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(Chaos of) reading (chaos): The fuzzy logic of postmodernism

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The Ohio State University, 1993
(CHAOS OF) READING (CHAOS):
THE FUZZY LOGIC OF POSTMODERNISM

DISSERTATION

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the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
Graduate School of the Ohio State University

by

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*****

The Ohio State University
1993

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To Brenda
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Introduction

This work is about chaos and order—and the role that the dynamic of chaos and order play in the act of reading and engaging with texts. The order to which I am referring is not just the order of rationalism (which tries to master texts by bringing them under the control of orderly interpretation), but also an order beyond chaos (an order with a different logic), which cannot retreat from the implications that chaos has for reading. I would not want to argue that we do not order texts, but rather that order is inseparable from chaos and that the two terms exist in a dialectical relationship that reflects the very nature of the functioning of the human mind. In some ways this work is a little more about chaos, because it is the term that is usually placed in a secondary position in any discussion of texts and reading, or omitted entirely as a site of meaninglessness. I think it is necessary to confront the chaos in order to recognize its role in the dialectic of engaging with a text.
The dialectic of the mind is situated within another dialectic: that of the text and the reader. One of the assumptions about this work is that culture is as important to understanding the mind as science is, and that the two can deepen the understanding of the mind when they are brought into play. The chaos and order of the mind are thus placed into play with the demands of a text, and texts can demand things of the mind that allow the mind to learn something of itself. Thus, I will refer to the reading subject: that consciousness which is engaged by and engages with a text.

The term dialectic carries a lot of baggage, some of which I prefer to see lost along the way. I want to start by positing that my idea of the dialectic closely approximates that employed by Walter Davis in his work *Inwardness and Existence* and also embraces much of the possibility inherent in Jean Baudrillard's term "seduction." In *Inwardness and Existence*, Davis articulates the idea of a hermeneutics of engagement founded upon a dialectic of never-ending referral (not deferral) to a deeper subjectivity. This notion of the dialectic requires a constant need to interrogate assumptions and then to move beyond those assumptions to a deeper ground that presupposes, integrates, negates and transcends the earlier assumption. Still, my idea of the dialectic requires a few other grounding assumptions that, while I think are implicit in his work, Davis does not specifically address. Thus I need to borrow from Baudrillard the power of his concept of seduction, developed in *Seduction*. This
seduction is simultaneous and mutual and instantaneous, in a way that the traditional notion of the dialectic is not. Baudrillard's notion of seduction might well be called a poststructuralist dialectic, always already decentered from the traditional binary/tertiary notion of the dialectic. Seduction is a dialectic without a first term. The dialectic of chaos and order that I am positing takes neither chaos nor order as its first term, but rather enters into the play that those terms are already enacting.

This work will also examine the relationship that this concept reading has to postmodernism, not merely as a literary movement but as a lived condition in relation to the real. I feel that in order to understand the nature of this idea of reading, it is essential to look at both the cognitive foundations and the literary applications of this idea. I will attempt to develop these ideas together through the examinations of specific texts and the demands that those texts make of their readers. I do this not because I think postmodern texts are "read" differently than other texts, but rather that they foreground something which is always being done in the act of reading. The foregrounding makes them useful tools for understanding the dialectic of reading, but this work is not about how to read specific texts (a manual for tackling chaotic texts).

This notion of reading is really a notion of thinking. Thus, it would seem necessary to question the reason for using reading as my focus. First, this dialectic of chaos and order is one founded upon an assumption of the power
and empowerment of an engagement with something Other through introspection. Thus, something external is needed to enact this dialectic. I have chosen written texts for reasons that I hope will become apparent through the course of this argument, but there are aspects of language itself that make it a particularly important site for raising these questions. I have chosen postmodern texts because I live in a postmodern world and it shapes my subjectivity in ways that certain texts foreground for me. I hope that it nonetheless remains implicit in this argument that I think its foundations in thought extend far beyond written texts in ways that still cannot deny the important movement those texts create. Postmodernism constructs a new sense of reading by cutting through and deconstructing certain cultural assumptions.

"The grand narrative has lost its credibility" (37). This is how Jean-François Lyotard characterizes postmodernism. Totalization has thus ceased to be a credible foundation for a critical practice claiming to address postmodernism (or for a postmodern critical practice). This makes it necessary to ask what might be said and how it might be said. Brian McHale, in *Constructing Postmodernism*, points out that "a deconstructive move might be to assert the amphibiousness--irreducible doubleness, indeterminacy--of all texts, thus dissolving all such literary-historical distinctions as 'modernism' into a general textuality. But this move is too powerful, I think; unhelpfully so" (McHale 163-164). The fact that this move is "too powerful" leads McHale to the need to
find something provisional to do, to find a "helpful" way to come at the problem of how to say something (about the) postmodern.

Jacques Derrida, I think, would argue that the move McHale attributes to deconstruction is not a deconstructive one, but rather one that comes out the New Criticism-based deconstructive practice that was its most visible form. On the other hand, the move that he makes— that the totalizing move is too powerful— is a deconstructive move: certainty about postmodernism can be lost without determinate distinctions being lost. What is needed is a logic that does not exclude middles, but which can work with the existence of that non-excluded middle. Derrida points out in Limited, Inc. that "undecidability always involves a determinate oscillation between possibilities" (148).

I raise this point because I think that McHale makes a very useful distinction in Constructing Postmodernism in positing the idea of a constructed postmodernism, which is not "out there" in the form of some clear presence. Rather, postmodernism becomes a practice of interpretation with determinate oscillations, but no decidability. As Mark Poster notes

The issue for theory, then, is to elaborate a position for the theoretical subject which acknowledges the contingency of its validity claims, the embeddedness of theory in the present, in the political conjuncture, without, however, relinquishing the critique of domination or the project of emancipation. In other words, the problem is to generate discourses whose power effects are limited as much as possible to the subversion of power (Critical Theory and Poststructuralism 30).
This work will attempt to construct such a provisional position for itself, because I think there is something very useful in confronting how we read (and how we allow ourselves to read). It is not intended that this work will decide how we read, but rather that it will operate within a determinate field of possibilities. And that field of possibilities will define itself by the exploration of itself, for in describing how we read and engage with texts, it is implicit that this is how this work will be read. This is nothing but a field of possibilities, but this work will argue that such a field can be a site of "meaningful" engagement (with "meaningful" itself a term in the process of being constructed).

The argument of this work will attempt to follow a few works of literature into new grounds of reading and then emerge with some overall picture of the act of reading that relies upon those texts as much as on the theoretical notions expressed. The arrangement of materials hereafter is a bit chaotic itself, but I would be staking myself some strange ground if I chose an orderly analysis of chaos. The arrangement is designed to mirror the skipping of my thoughts through these ideas. It is also designed to keep this work open to constant interpretation. Umberto Eco suggest that "the 'open' work tends to encourage 'acts of conscious freedom' on the part of the performer and place him at the focal point of a network of limitless interrelations, among which he chooses to set up his own form without being influenced by an external necessity which
definitively prescribes the organization of the work at hand" (The Open Work 4).

This work will, I hope, be an "open" work of criticism.

There are dangers in proposing this kind of theory: biological essentialism, certainty, a return to a nostalgia for a perfectly comprehensible practice. I hope that the discussion that follows will situate itself in opposition to the desires of those dangers (and the dangers of those desires). In postulating that reading is Chaotic, I do not want to provide a means of pinning down reading, but, rather, a means of liberating meaning from certainty. I hope the texts that follow will allow me some means of escaping the trap I have set.

Teletheory offers mystery, that is as a translation (or transduction) process researching the equivalencies among the discourses of science, popular culture, everyday life, and private experience.

A mystery is always specific to its composer, constituting a kind of personal periodic table of cognitive elements, representing one individual's intensive reserve. (Gregory Ulmer, Teletheory vii).

This work is not a "mystery," which is a critical practice with clear links to the personal criticism practiced by many feminist critics, but does seem to follow a very close path to that which Ulmer describes. Criticism must be internal reflection and disclosure; this work reflects those needs most in its structure. The structure of this work assumes a form that is based only upon my own discovery of these ideas and connections--the texts themselves do not dictate the structure, only my experience of them does that. It is a highly individual
path, and one that probably says as much about its author as it does about the works themselves. Yet, since this work is intended as a conversation between myself and my reader, it seems appropriate to lay out my thinking on these matters.

First, I do not wish to make any claims about authors here, only about texts. I do not want to fall into the trap that John Barth falls into in "The Literature of Exhaustion" and "The Literature of Replenishment" of trying to characterize writers, when in fact a writer can adopt many different literary practices (a good example being Carlos Fuentes, whose works take on forms that seem to cut across movements and their desires). I will argue for the postmodernism of the texts herein discussed, but not for that of their authors. I think that the awareness I want to create is a result of engagement of reader and text (reading subject and textual other) and that engagement is related to the text's author only in very roundabout ways.

This work, then, follows my thinking on these texts. Still, for the reader whose interests lie elsewhere, it might be useful to consider some alternative routes through the work. Chapter 1 provides some basic foundation in the various disciplines I will be using. It is a useful starting point, but might also be considered an appendix, to be referred to when subsequent discussions seem to move too cursorily through the various disciplines. Chapter 2 provides the starting point of the process of uncovering the inherent chaos of reading. It uses
James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* as its test-case. I think *Finnegans Wake* provides a useful starting place, serving, in a sense as the beginning of postmodernism (as Ihab Hassan has argued), but more importantly as a reading challenge that illustrates much of the chaos of reading. Still, a reader more interested in postmodern culture, might prefer to begin with the Chapter 4 on William Gaddis's *The Recognitions*. Chapter 3 treats the relation of chaos to narrative and uses Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* as its place of engagement. This argument sets the stage for Chapter 4, but more directly leads into Chapter 5, which is on Marguerite Duras' *Blue Eyes, Black Hair* and *The Malady of Death* and Clarice Lispector's *The Stream of Life*. The path from Chapter 3 might best be followed in that direction. Chapter 4 focuses on the text as information and examines William Gaddis's *The Recognitions*. Its successor is really Chapter 7, on Gaddis's *JR*. Chapter 5, on Marguerite Duras' *Blue Eyes, Black Hair* and *The Malady of Death* and Clarice Lispector's *The Stream of Life*, provides a certain sense of purpose to this argument, and opens up certain areas of inquiry that must be explored. Chapter 6, on *Christopher Unborn* tries to examine how the logic of chaos relates the culture. It therefore can stand somewhat on its own. Chapter 7, on *JR* discusses how readers cognitively map their ways through the space of texts. The Conclusion is the point of egress for all of the paths, as it takes what the texts have shown and takes them to the next step. This work
ends with a PostConclusion. It is, in many ways, optional. It may also be the starting point of the work.
Chapter I

A Context for Chaos

Chaos, Cognition and Consciousness

Patricia Churchland argues that "it is a mistake to see science as standing in opposition to humanism" (482). Rather, we should see that it is the metanarratives that science and humanism have created for themselves that stand in opposition. Science tries to install itself behind a metanarrative of the ultimately explainable that Jean-François Lyotard has already deconstructed. Humanism, on the other hand, often tries to rely on some mystical undefinable presence (such as the aesthetic) which is constituted within a metanarrative designed the keep scrutiny of science at bay. Jacques Derrida has deconstructed that desire for presence. Somewhere in the deconstructed space of those metanarratives is a possibility for bringing the two "fields" into a dialectic that can allow for the brain and the aesthetic to share the same line of inquiry. I think that the brain is the site of thought and reading, and that this line of inquiry is therefore a potentially fruitful one. Churchland notes that "mental processes are brain processes" (482). It seems obvious to me that the discussion of each would somehow be deepened by an understanding of both.
Cognition relies on an underlying chaos that creates certain potentials for ordered thought. The relationship of this dynamic is such that both the chaotic potential and the ordered realization are mutually existing and simultaneous—dialectical in the sense I have defined in the introduction. Neither term is really privileged over the other. Even though the chaos exists as the ground state, it cannot really be said to exist without its realization in order.

The brain works by using a chaotic firing of neurons to create a field of possibility for the entry of new information. That field of possibility is created within a network of highly interconnected neurons. The new information thus enters into a chaos delimited by a very specific order. The brain itself has the ability to use that chaos to incorporate the information into a specific pattern of firing (a process called phase locking) within the network. The brain thus "orders" the chaos. This order is then incorporated into networks of thoughts and the brain itself adapts its structure to the new information. The membrane of the neuron changes in response to the continual firing at a synapse, a change that makes the brain more receptive to that firing (and it is thus information is "learned"). The networks themselves thus have a certain flexibility granted by the changes that occur within the neurons in the networks (and a given neuron can be a participant in more than one network at a time, thus granting an even deeper complexity to this arrangement).
It is important to stress that the all-or-nothing binary of the neuron is not *the* defining principle of the brain (although it is certainly one of them), especially since the neurons can change to become more receptive to certain inputs. It would be the defining principle if the brain "read" the firing of each neuron for information. It appears however that the brain has highly interconnected networks of neurons that can fire in patterns that are complicated enough to lose the binary within its larger context of connections. Further still, there is the possibility that the brain "reads" the frequency in which the neurons fire. While the frequency has limits (its upper limit being dictated by the recovery time for the neuronal membrane), within those limits the brain's ability to discriminate between frequencies is limited only by its resolution (how finely can it distinguish between frequencies?). As the resolution becomes finer, the possible number of recognizable frequencies between those limits approaches infinity.

Thoughts are not discrete. Every thought is invested with an enormous context of other thoughts and feelings and impressions and sensations (perhaps somewhere in the many frequencies in the initial chaos). These contexts involve not only prior cognition, but simultaneous cognition. The end result is not merely to invest a new stimulus with a context, but to change the elements of the context as a reaction to the stimulus.

It is important to add that any stimulus from the external world always enters into this chaotic cognition and any ordered thought that comes out of the
reaction to that stimulus has always passed through chaos. I would have to think that the same is true of introspection, which must be pulling some order out of the existing chaos. That is, it is my contention that introspection partakes of the same dynamic of chaos and order that sensory processing does. Although there seems to be a controlling order to the act of introspection (a certain directedness), I think it would be a mistake to assume that such an order in some way evades the play of chaos. In fact, I would argue that what makes introspection powerful (and what makes it dialectical)—the ability to discover the new in ourselves—relies on the possibilities of chaos.

I am not sure how to establish a real distinction between this previous idea of cognition and the idea I now want to deal with—consciousness. I think of cognition as how the brain handles ideas and consciousness as the awareness of those ideas (and yet there may be an enormous gap between these two things). Yet, the idea of consciousness that I want to develop here exists in relation to an unconscious that may be the underlying chaos of cognition or may be something altogether different. It is not really my intention to clarify this distinction, because I do not think that it is an important one. I do not believe that there is anything in the mind (consciousness) which does not come from the brain (cognition); I do not want to posit some Cartesian theater that springs out of nowhere and partakes only of the metaphysical. Yet the relationship between mind and brain does not seem likely to be as facile as any one to one
correspondence might allow. There is no way to read the mind (as I am defining it) by reading the brain (since a knowledge of the biology of the brain does not of necessity imply an understanding of how the consciousness "reads" that biology). Consciousness in this model is not phenomenological, but, as Douglas Hofstadter suggests in his application of Gödel's Theorem to the mind, it is unknowable.

The consciousness I posit is not a thing of pure rationalism, as some theorists, especially those who want to hitch themselves to the artificial intelligence bandwagon, would have it. Consciousness embraces desires and emotions and will that are more than mere information processing. This is important for the argument that follows, for these aspects are certainly a part of the "chaotic unconscious" that I am positing in relation to this consciousness. This term is a tentative one. This unconscious has some relations to those ideas of the unconscious developed by Freud, Jung, Lacan, Deleuze & Guattari, Kristeva, and Jameson. Those relations will be developed in terms of the analyses of the texts that I have chosen, but, for now, what I want to establish is that this idea of the unconscious takes into account the chaos of the brain and what that chaos implies about the workings of the mind.

Consciousness is a process of ordered introspection that comes out of and partakes of a chaos that I will call the unconscious. What I am calling the unconscious is related to the chaotic firing of the ground state mind, capable of
all the characteristic interplay of ideas that the traditional Freudian and
post-Freudian models of the unconscious imply. The unconscious is chaotic; the
conscious is ordered. The two have a dialectical relationship, but they are not
two sides of the same coin. There is no clear line between them. The
unconscious in not always present to the conscious. The unconscious will make
connections of ideas and charge images and thoughts with contexts that the
conscious knows nothing of. This unconscious is not only an interplay of
thoughts and memories, but, as I have already stated, of desires and emotions
and of will.

The relationship between the two is dialectical, in that they exist mutually
and simultaneously, affecting each other, and referring back to each other,
constantly. What Julia Kristeva calls "the de-structuring and a-signifying
machine of the unconscious" (Revolution in Poetic Language 17), I would call the
mutually structuring and a-signifying machine. I think that this distinction is an
important one. I want to challenge the notion of an unconscious that exists
subsequent to the conscious ("de-structuring" seems to leave open too much
possibility of creating an a posteriori relationship to consciousness--not for
Kristeva, but for certain readers of her work). Signification exists in the
interaction of conscious and unconscious.

In order to understand the implications of this Chaotic process of
consciousness for this work, it is useful to turn to Anton Ehrenzweig's analysis of
how we think about and respond to the visual arts. Ehrenzweig draws on and expands upon Piaget's concept of the syncretistic vision of children to show how the "normal vision of reality is not based on the interpretation of pattern, but goes directly for the visual object with little interest in its abstract shape" (14). The engagement with art requires, for Ehrenzweig, unconscious scanning. I would call that unconscious scanning a chaotic engagement with art, because I do not think we react to art through a purely conscious process, but that there is a chaos of mind that exists in that act of the engagement and always informs it. What Ehrenzweig has postulated is that we do not build our understanding of a work of art by systematically compiling reactions to its combinations of shapes and colors, as a notion of thought as combinations of various pure (and conscious) orders (for example Gestalt theory) might lead us to think. Rather, the shapes and colors are a background "noise" (or chaos) wherein we enact our response to and understanding of a work of art, even as we develop our "orderly" understanding of the work. In the same way, the act of reading involves a chaotic engagement in which all the components of the text are but part of the field of possibility of meaning and engagement which is our response to and understanding of a text. The language of a text is never unmediated by referral to the chaos. The text is received as an ordered chaos from which we draw some order as a means of giving it meaning.
There are differences between the response to art and the reading of a
text (e.g. narrative) that make it necessary to complicate this discussion still
further. Roman Ingarden provides a useful place to start this distinction. In The
Cognition of the Literary Work of Art he argues that

we must distinguish here between two different procedures: first,
the reading of a specific literary work, or the cognition of that work
which takes place during such reading, and, second, that cognitive
attitude which leads to an apprehension of the essential structure
and peculiar character of the literary work as such. These are two
different modes of cognition and yield two quite different kinds of
knowledge. The first is accomplished in an individual reading of an
individual work. It is a particular kind of experience in which we
establish the actuality of the work and its details. The second is
not accomplished in a reading at all and does not give us an
experience of the actual qualitative constitution of a particular
work, say of the Magic Mountain, by Thomas Mann. The second
kind of cognition differs from an individual reading to such an
extent that, even if we completely described the course and
functions of an individual reading in our investigation, we would still
be merely at the threshold of the difficult problem: What constitutes
the general nature (to use the inappropriate but common term) of
the literary work of art? (10).

Ingarden wants to suggest that there is the actual act of reading the linear (or
nonlinear, in certain cases) flow of words on a page and still another act, which
is the coming to respond to and engage with the "whole" (the field of
possibilities) of the literary work. This distinction is played out in slightly
different terms for Peter Rabinowitz in Before Reading. Rabinowitz sees the act
of reading as being divided into a "before reading" (a context, a field of possible
contexts for Ingarden's second aspect), a "during reading" (Ingarden's first
aspect), and an "after reading" (Ingarden's second aspect). The act of reading
is thus both the act of reading and also the cognitive mapping of the reading subject into the "textual space" that the literary work creates.

Having said all of this, I think it is important to remember that "we do not yet know the full extent and structure of our (unconscious) scanning powers, but somehow we must search for undifferentiated low-level sensibilities not unlike syncretism for an explanation" (Ehrenzweig 17, emphases mine). This is not about certainties of cognition and consciousness, but it is about the need to discuss those things in the absence of certainty.

Information Theory

Information is thus a form of negative entropy (Man and Woman, War and Peace 40).

Because this notion of reading that I am formulating attempts to describe what happens in the act of engaging with a text, I think that it would be useful to spend a little time running through some of the implications of an area of inquiry that describes this point of contact: information theory. I do not think this theory provides an absolute answer to engagement with a text (it ignores the sender and receiver in concentrating on the medium and message), but it is still an important part of that engagement and is an area where chaos is already known and recognized. As N. Katherine Hayles puts it: "chaos is no longer simply the opposite of order. Rather, it is the precursor to order, an infinitely rich
information source from which all potential order and form come ("Information or Noise?" 121). At the level of information, I think this idea of chaos is a good one, although I think that when the receiver of the information is considered, the idea of chaos as "precursor" is a questionable one.

