). In a similar manner, Howe’s postmodern is marked by the absence of strong belief systems, the loss of a moral center, or ground.¹³ This loss of traditional authorities is, for Howe, symptomatic of a “mass society”:

By mass society we mean a relatively comfortable, half welfare and half garrison society in which population grows passive, indifferent and atomized; in which traditional loyalties, ties and associations become lax or dissolve entirely; in which coherent publics based on definitive interests and opinions gradually fall apart; and in which man becomes a consumer, himself mass-produced like the products, diversions and values he absorbs. (426)

As a result of this mass societal state, “vast numbers of people now float through life with a burden of freedom they can neither sustain nor legitimately abandon to social or religious groups” (427). While it is, perhaps, more closely related to phenomenological or existential theories of subjectivity and freedom,¹⁴ Howe’s understanding of mass society clearly anticipates the more recent discussions of late-capitalism and the death of the subject.

Levin, for his own part, makes similar observations about the postmodern state of economic and societal growth. In fact, Levin’s postmodern epoch is initially associated with what we might understand today as a Baudrillardian sense of mass production, simulation, and hyperreality:

this is reproduction, not production; we are mainly consumers rather than producers of art. We are readers of reprints and connoisseurs of High Fidelity, even as we are the gourmets by virtue of the expense account and the credit card. For our wide diffusion of culture is geared to the standardizations of our economy, and is peculiarly susceptible to inflationary trends. The independence of our practitioners, when they are not domesticated by institutions of learning, is compromised more insidiously by the circumstances that make art a business. (313)

Of course, Levin (and, I imagine, to a lesser degree, Howe) is seemingly still enamored by the illusion that modernism was an unprecedented period of artistic autonomy, a period in which the market

failed to penetrate the elite arena of “high” cultural production. Still, both Levin and Howe seem to anticipate the ways in which the effects of rapid societal modernization would be read by future postmodern writers and theorists. And the fact that Howe explicitly identifies a certain “threat” to the subject is, particularly, worth noting. Howe’s conception of a postmodern period, while associated with a canon of writers we would hardly recognize today *as postmodern*¹⁵ is, as Bertens points out, “important in its early recognition of the role that epistemological and ontological doubt would play in postwar American literature” (14). More significantly, though, it is important (as is, to a lesser degree, Levin’s understanding) in terms of its initial recognition and articulation of what later critics would come to identify clearly as a cultural and epistemological “break” or “rupture,” a definitive shift from modernism to something explicitly *not* modernist—whether that “something” is an improvement or not.¹⁶

By the mid-1960s, and into the 1970s, critics like Leslie Fiedler, Susan Sontag, and Ihab Hassan were outwardly celebrating just such a “rupture,” or epistemic upheaval (if we can return to the Foucaultian terminology discussed above). This turn to a distinctly positive view of postmodernism is perhaps best exemplified in Fiedler’s virtually ecstatic pronouncement, in “Cross the Border—Close that Gap: Post-Modernism,” of the *passing of* modernism:

We are living, have been living for two decades—and have become acutely conscious of the fact since 1955—through the death throes of Modernism and the birth pangs of Post-Modernism. The kind of literature which arrogated to itself the name Modern (with the presumption that it represented the ultimate advance in sensibility and form, that beyond it newness was impossible), and whose moment of triumph lasted from a point just before the First World War until one just after the Second World War, is *dead*, i.e., belongs to history not actuality. (344)

Like Sontag—who, in *Against Interpretation*, celebrates the postmodern aversion, or outward resistance, to final meaning(s), authorial intention, and thus interpretation—Fiedler conceives of the postmodern as “apocalyptic, anti-rational, blatantly romantic and sentimental; an age dedicated to joyous misology and prophetic irresponsibility; one, at any rate, distrustful of self-protective irony and too great self-awareness” (Fiedler 345). If such apocalyptic pronouncements give us a somewhat uneasy sense of *déjà vu*, it’s not surprising.¹⁷ The claim, here,

that modernism is *finally* dead (and not just dead, but—with empathic italics—*dead*) is remarkably similar to the postmodern death notices mentioned above. It is at this point—that is, the point at which the postmodern debate begins to include outward celebration—that I can begin to tie together the initial portion of this survey, while further articulating the spectrological argument proposed above.

That the death of modernism was read as the end of history¹⁸ and the teleological assumptions of history, that its death marks the birth of a finally postmodern, posthistoric aesthetic sensibility devoid of positivist assumptions and humanist imperatives, has several crucial implications. These implications—implications that I have already touched on in the above discussion of Toynbee’s “post-Modern” epoch¹⁹—are all the more germane to our discussion if we consider the fact that the theorizing of modernism’s “passing” has been neatly echoed in the more recent pronouncements of another epochal death: the death of postmodernism. On the surface, there are two ways to look at this. From either perspective, though, the majority of postmodern analysis since the first considerations of Toynbee and Olson must be viewed as inherently flawed. *Either*, as critics like Gerald Graff²⁰ have suggested from the beginning, late modernism has been mis-recognized as POSTmodern—that is, the *true end* of modernism; *or*, postmodernism *was indeed a break* with modernism, but it was ultimately unable to be what the majority of critics claimed it was: post-ideological.²¹ But which is it? Or, is there another possibility?

Andreas Huyssen, to a certain degree, had much of this worked out back in the mid-1980s: “Either it is said that postmodernism is continuous with modernism, in which case the whole debate opposing the two is specious; or, it is claimed that there is a radical rupture, a break with modernism, which is then evaluated in either positive or negative terms” (Huyssen 182). Given the recent development of an epoch/episteme that has emerged *after* postmodernism, it would seem that the “rupture argument,” as I suggested above, can only be maintained if the effect of the rupture is considered a failure, an unsuccessful and ultimately temporary postmodern—an *almost-(truly)POSTmodern*. But Huyssen seems to anticipate a way out of this dilemma. Viewing the either/or sensibility animating much of the postmodern debate as a failure to understand the most useful insights of Derridean deconstruction, Huyssen suggests that the postmodern—rather than being *either* continuous *or* wholly discontinuous with modernism—is *both* continuous *and* discontinuous. This is apparent, Huyssen points out, in the term itself; “postmodern” inscribes within itself the very term (i.e., “modern”) that it defines itself against. Ultimately, though, Huyssen’s argument

and apparent answer to the dilemma with which we are now confronted reaffirms the very binary he wishes to avoid. Huyssen eventually goes on to describe a series of movements *out of* modernism, a series beginning in the 1960s with a type of “anti-modernism” and seemingly culminating in the 1970s and 1980s with an almost complete epochal transformation into what we might think of as postmodernism proper. Huyssen essentially categorizes the postmodernism of the 1960s as a rebellion against certain strains of high modernism: its institutionalization, via the New Critics, within academia and its consequent failure as a subversive and critical avant-garde. By the late-1970s and early 1980s, though, postmodernism ceases to be simply anti-modernist, abandoning the concept of the avant-garde altogether and splitting into two separate strains: one that manifests itself as an affirmative culture of eclecticism with little interest in critique or subversion and another that manages to resist and critique the status quo while abandoning avant-gardism and/or basic modernist assumptions. Huyssen is particularly interested in the latter form of postmodernism and the possibility of its eventual transformation into a cultural dominant. What is important about his argument is that he sees the postmodernism/anti-modernism of the 1960s as a type of postmodern “pre-history” (195), as if the postmodernism that begins to emerge in the 1980s is almost finally and truly POSTmodern. The sense we get is that, even by the mid-1980s, postmodernism has not yet finally emerged—that, while it *has been* both continuous and discontinuous with modernism, it will eventually be something wholly different, something truly POSTmodern: “what appears on one level as the latest fad, advertising pitch, and hollow spectacle is part of a slowly emerging cultural transformation in Western societies, a change in sensibility for which the term ‘postmodernism’ is actually, at least for now, wholly adequate” (Huyssen 181).

In a way, then, Huyssen can be read as the first critic to theorize a period *after* postmodernism. That the term “postmodern” is “wholly adequate” in terms of temporarily describing a final shift to something wholly other than modernism is tantamount to saying that true POSTmodernism will not actually be identified *as* “postmodern”—a term that, according to Huyssen, cannot help but intimate a latent connection to modernism. From this perspective, Huyssen does indeed theorize a (for lack of a better term) POSTmodern rupture; but the rupture he theorizes is delayed, or prepared for, by a period of anti-(or, post)MODERNISM. Huyssen’s still forthcoming postmodern episteme is thus equivalent to what is currently described as the period *after* postmodernism. Hutcheon, in fact, does a similar thing. Hutcheon doesn’t *really* announce *the death* of postmodernism; rather, she seems

to suggest that what has been mistakenly thought of as postmodernism is dead and that POSTmodernism has finally become a reality—so much so that it requires “a new label of its own” (181), one (we might assume) that no longer implies a connection to the past.