The basic principle of information theory is that all messages can be divided into "information" and "noise". The transmission of a message is thus a transmission of both the information to be conveyed and the noise which serves as a background from which the information must be lifted. This notion is an important one, in that it implies that there must be some activity on the part of the receiver to receive the information. Information theory challenges the notion of clean, clear transmission of information.

This notion of information theory has been complicated still further by exploring the role of noise. It becomes necessary to move from information theory to systems theory to see the relationship of information and noise in their larger context. Michel Serres points out that "from a point of view within the system, the transmission of information along a given circuit from one element to another subtracts ambiguity because it is a noise, and obstacle to the message. For an observer outside the system, ambiguity must be added, for it increases the systems complexity" (Hermes 79-80). The idea of dividing messages into information and noise requires a specific system through which it is possible to posit what is important in the message and what is not. This then becomes the
criterion for distinguishing information from noise. Viewed from outside that system, however, the noise takes on a new character: it becomes a complexity in the message that enables the possibility of extracting other information from that message. That is, "noise gives rise to a new system, an order that is more complex than the simple chain....The town makes noise, but the noise makes the town" (Serres, Parasite 14). Noise thus assumes a new role, it is the chaos that shatters one order (pure information) and enables another order (plurality of information) without rendering information impossible (only certainty--or tautology--is rendered impossible, or at least confined to a specific closed system, not unlike Derrida's field of determinate possibilities). This leads to the conclusion that there are then two possible readings of noise: disruption or play.

Information itself must also be complicated by Jean Baudrillard's attempt to politicize the distinction of information from knowledge (a distinction that hinges on "meaning"). He argues that we are in an age in which information, rather than knowledge is the goal, that "we are in a universe where there is more and more information, and less and less meaning" ("The Implosion of Meaning in the Media" 95). Information is sent and received as just information, without a real engagement that leads to knowledge. I think that this is a justifiable critique of our culture, but remains too simple to explain the subject who is living within that culture (a subject whose very existence Baudrillard would question). Knowledge is assumed to flow out of a local system where information can be
separated from noise (where the text can be said to have determinate meaning). That system has been challenged by poststructuralist thinking. Hayles explains that "what AT&T would like to eliminate, throw away as useless information, Barthes offers up for consumption, claiming that it is precisely what has been added to the original message that nourishes the reader" ("Information or Noise?" 128). Noise thus provides the possibility of a new type of meaning (if a reader is situated in a way that he/she is able to escape from the need or desire for "pure" information).

All messages are not language-based and the entry into the domain of language entails certain complications of the basic paradigm of noise and information. Certainly language is always already constituted within a cultural and ideological framework that strongly opposes any possibility of it representing pure message. Nonetheless, information theory has much to say about the way we think about language (as the reference to its relation to deconstruction has already implied). Serres creates a link between the two:

It immediately became obvious, or was taken as such, that a store of information transcribed on any given memory, a painting or a page, should drift by itself from difference to disorder, or that an isolated-closed system about which we know nothing, an unknown of some sort, could be and, in certain cases, had to be a language pocket. (Hermes 73)

Language might well be thought of as one closed system of information and noise, which is always already in jeopardy of failing to remain closed. It is generally approached as a closed system, but is known to be open (and thus
subject to reinterpretation by its own noise). Serres notes that "a semantic field
is not a concept but a fuzzy set, a playing field for what amounts to, sometimes,
only a play on words. Meaning, inevitably; play, obviously" (Parasite 9).
Traditional assumptions about language cannot hold in this poststructuralist
framework of information theory, and language itself becomes redefined in the
encounter. Anthony Wilden argues that "it is self-evident that language has
evolved from communication and exchange in nature, and that it cannot be
separated entirely from these natural non-cultural processes. It is evident also
that every emergence of a new level of semiotic freedom must necessarily
change the relations of logical typing anterior to such an event" (System and
Structure 435). The relation between the two is such that the language is
subject to the dynamics of information, and is altered by its use as information
(just as it is most assuredly altered by its position within culture and its relation
to ideology).

The fact that the encounter with texts is always mediated by language
leads to an awareness that the possibility of meaning emerging in the act of
reading depends at least in part on some awareness of language as information.
It is possible to read a text and leave with a certainty of its meaning, but, to do
so, the reader must ignore the noise of the text. "In cultural systems, then, just
as in physical systems, noise or chaos amounts to a force for renewal...noise too
can produce a new system of meaning. (Eric Charles White, "Negentropy" 268).
The need to look at the relationship of information theory to reading is all the more imperative now, since we live in an age dominated by information. All cultural constructs (and the act of reading is a cultural construct every bit as much as a text is) are situated in a moment in history when information has become an enormously powerful cultural force (as Lyotard has noted). Jean Baudrillard argues that "there is a rigorous and necessary correlation between [information and meaning], to the extent that information is directly destructive of meaning and signification, or neutralizes it. The loss of meaning is directly linked to the dissolving and dissuasive action of information, the media, and the mass media" ("Rituals of Transparency" 96). The loss of meaning that Baudrillard describes is a loss of the certainty of meaning. The firm ground of understanding is undermined by the proliferation of information, which serves not only to dilute the possibility of meaning, but also to create a wider range of noise from which information must be extracted. The information age requires of its subjects either a frustrated nostalgia of certainty or the need to change the lived relation to meaning. Mark Poster notes that "the new structures of information, treated as linguistic phenomena, introduce changes in the pattern of communication in society and destabilize the positions of subjects in that society" (The Modes of Information 28).

This noisy culture is only a challenge to desires for order and control and mastery, not to the abilities of the human mind. Chaos is not mere confusion. It
is something that we can engage. As Serres notes: "The body is an extraordinarily complex system that creates language from information and noise, with as many mediations as there are integrating levels, with as many changes in sign for the function which just occupied our attention" (*Hermes* 82). All this noise does not leave us outside language, it is always already part of the language inside.

**Engagement**

I have been using the term "engagement" to describe the interaction of reader and text. I find this term necessary because "reading" has come to assume a meaning that makes it all the easier for a reader to erect defenses between himself/herself and the text. I do not think that those defenses are as effective as a reader might want, and I do not think that the act of holding a text out from one's subjectivity is at all the act of reading that I am discussing. There is reading to gain an understanding of the text (to pin down what it means) and there is reading which is the act of engaging with the text in a way that risks a reader's subjectivity. Engaging with a text not only includes understanding its meaning, but reacting to that meaning in ways that are not subsequent to, but situated within, the moment of engagement with a text. Just as the theory of consciousness without desire and will is lacking, so, too, is any theory of reading which attempts to exclude these elements.
Of course, not all reading risks our subjectivity. Nor do we read for only that purpose. It is not my intention here to suggest that all acts of reading are or must be acts of supreme risk (that would seem to me to lead to a false and untenable position), but rather that the act of "engaging" with a text does involve that deepening of subjectivity. One of the ways in which engaging with a text accomplishes that deepening of subjectivity is by bringing its reader to an awareness of what reading is and demands.

I do, however, want to suggest that a reader might attempt to purposefully exclude those elements from his/her reading. There is certainly a psychodynamics of reading that includes such defenses against a text (just as there are certainly texts that resist creating such an engagement). Nonetheless, the chaos of the engagement makes those defenses porous (and perhaps creates the need for those defenses). I do not think it is possible to exclude the unconscious chaos of textual engagement (whether that unconscious is a personal unconscious of the reader, a political unconscious of the text, or the noisy unconscious of the information or, more likely, some articulation of the relation of all three). Thus, I think it is essential to talk about the engagement of reader and text, even where such engagement might be resisted.

This idea of engagement draws heavily on Walter Davis' idea of a hermeneutics of engagement, developed in *Inwardness and Existence*. The basic premise of that hermeneutics is that "consciousness must be internally
constituted such that it is forced to mediate the difference it encounters in the world in order to develop its own inherent mediation of identity and difference" (Davis 357). The encounter between text and reader is an engagement of the reader's subjectivity. That engagement exists in the form of a dialectic of constant referrals of subjectivity and Other/object. Davis explains that the only end possible for a dialectic of inwardness and existence is an explicit appropriation of the full subjectivity evolved through the dialectical process as the basis of a praxis which projects that awareness upon history. That act raises the dialectic to a new complexity, for through it the subject which reflects and the 'object' upon which it reflects become one in the lived recognition that subject as being-in-the-world faces the task of totalizing historicity. (Davis 342)

This engagement of reader and Other (in the case I am making, the text) is characterized by a constantly empowered and charged dialectic of necessary subjectivity. The object confronts the reader with knowledge of himself/herself as subject and forces the reader to see inherent contradictions that lead to a renewal of the dialectic at ever deeper levels. "The contradictions in each position, however, generate the need for progressively more complex mediations" (Davis 343). The dialectic of engagement is informed by the chaotic unconscious of the engagement in a way that partakes of that dynamic, even when it does not partake of the essential inwardness (we don't always realize what a text is doing to/with/for us).

This brings me to the point of using this idea of engagement: a need to establish a new idea of what reading entails. The presence of chaos in the act
of reading shatters illusions of certainty and control and mastery of a text, as well as notions of an ideologically neutral text. Yet, to stop at this point would be to stop this cultural dialectic at the point of its most important and immanent critique. This idea of engagement moves beyond that critique and attempts to keep the dialectic in action (although not to move it forward, since the critique is simultaneous and mutual). Engagement is a reason why we read texts and why they challenge our subjectivity, but is a reason not only always already in question, but in fact empowered by that fact of being always already in question. There can be no honest return to old certainties (any such return says more about the desires of the critic than about the text), but there can be honest use of the old methods, as long as they are situated within a constantly-referring dialectical subjectivity. That is to say that this idea is not anti-theory, but anti-control.

The chaos of reading leads to a type of order which is a type of engagement that can be part of a cultural discourse. N. Katherine Hayles emphasizes the "intuitive" aspects of knowledge and points out that "the forms are so complex that they never resolve into completely ordered structures" ("Complex Dynamics in Literature and Science" 27). I will grant that this idea of intuitive order can easily become confused with the older idea of order, but I think it is necessary to prevent the spiraling off into meaningless that is the potential trap of an un-referred poststructuralist critique.
Literary Theory

Chaos is not an idea which cannot be related to some paradigms of literary theory already in use (beyond the poststructuralist correlations above). The theory of the novel developed by Mikhail Bakhtin, for example, opens out into chaos, after starting in assumptions of complexity: "The novel as a whole is a phenomenon multiform in style and variform in speech and voice. In it the investigator is confronted with several heterogeneous stylistic unities, often located on different linguistic levels and subject to different stylistic controls" (261). This complexity of possibility already opens up the engagement of reader and text to multiple possibilities which can challenge the reader in chaotic ways (although they can also be quickly compartmentalized and controlled, if such is the desire of the reader). How that possibility from complexity works is best understood by beginning with the chaos inherent in Bakhtin's theory of the dialogic:

The word in living conversation is directly, blatantly, oriented toward a future answer-word: it provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer's direction. Forming itself in an atmosphere of the already spoken, the word is at the same time determined by that which has not yet been said but which is needed and in fact anticipated by the answering word. Such is the situation in any living dialogue (280).

This notion of the dialogic serves as a bracketing of the tenets of information theory I have already employed. Here in Bakhtin is the sender (and implied receiver) of the message of information theory. The dialogic is an ordered
articulation out of a chaotic consciousness inserted into the chaotic medium in a
chaotic message. That articulation comes out of chaos (the sender/author) and
enters into chaos (the receiver/reader). Yet, to the extent that we can agree on
a certain transmission of meaning from one person to another (which seems to
happen all the time in a very imperfect way), we can say there is something of a
scale to which we have agreed, that neither contains nor dismisses chaos, but
rather acknowledges its presence.

I should note that Umberto Eco, in *The Limits of Interpretation*, argues that
such communication precedes the play of meaning. We must have already
received the word in some way, before we can allow its meaning to open itself to
possibility of interpretation. We are constrained by a certain literal meaning that
is the essence of that transmission. Eco thus argues that "any act of freedom on
the part of the reader can come after, not before, the acceptance of that
constraint" (6). I might argue the temporality of Eco's paradigm, opting for a
simultaneity, but I think the basic impulse is an important one. The chaos I am
postulating leads to uncertainty, not to an impossibility of communication.

In light of the nature of this idea of reading, I think it is necessary to
account for the reader-response theory of Stanley Fish. Although Fish first
attempted to balance his theory with a universality of language that he drew from
Noam Chomsky, he has since dropped this idea and positioned meaning purely
within the reader (with both reader and text being constructed within interpretive
communities). In so doing he opens reading to absolute possibility. If this attempt draws its basis from the positioning of language within the reader—that is, if Fish is recognizing that the reader exists within the Symbolic Order—then his theory must defer meaning to the language relation of the reader. Yet, such a language relation must have the kind of dialogic character that Bakhtin posits. The act of reading a text is not a language act within the reader, but rather is a language act which exists within the engagement of reader and text. The reader-response idea of the text opens infinite possibility, but not the kind of field of possibility to which I have been referring. The field here is defined by academically-sanctioned interpretive possibilities. Reader-response theory cannot permit that there would or could be a deepening subjectivity of the reader, because there is no other/object with which to engage as subject. The text becomes a Rorschach, but one lacking in meaningful challenge to the reading subject. The absolute possibility that Fish posits in every text, must be tempered by the engagement of the reader with a particular text, a text that is an object which does have a chaotic, but finite, position within language.

As Roland Barthes notes, "To interpret a text is not to give it a (more or less justified, more or less free) meaning, but on the contrary to appreciate what plural constitutes it" (5). The critical practice(s) that is(are) poststructuralism challenges the desire for control and mastery of the text and shows their inevitable outcome:
The commentary, based on the affirmation of the plural, cannot therefore work with "respect" to the text; the tutor text will ceaselessly be broken, interrupted without any regard for its natural divisions (syntactical, rhetorical, anecdotic); inventory, explanation, and digression may deter any observation of suspense, may even separate verb and complement, noun and attribute; the work of the commentary, once it is separated from any ideology of totality, consists precisely in manhandling the text, interrupting it (Barthes 15).

The act of interpretation interrupts a text rather than masters it. "Play is the disruption of presence" (292), Derrida writes in *Writing and Difference*. Given what has already been said here, it should be obvious how it might be possible to associate play with chaos. Each contains the infinite possibility which disrupts order, or, rather, the concept of order. Underlying Derrida's discussion of play is the idea of the absence of a center--the center being that which orders a text. Thus, it becomes possible to see that the instability of language is in fact a form of chaos. Derrida further states that:

There are thus two interpretations of interpretation, of structure, of sign, of play. The one seeks to decipher, dreams of deciphering a truth or an origin which escapes play and the order of the sign, and which lives the necessity of interpretation as an exile. The other, which is no longer turned toward the origin, affirms play and tries to pass beyond man and humanism, the name of man being the name of that being who, throughout the history of metaphysics or of ontotheology--in other words, throughout his entire history--has dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of play (292).

I would like to argue that the first case represents the attempt to privilege order and marginalize disorder; the second case represents the acceptance of chaos because it allows the disorder of the absent center into the order of language.
It would certainly be possible to extend this discussion still further and to show how, among other things, that, as Derrida implies in *Writing and Difference*, the language of this field also serves to deconstruct itself, that I am, in many ways, trying to catch lightning in a bottle by writing a theory about how reading is chaotic. It is not my intention to order this chaos so as to make it accessible, but to lead into an awareness of how this knowledge of chaos can enact a challenging of the defenses and the desires for control that are a part of certain ideas of reading.

Of course, the chaos of language and the chaos of thought are not the same thing. Language represents only one possible outlet for the communication of thought, and there exists no outlet which can allow for complete communication of thought to another person, and, for that matter, most thought is never even communicated. Language is made up of words we have learned from someone else which cannot fully express exactly what is meant by the person teaching the language and which thus complicates our use of them all the more. Thus, we enter a Symbolic Order already disordered by its insufficiency for accurate transmission of thought. Language is further complicated by the fact that, as Ferdinand de Saussure has noted, language represents an attempt to divide up a continuum of reality. Furthermore, language itself serves to create thought, with discourse providing thoughts that do not exist outside of its field (such as "I" and "you"). The attempt to order the
chaos of reality through language is itself chaotic. All of these problems bear
directly on the act of reading.

The departure that I want to make from deconstruction is based upon an
assumption that deconstruction is only necessary when there is a desire for
order. If we reconstruct consciousness and thought amid chaos, all that
deconstruction is is always already part of the assumptions. We don't "want"
certainty, only engagement with possibility (which gets the affect back into
consciousness). And all that deconstruction is challenging is always already
extent in challenge.

I would also like to complicate deconstruction a little further, to point out
some of the dangers in arresting a dialectic such as the one deconstruction is
always already constituted within. Umberto Eco points out the need to keep the
dialectic in motion when he notes that "even the most radical deconstructionists
accept the idea that there are interpretations which are blatantly unacceptable.
This means that the interpreted text imposes some constraints upon its
interpreters" (The Limits of Interpretation 6). This brings deconstruction back to
addressing the idea of meaning (although I think meaning is already altered by
the existence of deconstruction). The larger problem with the arresting of the
dialectic is that deconstruction becomes a final movement, and thus assumes a
form of power that it was initially created to question.
This would seem to lead appropriately enough to the question of how this theory of reading relates to questions about the practice of criticism/theorizing. Although James Battersby, in *Paradigms Regained*, makes an important distinction between these two practices as they relate to the Academy, I do not wish to distinguish between them in terms of their foundations as practice. Catherine Belsey articulates an important foundation of critical practice (in her book of that name):

> In reality texts do offer positions from which they are intelligible, but these positions are never single because they are always positions in specific discourses. It is language which provides the possibility of meaning, but because language is not static but perpetually in process, what is inherent in the text is a range of possibilities of meaning. Texts, in other words, are plural, open to a number of interpretations (*Critical Practice* 19-20).

There is a cultural and ideological underpinning to the practice of literature and this theory of reading is intended to explore the relationship of texts and readers to that practice. That exploration leads onto cultural assumptions that I will explore a little later, but the importance of which are asserted by Mark Poster:

> While these caveats about deconstruction or even about poststructuralism generally may be partly justified, in some cases they are fueled by an assumption even more dangerous than the position they attack: the detractors of poststructuralism may be ignoring changes in the social world by which it has become constituted in part by simulacra, by copies with no originals, by an unending proliferation of images, by an infinitely regressive mirroring of word and thing, by an simultaneity of event and record of the event, by an instantaneity of act and observation, by an immediacy and copresence of electronically mediated symbolic interactions, by a language that generates its meanings to a large extent self-referentially. Time and space dimensions in our culture are undergoing vast, massive, and profound upheavals. (*Critical Theory and Postructuralism* 9)
The culture in flux thus creates the need for a theoretical questioning that is also in flux:

The issue of theory, then, is to elaborate a position for the theoretical subject which acknowledges the contingency of its validity claims, the embeddedness of theory in the present, in the political conjuncture, without, however, relinquishing the critique of domination or the project of emancipation. In other words, the problem is to generate discourses whose power effects are limited as much as possible to the subversion of power. (Critical Theory and Poststructuralism 30)

I hope that this theory establishes just such a discursive practice founded in the cultural milieu of its writing.

This discussion of theory and criticism is intended to point out that these schools can be important tools in a real dialectical engagement with a text. The finding of forms and the questioning of determinacy can all be essential aspects of the act of reading, as long as they are situated within a dialectic that interrogates a text without seeking to find a final, "appropriate" means of interrogating. Such an interrogation would have little to do with the text and much more to do with the desires of the reader. In many ways this discussion of critical desires covers some of the same ground that is covered by Peter Rabinowitz in the political section of Before Reading. Rabinowitz argues that the assumption that a text is coherent will usually lead to its being found to be so. I would amend that to say that assumption that a text is incoherent will lead to its being found to be so. These are the political consequences of the desires implicit in the privileging of either order or chaos in a text. This theory of reading
privileges chaos only in the need to challenge an already existing practice, not in
the establishment of a new practice. Engagement with a text is always
constituted by both chaos and order.