Unfortunately, all this leads us back to the initial problem: either we “jumped the gun” when we first started identifying aesthetic production and social dynamics as postmodern, or the postmodern we correctly identified was unable to live up to our expectations. Both options, of course, ultimately become conflated; whether the past fifty or so years was just a continuation of modernism or an unsuccessful version of postmodernism, the fact remains that a truly POSTmodern epoch, with a name of its own, remains to be seen. And, besides, wouldn’t an unsuccessful postmodernism, by definition, be a continuation of modernism anyway? As a possible way out of the problem, and as a way of salvaging the majority of postmodern criticism, I want to focus on Huyssen’s suggestion that the postmodern is both continuous and discontinuous with modernism—but I would like to dismiss as somewhat facile the importance of the term itself; it seems to me that modernism is as continuous/discontinuous with the epochs that preceded it as is postmodernism, and the term “modernism” does not include references to the Enlightenment, romanticism or Victorianism. In this sense, I would like to employ a theory, or rhetoric, of ironic continuity/discontinuity as a means of understanding the death of postmodernism (as well as postmodernism itself). Nevertheless, the various versions of this particular position are not entirely in line with the direction I’d like to take such a theory. Some, like Huyssen, fail to sustain a wholly ironic viewpoint; others, like Hassan, employ a sense of continuous discontinuity in order to reaffirm a sense of historical trajectory, or progress. Still, Hassan’s suggestion that a period, or epoch, is “both a diachronic and synchronic construct” (Hassan 88) is a useful one. But instead of viewing the seemingly discontinuous, or synchronic, as the effect of an almost arbitrary system of categorization that gives definition to an otherwise smooth historical trajectory (as Hassan seems, in the end, to be interested in doing), I want to suggest that it is as incorrect to say that “modernism and postmodernism are not separated by an Iron Curtain or Chinese Wall” (Hassan 88) as it is to say that postmodernism, like all periodizations, is simply an illusory construct that obscures the reality of what is actually a much larger and unified historical movement. I’m not willing—nor do I think it is useful—to wholly abandon the rhetoric of the rupture.

Importantly, this critical sense, or theorizing, of a rupture is itself an identifiable symptom of the postmodern. As Jameson notes, “The

postmodern looks for breaks, for events rather than new worlds, for the tell-tale instant after which it's no longer the same; for the 'when-it-all-changed' . . . or, better still, for shifts and irrevocable changes in the representation of things and of the way they change" (*Postmodernism* ix). There is no better example of such thinking than that of Michel Foucault. The seismic upheavals identified in *The Order of Things* and *The Archeology of Knowledge* can be read, I would argue, as a poststructuralist counterpart to the postmodern, or markedly "Anglo-American," appeal to ruptures discussed above. Similarly, and while remaining wary of any simple conflation of poststructuralism and postmodernism,²² we might usefully (if tentatively) approach the apocalyptic "ends" repeatedly articulated in the poststructuralist discourse of the 1960s and 1970s—including Barthes' death of the author and Derrida's "ends of man"—as distinctly postmodern realities, born of a certain epistemological configuration that aimed to sever all ties with history, to be (as Lyotard might have it) radically new. This is not to deny that certain shifts have occurred—or, even, that certain "ruptures" have occurred. On a certain level, Foucault's posthistoric conception of synchronically defined epistemes remains a useful one; his announcement in the concluding portions of *The Order of Things*, like Derrida's at the end of "Ends of Man,"²³ functions as an accurate foretelling of what the postmodern would become: the end of a distinctly modern mode of representation and the absence of a certain, relatively short-lived, concept of the individual as the subject and object of knowledge. What I want to suggest is that the postmodern debate—and, now, the discussion of postmodernism's death—can be read as symptomatic of some type of ineffaceable "inheritance" that carries across these seemingly self-contained, or exclusive, epistemes (or, better, epistemological configurations). Primarily, though, I want to avoid falling into the trap of simple historical analysis. In looking at the postmodern debate, or the phenomenon that is the subject of that debate, I'm not interested in demonstrating that the proclamation of an end of history (or the end of anything else—postmodernism included) was nothing more than a miscalculation, that, as Anderson attempts to demonstrate in the *Origins of Postmodernity*, the claims attributed to a postmodern way of thinking can be traced backward as progressive developments of temporally and geographically contingent modes of thought, developments that ultimately reaffirm the persistence of what we might think of as a type of Hegelian and/or Marxist historical advancement.