Postmodernism

Although I would not want to argue that postmodern literature is read
differently than other works, I do think that postmodern works can force their
readers into an awareness of acts that occur in the course of engaging with a
text. This is not suggest that postmodernism really enacts anything
fundamentally new (Tristram Shandy reads much like a work of postmodernism).
It does seem to reflect a set of cultural assumptions that I think are relevant to
the postmodern age. This theory is situated within its culture in a such a way
that the dialectic it enacts with culture is an important one. "The postmodern
way of defining the self (an internalized challenge to the humanist notion of
integrity and seamless wholeness) has much to do with this mutual influencing of
textuality and subjectivity" (Linda Hutcheon, The Poetics of Postmodernism 83).
It reflects old notions of reading and engaging with texts, but "[postmodernist
contradictory art] uses [that order] to demystify our everyday processes of
structuring chaos, of imparting or assigning meaning" (Hutcheon, The Poetics of
Postmodernism 7).
N. Katherine Hayles posits that three waves of denaturing characterize postmodernism: language, context, and time. What must follow, what is "undeniably building in force and scope," is the denaturing of the human.

The denaturing process, then, is one of the technical developments that helped to constitute cultural postmodernism. It is also a metaphor for postmodernism's deeper implications. When the essential components of human experience are denatured, they are not merely revealed as constructions. The human subject who stands as the putative source of experience is also deconstructed and then reconstructed in ways that fundamentally alter what it means to be human. The postmodern anticipates and implies the posthuman (Chaos Bound 266).

I haven't a clue what the posthuman might be, but I think that these points about the affect of postmodernism indicate a fundamental shift in consciousness that is a result of living as a subject in the postmodern world.

That shift is reflected in the literature produced by subjects within that culture. The awareness of chaos in our culture is certainly related to what we articulate in our literature. David Porush notes that "one possibility is that the postmodern novel is at a point in the evolution of literary technique that it actually is able to reflect and capture how phenomena like the mind or social organization or human decision-making processes or traffic work" (76). The literature of postmodernism articulates not only a relation to literature (is not only a reaction to modernism and premodern "-isms"), but also a relation to the cultural knowledge of the time. The fragmentary character of postmodern literature may be the means by which it is able to articulate its cultural situatedness. Arthur Knoespel recognizes that relationship and takes this a step
further: "While postmodernism has become criticized for being an ideological justification for a bric-a-brac culture, its inquiry also emerges from the recognition that the most fragmented events provide access to cognitive acts at all levels of cultural discourse" (109). Postmodernism not only turns out at the culture, but turns in toward the mind. It is just that relationship of postmodernism and thought that I will try to develop through this work.

The idea that texts are chaotic leads to questions about why we want (or have wanted) to order them. William Paulson has noted that "literature is both more and less than an act of communication: more because it is less, and less because it is more. Autonomous verbal complexity produces noise that impedes communication; noise in turn gives rise to new meaning beyond whatever could be said to have been communicated" (The Noise of Culture 145). I know that I have recursed back to information theory here, but I think it is an important starting point for characterizing a text. The noise is certainly not different in quality from the engagement with art or music, and I would not want to argue that literature is a richer site of subjective engagement than these forms. It is however more meaningful to the subject than mere information is. Here there is the potential for knowledge (to once again evoke Baudrillard's distinction), in that literature has the ability to enact a meaningful subjective engagement with the reading subject. The chaos and the order, the noise and the information, are all a part of that engagement. As Paulson notes:
At the level of an individual reading, textual ambiguity and even undecidability oblige the reader to understand the text in a more complex manner and to participate actively and freely in a construction of meaning. Literary texts and their study thus provide what might be called a pedagogical service to the intellectual enterprise in that they constitute a cultural apprenticeship of complexity, of the approach to complex systems. (The Noise of Culture 165)

Literature is thus a means by which to look at culture and the subjects in that culture. That is at least a part of the reason I have chosen to look at literary texts. Literature has the ability to make a chaotic engagement with the reader that will challenge him/her as reading subject. "The value of literature lies in its strangeness, its otherness, its capacity to surprise and confound, and these traits do not appear without serious study that respects at least for a very long moment, the autonomy and integrity of the text" (Paulson, The Noise of Culture 183-184). We read literature because it "means" something to us, not to find its determinant meaning.

Literature is therefore important to the understanding of culture and its subjects. Eric Charles White notes that:

Literture is a 'noisy channel' that 'assumes its noise as a constitutive factor of itself.' Literary discourse is thus distinct from instrumental discursive modes that seek communicative transparency. Literature functions as the 'noise' of culture. By perturbing existing systems of meaning, it enables the invention of new ideas, and ultimately, new domains of knowledge ("Negentropy, Noise, and Emancipatory Thought" 269).

In the reading of literature, something new can enter culture (or something new can be constituted within the culture). It is exactly this possibility that underlies the reason for choosing the specific texts that I have chosen. They not only
reflect the culture in which they are written, they challenged me to engage it in a meaningful dialectic that has led me to new knowledge about the subjectivity of the individuals in that culture. Literature, as with all art, can teach us something new. In order to learn that lesson, we must be aware of the dialectic of chaos that we enact and these texts will lead us toward that awareness.

Postmodernism is not the next step beyond modernism, but a recognition of the need to explore the issues of modernism by engaging it and questioning it and deconstructing it in the context of a dialectic with it (or within it). By looking at such texts I think it is possible to reach some insight into the relation Chaos Theory has to the act of reading (at least at the level of the text). This insight can then be turned back to all texts, postmodern, modern, and premodern. All texts are chaotic, but it is postmodernism that forces us into confronting that idea.

It is certainly true that post-modernist strategies, like my cyborg myth, subvert organic wholes....The transcendent authorization of interpretation is lost, and with it the ontology grounding 'Western' epistemology. But the alternative is not cynicism or faithlessness, i.e., some version of abstract existence, like the accounts of technological determinism destroying 'man' by the 'machine' or 'meaningful political action' of the 'text' (Haraway, 177).

A practice in the postmodern age must be constructed with an awareness of its provisionality, as well as of the provisionality of the interpretations it applies, and of the texts to which it applies them. Postmodernism demands this of its critics and it demands it of those who live it (and these are not necessarily
exclusive sets). "Meaningful" is still possible, but means something a little bit different in postmodernism.
Chapter II

Finnegans Wake and the Dream of a Chaotic Reading

The idea that reading is chaotic, while it has a clear relation to the postmodern reading subject, is not really an historical concept. All reading is chaotic and any attempt to see reading as a purely orderly pursuit is merely an attempt to somehow control the chaos of engagement with a text. Given this essentially ahistorical character, the question of where to begin to describe the chaos of reading arises. I have selected Finnegans Wake as my starting point not because it is the most chaotic text possible (although it may well be) -- this theory of reading assumes that the very act of reading is chaotic, regardless of the relative chaos of the text -- but because it allows me to spend some time establishing what I think is the most important link in this idea of reading: that consciousness is chaotic and that the act of reading is always already situated within that chaos. Furthermore, it does form an important part of my contention that postmodern texts (always dialectically related to the postmodern reader) elicit (or elucidate) some new knowledge about the way we read that can allow us to move into a new understanding of (and a new conception of) what reading is and means. I could have chosen other texts by other authors, or even
sections of *Ulysses* (a book which is, as Brian McHale has noted, both a modern and postmodern text at the same time) such as "Circe", but *Finnegans Wake* seems like a site of very interesting possibility.

*Finnegans Wake* is also particularly useful because it is a book about itself. As Samuel Beckett said of it (while its was still *Work in Progress*): "Here form *is* content, content *is* form. You complain that this stuff is not written in English. It is not written at all. It is not to be read—or rather it is not only to be read. It is to be looked at and listened to" (14). I would push Beckett's evaluation a little further still and say that it is a book which is and embraces its own interpretation (although certainly not all of its interpretations). Therefore, in discussing the book below, I will often cite it as an interpretation of itself, creating of the text a critical reading of itself, and thus, I hope, helping to keep its play in motion.

It has been remarked many times before, by many other critics, that *Finnegans Wake* is intended to represent dreaming consciousness. The discussion has taken many forms, including looking at the text as a dream, as a representation of a dream, as the dream of a dreamer within the text, as the dream of a dreamer which is the text, and so on. Yet, as John Bishop notes, "what we have rashly labeled a dream, then, might more accurately be called a 'murmury' of a dream (254.18)" (8). That is, our understanding of dreams is always already complicated by the fact that they are "remembered" within the
conscious, waking mind. Thus, we do not understand dreams external to consciousness. This is an important distinction. It also would seem to lead to the question of whether Joyce is providing the dream and then the reading provides the conscious part of that relation, or whether Joyce is providing the "murmury" of a dream and the act of reading makes the relation even more complicated. *Finnegans Wake* represents an attempt by Joyce to create a book which explores the chaos of dreaming (without necessarily trying to reproduce that chaos mimaetically). Most importantly, that attempt shows us something about what we normally do with a text and the relation of that work to a desire for order. This is a "chaosmos" (118.21) where the kinds of conscious and unconscious connections that are always being made in the act of reading are brought into the foreground in ways that force the reader to consider what she/he has been doing with texts all along (especially on the level of the unconscious). The traditional ideas of reading are "transaccidentated through the slow fires of consciousness into a dividual chaos" (186.03-05).

Now, I think it might be useful to talk a bit about the relation of dreaming to this idea of the conscious and unconscious (in order to establish an important link to *Finnegans Wake*). Dreaming, which both escapes from and partakes of the controlling desires of the conscious, provides a particularly important site for the enactment of the simultaneous complication of chaos and order in the unconscious. Dreaming partakes of the dynamic of the unconscious that I have
already described, but does so within a different form of engagement than when
the conscious mind is at work. The "interpretation" of dreams exists not
subsequent to dreaming, but simultaneous with and within it. Play of chaos and
order is the interpretation. The conscious mind may later come back and order
that interpretation, but the interpretation itself is neither order not chaos, but
exists in the thing they enact.

Before I move on to talking about how we engage with this book, I must
dedicate some time here to explaining some of the levels of the act of
engagement. I want to state here that it is not my intent to break up this
engagement into something that can be mastered and contained, but rather to
concentrate first on what particular challenges this text represents for its reader
and what those challenges might entail. I will try to look at the language of
Finnegans Wake and its relation to chaos, then at the narrative of Finnegans
Wake and its relation to chaos, then at the act of reading the book and its
relation to chaos. Finally, I will attempt to characterize the way we engage with
this text. I hope that at that point it will be possible to then return to the act of
reading and show how this book yields a deeper insight into the act of reading
through its particular demands on and challenges to the reading subject who
encounters it.
Language

What deconstruction has shown is that it is not the center which gives meaning to language, it is the play. In so doing, it has opened up the possibility of an understanding that language is chaotic. As physicist David Bohm has noted, we have become accustomed to thinking of the final order of thought as the primal state: "we tend strongly to feel that our primary experience is of that which is explicate and manifest" (206). We assume that the final understanding of a text is the primary experience of that text, and most interpretation and most criticism are directed at this manifest level of reading. This understanding of reading excludes, among other things, the infinite possibility of the chaos of thought that is also a significant part of the nature of consciousness, and thus of reading. If language is deliberately led into play, as the language of *Finnegans Wake* is, then meaning and engagement are multiplied (and deepened, in the sense that what emerges partakes of both the play and the order of meaning that is being played with).

*Finnegans Wake*, more than any other text in the English language (if *Finnegans Wake* can even be said to be written "within" the English language), requires the chaotic nature of reading for the engagement of its language. John Bishop observes that "a book 'about the night' would of necessity have to undertake an intricate and wondrously obscure inquiry into the nature of language" (19). *Finnegans Wake* thus is not merely an attempt to write a dream,
but an attempt to create within the severely limited possibilities of language something which approaches the chaos involved in the act of dreaming and in the act of reading. The act of reading this book is neither merely the attempt to pull some clear final denotation out of some arcane puzzle of near meaninglessness, nor merely the attempt to flow with the play of signification at work in the twisting of language in this book, but, rather, is an encounter with all the possibilities and free play of chaotic engagement. Joyce in *Finnegans Wake* is attempting to articulate the chaos of that unconscious activity which complicates the ordering of words into meaning (that establishes the relation between signifier and signified). By multiplying orders nearly to infinity, by complicating orders with each other, by playing with the nature of linguistic structure, Joyce achieves a chaos that ultimately serves as part of a dialectical interaction with the orders in question. This dialectic of chaos and order it would seem is the way in which to engage the language of *Finnegans Wake*.

As Umberto Eco argues, the *Wake* is a "metalinguistic representation of the nature of language" (142). Such a representation cannot be pinned down to a single notion of reading, for no single notion of language can account for all the possibilities of language. Since this text, more than any other, is an attempt to come to terms with the possibilities of written language, it must be allowed to be seen within a wide range of such possibilities, including that of being an interpretation of its own linguistic practice. This range can be situated within a
dialectical structure of chaos and order that leads back to a further and deeper complication of the idea of how we approach language.

"You will say it is most unenglish and I shall hope to hear that you will not be wrong about it" (160.22-23). This text is written in unenglish: the language is really languages. One of the dangers of approaching the languages is the assumption that a knowledge of these languages will help to uncomplicate this text (as if this were a game where the reader merely had to retrace the route in Joyce's thinking in reverse to arrive at what he "really meant"). I do not think that this is the way in which we engage with these words. Whatever we might gain from glossing these words, the meaning is always already within a field of linguistic play that cannot be contained by that act of glossing. That is, while such work may help to deepen the engagement with the text, it is only one movement in a deeper dialectic that defies the very intention of the work while necessitating its practice. So what do these languages do to the text and how do they affect our engagement with it? They complicate the text and complicate our engagement by demanding us to consider what we are doing with the words, and these words in Finnegans Wake are not used in an uncomplicated fashion. The foreign words are twisted sideways just as much so as the "English" words. "Ab chaos lex, neat wehr" (518.31-32) calls to mind foreign words, but has no definite gloss. We "sense" what it might mean.
Even at the level of the "English" words we "may have our irremovable doubts as to the whole sense of the lot, the interpretation of any phrase in the whole, the meaning of every word of a phrase so far deciphered out of it" (117.35-118.2). The words here are somehow transformed into images which have some relation to words, but often enact that relation in the unconscious, as we "sense" their meaning rather than understand it. From the very beginning words are broken loose from their usually usage. The book begins (if a circular text can really be said to begin): "riverrun, past Eve and Adam's, from swerve of shore to bend of bay, brings us by commodius vicus of recirculation back to Howth Castle and Environs" (3.1-3). As Jacques Aubert notes "our first conclusion is: if 'riverrun' remains unreadable, it is because it remains undifferentiated. Reading is obstructed by lack of difference" (69). The usual way in which we establish signification, through difference, is here suspended, and we are thrown into having to find something else to do with this language. Whatever practice we do enact is further complicated by the circularity of the text, which complicates the beginning with the ending: "A way a lone a last a loved a long the [riverrun, past Eve and Adam's...]" (628.16-17). Aubert, again, provides some insight:

But, while it does confirm the general mode of functioning of the discourse, our forwards/backwards reference to 'A way a lone a last a loved a long the', the half-sentence with which the book closes and which links up, as we know, with the opening one, once more calls into the question this attribution of the function of subject to 'riverrun'. (75)
We can try to find a practice for engaging this language, but that practice may well prove every bit as unstable as the one we have been forced to reject. Yet we do engage with this language somehow (and even permit the language to become a text). We open our language to its language, thus redefining the parameters of our language. *Finnegans Wake* thus carnivalizes semiosis in a way that tends to push semiosis toward the infinite. Umberto Eco notes that "the universe of unlimited semiosis looks extraordinarily similar to the Joycean meandertale. One could say that the whole of *FW* is only a metaphor for the semiosic universe, or that the theory of the semiosic universe is only a metaphor for *FW*" (142). *Finnegans Wake* brings its reader fact-to-face with the chaos of language.

The act of reading *Finnegans Wake* necessitates giving oneself up to the play of language. Trying to resist that abdication of control would lead only to frustration because "it is almost impossible to isolate one series in the complex intertwining of images" (Rabaté, *Joyce Upon the Void* 137). This necessitates a new reading of *Finnegans Wake* that does not require a position of control over the text. "Unfortunately, the balancing act of keeping one's attention fluid between all levels defeats most readers, who trust one level and pay lip-service to the others" (McHugh 9). This failure stems from an unwillingness to relinquish control, not from an inability to take in the chaos. Joyce gives us a chaotic text that the mind can and does receive, but which challenges certain assumptions
about how we control information entering our consciousness—one of those assumptions being that texts enter through the conscious but not through the unconscious.

This leads to Stephen Heath's conclusion that "the impetus of the writing of *Finnegans Wake* is, then, the theatricalization of language" (57). The purpose of the language of *Finnegans Wake* would seem to be the de-construction of language, in the creation of an "unenglish" which turns back on the English it is not. Margot Norris argues that "Joyce uses such deviations and word play for a legitimate psychological purpose—to correct the conscious untruths of speakers with unconscious truths" (*The Decentered Universe of Finnegans Wake* 101), thus making this language not merely something other than language, but something which serves as a corrective to and challenge of language.

When *Finnegans Wake* takes language and twists it, it does so with some attempt to create something out of the twisting. Norris notes that the portmanteau words, such as "scherzerade" are constructed "of two phonetically similar but semantically dissimilar words, thereby expressing an unlikelihood or contradiction" (Norris, *The Decentered Universe of Finnegans Wake* 108). The twisting thus expresses a contradiction. That is, we receive not only the words, but the sense of what they might have been, and the contradiction that exists out of that relationship—and we receive all of this at once. This is a language already in motion and already in play.
In the specific case of "scherzerade," the reader receives not just that word, but the possibilities already implicit in its construction, which are at least "scheherazade" and "charade", and possibly much more than those (Umberto Eco's *The Limits of Interpretation* provides a much more thorough examination of these portmanteau words than I am providing here). While the reader can consciously stop and puzzle out the inherent contradiction of the word "scherzerade," that is a move subsequent to the play already received into the chaos of the mind. In fact, I think that the Joycean pun must be engaged at the conscious level, so that the reader can be lead to confront the chaos of this word. *Finnegans Wake* is about the language that it is disrupting and thus attempts to foreground for the reader the act of interpretation implicit in the reading of any word, and accomplishes this by slowing down that act with the portmanteau words that demand such conscious reflection on interpretation. While the reader may always vacillate between determinate possibilities of meaning (or the realm of unlimited semiosis that Eco proposes), the act of reading *Finnegans Wake* specifically confronts the reader with acts of interpretation involved in reading.

Of course, such a reception of words in play generates difficulties of its own. Jean-Michel Rabaté provides some insight into those problems: "Having examined at some length the 'double binds' of doubt produced by an enunciation which undercuts itself in order to generate the semantic motif of textual
hesitancy, I wish to relate the crucial motif of the 'tongue cutting the throat'...to Joyce's linguistic strategy" (Joyce Upon the Void 134). The very act of enunciation already would seem to cut the life from the language, but instead, we have a sustaining of that threat, even as we read through and with it. In enacting a de-construction of language, Joyce must put into play a language which can both be deconstructed and which can deconstruct and enter "the paradox of critical language, the need to use language to represent the deconstruction of language" (Norris, The Decentered Universe of Finnegans Wake 126). He can do this because of the "sense" in which the language is received. The language is taken in with its contradictions and engaged on a level that acknowledges those contradictions and attempts "to describe the loops of the text to its ideal or real reader, and appreciate the subversive power of its renewed semantics" (Rabaté, Joyce Upon the Void 199).

The question of enunciation leads to another complication of the language of Finnegans Wake: its aural quality. I am not here referring necessarily to the act of reading the text aloud (although that is certainly one possibility), but to the sound that the text makes in the head of the reader. The reading of any text involves such a "sound," although Finnegans Wake complicates it in ways that bring that act into the foreground. This aural quality is manifested in a number of ways, but I think one illustration will be enough to get some sense of how it functions. In the act of reading this text, the reader will
suddenly discover rhythms of words that will call into play (partaking of a series of unconscious receptions and connections—a dialectic of chaos and order in the mind) a rhythm of words already known. There are, for instance, a number of places in the text where the words flow into the pattern of the nursery rhyme "The House That Jack Built," one version of which goes "This is the farmer sowing his corn that kept the cock that crowed in the morn that waked the priest that married the man that kissed the maiden that milked the cow that tossed the dog that worried the cat that chased the rat that ate the malt that lay in the house the Jack built." In *Finnegans Wake* it leaks into the text in versions such as this one: "This is the glider that gladdened the girl that list to the wind that lifted the leaves that folded the fruit that hung on the tree that grew in the garden Gough gave" (271.25-29, the internal footnote is part of the "Night Lessons" construction). This connection is made by the reader within a dialectical engagement with the text that both receives this consciously and makes connections unconsciously (which are of course related back to the conscious). This technique transforms the act of reading into the making of connections that is always already a part of that act. Such passages suddenly foreground the fact that contexts are always being constructed both consciously and unconsciously in the act of reading. The sound pattern provides just the necessary rupture to the text to enable that awareness. This awareness does not then refer the reader on to some deeper insight about the text, but rather about the act of
reading it. This metatextual move does not, however, push the reader out from
the text (this is the text which is one of its own metatexts) because such play is
part of the very way in which this text is read. The reader then is situated within
a dialectic that does not make a turn backward or forward, but is always already
in motion. The reader hears a text the hearing of which questions its reading,
yet reads a text which cannot really be heard. This "admirable verbivocovisual
presentation" (341.18-19) is part of how we read *Finnegans Wake*.