Yet, and at the same time, I'm interested in demonstrating that the various complete and utterly unbridgeable ruptures identified by "the postmodernists" share a *certain history*, a certain genealogy, that

the postmodern theory of “ruptures” was indeed (at least on one level) effected by a certain shared experience, a certain experience of the past.²⁴ Let me put this differently. Certainly, it is entirely possible to identify certain breaks, or shifts—even if it is, perhaps, going too far to say, along with Foucault, that in terms of *other* epistemes, like modernism, “There is *nothing* now, either in our knowledge or in our reflection, that still recalls even the memory of that being” (*OT* 43, my emphasis). What I would like to suggest, instead, is that it is possible and *more useful* to conceive of such breaks as moments of epistemological *reconfiguration*. By conceiving of historical periodizations in such a way we can avoid the rather simplistic alternatives: either such periods are (1) artificially categorized moments in a much larger and inevitable historical trajectory, or (2) synchronic and utterly exclusive epistemes. Viewed as a series of nonprogressive *reconfigurations*—as *reconfigurations* of, as I explain more fully below, a certain essential spectral relationship—periodizations as such can be more easily understood as both continuous and discontinuous with their predecessors. At the same time, any given epistemic reconfiguration can be understood, in line with a more Jamesonian view, as a type of cultural dominant, even as other residual and emergent configurations continue to persist and influence each another—like wheels within wheels. The conception of epochal or epistemic shifts (i.e., reconfigurations) here proposed allows us to account for seemingly evident ruptures while simultaneously making room for a certain underlying spectral persistence, a certain *shared history*.

After all, if the horror films of the last century have taught us anything, it’s that even after the break is complete, after the dead are finally separated from the living, something always manages to come across from *the other side*—or rather (and I’m not just speaking of essential horror plot devices) something *must* come across; it’s absolutely essential. What I’m suggesting is that postmodernism—like all such “epistemes”—is, if we employ Derrida’s phrasing, a “double and unique experience” (*Specters* 15). The experience of any given episteme is always, then, to a certain degree, an experience of *déjà vu*. It is this sense of *déjà vu*, I would like to suggest, that has animated the postmodern discussion, a discussion that has, and which continues to, struggle with postmodernism’s relation and/or lack thereof to modernism, its seemingly contradictory impulses and its more recent passing. What we have—in modernism, in postmodernism, and now *after* postmodernism—is a series of repetitions, or returns. A persistent revenant. Yet each of these revenants—as that which comes back, a ghost—is always also original, unique. Here, then, we can begin to

employ the metaphor of the specter: that which is and (yet) is not, that which returns *for the first time*, that which “*begins by coming back*” (*Specters* 11).²⁵

It is with this ironic, or paradoxical, metaphor in mind that I want to continue my inspection of the postmodern debate. By viewing the postmodern as an episteme defined on both sides by certain discernable “ruptures,” while understanding it as a periodization or epistemological reconfiguration animated by a certain persistent specter or inheritance (passed on to, and in turn, by, modernism), we can begin to see a way out of our current dilemma. Modernism and postmodernism and, now, this newly emergent epoch can indeed be viewed as singular events, or epistemes; they are also, though, epistemological *re*configurations, *re*configurations of an unavoidable relationship with a certain repeating—we might say passing, or “passed on”—aporia: a certain inheritance, a certain specter.

Exorcisms Without End

In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida argues that Marxism was haunted by various spirits. According to Derrida, one of these spirits cannot be ignored; it cannot be ignored because it compels movement—that is, critical, aesthetic and/or revolutionary movement. But a spirit, Derrida insists, arrives, or manifests, as a ghost, a specter. It is both seen and unseen, present and absent; or, if we employ Derrida’s earlier terminology, the spirits of Marxism exist only as trace and differance. What is interesting about Derrida’s “essential” specter—and the use of the possessive has double significance, for Derrida (like Marx before him) possesses, or is *possessed by*, the very specter he is discussing—is that it is associated with “emancipatory and *messianic* affirmation, a certain experience of the promise” (89). The specter of Marx—the one that Derrida is concerned with, the one that continues to haunt and thus compel deconstruction—is the one motivating spirit haunting all past idealism(s): faith in god, humanism, meaning, telos, truth, and so on.²⁶ Ironically, these “spectral effects,” these *ideological tendencies*, are the very “opiates” of which Marx (at least according to Derrida) would like to rid the world. Yet the very specter, or teleological aporia, that compels the ideological tendencies to which Marx is opposed animates the discourse of Marxism, the discourse that is intent on exorcising all specters *once and for all*. Simply, if more crudely, the specter of a “true and final” state of communism haunts, and thus compels, the subversive implications of historical materialism; the very ideal of com-

munism is, Derrida seems to suggest, wholly contrary to the anti-idealist discourse that is ultimately animated by *the possibility of communism*. And it is, as I've already intimated, this specter of the messianic, of the promise "to come," that *effected* the very shape of postmodernism as a cultural dominant.