Hélène Cixous characterizes the language of *Finnegans Wake* as
eventually leading Joyce to "the attempt to save his work through inaudibility,
gradually reducing the distance between the word and its appeal to the senses,
and trying, particularly in *Finnegans Wake*, to create a *full* kind of writing--a
language that would be immediately understood and meaningful" (281). This
idea of a language which is full and yet immediate would seem to imply a
concept both of semiosis and reception that articulates some of the relationship I
have posited for the engagement of reader and text. The unconscious reception
of the text accepts this "full" language both as it is and in its relation to the
language it is not.

Roger Callois tries to develop a theory of lyrical thinking (for the moment
we might equate this with poetic thinking, although not strictly with poetry) in
which he postulates that the lyrical ideogram (the mental representation of the
idea) is overdetermined. This means that there is more to the language than its
surface meaning, that its way of representation is such that language means much more than the simple explication of the words allows for. The ideogram encompasses not only the meaning, but its relation to other meanings, its way of appearing (idea complicated by image) and the various contexts that it evokes. Thus lyrical language enables metonymy and metaphor.

_Finnegans Wake_ is written in just such lyrical ideograms: images, which are not words, understood in relation to words, in relation to sounds, in relation to contexts. This is metaphor the way it is in dream, not metaphor in clear framework, but where language is searching for the place of metaphor. This lyrical language is also affectively heightened, carrying an affective engagement that exceeds its representation. These words mean more than just their definitions (as do any lyrical words in Callois' scheme).

Words in _Finnegans Wake_ are overdetermined in that they mean multiple things all at once and in that the way of their representation grants them still more meaning. Now this can be thought of in terms of the conscious chase after the possible nuances of each Joycean pun, but this alone would be merely a recursion back to a more primitive understanding of this text that ignores the fact that the real power is in the words and their overdetermination, and not in the interpretative acts of the readers. _Finnegans Wake_ leads us back to language itself, into a realization that all language begins in chaos and emerges as order (meaning), although an order always mediated by chaos. It begins
overdetermined (exists as a continuum of meaning uncompartmentalized by the acts of language that de Saussure postulated) and is made underdetermined by the act of conscious work within the Symbolic Order (it is important to stress that it is made underdetermined, because that is exactly what deconstruction indicates happens to language).

So what are we to do with this deconstructive, overdetermined metalanguage? We engage with it in a way that does not deny its play, yet where is the ground for articulating some understanding of the text? The language of Finnegans Wake is not merely the path to insensibility. However it may radically deconstruct our ideas about language and the reading of it, it also reconstructs a new idea of language and the reading of it. That reconstruction is not merely a return to old ideas of certainty, but it is a means by which we can engage with this text. Kimberly Devlin notes that Finnegans Wake "is characterized by a linguistic freeplay, but a freeplay that often has a rationale to it, so that the dream becomes a 'chaosmos' (FW 118), a paradoxically chaotic order, an antic yet patterned cosmos" (13). It is perfectly possible for the reader to make some a posteriori meaning out of this linguistic chaos--in fact, I think it is an essential act on the part of the readers of this text (and that order does partake of the old orders, using the definitions as possibilities and what Eco might call limits of interpretation or what chaos theorists might call strange attractors). Even those who attempt to show its deconstructive nature are
moving out of the chaos into some meaning, however deferred and uncertain that meaning might be (and must be).

Certainly this "cellelleveteutoslavzendlatinsoundscript" (219.17) Joyce has created leads to the need to categorize this book (like Ulysses) as encyclopedic. The kind of knowledge that it requires is not the issue that I want to get at with this characterization of the text. Rather, I want to suggest a practice of reading in which the reader is challenged to pursue meaning both deeper within the text and further outside the text. This simultaneous challenge is an essential part of the way in which a text such as Finnegans Wake engages its readers.

I think that it is now time to take this deconstructive argument and turn it on the text. I think that the best way to do so would be to stop here for a minute and watch Jacques Derrida at play in the field of Joycean language in an article entitled "Two Words for Joyce."

Derrida starts out by reckoning with all the plurality of languages in Joyce's words (yet another permutation of the words--their ability to enfold many languages within the play of their puns):

I do not yet know what language, I do not know in how many languages.
How many languages can be lodged in two words by Joyce, lodged or inscribed, kept or burned, celebrated or violated? (145)

Then he provides the two words with which he shall engage: "HE WAR" (145).
It is an extremely small unit of language, but Derrida skillfully explodes the meanings and possibilities that have been condensed into those words. Doing so, he can come to terms with what those two words imply about the text as a whole:

This is already what *Finnegans Wake* represents with respect to all the culture, all the history and all the languages it condenses, puts in fusion and fission by each of its forgeries, at the heart of each lexical or syntactic unit, according to each phrase that it forges, stamping invention there. In the simulacrum of this forgery, in the ruse of the invented word, the greatest possible memory is stamped and smelted. (148-149)

These two invented words, these Joycean puns (and the text which surrounds and includes them), thus encompass something of that limitless semiosis that Eco implied. Yet, that limitless semiosis must be engaged in some way:

'He war', then. How to read these two words? Are there two of them? More or less? How to hear them? How to pronounce them and pronounce on their subject? The question 'how to hear them' multiplies itself, moreover, and echoes in the whole passage from which I extract these two words with the unjustifiable violence which the situation imposes on us, the little time at our disposal. How to hear them? (152)

And in enacting these questions, in de-constructing the text with and through them, Derrida engages the words, not by wrestling them into some denotative submission and then mounting them to proclaim their meaning, but by letting the questions that they ask create a questioning reading. The engagement is thus not a question in search of an answer, but an engagement with the question itself. The reader, in this case Derrida, must read within the confusion of *Finnegans Wake*, not against it. Even to read these two words aloud would
somehow defuse the meaning (just as others must be "heard" to gain their surfeit of meaning). As Derrida says:

You can't economize on it, and this book could not be read without it. For the Babelian confusion between the English war and the German war cannot fail to disappear - in becoming determined - and when listened to. It is erased when pronounced. One is constrained to say it either in English or else in German, it cannot therefore be received as such by the ear. But it can be read. The homography retains the effect of confusion, it shelters the Babelism which here, then, plays between speech and writing. (156)

I think that Derrida leads us through this language in a very useful way, multiplying the possible ways of perceiving the manifest order of the text and then deconstructing not the words themselves (which are always already deconstructed), but rather the very desire for finding a manifest meaning to this language. Derrida's play puts the Joycean language back into play, a place from which it cannot truly be removed. The language is in play. Yet, this does not mean that we cannot engage with that language. Although Derrida has often been accused of using play to lead to meaninglessness, I think that this work with Joyce shows that this play does not exist outside the possibility of meaning, but rather exists to reconstitute meaning within a new set of desires: not for meaning, but for the plural possibility of meaning.

As I argued earlier with the portmanteau words of Finnegans Wake, so, too, does this passage ("HE WAR") manage to confront the reader with the unconscious aspects of received language and engaging texts. The chaos of possibilities here is made manifest by the text and the reader is reflected back
into the nature of interpretation (and into the fact that language acts are always acts of interpretation), and into the fact that such interpretations are usually played out in the chaos of unconscious possibilities. We receive all language in play, and then make some sense of that play (allowing some acceptable meaning within the range of determinate possibilities). Joyce simply forces that act into the conscious with *Finnegans Wake*.

Deconstructive acts such as Derrida's are a reflection of the relation of language to its unconscious reception amid chaos and possibility. Deconstruction represents not a challenge to meaning, but a reflection on the nature of how the mind makes that meaning. The making of meaning out of language is a provisional act that represents an attempt to order chaos (a necessary act, but one that should not go unreflected upon—which is what Derrida argues in his writings). Joyce is not rupturing language in *Finnegans Wake*, but the interpretive and critical practices that have argued for unruptured language and certainty of meaning.

**Narrative**

Given a traditional conception of narrative, this text might be considered not to have a narrative structure to it. Ideas of progression would seem to be violated by the idea of a circular text, which both ends and yet does not end. Notions of plot and character are likewise exploded by this text. Rather than a
plot, there are multiple permutations of various plot elements. Rather than
characters, there are multiple appearances of what may or may not be the same
character in different forms (and in some cases what may be composites of what
are elsewhere seemingly discreet characters). It would seem therefore that "the
words which follow may be taken in order desired" (121.12-13), and that
narrative structures are irrelevant to this text.

Yet there are other readers and critics of *Finnegans Wake* who do perceive a narrative in this text, albeit a rather twisted and well-concealed
narrative. Thus, "with *Finnegans Wake*...Joyceans tend to divide into two
separate camps - those who, like Joseph Campbell and Henry Robinson,
attempt to extract from the text a recognizable narrative and those who celebrate
the *Wake* as a post-structuralist *oeuvre*, free of character, story, or identifiable
subjects" (Henke 164-165). I would like to suggest that both characterizations
are appropriate and that it is the definition of narrative which generates the
problems here (not *Finnegans Wake*).

If there is a narrative here, it is a narrative that demands new possibilities
of narrative. As Michael Begnal notes, "Joyce takes great pains to undercut the
formal expectations of plot and to demonstrate that narrative must be adapted to
the mental processes it attempts to represent" (15). The mental processes of
the dream text that is *Finnegans Wake* demand a narrative which constructs
itself not out of some external narrative structuring, but out of what might best be
term ed "a sequentiality of improbable possibilities" (110.15). With the "sequentiality" expressing the way in which the narrative of *Finnegans Wake* is received and the "improbable possibilities" expressing the unstable characteristics of both the narrative and what it is narrating. Narrative cannot exert a temporal ordering onto this text, "for time and space cancel out one another in [Joyce's] dream" (Mercanton 219). So we have a narrative which is not narrative as it is most rigidly defined, but which nonetheless might still deserve to be called narrative. If we can emphasize the radical revision of narrative, *Finnegans Wake* has a narrative structure. It is not the traditional narrative of orderly progression of text with characters and plot toward some resolution. Rather, it constitutes a different narrative, founded in chaos. We can engage this text as narrative, but that engagement alters narrative, not only for the suspended moment of reading *Finnegans Wake*, but thereafter. Whatever narrative was before the reading of this text, it is now something else which must reflect this narrative.

So how might we consider the narrative of *Finnegans Wake*? What more might be said of it, other than that it deconstructs narrative? There are some characteristics of this narrative. It is without linear direction (or at least its linearity is multidimensional, which in itself reconstitutes what narrative can be). There is a relation of meaning and contingency between parts of this text, but the relation lacks the determinacy and linearity of which narrative usually
partakes. The repetitions here do not merely serve to charge an idea (as might be the case if Freud was all the explanation we needed here). The repetitions also serve to destabilize the narrative, altering and retelling and undoing what has gone before and what will follow.

The alteration of the image of the words on the page yet further complicates the narrative, especially in the "Night Lessons" section (260-308), where the main text is accompanied by notes to the left and to the right and at the bottom (a piece of this section is reproduced in figure 1). "The physical act of moving one's eyes down the page is impeded by a structure which forces our gaze off the central narrative to the left, to the right, and to the bottom of the page" (Begnal 18). This alters the usual relation of reader to narrative in a way that generates both a new situation from which to receive narrative and also points out something of the controlling assumptions of traditional narrative, that the process of ordering words on a page into a narrative is itself a signifying process that tries to deny its existence as such.

The notes in "Night Lessons" disrupt the flow of the text. Shari Benstock notes that "The notes are not a narrative (although they may be arranged to create a story line). Rather, they elucidate the complex relations among internal parts of the text" (79). There are, then, at least three ways to approach this section:
The first page of "Night Lessons."
1) to assume that there is some particular order and attempt to pursue it as a means of controlling this section of the text,

2) to assume that the section is "unreadable" and try to deal with it as something other than narrative, or

3) to assume that the section can be read multiply (sustaining its plurality of meanings) and engage with that possibility of it.

The last possibility is one which seems most likely to lead to an engagement with *Finnegans Wake* and thus to a confrontation with narrative assumptions in literature in general. The multiplicity of possibilities allows the reader to have a deeply chaotic engagement with the section, playing out the dialectic of chaos and order in ways that can lead to a newer and richer understanding of the text, as I have suggested this idea of reading implies. The reader thus enacts a new reading which takes in all the possibilities and engages with them.

As a means of seeing how this might be the case, it would be useful to turn an actual reading of this section of the text (or at least an attempt at its reading). The structure is created to evoke marginalia inscribed on a primary (central on the page) text. Thus, we would seem to have a central text which we read and then reinterpret in light of the marginalia. The marginalia would seem to take their "sense" from the text upon which they comment. Yet, the voices here evoke the characters of Shem, Shaun, and Issy, and thus represent contesting and contested marginalia which enter into the narrative contestation
of these characters. Now, this is the "orderly" attempt at describing the act of
how we receive the text (and to a certain degree might be the description we
would make of this section if we were to argue for the need to "make sense" of
this narrative). That might be the way we consciously make sense of this
pattern of text. It is not how we receive it.

The very choices described in the previous paragraph are made after the
pages are received as images of multiple possibility. We receive the text then
as an image of words/images on a page, complicated by the meanings and
space created by the "meanings" that we ascribe the words within those images.
Joyce wants to foreground in this section that we always receive text as image.
We engage the text by taking in its chaos as image, creating an order for
"reading" the words (for we must choose an order of reading them, whatever
relation that order has to how we engage the text), accept the words within the
range of determinate possibilities of meaning that they may have, and then
construct a sense of the text as a whole (see the earlier discussion of Ingarden)
which encompasses the possibilities created by the combination of the all of the
possibilities above. The "central" narrative interprets and is interpreted by the
"notes," which are themselves reinterpreted by the context of character
associated with them. The play of language and image is accepted within that
field of text and we engage with the "space" of text created by these possibilities.
We "read" this section both by accepting and rejecting the possibilities of order
and meaning it creates. And we are forced to confront the assumptions implicit in those orders and meanings Joyce has attempted to put into play.

Is *Finnegans Wake* narrative? There seems to be a story (stories) being told here, but they are immersed in a field of information and possibility that complicate the receiving of those stories. The narrative of *Finnegans Wake* resists and challenges narrative. "This resistance, it should be noted, does not take the form of *refusing* such patterns, but proffering them in such abundance that none can stand as central or even consistent with the others" (Attridge 380). Patterns here serve not to explain and substantiate, but to muddy and complicate. What we would normally consider narrative is here not a means of clear communication, but of challenging the very desire for such communication. The narrative "apparatus frames the divided subject of desire, a divided subject which becomes the locus of a disjuncture between voices and events" (Rabaté, "Narratology and the Subject of *Finnegans Wake*" 139). The narrative becomes a site of play and not one of determinate meaning. Joyce does not want to provide information, he wants to bring into play noise that points out something about how information is transmitted and received. Narrative cannot escape from that critique.

This leads us to some important conclusions about the relation between the narrative and the reader who encounters it. Jean-Michel Rabaté argues that:
an 'imaginary narrative' fulfills the function of mediating between the text and the reader already inscribed within it. The chaos facing us is a 'complex matter of pure form' (581.29-30), echoing 'the matter is a troubulous and peniloose' (581.01), and exceeds any meaning not predetermined by the Wakean patterns of guilt, trial, original sin as the sin of origins, and so on. But at the same time, this chaos escapes from the control of first any narrator, then of even the author, since it is only found in an interaction between the structure of the text and our felicitous misreadings... ("Narratology and the Subject of *Finnegans Wake*" 140-141)

The narrative, like the language, thus serves as one of its own interpretations, enacting in its practice questions of that practice and of the practice it most obviously is not.

So what is Wakean narrative? It is something received not purely through the conscious ordering of "events" and "characters," but something which is received as a sense of events and characters already plural and complicated and in the process of questioning themselves even as they are received. It is a sense of relations between things, of connections, of possibilities. As such it enters the chaos of the unconscious in a way that immediately (as Cixous might argue) sets into play a series of multiply-ordered or unordered potentials that are related in some way to the conscious understanding of the text, although not controlled by that understanding. The book is received as something more full of possibilities of engagement because of the plural means by which it is engaged.

(The ideas of narrative I have been using here are rather limited. I will attempt to pursue some of those limitations in relation to Woolf's *The Waves*.)
Engaging with the Wake

The act of reading *Finnegans Wake* is not directed at getting at what the book is "about," not a reading which hopes to reach some final, clearly-articulated and manifest understanding of just what happened (or what just happened). Margot Norris, in writing the section on *Finnegans Wake* in the *Cambridge Companion to James Joyce* (a section which presumably would attempt just such an articulation), notes that

The most helpful service a guide to *Finnegans Wake* might seem to offer would be to tell readers what the text is 'about'. But one of the many peculiarities of *Finnegans Wake* is that its content, what it is 'about', is indivisible from its form, from the language in which it is told. 'His writing is not about something; it is that something itself', Samuel Beckett wrote... *Finnegans Wake* might be said to be 'about' not being certain what it is about: its subject is the nature of indeterminacy itself. (161-162)

This idea of the text may be as old as Beckett's observation and yet may also represent the poststructuralist thinking of Norris without there being any problem because *Finnegans Wake* represents not an historical positioning, but a positioning in relation to the consciousness (although arguably a position in relation to the dominant conception of the consciousness within the historical time of its writing). Joyce is creating a text which, in challenging the idea of orderly representation, is turning to something always already present in consciousness (and often recognized by artists and thinkers regardless of time period): that the chaos of the mind is always present and represents possibilities
that ordered models of the conscious mind cannot. Norris explores just this idea when she argues that:

In other words, expecting the work to 'make sense' in the way *Portrait, Ulysses*, or traditional novels 'make sense' implies a conceptual framework and epistemology that Joyce strongly intimated he wanted to undermine. *Finnegans Wake* is a puzzle because dreams are puzzles—elaborate, brilliant, purposeful puzzles, which constitute a universe quite unlike any we know or experience in waking life. (*The Decentered Universe of Finnegans Wake* 5)

This notion provides *Finnegans Wake* a position not merely as an anti-novel, but as a text constituted outside an epistemology which would need and desire the control of a text (*Finnegans Wake* is, then, by definition not a novel, but in the practice of its internal dialectic it is always already been one). It is not just the text but also the epistemology that it seems to partake of which makes *Finnegans Wake* a challenging read. It constructs its own framework (challenging old frameworks and even the need for frameworks as its does so). *Finnegans Wake* attempts to lead its reader into some awareness of various practices that she/he has been participating in, and what those practices say about the culture and about the reader as subject. That is, *Finnegans Wake* challenges cultural assumptions and forces the reader into risking certain defenses or controls that are usually a part of reading.

Jean-Michel Rabaté says of *Finnegans Wake* that it "hesitates between the writable/unreadable which the reader must rediscover at the cost of an excessive investment or an 'ideal insomnia'"(120.14), and the readable/risible -
that 'readable' which attacks us brutally in the laughter that takes us unawares when we are faced with a sentence or a word" ("Lapsus ex machina" 97). The pun and the narrative cannot be read externally to the writable way in which we encounter them. To read Finnegans Wake then is to perform the writing of this text that enables engagement on any conscious level while maintaining the unconscious play that takes us unawares. Joyce's text attempts in some way to find its way into our unconscious so as to bring the chaos of the unconscious into conscious awareness. The text constructs a metaphor of the mind that serves not merely as metaphor, but also as a means of challenging the reading subject to come to some awareness about the mind, by creating possibilities that point out practices and by enacting practices that open up possibilities.

The reading then exists within this dialectic, which Roland McHugh describes as follows:

There is a certain parallel between the collection of Myxomycetes and the exegesis of FW. In both cases the trick is to acquire an instinct for the potentially most profitable areas to search. A forest contains an infinitude of logs and twigs, and the spongier they are, the better their chance of supporting Myxomycetes. Unless you are able to predict whilst upright which sticks will repay your turning them over, you'll wear yourself out on unproductive material. At the same time some part of one's consciousness should monitor the rest of the environment, because there will always be certain treasures concealed in unexpected niches. (39)

That maintaining of openness to possibility is an essential part of relinquishing some of the controls and defenses which try to limit the subjective dialectic
within the mind. As Frederic Jameson notes about experimental video (in a comment I think appropriate to the reading of *Finnegans Wake*):

> My experience, however, is that you can't manage to think about things simply by deciding to, and that the mind's deeper currents often need to be surprised by indirection, sometimes, indeed, by treachery and ruse, as when you steer away from a goal in order to reach it more directly or when you look away from an object to register it more exactly....Released from all conventional constraints, experimental video allows us to witness the full range of possibilities and potentialities of the medium in a way which illuminates its various more restricted uses, the latter being subsets and special cases of the former. (*Postmodernism* 71)

*Finnegans Wake* then demands something of (and in) its readers. We gain a sense of it by rejecting what we have been taught and listening to what we already know, by releasing control and letting the unconscious connections make themselves felt. That is not to say that we want to pursue the connections back to their source (and meaning). Rather, we want to move beyond that desire for the text and create a new desire (or perhaps accept an even older one).

The reading of *Finnegans Wake* then relies upon an engagement poised on the moment of rupture and disruption. Rabaté observes that Joyce wants "to uncouple his pairs; to unleash his couples of opposites; he looses his hounds, who, like Actaeon's, devour their master..." (*Joyce Upon the Void* 156-157). The book provides information but questions the desire for mastery of that information. The reader is confronted with a reading that defies and denies the epistemology of the practices of reading and interpreting. Instead it creates a
reading which relies on the possibility that a "sense" of the text will reach the reader and will engage her/him in the reading.

The sense that the reader gets of the text then emerges not from structure and historical practice, but from possibility itself. As Derrida suggests: "with Joyce, luck is always taken in hand by the law, its sense and its agenda, using overdetermination of figures and ruses. And yet the chance nature (l'aléa) of meetings, the randomness of coincidences lends itself to being affirmed, accepted, yes, even approved in all their occurrences" ("Ulysses Gramophone" 28). The possibility may not be actualized (may not come into some clearly definable form), but it can be accepted and engaged. This is not true only of *Finnegans Wake* but of the very act of the signifying practice, as Julia Kristeva points out:

Mallarme's Igitur points toward the specific arena of this social practice: a hazardous act putting into play the disappearances of the symbolic; Mallarme's calls it 'chance' [*le hasard*]. In order to come about, this practice incorporates the symbolic, but expends itself while bringing it about. Such a practice is neither science nor madness, neither the familial, national, or racial historical lineage, nor the anachronistic ego--neither time nor its loss. Indeed the character in this scene is logic itself--*Igitur* [in Latin: therefore]---which had become its interdependent opposite--madness--in order to call attention to what is lacking in both: active chance, which cannot be discursively, linearly stated--A *Throw of the Dice* will be its realization in language. In this movement from logic to madness to active chance, madness is never necessary. (*Revolution* 226)

Therefore possibility and chance are the very nature of the act of reading. This is not an escape from meaning. Instead, it is a new possibility of meaning.
So what do we gain by understanding that the reading of *Finnegans Wake* is chaotic? This conception of its reading points out that there is no certainty, but this is a way of reading that does not require certainty, that revels in and is empowered by its absence. It is possible to engage with this text without having to master and control it. Margot Norris argues that "the greatest critical mistake in approaching *Finnegans Wake* has been the assumption that we can be certain of who, where, and when everything is in the *Wake*, if we only do enough research. The discovery that Maggie is ALP may be true enough, but it doesn't mean anything" (*The Decentered Universe* 120). Joyce then created a text not merely intended to challenge his readers, but to challenge the institution which guards traditional practice and trains readers in that practice. The problem with that institution is, as Derrida notes, that "there can be no Joycean competence, in the certain and strict sense of the concept of competence, with the criteria of evaluation and legitimation that are attached to this" ("Ulysses Gramophone" 49). This seems to put the reader into a position from which we can no longer "read" in the sense to which we have become accustomed. Yet, we do something with Joyce—a something without legitimacy, competence, authorization—and that something is "reading," defined and refreshed from its old idea of cognitive mastery and brought to life in a form of willed/desired engagement that "means" and is "meaningful" as "mean" is lost and "meaningful" threatens to burst from the force of its own plurality.
Finnegans Wake leads into an awareness of the act of reading that has implications for the reading of all texts. As Derek Attridge notes in discussing the complaints against Finnegans Wake:

What is being fended off by this process of marginalization is the worrying possibility that Finnegans Wake may not be an aberration of the literary, but an unusually thorough-going exemplification of the literary, of the very conditions of existence of Middlemarch or Sons and Lovers as literary texts—namely, the impossibility of ever being limited by originating intention, or external reference, or constraining context. That is to say to the extent that literary texts can be read as being so limited, they perhaps fail to be literary, or at least to be read as literary, offering themselves instead as if they were reports, arguments, confessions, sermons, etc. (391)

The complaints against Finnegans Wake seem to want to protect reading from its challenges. I think those defenses are untenable.

That is how we "read" the text, in the sense of how we enact our understanding of it (but, of course, that understanding is not a stopping point for this discussion). There is still the question of why we engage with it (not really a different question from how). That is, what is the meaningfulness of the reading of this text?

Is this a cold text, in which there is no real subjective engagement, but rather only wordplay and trickery? That is, is this text only a mental exercise, an elaborate riddle that engages the emotions and spirit of its readers only in that it frustrates them? I think it is important to recognize the cultural aspects of the practices Joyce is challenging. Finnegans Wake is "a turning that confuses subjects and objects, waking and sleeping, borders and boundaries, definitions
and explanations, genders and genres" (Shari Benstock *Textualizing the Feminine: On the Limits of Genre* 84-85). It represents not merely a challenge, but a challenge to ideologically and psychologically constituted practices of reading.

Is there a politics to this text? I think that it is obvious that there is a gender politics here. As Susan Henke notes: "In *Finnegans Wake*, Anna Livia is the source of an explosive, hysterical bisexual discourse. She spews forth words in flagrant violation of the symbolic law of the Father, re-playing the scenes of psychological life in the world of the imaginary" (*James Joyce and the Politics of Desire* 209). Henke thus indicates that this text has within it some possible means of achieving an engagement with the text which yields something meaningful, in this case a challenge to the patriarchal structures that underlie language itself. It provides a certain opening into the challenging of language as a site of power and control, by ripping language apart and exposing its desires for those things. It is not surprising that theorists such as Hélène Cixous have turned to *Finnegans Wake* and the more postmodern sections of *Ulysses* in their explorations of the possibilities of finding new ways of writing and reading which can escape the traps implicit in the use of language. I do not think that Joyce himself pushed forward the political possibilities present in *Finnegans Wake*, but I do think that his experiment provided certain openings through which those more political challenges can be made.
In addition to the political meaningfulness of the text, there are the issues that it addresses for the subject reading it. Margot Norris, speaking of dreams, argues that "They are statements not only about what it means to be human, but also what it feels to be human. Sigmund Freud himself announced the grand theme of all dreams: since they are wish fulfillments, their theme is desire. In *Finnegans Wake* we can see this shifting play of desire readily enough" ("Mixing Memory and Desire" 132). This book then enacts some relation to desire, a relation mediated by the chaotic nature of its reception, but nonetheless felt by the reader.

Unfortunately, despite its chaos and complications, I do think that *Finnegans Wake* falls short of leading us into some wholly new ground in the affective and psychological levels of our engagement. It does force us to enact those levels of engagement in new ways, but I think that its challenge to the reader is to the practice of reading, rather than directly at the authoritative structures (the cultural logic) implicit in that practice (structures challenged by writers such as Woolf, Duras, Lispector or Fuentes). That is not to completely dismiss this as an intellectual exercise. Rather, it is to suggest that there is still a lot more to the act of reading than Joyce was able to point out in this particular text.

I think *Finnegans Wake* has implications for an argument for the use of texts to generate new awarenesses of reading, which they do in order to both
problematize old ideas of reading, which of necessity distance the reader and the text and the culture, and to refresh the idea of reading with new possibilities of engagement. Ihab Hassan argues that: "If the fall of human consciousness is into language, then redemption lies in puns and metaphor, holy derangement, and re-sexualization of speech, babble or silence" (16) and *Finnegans Wake* serves just such a purpose. *Finnegans Wake* leads us then to a contemplation of consciousness and thus of the act of reading.

Elsewhere Hassan argues that *Finnegans Wake* may be the crucial text of postmodernism (*Paracriticisms* 43) and sets it as the limit of modernism (perhaps thus granting it an existence as border text—partaking of and in modernism and postmodernism, while bring fully part of neither). I do think that *Finnegans Wake* articulates a particular relation to postmodernism (which may or not be the one Hassan ascribes, depending on whether the definition of postmodernism being constructed encompasses the assumptions that Hassan's definition encompasses). Hassan stands "convinced that the work stands as a monstrous prophecy that we have begun to discover (thanks to many deep readers) but have not yet decided how to heed" (*Paracriticisms* 77). *Finnegans Wake* would seem to have something to say to the postmodern reader about reading, and perhaps about living in the postmodern world. To read *Finnegans Wake* we must "[b]egin to forget it. It will remember itself from every sides, with all gestures, in each our word. Today's truth, tomorrow's trend" (614.20-21).
I do think that *Finnegans Wake* provides a useful starting point for examining the way in which postmodern texts try to recover certain possibilities of reading by rupturing certain academic limitations imposed on the interpretation of meaning. It is a starting point that can lead in several directions. The chapters that follow will take up some of the challenges presented by Joyce's text.
Chapter III
The Waves and the Chaos of Narrative

There have been many attempts to discuss the relationship of Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* to narrative and lyric. Woolf's construction of a lyrical novel seems to present a challenge to the idea that narrative is the form of the novel. What I would like to do is to take a look at how the relation of the ideas of narrative and lyric is played out in *The Waves* and how that playing out reflects something about the distinction being made, even as it indicates what precedes that distinction, the chaos of engaging with a text. That is, the play of the narrative/lyric distinction leads us into an awareness of the engagement of the mind with text which underlies narrative and lyric.

What might be accomplished in this new manner of telling? It opens up the possibility for discovering just how much of the engagement of reader and text is dependent upon connections made unconsciously. That, in turn, leads to ways of thinking of texts as sites of engagement. "Engaged thinking," notes Walter Davis, "necessarily does violence to objective commentary because its goal is to reawaken that richer relationship to ourselves that is the basis for a richer relationship to texts" (7). What becomes the issue of reading is not how
do we know what the text is saying, but how do we engage with what the text is saying. If the mind can engage in a play of unconscious chaos, where connections are built into a textual space, then the distinction of lyric and narrative becomes a problematic one. If the purpose of reading (or at least of reading literature—a distinction I will return to later) is to engage with the text, then the narrative/lyric distinction tells us something about the usual assumptions that we make in the act of engaging with narrative. It points out that narrative and lyric reflect a desire for a specific type of ordering. *The Waves* forces its reader to confront the engagement that underlies that desire, and then reflect on how lyric and narrative each make such engagement possible.

That aspect of mind toward which *The Waves* points leads into different ways of considering texts. What we learn about the mind in confronting *The Waves* points towards possibilities of texts that will be taken up by postmodern writers. For this reason, I think it is useful to consider *The Waves* a postmodern text, in that it enters into a discourse about representation and culture that underlies the discourse of postmodernism. This is not to say that *The Waves* is postmodern, but that it can be considered to be so if postmodernism is constructed within that discourse. What *The Waves* brings us to consider about representation and engagement will be important to the discussion of postmodernism that follows.
Narrative (and Lyric)

The question of whether *The Waves* is narrative is preceded by the implicit assumption that narrative is the test condition. Hayden White argues that "narrative might well be considered a solution to a problem of general human concern, namely the problem of how to translate *knowing* into *telling*, the problem of fashioning human experience into a form of assimilable structures of meaning that are generally human rather than culture specific" (1). Narrative then can be considered as a "metacode, a human universal on the basis of which transcultural messages about the nature of shared reality can be transmitted" (White, 2). It is not my intention to disagree with the utility of narrative. Rather, I think one of the dangers in narrative is assuming that the telling is its purpose, rather than an engagement of the knowing. And an even larger danger is that those narratives take on the character of the metanarratives that Jean-François Lyotard warns against. In that case, narrative becomes the way of knowing, rather than of telling.

Narrative is a construct and must be considered as such. Gérard Genette points out that "analysis of narrative discourse as I understand it constantly implies a study of relationships: on the one hand the relationship between a discourse and events that it recounts (narrative in its second meaning), on the other hand the relationship between the same discourses and the act that
producethatplotmakes

In reading narrative, the reader is given a particular structure with particular assumptions. Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth argues that "narrators literally constitute historical time by threading together into one system and one act of attention a whole series of moments and perspectives" (28). Yet, even as the narrative creates historical time, the reader incorporates that time into the chaos of the mind. The reader of narrative constructs a textual space from that threading together and then engages neither the act of narrative, nor the knowing it is trying to express, but both syncretistically. If the reader gets lost in an objective pursuit of the meaning of the narrative (remains in the technique) it
is not because this is a limitation of narrative, but of the interpretive strategies
with which it is being considered.

Narrative must make this move into the mind because there is an
engagement implicit in narrative, in its dialogic character. The danger occurs
when the move in reading is not through narrative to engagement, but just into
the narrative. In this case, "in a sense, the people are only that which actualizes
narratives: once again, they do this not only by recounting them, but also by
listening to them and recounting themselves through them; in other words, by
putting them into 'play' in their institutions--thus by assigning themselves the
post of narratee and diegesis as well as the post of narrator" (Lyotard, 23).

Narrative then plunges into the realm of metanarrative and becomes the way of
knowing reality. People become subservient to the narratives, and serve only as
the means of perpetuating the narratives. Narrative ceases to be a tool for
engagement.

The reader must bear in mind that "for any particular narrative, there is no
single basically basic story subsisting beneath it but, rather, an unlimited number
of other narratives that can be constructed in response to it or perceived as
related to it" (Barbara Herrnstein Smith, 217). This idea of narrative as act of the
mind indicates how narrative is engaged in possibility. Narrative is something to
be engaged, not just read as information (even textbooks read for information
must be recognized as being encompassed within ideologies that are engaged on the (un)conscious level).

Narrative theory and theories of the novel are not necessarily means of controlling a text (although interpretative communities can force them into this service) rather than engaging it. As long as they do not serve final ends of determining meaning (arresting the dialectic of engagement), they certainly can be essential movements in the engagement of reader and text. Even seemingly impenetrable texts such as *Finnegans Wake* are not designed to be unengagable, rather they work to challenge assumptions that limit engagement. The engagement of reader and text requires some ability to take in the information (and possibly noise) of the text. Narrative theory can provide important possibilities of enabling that taking in of the text. Furthermore, as Catherine Belsey notes, there are aspects of narrative that are empowered by disorder:

Narrative tends to follow certain recurrent patterns. Classic realist narrative, as Barthes demonstrates in *S/Z*, turns on the creation of enigma through the precipitation of disorder which throws into disarray the conventional cultural and signifying systems. Among the commonest sources of disorder at the level of the plot in classic realism are murder, war, a journey, or love. But the story moves inevitably toward some *closure* which is also disclosure, the dissolution of enigma through the re-establishment of order, recognizable as a reinstatement or a development of the order which is understood to have preceded the events of the story itself (*Critical Practice* 70).

Even classical realist narrative takes advantage of possibilities of chaos to engage their reader. It is not the point of my argument to suggest that they do
not. Rather, I want to suggest that interpretive bodies have tried to marginalize the chaotic aspects of reader in order maintain control or mastery over a text. James Phelan points out, in Reading People, Reading Plots, that the "instabilities" and "tensions" that this narrative process creates are what drive the progression of the text. There is a connection implicit in this process between the narrative and the engagement it creates. The sense of a textual space in the mind is what enables the sense of that which is unstable or tense. The play of chaos and order in the mind are a part of the process of engaging narrative and they are a part of what drives the "story" into "completion" (whatever that completion may be).

Narrative, then, has as parts of its constitution the implicit engagement with the "knowing" which has been translated into "telling." Mieke Bal points out that "by presupposing that the literary text is marked by the unconscious (which is the discourse of the Other), we can define the textual unconscious as that which is systematically eliminated from the narration and which can be interpolated into the gaps in the narration (which by definition remains incomplete)" (Bal 147). It is in/with/through that unconscious of the text (or the unconscious of the text as Other) that we engage with the text. Narrative is one means of enabling that engagement, especially in that its gaps are the places where the chaos of the mind constructs the text as space.
How does this relate to the lyrical novel, such as *The Waves*. Ralph Freedman argues that

the lyrical novel shifts the reader's attention from men and events to a formal design. The usual scenery of fiction becomes a texture of imagery, and the characters appear as *personae* for the self. Lyrical fiction, then, is not defined essentially by a poetic style or purple prose....Rather, a lyrical novel assumes a unique form which transcends the causal and temporal movement of narrative within the framework of fiction. (Freedman 1)

I would disagree with Freeman that lyrical writing is more formalistic than narrative. Rather, since narrative is assumed to be the neutral metacode of telling, the lyrical forms are seen because that stand outside that neutrality. I do think that Freedman leads us in interest lines with the idea of characters serving "as *personae* for the self." Phelan, in his essay "Character and Judgment in Narrative and Lyric," argues that lyric is the sharing of experience rather than the narrating of a tale. Rather then placing experience into a frame for sharing, a more immediate access to the experience is granted through lyric. How does this play itself out in *The Waves*?

*Redefining Narrative: Riding the Waves*

Although the narrative of *The Waves* does take the ostensible form of traditional narrative discourse, it is obvious to the reader that this novel is not characterized by dialogue between individuals, but by lyric responses to situations that are not directed at some receiver of the dialogue (it is non-dialogic dialogue, even as it is dialogic lyrical writing). *The Waves*, Patricia
Ondek Laurence notes, "exists outside of time and logic in a space of narrative and psychological 'suspension'" (147). In this suspended space, Woolf reinscribes dialogue into a more lyrical form. "More than any other twentieth-century novelist, she reaches for a condition of poetry" (Laurence, 170). *The Waves* reaches for poetry, but does so in order to create an engagement that points out something about how readers respond to texts.

How does this lyrical writing work? The characters are clearly not engaged in the exchange of direct discourse, although such discourse clearly informs some of the lyric responses.

'I see a ring,' said Bernard, 'hanging above me. It quivers and hangs in a loop of light.'
'I see a slab of pale yellow,' said Susan, 'spreading away until it meets a purple stripe.'
'I hear a sound,' said Rhoda, 'cheep, chirp; cheep, chirp; going up and down.'
'I see a globe,' said Neville, 'hanging down in a drop against the enormous flanks of some hill.'
'I see a crimson tassel,' said Jinny, 'twisted with gold threads.'
'I hear something stamping,' said Louis. 'A great beast's foot is chained. It stamps, and stamps, and stamps.' (9)

What Woolf presents are a series of six clearly distinct consciousnesses providing discourse which is only "heard" by the reader (since these responses to not seem to acknowledge each other, as they would in traditional narrative). This character-to-reader discourse is not part of the mimetic nature of the narrative and, on the mimetic level, the narrative must be considered as simply a series of interior monologues.
Yet, implicit in them is some dialogue and interaction which is not being written into the text—an implied narrative, perhaps. Daniel Ferrer points out that "these discourses placed next to each other are inserted into a narrative which integrates them. The external narrative is present in a minimal but explicit form" (Ferrer 66). *The Waves*, then, is not lyric as opposed to narrative, it is lyric being used to reconstitute narrative. "For in fact what *The Waves* constructs is not a dialectic opposing external reality to the perception of that reality, as in the 'classical' interior monologue, but one opposing a perception (or sensation, or affect, or hallucination) and consciousness of the perception. External reality is relegated to the third position, to a very low rank" (Ferrer 89). *The Waves* tries not to share an event, but the experience of that event, by presenting the consciousness of the event (or the multiple consciousnesses of those events as reflected through the different characters).

To complicate this text still further, the monologues have a seemingly lyric relation to the framing pieces of the text. The section cited above is preceded by:

The light struck upon the trees in the garden, making one leaf transparent and then another. One bird chirped high up; there was a pause; another chirped lower down. The sun sharpened the walls of the house, and rested like the tip of a fan upon a white blind and made a blue fingerprint of shadow under the leaf by the bedroom window. The blind stirred slightly, but all within was dim and unsubstantial. The birds sang their blank melody outside. (8)

The "dialogues" are given some sense by the description of the sunrise. The mind makes these connections, as it does with lyric in any form. The
juxtaposition of the frame and the monologues is constructed into a textual space that enacts the possibilities of that juxtaposition. A "narrative" emerges from that chaos, one in which the monologues are responses to the dawn (or a dawn).

That same kind of play of frame versus monologue emerges when Bernard takes an image from the frame

In the garden where the trees stood thick over flower-beds, ponds, and greenhouses the birds sang in the sunshine, each alone. One sang under the bedroom window; another on the topmost twig of the lilac bush; another on the edge of the wall. Each sang stridently, with passion, with vehemence, as if to let the song burst out of it, no matter if it shattered the song of another bird with harsh discord... They spied a snail and tapped the shell against a stone. They tapped furiously, methodically, until the shell broke and something slimy oozed from the crack. (108-109)

and incorporates it into his monologue: "who have sung like eager birds each his own song and tapped with the remorseless and savage egotism of the young our own snail-shell till it cracked" (123). There is a lyric connection here. No narrative links these passages, yet there is an implicit connection in "our own snail-shell." The reference to unconnected passages creates a connection that forces us to confront how much such connections are a part of our engagement with texts.