That being said, I'd like to move slowly at this point. To fully understand Derrida's argument—and, in turn, to make it fully applicable to a discussion of the passing of postmodernism as an episteme—we need to keep in mind that a specter is always a revenant (i.e., *of the past*) and a promise, or sign, of the future, a future to come. It returns from the past to herald the future. The ghost of Hamlet's father is, as Derrida's analysis of *Hamlet* demonstrates, a useful point of reference. The dead King *returns*, but his return as a revenant speaks to the possibility of a future, a time when justice is fulfilled, time is back "in joint" and the revenant is allowed to rest, dissipate, dissolve *finally*—at which point *the future would be present*; the possibility of the future, of the promise, would cease to be a possibility (for the condition of a promise, of its possible fulfillment, as Derrida asserts on numerous occasions, is its impossibility). The specter of Marx can be understood, then, as the animating factor in all past ideological revenants that beckon toward the *horizon* of the future. The specter represents the promise of a future that is forever "to come," or what Derrida refers to as "a messianic without messianism" (*Specters* 59). Now, I have repeatedly associated the specter in question with a certain inherited aporia, namely, a certain teleological aporia.²⁷ This is because this aporia can be defined as a desire for, or latent belief in, finality, a faith that will never be *finally* "worked out" of our (epistemological) systems/configurations. This is because it animates those very systems. However, and here is where the issue of postmodernism begins to converge with Derrida's discussion of Marxism, these discursive systems (or, in the specific context of this paper, epistemic configurations)—at least since the beginning of what Foucault marks as the modern episteme—have been opposed to, if not entirely frightened by, ghosts. The irony, as Derrida argues, is that the "hostility toward ghosts, a terrified hostility that sometimes fends off terror with a burst of laughter, is perhaps what Marx will always have had in common with his adversaries" (*Specters* 47). According to Derrida, then, the specter that "is haunting Europe"²⁸ (i.e., communism) is as troubling to Marx's opponents as the specter motivating our blind faith in bourgeois ideology, exchange value, and religion is to Marx(ism). So, Derrida asks: "But how to distinguish between the analysis that denounces magic and the counter-magic that it still risks being?" (*Specters* 47). The war against Marxism, just like the war

Marxism wages against the presumption that ideology, or the immaterial, is *real*—that it is the ultimate source of historical development—“is a war against a camp that is itself organized by the terror of the ghost, the one in front of it and the one it carries within itself” (*Specters* 105). What is always desired in these wars against ghosts is to “exorc-analyze the spectrality of the specter” (*Specters* 47)—that is, to conjure the specter, to make it *be* finally and thus to exorcise it finally. But, “to conjure” (as an act of calling into being or as an act of exorcising, for the one is ultimately the same as the other)²⁹ is an act compelled by the specter of an end³⁰—or, put differently, a certain teleological impulse.

Let’s put this as simply as possible: the primary injunction of the specter, its promise of emancipation, is to be rid of all specters. The promise promised is a world without ghosts, a world that is post-ideological: the future as present, the end of history. However, and this is Derrida’s main (ethical) point: the promise of such a world *is a specter*. It is only possible because it is impossible. Yet, its possibility compels movement. Ideally, for Derrida, we need to respect the specters of emancipation, not as the promise of a definite telos (which promises the end of the specter, of the promise, of the future, etc.), but as a certain non-teleological eschatology, a repeating promise of the end represented by a type of radical democracy, a sense of justice and/or meaning, deconstruction completed finally and *at last*. But I am not, at this point, interested in our *ideal*, or ethical, relationship to the specter of the messianic; rather, I’m interested in looking at the way in which this specter, or teleological aporia (for, I would argue, this specter continues to compel teleologies rather than non-teleological eschatologies) is seemingly “conjured” by a given epoch. Moreover, I’d like to suggest the possibility that what we might identify as an epistemic rupture occurs at the point when it is impossible to avoid the fact that a given epistemological reconfiguration is animated by the very revenant that was apparently conjured/exorcised by that episteme in the first place. This will make more sense if we look at Derrida’s discussion of Marxism *as* communism:

There is nothing “revisionist” about interpreting the genesis of totalitarianisms as reciprocal reactions to the fear of the ghost that communism inspired beginning in the last century, to the terror that it inspired in its adversaries but that it turned inside out and felt sufficiently within itself to precipitate the monstrous realization, the magical effectuation, the animist incorporation of an emancipatory eschatology which ought to have respected the promise, the being-promise of a promise. (*Specters* 105)