*The Waves* works within a play of unconscious connection that has a dreamlike quality (as was true of *Finnegans Wake* above). The connections have both the disorder and the power of the unconscious connections of dreams. Laurence notes that "In order to escape the alphabet, Woolf has used
images relating to the 'deciphering of pictographs' or the 'decoding of hieroglyphs' in relation to the reading of women's dreams, delirium, hysteria: all states of the 'absence' of the conscious mind and the 'presence' of the unconscious" (139). The text here is trying to get closer to the "knowing," by taking advantage of the immediacy and possibility of lyric and of the unconscious chaos of the mind.

The interior monologues represent an attempt by Woolf to represent the subject position of each of the six characters, external to that "I," or part of themselves, they articulate in discourse. By writing the silences rather than the dialogue, Woolf is able to force the reader into an acute awareness of these characters as subjects. This is important to creating the overall effect of the single subject as what might be called the "intersubject." The intersubjectivity of the characters (in the implicit narrative of their monologues) makes them an intersubject, to be engaged by the reader. "Woolf's speakers may have mimetic dimensions rather than mimetic functions, but that does not negate the usefulness of the concept of character in discussing our response to Woolf's speakers" (Phelan, "Character and Judgment in Narrative and Lyric" 409). We have characters which are both characters in an implicit narrative, and which are sites of intersubjective engagement with the reader. Woolf does not try to resolve any contradiction in that duality, but plays out its possibilities. As Phelan suggests, character is still a useful term here, because we respond to the
individual subjects and their intersubjectivity. In doing so, we are able to see that this is something that underlies engagement with character in any form. As Thomas Docherty suggests about postmodern characterization:

The result, in characterological terms, is twofold: firstly, 'appearance versus reality' as a paradigm is replaced by 'appearance versus disappearance'; secondly, character never is, but is always about-to-be, endlessly deferred. This elusiveness of character, it is often suggested, makes postmodern narrative in some sense 'unreadable', and many readers find it tedious in its disappointment of their characterological expectations. (169)

Here, too, character is always about-to-be. That deferring of character allows Woolf to lead the reader into a questioning of the assumptions about character that are made in traditional narrative. Phelan suggests "that we look to discriminate between them according to the attitudes we are asked to take to that material...In short, a crucial difference between narrative and lyric is that in narrative internal judgments of characters (and narrators) are required while in lyric such judgments are suspended until we take the step of evaluation" ("Character and Judgment in Narrative and Lyric" 411-412). *The Waves* exposes that distinction.

What, then, are these subjectivities that Woolf creates? In order to understand the question of the subject, it is important to look at some implications of the title Woolf has given to this novel. Clearly, the title can be seen to refer to the waves which pound on the beach in the italicized interludes, as well as to those which provide the ending to the novel ("*The waves broke on the shore.*"). Yet, the title can also be seen as having ramifications for the idea
of the subject as quantum. It has been traditional to perceive the subject as a
discrete particle, just as it long had been traditional to perceive matter as being
particulate in nature. Schrödinger, de Broglie, and the other quantum theorists
of the early part of the century, complicated the notion of matter by positing that
it exists as both particle and wave. In the same way, Woolf is throwing open the
possibility of conceiving of the subject as existing as a wave: the subject is part
of a continuum of reality.

That continuum allows for the blurring of the borders between subjects;
the subject is thus defined by its interaction with other subjects—not only an
interaction with those who live at the same moment in time, but also with those
who have lived before the subject and those who will after. In The Waves,
Bernard relates how he purchased a picture of Beethoven "because the whole of
life, its masters, its adventurers then appeared in long ranks of magnificent
human beings behind me; and I was the inheritor; I, the continuer; I, the person
miraculously appointed to carry it on" (253-254). Bernard perceives himself in
the context of just such a continuum of subjectivity.

As Ferdinand de Saussure notes, the world would be perceived as a
continuum without its division by signification. So, too, would intersubjectivity be
a continuum were it not the fact that it is divided by the entry into what Jacques
Lacan calls "the Symbolic Order". That entrance into the world of language and
discourse divides the "I" from its awareness of its intersubjectivity. By writing
external to discourse, Woolf can bring the continuum back into a position outside of the Symbolic Order (to the semiotic of Julia Kristeva), from which it can be understood.

One "consequence of this variation is that Woolf is able to incorporate an enormous range of experiences into the text" (Phelan, "Character and Judgment in Narrative and Lyric" 416). The narrative of *The Waves* presents a multiplicity of intersubjects which may be perceived as a single subject. It is not possible to make an absolute determination as to whether that single subject is some unnamed abstraction of those intersubjectivities or whether it is Bernard, although there is certainly some evidence for the latter possibility. In the last chapter of the book, the other subjects fall away and only Bernard remains. In fact, Bernard does engage in what appears to be direct discourse with some implied listener: "Now to sum up," said Bernard. "Now to explain to you the meaning of my life. Since we do not know each other (though I met you once I think on board a ship going to Africa) we can talk freely" (238). It is to this listener that Bernard relates the way in which his subjectivity has been defined by the others: "what I call 'my life,'...is not one life that I look back upon; I am not one person; I am many people; I do not altogether know who I am--Jinny, Susan, Neville, Rhoda, or Louis: or how to distinguish my life from theirs" (276).

Confronting his subjectivity, Bernard recognizes its foundation in intersubjectivity. In another part of the last chapter, Bernard describes his
subjectivity as a symphony, with each of his friends representing instruments; it would be impossible to think of such a symphony only in terms of its individual instruments.

Bernard may then be seen to emerge from the silence as the subject, but that does not mean that the earlier subjects are lost within his subjectivity. Rather, it would seem likely that each of the six subjects has subsumed the other subjects and we see this only in the case of Bernard--that Bernard stands in as the subject in the same way that any of the others might (the reason for Woolf's choice of Bernard is apparently his concern with and ability to articulate these questions of subjectivity). The lyric selves, Mary Ann Caws argues, "become finally clear as 'statues seen against the sky,' and are not modeled by exterior events...but in relation to other selves and from within" (52). Bernard is the background upon which those selves are seen. "The absence of dialogue and narration radically pushes to the background their different strategies in interpersonal interaction as well as their different social roles" (Eileen B. Sypher, 187). It is not the ways of communicating, but the intersubjectivities which are on display in *The Waves*.

This method of presenting character provides Woolf with possible ways of moving behind the telling and exposing the knowing (even as she is tries to escape that distinction in her lyrical technique). "The novel's non-developmental and non-dialectical structure, in addition to hinting that sex differences are
natural, certainly also implies that characters, males as well as females, are imprisoned in their way of seeing. Each is locked in a structure" (Sypher, 205). This breaking down of the structure of narrative allows Woolf to free her characters from one kind of structure to expose how other structures lie behind that structure.

Woolf has thus created this novel of silences to show the way in which such intersubjectivity is not merely something incidental to subject-formation, but rather something essential and imperative to that formation, a means of filling the loneliness and loss that comes with the entrance into the Symbolic Order. Bernard gives his listener a view of the intensity of that entrance: "Louis was disgusted by the nature of human flesh; Rhoda by our cruelty; Susan could not share; Neville wanted order; Jinny love; and so on. We suffered terribly as we became separate bodies" (241).

Woolf has thus tried to create a narrative that in some way exists outside that order, so that she can show that intersubjectivity exists as part of the very essence of the subject. Forcing the reader to engage the intersubject, Woolf confronts the nature of engagement with text (and character). "By creating unresolvable contradictions between one moment of awareness and another, postmodern narrative maintains multiple perspectives that produce a crisis in the temporal system of rationalizing perspective because the multiplicity is irreducible" (Ermarth, 108). Here in The Waves the crisis and the awareness
are in the reader, "who is provided the white space in the text (various kinds of silences) by the writer for the play of his thought and emotion" (Laurence, 172).

As a text with spaces, *The Waves* is a text which can enable the chaos of possibilities of the mind that traditional narratives might obscure with order. Laurence argues that "Woolf's alterations of theme and rhythm weave the fabric of language into new textures and patterns" (186), with gaps that "represent Woolf's spatialization of ruptures of the mind" (200). In this way, Woolf is able to generate meaning out of silence and lack, disrupting the order of language and engaging the reader in the chaos. "Finally, the reader of silence is implicated in the text in a new way in Woolf's novels, for she or he must join with the writer to understand and decipher the silences in the novel: a mode of subjectivity" (Laurence 217).

*The Waves* provides Woolf with a place of disrupted narrative. She can use that site to expose the intersubjective engagement that underlies narrative. In so doing, she can refresh possibilities in narrative that can lost in traditional narratives (or, at least, the interpretative strategies used to "read" those narratives).

One possibility this creates for Woolf is the possibility of challenging the ideology of the culture implicit in assumptions about narrative. Removing subjectivity from narrative gives Woolf a way of showing how narrative has been configured within an specific ideology. Susan Stanford Friedman points out that
"DuPlessis has shown how women re-configure narrative to write themselves out of ideological scripts...I am suggesting that narrative itself is potentially polyvocal and polymorphous. So too should theories of narrative be supple and multi-shaped" (Friedman 180). The Waves demands just such a theory of narrative. Narrative, if it is the way of telling what is known, must include a lyrical narrative such as we see in The Waves. Such a narrative, which engages through subversion of narrative assumptions, makes it possible to find ways to challenge the ideology of the culture whose knowledge is being translated into stories.

Ermarth argues that "the postmodern novelist attempts to prevent our habitual flight from that subjectivity into some putatively (and functionally impossible) objective state by finding ways to avoid making that subjectivity a servitude" (123). In this sense, The Waves is postmodern. It anticipates the questioning of the relation of representation to subjectivity that postmodern incorporates into its practice.

In The Waves, the challenge is specifically of a male-centered ideology which has configured narrative to history and progress(ion). If Woolf wants to engage subjectivity, without making subjectivity subject to the narratives of history, she must write into a different narrativity. Julia Kristeva writes: "when evoking the name and destiny of women, one thinks more of the space generating and forming the human species than of time, becoming or history"
("Women's Time" 15). If Woolf is then to find a writing adequate to subjectivity, she must escape the assumptions of narrative that would exclude her. As is true of later women writers (as I will explore later in terms of the writings of Marguerite Duras and Clarice Lispector), Woolf is looking for a writing which can express subjectivity as she experiences it (a "telling" for her "knowing").

Ermarth posits that in postmodern literature the linear time has been replaced by a rhythm. This shift reflects the deconstruction of time as a certainty which gives definition to experience. She writes:

I do not mean to suggest that this shift [from the linear track of historical time to the conjugating rhythm] is a simple exchange of one model for another; on the contrary, it belongs to an extensive and complex set of redefinitions necessarily simplified by discussion. Implicit in this shift are new definitions of subjectivity. Because the individual subject is largely a construct of historical conventions, the revision of historical temporality necessarily involves among other things, the replacement of the Cartesian cogito ergo sum with a new formulation, 'I swing, therefore I am.' In postmodern narratives temporality has little to do with historical conventions; instead it is multivalent and nonlinear. Whatever the advantages of this new temporality, they are gained at the expense of certain preconceptions that are commonly held to be essential, 'natural,' even sacred, and so the narratives that inscribe it can strike an unwilling reader particularly hard. (Ermarth 20-21)

The Waves represents just such a text. It tries to examine subjectivity within a redefinition that both recognizes the historicity of the subject, even as it critiques and challenges that historical quality.

This challenging of narrative leads back to the mind, and how it engages with literature. Eric Charles White notes that "the totalizing finality of comprehensive narrative history can only lead the mind into delusion"
"Contemporary Cosmology and Narrative Theory" 95). The mind is not a place of order, but a place of the play of chaos and order. The delusion of the mind is about its own engagement with narrative. If narrative is perceived as totalizing, "telling" becomes adequate to replace "knowing." The mind becomes only what can be encompassed within language. Yet, language emerges out of a place of chaotic possibility. Narrative must be constructed with a recognition of this fact.

As Ermarth suggests:

The best definition of postmodern narrative might be precisely that it resolutely does not operate according to any form of historical time, that is, representational time, and in many cases directly parodies or disputes that time and the generalizations it allows to form....History now is not just the convention that uses the past to hold the present in a controlled pattern of meaning: history now takes up the interesting position of confronting its own historicity. (Ermarth 43)

These are the possibilities that emerge from Woolf's lyrical narrative in The Waves.

The confrontation with narrativity and the reinscription of character here point to one of the other aspects of engagement that is all too often left aside. In the objective study of narrative, engagement becomes an exercise of the intellect. Yet, the mind does not have an intellect separate from will or from desire. The chaos of the mind is a chaos where thought and will and emotion are inextricably linked. By exposing the assumptions of narrative, Woolf is able to show how engagement with a text involves those aspects of intersubjectivity. And that engagement is not limited to "literature." Just as all texts are inscribed
within the ideology of their culture (even seemingly neutral texts as textbooks or encyclopedias), so, too, are all texts read into a play of will and desire (and defenses against will and desire). The translation of "knowing" into "telling" is not a neutral process. Since knowing and telling are not the same thing, there are choices, omissions, contradictions and impossibilities that complicate the translation. Not all texts are confrontations with subjectivity, but they can be, for the confrontation is not a function of either text or subject, but of both. In the engagement of text (Other) and reader (subject) there are possibilities that emerge from the play of chaos and order that cannot be limited to text or mind.

In returning attention to the way the possibilities of the mind relate to the telling of narratives, Woolf foregrounds for her reader an awareness of the act of reading that many interpretive processes would omit. Woolf challenges the primacy of narrative for experience. The order of narrative is not a necessary condition for meaningful engagement (because we engage the chaos of textual space, of which narrative is one means of making sense). This text forces a reconsideration of literature and narrative. If narrative is a means by which subjectivity can be inscribed into stories conveyed through language, then the definition of narrative must be flexible enough to embrace all the possibilities of that expression of subjectivity. The reader can engage with The Waves, because this lyrical narrative points out that the possibilities of narrative can escape from limitation that may be placed around it. This redefined narrative
can thus lead into the lyrical wonderings of Duras and Lispector (where subjectivity can be explored in terms of desire), as well as into the shattering of narrative of Joyce and the postmodernists (whoever and whatever they may be). Each of these directions (which are not entirely different directions) emerge out of a returning awareness of the way the construction of narrative relates the act of engaging a text. The experience of literature is both through and outside of narrative. This not a paradox (although a different logic is necessary to escape from the trap of paradoxes, as I will explore later). Narrative is one aspect of the chaos of reading (as well as one way of ordering that engagement). Narrative creates expectations (which in turn generate that metacode that Hayden White mentions), but it is a mode of experience that is received not in the primacy of its forms and conventions. Thus, narrative generates possibilities and works through them.
Chapter IV

Reading the Information/Reading The Recognitions

The words which the tradition of her art offered her were by now in chaos, coerced through the contexts of a million inanities, the printed page everywhere opiate, row upon row of compelling idiocies disposed to induce stupor, coma, necrotic convulsion; and when they reached her hands they were brittle, straining and cracking, sometimes they broke under the burden which her tense will imposed, and she found herself clutching the fragments, attempting again with this shabby equipment her raid on the inarticulate....

It was through this imposed accumulation of chaos that she struggled to move now: beyond it lay simplicity, immeasurable, residence of perfection, where nothing was created, where originality did not exist: because it was origin; where once she was there work and thought in causal and stumbling sequence did not exist, but only transcription: where the poem she knew but could not write existed, ready-formed, awaiting recovery in that moment when the writing down of it was impossible: because she was the poem (The Recognitions 299-300).

While Joyce and Woolf try to evoke chaos in their texts by altering the representation of language and narrative, William Gaddis, in The Recognitions creates a chaotic engagement with his text through a multiplication of orders, creating a textual system so complex that it becomes chaotic. Rather than indicating the chaos that underlies reading, as Joyce and Woolf do, Gaddis indicates the unstable quality of the orders we use to approach texts. This instability arises out of the chaos that Joyce and Woolf illustrate in Finnegans
Wake and The Waves, but Gaddis brings that instability to the foreground not by turning back on assumptions, but by following those assumptions to the limits of their stability.

Gaddis uses this iteration of orders to challenge the defenses of his readers. The desire of many readers (and the focus of many interpretive strategies) is to pull all of the pieces of a text together and thus master the text. Gaddis presents a text which resists mastery not by denying it, but by pushing it to an extreme where its tenuous nature is exposed. He challenges mastery with difficulty, trying to throw a reader off-balance with information and uncertainty in order to break through the defenses of the reader and make a statement about the need for "disciplined nostalgia." Gaddis wants to challenge his reader at least as much as he wants to challenge the culture. In order to accomplish that ends, he turns away from technical questions of representation and back on the reader and what the reader does with the representation.

This forces the reader into a confrontation with text as Other and thus with the reader as subject. It uses the confrontation to engage its reader. Rather than engaging the reader in cultural assumptions (as Joyce and Woolf do), Gaddis engages the reader as product of the cultural assumptions. His text explores madness, consciousness, and the unconscious connections of information—and his text leads the reader into confronting how, at the limits of
order, those distinctions break down. This novel tries to seep into the mind of
the reader by pushing order to its limits.

*The Recognitions* is a highly ordered novel and demands conscious effort
on the part of the reader to keep the order straight. Yet, the order breaks down
and Gaddis is able to engage the mind in chaos. Orders play off each other and
create connections that emerge from the possibilities of chaotic interaction in the
mind. At the limits of the novel's orders, certainty ceases to exist and the reader
is confronted with possibility. John Johnston points out that "in these terms,
virtually the entire text of *The Recognitions* appears to be 'double-voiced'"
(Johnston 153). It is about order and about chaos. And it engages the reader in
both.

Johnston explains that allusions (ordered and conscious connections) are
multiplied to the level where they cannot all be mastered. The multiple allusions
become elusive and the reader must track them down:

These multiple allusions are typical of how 'the space of
representation' in *The Recognitions* is saturated with cultural
references, some being fairly well 'hidden' while others obtrude
rather ostentatiously. In fact, the more we look at any given scene
the more we discover how many elements appearing elsewhere in
the novel have been incorporated and how the scene has been
constructed as a mosaic of quotations, references, and allusions to
the cultural past, with the total effect of such textual mosaics
greatly exceeding anything that 'double-voicing' and 'disguised
quotation' could account for. Rather, it is as if *The Recognitions*
had been consciously elaborated according to a basic principle of
intertextuality—that 'every text is the absorption and transformation
of a multiplicity of other texts' (Johnston 167).
The limits of allusion are reached in the saturated text of *The Recognitions*. Yet, the reader still maintains some sense of the connections. They will suddenly fall together, making the reader aware that such mosaics have been lurking under the conscious recognition of the text. By confronting the reader with limits of orderly reading, Gaddis lures his reader into a recognition that the orders of art are not the limits of the engagement of art. *The Recognitions* slips past defenses: the reader is confronted with the limits of trying to master a text and by the possibilities which are being excluded in such an effort. Gaddis' text challenges the reader to engage the text as Other and allow that engagement to generate an inwardness.

Anton Ehrenzweig's challenge to Gestalt theories of art provide some insight into what Gaddis manages to accomplish here. As Ehrenzweig argues that unconscious syncretistic scanning of the work as a whole is not simply a reflection of the piecing together of shapes, so, too, is the reading of *The Recognitions* the scanning of a whole text that exceeds and precedes the pulling together of its various parts. The textual space that Gaddis creates here is not merely a complicated interweaving of orders, but is also a place of chaos. Ehrenzweig notes that "musical space is quite comparable to pictorial space in painting. Like pictorial space it is constantly converted into a more solid vertical sonority". The text, too, is converted into a more solid vertical space of representation. This, for Roman Ingarden, is the cognition of the literary work of
art. The text is engaged as a space that has a relation to its component parts, but is not just a assemblage of those parts. Gaddis leads the reader into this awareness by creating so many parts that the reader must confront the way he/she is reading into and through that tangle of parts. They are not all consciously held in mind, yet the mind is aware of them on some level that precedes their surprising emergence. Gaddis uses order to get to that chaos of engagement.

*The Recognitions*, then, might be seen to be approaching postmodernism. It takes what Frederic Jameson argues are "perceptual habits...formed in that older kind of space I have called the space of high modernism" (*Postmodernism* 39) and brings them into confrontation with a space of chaos that they are seemingly unable to map. Jameson points out that "surely this is exactly what the cognitive map is called upon to do in the narrower framework of daily life in the physical city: to enable a situational representation on the part of the individual subject to that vaster and properly unrepresentable totality which is the ensemble of society's structures as a whole" (*Postmodernism* 51). This same mapping occurs in the textual space of *The Recognitions*. Gaddis uses that mapping to point out the limitations of narrative maps constructed within "high modernism."

Whether or not *The Recognitions* is a postmodern text is an arguable point. John Johnston wants to position it as a work which looks toward
postmodern practice. I would want to argue that its position is somewhere on the borderline between the modern and postmodern, a line which is not a line at all, but a gray area of considerable size. The demands of its reading include the kind of challenges of representation that characterize the writings which we typically call postmodern, and those demands make it an important site for examining just what the postmodern questioning of representation might point toward.

In *The Recognitions*, Gaddis takes a wide and wild assortment of fragments and, in a traditionally Modernist technique, creates some artistic order from which they can be perceived and judged. Despite its length and the complexity of its plot, *The Recognitions* is a very precisely crafted book. Yet, Gaddis complicates the notion of order, by putting down more and more layers of order as he goes along, creating an order so complex that it starts to become chaos. Plots overlap and intersect in a way that can leave the reader confused by the action; languages multiply far beyond the scope of the knowledge of the average reader. Wallace Stevens writes in "Connoisseur of Chaos" that "A violent order is disorder"; Gaddis creates a violent order that starts to approach disorder, establishing a position that encompasses that of both modernism and postmodernism.

While it may seem from this discussion that Gaddis does nothing more that push order toward chaos, thus leaving him more truly within Modernism,
The Recognitions also plunges beyond order and into disorder on several occasions: the schizophrenic letters sent by Esme and Agnes and, most notably, the wild delirium of Wyatt when he returns home. Although these passages exist within the order of the book, they are more than just fragments being ordered. These passages force the reader into an encounter with a narrative characterized by an almost incomprehensible play of ideas. The only way for the reader to engage with those passages is for that reader to throw aside the order and embrace the disorder, and its simultaneous critique of the order.

The Recognitions, then, is a work which straddles the line of modernism and postmodernism: its expresses the desires and enacts the practices of both. As such, it is a useful place for remarking on the fact that each took advantage of possibilities of the chaos of the mind. It is the desire behind that approaching of chaos which differentiates modernism and postmodernism. The slippery and elusive nature of such desires is one reason why those categories are so hard to maintain. It is much easier to attach a presence to a practice than it is to attach one to a desire.

In this discussion, I will be constructing a notion of postmodernism as that practice (seen here in The Recognitions) which attempts to rupture the modernist cognitive mapping (by exposing the disorders of order and the possibilities of disorders (chaotic or psychological). The Recognitions is only postmodern here in that sense (and that sense is not intended to define
Postmodernism with a capital "P" as a fixed essence/presence). Yet I think that provisional sense of the postmodern will provide a useful point of departure for the postmodernisms to follow in this work.

"We are in a universe where there is more and more information, and less and less meaning" (Jean Baudrillard, "The implosion of meaning in the media" 95).

How is that paradox of the information age reflected in the literature of the time? It creates a kind of reader that Gaddis wants to challenge: "people who read with the surface of their minds, people with reading habits that make the smallest demands on them, people brought up reading for facts, who know what's going to come next and want to know what's coming next, and get angry at surprises" (113)—people reading for information and not for meaning. Rather than recoiling from the information age, Gaddis plunges into it, loading his text with information, but leading the information through to an engagement where he hopes to see the reader get meaning.

_The Recognitions_ alters the basic structure of the conventional novel, creating new demands on its readers. John Leverence points out that

The loose baroque style gives the novel a sense of unfolding possibilities, but it is less well understood as a progressive, sequential narrative that lays out one plot ingredient after another than as an invention clustering of linear narrative segments that are properly perceived in patterns. A painterly analogy to this construction is pointillism. Another is television, which projects its pictures in a manner similar to the constructions/distributions used by Gaddis....The viewer's perception of television is one of total pattern recognition—a perception unlike the fragmented, marching-dot constructions of the conventional novel. (34-35)
The Recognitions demands of its reader that it be read in a way that departs from the conventional, linear, plot-progression model of reading for information. Its mosaic of connections of ideas forces the reader to juggle multiple linearities within the linearity of the text. In its departure it subjects that model of reading (to gather information) to analysis, demanding that we find some way of reconciling the reading of The Recognitions with the reading of a more conventional novel.

Its postmodern demands then involve some new form of engagement with the text (although not new for the reader of say Finnegans Wake, but the reading of Finnegans Wake is certainly not a part of the standard understanding of what was meant by reading in 1955, when Gaddis published The Recognitions, or perhaps even today). The reading of The Recognitions creates a way of reading for itself. Leverence characterizes this way of reading as developing "from loose baroque sentences and paragraphs, postmodern patterns, cues, and motif reconstructions; these integrate the epistemological, aesthetic, and philosophical substance into an occult pattern of spiritual exaltation that operates in a sphere of unfolding possibilities" (45).

That "sphere of unfolding possibilities" is the realm of chaos. What this novel demands of its readers is that they accept that the text is not limited within some specific, predetermined order of linear narration. The Recognitions is plural with fragments and patterns that are an essential part of the way the brain
accepts information. The reader makes "meaning" of the text in terms of that chaotic presentation (the mind engages multiple lineairities without untangling them). *The Recognitions* shows its readers that the engagement with a text is a much more chaotic and complicated process than conventional novels want to acknowledge.

Within the various layers of orders that he constructs, Gaddis makes a number of specifically chaotic demands on the readers of *The Recognitions*. There are obscure references that tax the limits of the reader's knowledge; there are vague—almost unintelligible—passages that require the reader to engage the text in a very Chaotic way (to sense rather than know); there are places in the text where information is withheld and the reader is forced to make leaps of cognition (to make educated guesses); there is an attempt to complicate reality in various ways (including carrying the text into the realm of madness). All of these challenges make *The Recognitions* a valuable text from which to derive an understanding of the chaotic nature of the act of reading.

One of the things which pushes mastery to its limits in *The Recognitions* is the enormous number of references which cannot be fully understood by most readers—that is, the encyclopedic quality of the text. As is clear of Joyce in *Ulysses* and Eliot in "The Waste Land", Gaddis is possessed of a tremendous amount of eclectic knowledge that forces the reader to contend with far more information than can possibly be handled in any easy fashion. The reader
receives the information without necessarily understanding it, therein pushing toward the limits of reading for information (by pointing out that the reading of texts for information requires information and that the connections can generate "meaning"). Nonetheless, the information becomes a part of the chaos of the reading of the text and makes itself a part of the overall pattern of reception of the text. For example, there are issues of theology and anthropology which underlie much of what is said by Wyatt's father. Gaddis gives the reader some hint of that knowledge, but leaves most of it unspoken and the reader is forced to accept and make do with this partial knowledge (or turn to some other source to research it, making a connection of meaning to the information).

These references take their most extreme form in Gaddis' use of several languages other than English at various points in the text. It is highly unlikely that any reader will be able to understand all those languages, yet they are taken in whatever partial form of understanding the reader constructs of them, and thus become a part of the engagement with the text.

The reader is given various clues into understanding the passage and must piece them together (the act of achieving some order out of the chaos). For example, near the conclusion of the novel there is a warning shouted out in Italian by a priest at the church where Stanley goes to play his requiem for his mother. The Italian may or not be understandable to the reader (many of the words are relatively close to being cognates to English, a fact that in itself has
many implications): "—Prego, fare attenzione, non usi troppo i bassi, le note basse. La chiesa è così vecchia che le vibrazioni, capisce, potrebbero essere pericolose. Per favore non bassi . . . e non strane combinazioni di note, capisce . . ." (956). Yet, the hasty departure of the priest — "apparently in a hurry to be off somewhere before the next service called him back" — and the subsequent collapse of the church enables the reader to piece together that the priest had warned Stanley that the church could not sustain the stress of vibration set up by the bass notes of the organ (956). That understanding comes not from a clear presentation of information, but from information pulled out of the noise of the text by the reader engaged with that text. It is not mastery which makes sense of this section (although it can be for certain readers), but nuance. And the singular linearity of text is disrupted as the reader goes back to passage in Italian and "translates" it from the clues.

This engagement with *The Recognitions* works by loading the mind with so much information that the play of the chaotic unconscious provides new possibilities of connection; aspects of clues come together to provide an understanding of what occurred. John Briggs, in *Fire in the Crucible*, posits the idea of the "possibility cloud" in the brain (61-65). Although his ideas are directed toward an understanding of how creativity works, there are reasons to see this idea as applicable to the act of reading. Briggs states that the brain has a tremendous range of possibility by virtue of its many neurons. Thinking along
directed lines would order thought very rapidly and thus reduce possibility (and studies have shown that difficult tasks increase the chaotic firing in the brain and thus the possibilities of order). To be open to possibility, the thoughts must be allowed to wander undirected to various nuances. The sustaining of chaos opens more possibility of meaning before the final ordering of the chaos into a conscious "understanding." I would argue that Gaddis has written his text in such a way that the reader is forced into just such an act of sustaining chaos. Gaddis has filled his text with various clues and lets the reader fill in the text (the writerly activity of Roland Barthes). He provides a Chaos of text that the engaged reader uses to produce some kind of order that might be termed "understanding."

One of the most crucial uses of this technique in *The Recognitions* revolves around the fact that Wyatt ceases to be identified as the text progresses. Wyatt never dissipates (as does Thomas Pynchon's protagonist, Tyrone Slothrop, in *Gravity's Rainbow*), but he ceases to be identified. The perceptive reader is provided with some means--Wyatt's pattern of speech, his subjects and the known events of his life--by which to assemble the fragments, but it is order that lacks certainty and thus puts into play so many orders that it leads the reader toward chaos. Thus, Gaddis's work muddles the line that might be drawn between modernist works such as *Ulysses* and postmodernist works such as *Finnegans Wake*, fragmenting his protagonist by separating him from
the signifiers that might identify him, but still preserving some artistic order from which to perceive him. This balance is what enable Gaddis to lure his reader and and then surprise her/him.

The reader is forced to infer his identity from the clues. For example, when we read of Esme that "Simply all she talked about was going to Assisi, to run in and out the door of the Portiuncula church there and get just oodles of indulgences for someone she knows in Purgatory, someone who came down into the celestial sea on a rope..." (912), we are able to link this to Wyatt through his earlier statements about the celestial sea. This technique relies upon nuances of possibilities, not clear and obvious presentation, yet the reader of The Recognitions is able to make some sense out of it (even as that sense is problematized by a lack of certainty).

Wyatt is found somewhere in the background play of text, rather than in a foregrounded certainty. Thus, Esme's "someone you don't know" that she dreamed about and Otto's "someone you don't know" that he saw in the park can both be Wyatt, pulled out of the play of information and noise of the text (220). And this seemingly throw-away passage pulls Wyatt into the foreground. The noise of the conversation is the information of the text (if we are reading this text for, among other things, Wyatt's character). We sense that this is Wyatt being discussed, but are not told that it is because the words serve this dual purpose of being noise and information.
In another section of the text, Otto, on his way to see Esme, passes Anselm in the park and Anselm smiles (206). Otto is sent away for an hour by Esme because "it's so early" (206). On his return, he passes Stanley, who hangs his head (207). From the web of information Gaddis weaves in The Recognitions, we can pull together nuances — such as Anselm's attitude toward sex (enthusiasm), Stanley's attitude toward sex (guilt), Esme's sexuality, the need to get rid of Otto for an hour, and the path to and from Esme's house — and we start to make some "sense" of this scene. The narrative relies on the contiguity and hint and nuance to pull engage us with this possibility of the text (and it is only an uncertain possibility).

When Agnes Dei jumps from a building, we are only made certain it is her through the statement "even Minnie wouldn't know him" (741), an obvious linking of Agnes to her Mickey Mouse watch:

—Thank you, lady. Where'd you get the funny watch?
—Why, Mickey Mouse is my loyal faithful friend, said Agnes. —I can always trust him. (598)

This is a coming together of possibilities that never achieves certainty. Gaddis is able to force the reader into an engagement with the text where Chaos is essential to responding to the action.

This play enables Gaddis to reflect the reader's attention back on that information- without-meaning as it is reflected in the structure of society in the information age. Information has become so abundant and so divorced from meaning that someone can be talking about someone you care very deeply
about and you will be unaware that this is who is being discussed. The ties that bind humanity together are being lost in the flow of information, because it is information without meaning. Gaddis confronts us with this limited use of information and its implicit denial of meaning. In luring us into the flow of information of *The Recognitions*, he also points out the ways in which we are complicit in sustaining that flow.

There are other ways in which Gaddis complicates the notion of what in the text is real. He leaves the reader without any sure ground from which to make a determination of the authenticity of Wyatt’s art. And he does this even as he weaves a tale that manages to somehow explore the whole issue of the real and the forgery, which itself turns on the separation of information and meaning. The forgery, and its more avant garde cousin, the simulacrum, turn on the reproduction of information, without the reproduction of meaning. Gaddis provides his readers with an uncertain play of forgery and a procession of simulacra and thus undoes the detectivist desire to pull hints into certainty.

Gaddis allows seemingly impossible strings of coincidence to become quite probable events. In one scene, Otto mistakenly meets a man (Mr. Sinisterra—the unnamed man of the beginning of the text, whom we later learned killed Wyatt’s mother, and who later befriends Wyatt...) whom he thinks is his father and thereby comes into possession of a large sum of counterfeit money (506-520). In a world of information without meaning, information has its
own ability to generate new meanings (and thus Otto is able to recognize his "father" by the green scarf lost in a web of miscommunication). The reader can pull all of these pieces together, but their order is one of coincidence, an unstable order with which to make sense of the story.

Yet, among these and other complications of reality, the one which stands out in *The Recognitions* is the way Gaddis allows madness to enter into his text. Wyatt suffers a fever in his childhood that brings about a delirium that "for the rest of his life...never left his eyes" (51). Yet, Wyatt is not the only character whose sanity must be questioned. It is certainly possible to argue that every character in the novel has a tenuous relation to sanity—an idea which leads to a questioning of such categories. Anselm asks, "Isn't any madness preferable to...all this?" (457) and we must consider the "this" to which madness is preferable. The world itself is insane and every one of these characters has adapted to that reality.

Gaddis allows us into that insanity on several occasions, therein forcing the reader to attempt his/her act of mastery on the chaos of insanity. We enter into Esme's drug-induced flight into chaos (298-302, a section of which is quoted at the beginning of this chapter). It is a lyrical and philosophical section of the text. Out of this chaos comes Esme's poetry (and sometimes Rilke's poetry (277), which itself says something about the meaning within the chaos). Gaddis
creates a link of chaos and insanity and creativity and memory and poetry in this section of the text that he will continue to play with throughout *The Recognitions*.

In the rambling and schizophrenic letter left for Wyatt by Esme (471-473), we see again the link between lyricism and chaos. Esme's reflections and musings are unordered, but meaningful. The sense of the artist that plays through *The Recognitions* is pulled into a certain focus by this letter, which tells us that "the painter, speaking without tongue, is quite absurdly mad to do so, yet he is inescapably bound toward this" (472). Meaning comes not out of the order of words, but something else. It is toward that chaos that these letters plunge the reader.

The equally rambling and schizophrenic suicide note of Agnes (757-763) provides yet another such place of examining the meaning in chaos. The letter's authorship can only be deduced from an earlier letter Agnes had begun which was also addressed to Doctor Weisgall (695); its suicidal quality can only be guessed at from the deduction of suicide that emerges from the reference to her watch. Yet, this suicide note, too, leads the reader into a disorder that produces meaning from the orders it disorderedly meanders through.

In these scenes of chaos and insanity are some of the most "meaningful" passages of the novel. The schizophrenic writers may seem to skip randomly across thoughts, but, in doing so, they make connections within the text that pull
order out of its information. What then is the reader to do with such passages? How do they relate to the carefully ordered plot lines of *The Recognitions*?

To answer that, I think that it is necessary to confront the section of *The Recognitions* where Wyatt makes his delirious return home (it begins on 387 and *might* end around 400, although it may just continue on to the end of the book). This passage is probably the most important in the text. Wyatt's thoughts are seemingly random and schizophrenic. The easiest way to read this section is to gloss over its disorder on the assumption that it will not be important to the progression of the narrative. Yet, the more difficult reading, if it is made, will allow one of the most chaotic engagements that a reader can make with a text.

Johnston notes that

Wyatt's delirious 'talk' thus also functions as a simulacrum, gathering up only to disperse a complex of textual strands. The resulting 'textuality' is very unlike the kind of fragmentation and juxtaposition found in Pound's or Eliot's poetry, however, and seems closer to the art of assemblage, where techniques of collage and montage are used to transfer bits and pieces of 'culture' to new settings and configurations rather than to recreate an archetypal one. (Johnston 162)

This unordered (or disordered) flow of text pulls the orders of the text together and then confronts them with their limitations—their inability to deal with the chaos of the mind.

The reader must confront the choice that has been made regarding how to read this passage. "Schizophrenic, now near the edge can he approach? how much longer disdain simple ruses?" (393). We, as readers, may well be afraid to
approach that edge of sanity (although it is not really an edge in the sense of a clearly discernible line). Yet, we must do so if we are to read this section. The dismissing of this passage as unintelligible cannot be sustained because its chaos is meaningful, as well as essential to engaging the character of Wyatt. If the reader to continue the pursuit of mastery, he/she must pass through this delirium with Wyatt. The engagement with this text demands that we open ourselves to the madness of this section. Yet, the understanding that emerges from that madness tears apart the line between sanity and madness; the engagement with this section shows how madness is in some ways a part of the chaos that is a part of every act of reading. The reading of this text leads to an examination of the assumptions we make about the sharp edges that define the real. If we follow Wyatt's tortured thought processes through this maze of text, we will be forced into allowing an enormous load of disorder to build up in our thoughts without any means of ordering it. In that act, we will see that we, too, are capable of engaging in this possibility of disordered reality. It may be a very uncomfortable place to be, but in arriving there, we will truly allow the disorder to have free play and we will be able to have a moment of chaotic reading in which we allow ourselves to be open to a very important possibility of thought. There is a personal risk here that we usually defend against most strenuously. If we drop those defenses and engage with this text, we can come to an understanding of how great and wonderful are the possibilities inherent in the
chaos of reading. As Ehrenzweig points out: "The exact role of the superego's aggression in creative work will probably only be fully understood when have found out more about its role in causing mental illness. In many ways creativity and mental illness are opposite sides of the same coin" (212). Insanity reflects back on creativity and on how we engage with that creativity.

*The Recognitions* thus leads us to confront just how chaotic the act of reading a text really is. The challenges its presents to the orderly idea of narrative representation forces not merely a new reading for itself, but a new notion of reading. The Chaos of *The Recognitions* is not really something new at all, but a subversion of the assumptions about reading that have served to mask that which *The Recognitions* shows us: that reading is a dialectic of order and disorder that starts with neither term and ends with neither term, but is always already both orderly and disorderly. Order and disorder are not there because texts create them, but because they are always a part of the engagement of reader and text, part of the reader and part of the text and part of the encounter that the two have.

In assuming a modernist strategy of text (building orders into a chaotic world) to enact a postmodern desire, Gaddis constructs in *The Recognitions* what Johnston argues is a simulacrum of a novel. "Wyatt's failure to become an artist is only a prelude and necessary condition to his becoming a success as a forger of old master paintings of the Renaissance, and that his "story" in turn is
only an allegory of *The Recognitions*'s necessary failure as a conventional novel in order that it can become a successful "forgery" and intertextually generated modernist text" (Johnston 172). This enables Gaddis to write that double-voiced modernist/postmodernist novel that Johnston argues *The Recognitions* is. "[A]s a simulacrum, *The Recognitions* 'simulates' an external reality but, at the same time, throws into question the original/imitation or model/copy paradigm...In any case, to say that a novel is a simulacrum implies that in some way it reproduces the conventions of the novel without actually being a novel" (Johnston 175). It is a simulacrum of a modernist work, the simulated quality of which throws modernist strategies of mapping the textual space into question. "As each reader brings its various elements into resonant play, he or she is caught up too in another series. For finally, it is a property of the simulacrum to include in itself the differential point of view by including the observer" (Johnston 181).

So what might we gain from thus situating *The Recognitions* into this position? Certainly some sense that the line between modernism and postmodernism is not a line at all, but a continuum that enacts a dialectic. This continuity has led critics to question the distinction between modernism and postmodernism. The problem with these distinctions between modernism and postmodernism is that they are rooted in the logic of modernism, a logic of order and distinction that *The Recognitions* puts into question. In asking "Are modernism and postmodernism different?" a modernist question has been
formed. Representation is not put into question. Postmodernism has a different logic than modernism, but that difference is an elusive one (because the logic of postmodernism is not a refusal of the logic of modernism, but a different logic).

In leading us to the limits of orderly reading of texts, Gaddis exposes the limitations of the logic of modernism. "The Recognitions can direct our attention toward what is or should be of signal importance for any theory of postmodernism" (Johnston 191). What is of importance is that need to consider the mind, and its relation to the cultural logic. Postmodernism is not a presence, because its logic cannot be framed in terms of presence/absence. It is not necessary to make this distinction regarding The Recognitions because The Recognitions itself leads us into the problems of making such distinctions.

Placing The Recognitions in both the realm of modernism and the realm of postmodernism points out the non-exclusive nature of those categories. They are provisional categories, and useful for particular analyses, but they are too fluid to be made a place for defining texts.

Gaddis leads us back to the mind. He challenges his reader. By taking advantage of the ability of chaos to generate engagement (without the controlling orderly mastery of the text) he tries to break through defenses and confront a reader through/about his/her defenses against engagement with texts, engagements which place the subject at risk. This is not to suggest that the reader will not shore up his/her defenses in the face of The Recognitions. The
book's original reception indicates that this book did not fit into the model of the novel that the critics wanted to apply.

And that is why people read novels, to identify projections of their own unconscious. The hero has to be fearfully real, to convince them of their own reality, which they rather doubt. A novel without a hero would be distracting in the extreme. They have to know what you think, or good heavens, how can they know that you're going through 'some wild conflict, which is after all the duty of a hero. (247, emphasis mine)

This novel was distracting, and was rejected as being too impenetrable. Yet, it is that distraction that allows Gaddis to surprise the reader and thus engage the reader past his/her defenses. The satire of this novel is played out in that pushing of textual mastery to its limits. The reader is asked to question insanity, forgery, commodification of art, commercialism, and the loss of intersubjectivity in the flood of information in the modern world. In order to confront the reader with those questions, Gaddis tries to lure the reader in and surprise him/her from the chaos of the own unconscious. He relies on the possibility of chaos generating meaning, and shows that chaos is implicit even behind the orderly structuring of information.

*The Recognitions* then serves to focus the reader's attention on the nature of pulling meaning out of information. Information and noise each provide possibilities of meaning and engagement. How then do we cognitively map our way into the textual space founded in the play of information and noise? *J R*, where Gaddis takes this play of information and noise to another level, might be
the place to turn for an answer. On the other hand, it might also be necessary to turn back to the culture and its logic before constructing that map.
Chapter V

The Writing of Desire:
Marguerite Duras and Clarice Lispector

"Desire can never be deceived. Interests can be deceived, unrecognized, or betrayed, but not desire" (Deleuze and Guattari, Anti-Oedipus 257).

While the psychological defenses of the reader must be challenged in ways that Gaddis makes evident, the challenges to the act of reading must extend beyond the single reading subject and outward to the larger culture (and its language) which both constructs and is constructed by those reading subjects. Such a challenge will need to find a way to foreground for the reader the limitations imposed on the act of reading by the culture: in Western culture by the dominant male-centered and male-derived paradigm of reading as an act of intellectual mastery and control of typically male texts about typical male experience told from a typically male perspective. Opening the act of reading (and the definition of reading) to the possibilities of chaotic engagement that reading can actually assume, it becomes possible to show how the academic practices of reading are based on a limited and limiting conception of reading that reflects not the act of reading as a mental activity, but as a cultural one.
One such site of opposition is *l'Écriture féminine* as formulated by theorists such as Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, and Monique Wittig and as practiced by writers like Marguerite Duras and Clarice Lispector. Ann Rosalind Jones asks "How, then, are the institutions and signifying practices (speech, writing, images, myths, and rituals) of such a culture to be resisted?" (362). Jones answers that question by noting that "these French women [Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, and Monique Wittig] agree that resistance does take place in the form of *jouissance*, that is, in the direct reexperience of the physical pleasures of infancy and of later sexuality, repressed but not obliterated by the Law of the Father" (362). *L'Écriture féminine*, then, is the attempt to write (of) desire. As Deleuze and Guattari note (in the quote I have cited above), desire cannot be deceived. The writing of desire can however provide a site of opposition which can expose the deceptions of the culture, by foregrounding what has been excluded from reading, and by restoring to reading that which is always already a part of it (and always already a part of the chaos of the mind): desire, emotion, need, will. Reading is not just the intellectual recognition of message amid information, it is an act of engagement with a text. While some texts may limit the engagement to the intellectual, this is not a limitation of reading.

Once made, such a challenge to the authority and control imposed by the culture on the act of reading can be extended to postmodern literature (and
other cultural practices, as well). What is restored to reading by \textit{l'Écriture féminine} can be restored to the cultural practices of literature. Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth pursues just such an argument in \textit{Sequel to History}:

If, as I argue, Cixous's description of 'feminine' language describes the usage of postmodern novelists, a usage quite far from explicitly feminist writing, then one of two things follows. Either these values or formations belonging exclusively to women are gaining ground as women gain ground \textit{(if they are gaining ground)} or else a permanent disposition of language is changing its gender definition or even ceasing to be gendered. Postmodern writing operates in the context of the latter alternative, as it operates beyond various other sorts of dualism. To speak of the language of the body, in other words, far from being a new way to maintain gender distinctions, instead undoes them with a new emphasis on embodied language. Such language has a rhythm or impulse, and immediacy, an 'impetus,' to use Breton's word; it functions without the authoritative, objective voice and quite differently from the supposedly neutral instrument with which people of affairs exchange information. (161)

Ermarth would seem to be arguing that the writing of desire serves not only to give voice to that which has been denied a voice, but also serves to transform the culture as it comes to listen to that voice.

Information. And noise. What cold and neutral terms these are. Is this play of information and noise literature? No. Literature is not merely play of information. Words on the page (a place of information and noise) may be the medium of literature, but the space those texts create are the site of engagement with a text (whether through progression or through a sense of the risk of subjectivity). The space of literature is not a place of orderly control of texts, it is a place of possibility. Confrontation with that possibility (whether the personal
confrontation of the reader’s defenses or the cultural confrontation of the structures of control) is what makes the reading of certain texts a challenge to the reading subject. This is not something brought to reading by these texts, but something brought out of it.

I would like to turn now to two writers who explore the relation of language to desire in their works: Marguerite Duras and Clarice Lispector. Each in her own way challenges the limitations that have been imposed on literature and the possibility of using the exploration of those limitations to express the seemingly inexpressible realm of desire.

*The Malady of Death*

In this short novel, Marguerite Duras plunges right into desire. It is a lyric moment of deep sexuality and need. As with Woolf, Duras looks to challenge the notion of storytelling as place of mastery and order and seeks instead to expose the desires that underlie the desire for stories.

It is a novel designed to implicate.

"You wouldn’t have known her..." (1, emphasis mine) The opening phrase of the text establishes the object of the gaze of this text, and as is all too often true in Western culture, the object of desire is female. The reader is configured into the act of gazing.
"...you'd have seen her everywhere at once, in a hotel, in a street, in a train, in a bar, in a book..." (1, emphasis mine) And the omnipresence of the woman as object of desire is the place where this text will enact its exposure of desire.

More importantly: "...in yourself, your inmost self, when your sex grew erect in the night..." (1, emphasis mine) The gaze is male, for it is male desire of the woman that will be explored in this text.

What follows is a story, but one stripped of all but the play of desire. This text is not about an event, it is not about character, it is about desire. There are characters here, but they are nameless, faceless characters who serve more as the site of desire. There are male desire and female as object of that desire situated within characters, but in characters such as Virginia Woolf creates in The Waves. They are characters "always about-to-be, endlessly deferred" (Docherty 169). They are characters, in the way in which character becomes redefined in Woolf as a site of intersubjective engagement. They are characters in as much as the concept of character can be made to expose and challenge desire.

"The body's completely defenseless, smooth from face to feet. It invites strangulation, rape, ill usage, insult, shouts of hatred, the unleashing of deadly and unmitigated passions" (16). This is the telling of desire. Is it a story? If we can bend the concept of story to include the telling of desire, then this is a story.
Yet, in exactly that demand, that bending, *The Malady of Death* illustrates that the telling of desire is an part of what we engage with when we read. Words on a page are received into the mind and engaged not as words, but as that which those words evoke. We can read desire, because the texts enter into a chaos always already complicated by desires. Mastery of a text, understanding of its meaning, is only a part of what we do in the act of engaging with a text. Our reaction to a text is also a reaction to its ability to write desire. The writing of desire is a part of what makes (some) texts challenges to our subjectivity.

"You look at the malady of your life, the malady of death. It's on her, on her sleeping body, that you look at it" (32-33). In the attempt to write desire, Duras attempts to position us so that we are implicated in these moments (although the moments implicate their readers in varieties of ways, because the desires of readers are not exactly this desire).

There are, however, limitations to the attempt at writing desire. The literary practices available may not be adequate to the writing of desire. Language cannot completely convey that which is not understood in language alone (even as desire cannot escape from being constructed within language). How, then can the cultural practices of literature be used to write desire? One way is to break down the boundaries that separate artistic forms. Duras pursues this avenue in her attempt to challenge the practice of writing a text: she reinscribes the text as "drama."
"Acting is replaced here by reading. I always think nothing can replace the reading of a text, that no acting can ever equal the effect of a text not memorized" (57).

What can be gained by the reading aloud of the text? Intonation can be gained. The words can be given a aural quality that heightens the effect of the words. The brain then receives not just the words, but also their sound, and the way that sound is given nuance by the voice of the actor. In *Finnegans Wake*, James Joyce explored how that readability of the text can heighten its possibilities of meaning (even as it also short-circuits other possibilities of meaning). Words on a page are a way of expressing desire, but desire goes such much beyond what can be expressed in words, that Duras is seeking some way of supplementing those words. The supplement will be used to try heighten the expression of desire that the text creates. Why?

"The stage should be low, almost at floor level, so that the young woman's body is completely visible to the audience" (58).

The word "her" is transformed here by the presence of a real actress. Woman as object, and the desire that she inspires in the male "spectator," are translated from a concept brought to life by words, to a concept augmented by an actual body which can be watched and desired.

The form of drama (especially one such as described here, where scene is minimal and character is foregrounded) takes the metaphorical gaze of the
text and turns it into the real gaze of an audience at the body of a real woman, collapsing the distance between the fictional construct and the subjectivity in the audience which is being challenged by this exposure of desire. If the purpose of the writing of desire is to make the reader engage that desire (not just to have a reader recognize that the characters have desires), then a writing must be found which is adequate to that engagement. Duras thus "writes" into the text a dramatic form which tries to compel its reader to both accept the text as text, and yet understand the text as also being drama. Even though it is not possible for this text to be both of the things it tries to be, the question must be asked "is it possible to engage the text as both things?" That possibility is what The Malady of Death explores.

Blue Eyes, Black Hair

What if it was desired that the narrative be foregrounded in this story? That a larger frame of story would be constructed around this desire? That text might be Blue Eyes, Black Hair.

How do we "map" The Malady of Death onto Blue Eyes, Black Hair if each is slippery and elusive? How does the existence of each serve to create a play between the texts? Why might Marguerite Duras try to recapture some sense of the desire that was written into The Malady of Death?
In *Blue Eyes, Black Hair*, the drama(tic) form of the text is not left as a reinterpreting afterthought, but foregrounded right from the onset: "A summer evening, says the actor, seems to be at the heart of the affair" (1).

The moment of the first gaze of *The Malady of Death* is reconstructed within a third-person narrative:

Among those watching the scene in the lounge from the road behind the hotel is a man. He makes up his mind, crosses the road and goes toward and open window.

Just after he crosses the road, no more than a few seconds, she, the woman in the story enters the lounge. She has come in through the door opening into the grounds.

When the man reaches the window, she's already there, a few yards away among the other women.

From where he's standing the man couldn't see her face even if he tried. She is looking at the door that leads to the beach.

She's young. She's wearing white tennis shoes. You can see her long, lithe body, the whiteness of her skin this sunny summer, her black hair. You could only see her face in shadow, even from a window opening on the sea. She's in white shorts, with a black silk scarf tied carelessly around her waist. A dark blue hairband must hint at the color of her eyes. But her eyes are out of sight. (2-3)

And the text of anonymous sceneless desire between the posited male reader and the female object of his desire (*The Malady of Death*) becomes transformed into a narrative with scene and characters and a story (*Blue Eyes, Black Hair*).

It would seem that Duras is attempting in *Blue Eyes, Black Hair* to see if desire can be written in a novel. Or perhaps it is an attempt to see how the novel relates to the writing of desire. If a novel is engaged differently than a more lyrical text such as *The Malady of Death*, then it might well be that the
writing of desire requires a different writing than a novel can sustain. Yet, I have already argued that desire is a part of the chaotic engagement of reader and text. While novels need not write desire, the exclusion of the writing of desire from the novel is an imposed interpretative limitation (a limitations of the orders we apply to "understand" texts) rather than a limitation of the ability of the mind to engage such texts. The problem would then lie in the interpretative community and the internalization of that community's practices by the reader.

*Blue Eyes, Black Hair* still attempts to break down imposed limitations of form that would limit itself as a novel. When the words of the story become inadequate, when the narrative becomes inadequate to expressing the desire, the form is changed.

"She gives him her lips to kiss. Tells him he's embracing the other, the stranger. she says, 'You're kissing his naked body, his lips, his skin all over, his eyes.' Until day dawns they mourn the mortal grief of the summer night" (11).

The words are not adequate to the desire that this moment attempts to capture, and so the senses must be extended and the dramatic form takes over:

*If the story were acted in the theater, it would be like this:*

*Blackout in the auditorium. The play begins.*

*The scene says the actor, is a kind of reception room furnished sparsely but with sumptuous, comfortable English furniture of dark mahogany: chairs, tables, a few armchairs. On the tables are lamps, cigarettes, ashtrays, carafes of water, glasses and several copies of the same book. One every table is a vase containing two or three roses. It looks like a place that has just been deserted. Funereal.*
Gradually a scent becomes noticeable, a scent which started out as that of incense and roses but which has now become the almost imperceptible smell of fine sand. A long time is supposed to have elapsed in between.

The description of the setting, the smell of sex, the furniture and the mahogany is to be read by the actors in the same tone as the story. Even if, in some theaters where the play is performed, the actual setting doesn’t correspond to the description given here, the description remains the same. In some cases it is up to the actors to make the smell, costumes and colors at their disposal accord with the form and content of the words.

It must always be the same funereal room, fine sand and dark mahogany. (11-12)

This passage is intended to bring to the words of the story the vitality that words alone lack. The passage is expected to open up the affective possibilities of the words, not to take over for them (thus the accord of scene to word). "None of the things that happen between the man and the woman will be shown; none of them will be acted. The reading of the book will act as theater for the story" (25).

The fact that words on a page are inadequate forces the text to play with form in such a way to bring about the sense of desire that words have within their possibility. Words can do what Duras wants, but only if their are twisted in a way to force the reader to confront that desire (after all, even the limitations of words on a page are provided here in words on a page). This is not a drama, but the possibilities and potentialities of drama must be evoked for the words to express the force of the desire. The very narrative of the text then must encompass the ability of narrative to break itself open to rupture of the story so that the desire
can be told. Form then becomes fluid, flowing as it must to convey desire. The
definition of the novel then becomes on based on its possibilities, rather than on
its exclusions. Narrative can tell subjectivity (as Woolf shows with *The Waves*)
and it can tell desire.

    Why tell this story? Why construct this narrative? Desires must be told.

    She sleeps.
    He weeps.
    He weeps over a distant image of the summer night. He
needs her, needs her there in that room, so he can weep for the
foreigner with the blue eyes, black hair.
    Without her in the room the image would be barren, would
dry up his heart and his desire. (46-47)

Desire must confront the Other. And the telling of desire must be a confrontation
with the Other, so that the subjectivity of the reader can be placed at risk.

Literature must have the ability to write this, too. The telling of stories must
include the telling of desire (and the reader must be able to engage that desire,
if that is what is being told).

    The relationship of *The Malady of Death* to *Blue Eyes, Black Hair* is such
that the play of the two texts exposes both the intensity of desire that can be
expressed in literature and the relation of that desire to the desire to construct
stories around them. *The Malady of Death* is, in a sense, the pure desire of the
story in *Blue Eyes, Black Hair*. Yet, the relationship is not that simple. *Blue
Eyes, Black Hair* shows how that desire can be complicated by the story.
Arguably, character is an essential aspect of the reaction to literature. Narrative is a powerful way to react to and relate to character (especially if that "narrative" is not a term which excludes the lyric, as I noted in the section on Virginia Woolf above). The story of Blue Eyes, Black Hair thus serves as a means of "characterizing" the universal male and female of The Malady of Death. The woman becomes a subject as well as an object and her subjectivity can enact a powerful critique of the cultural construction of woman as object. While a character can serve as a place to distance reader from text (another Other to deflect some of the challenge of the other from the reading subject), character can also be a place where the challenge of reader and Other can be deepened.

Still, it may not yet be this easy to reconcile desire and language.

The Stream of Life

In The Stream of Life Lispector writes a lyrical text that, even more overtly than Duras' texts, wrestles with the need to find a writing adequate to desire. The narrator/protagonist of The Stream of Life is writing a text that, through stops and starts and struggles attempts to find a way to write (about) desire.

Let me tell you... I'm trying to capture the fourth dimension of the now-instant, which is so fleeting it no longer is because it has already become a new now-instant, which also is no longer. Each thing is an instant in which it is. Each thing has an instant in which it is. I want to take possession of the thing's is. Those
in instants that elapse in the air I breathe: in fireworks exploding silently in space. I want to possess the atoms of time. And I want to capture the present which, by its very nature is forbidden me: the present flees from me, the moment escapes me, the present is myself forever in the now. (3-4)

Lispector's narrator wants to be able to capture the intensity and instantaneousness of the moment, and it is the word that she has chosen to use to capture it. *The Stream of Life* follows the narrator's attempt at capturing that moment, of expressing its desire.

*The Stream of Life*, Flora H. Schiminovich writes, "is a novel made of fragments, of impulses, a series of displacements and disseminations that reflect life as a dynamic and constant process. The narrative form of instants, of the division and fragmentation of the instant, a time that resists a linear and orderly chronology" (110). The text attempts to capture the flow of the stream of life. This flow of life, of possibility without linearity, reflects also the dynamics of the mind. Lispector engages the reader in presence rather than progression. This is not the presence that Derrida warns against, but a thing which is the moment, not as a part of the progression of moments, but frozen. The moment is not fixed; it does not exist in a full presence that denies absence. Rather, the moment is elusive and uncertain, but is still the place where the reader can be engaged.

Hélène Cixous points out that "*Agua viva* is not calculated in mathematical fashion. It is, as Clarice constantly reminds us, a text that follows
itself, which lets itself be led, which takes risks with the acacias and is not afraid to let itself go" (Reading with Clarice Lispector 23). The text itself flows with the stream of life. The flow is not lost, but flow is not progression. Watching a single point in a stream, one can see the flow of moments, but the progression of the stream can only be observed by following the stream's course. Reading this text, then, is the watching of the moment of the narrator's struggle to write desire.

"I write you completely whole and I feel a pleasure in being and my pleasure of you is abstract, like the instant. And it's with my entire body that I paint my pictures and on the canvas fix the incorporeal--me, body-to-body with myself." (4)

Lispector's narrator is searching for the language to write this desire. And the search is reflected in the narration. "Continuously transforming events and ideas into the sensations they elicit in the mind of the female protagonist," Earl E. Fitz notes, "Água viva is close to being a prose poem in its metaphoric expressiveness. As pure and successful an example of the lyrical novel form as Lispector ever wrote" (Clarice Lispector 84). It is in the mind of the protagonist that this possibility of writing desire is being played out. The progression of this text is the progression of the mind as it struggles to create a writing that escapes progression. And in this seeming paradox, is the place where we engage this text. We engage not the paradox, but both the possibilities and the limitations
that contradict each other. In that ability to engage both rests the possibility of
writing desire. The mind is not limited to the way we interpret language, and
even language itself is more fluid and plural than the practices of the interpretive
community might allow.

"Can what I've painted on this canvas be phrased in words? Just as
much as the mute word can be implicit in the musical sound" (5).

The engagement with the text is an engagement with possibility, with
chaos. The limitations that orderly language acts may present are only arbitrary.
The mind can receive the worded painting and the musical word without
rejecting them for the inherent contradiction implied there. Only in the act of
interpretation is the contradiction called into question.

So Lispector's narrator explores the possibilities of language.
I also have to write you because your domain is that of discursive
words and not the directness of my painting. I know that my
sentences are primary, I write with too much love for them and this
love fills in their gaps, but too much love harms a work. This isn't a
book because this isn't how one writes. Is what I write a single
climax? My days are a single climax: I live on the edge. (6)

Herein lies part of the reason that this narrator is trying to write desire.
Language has dialogic possibilities which make it a useful site for intersubjective
engagement.

The dialogic, as M. M. Bakhtin describes it, is an ordered articulation out
of a chaotic consciousness inserted into the chaotic medium in a chaotic
message. The articulation is therefore more plural and possible than its
specifically ordered articulation might seem to imply. There is much which is not
(cannot be) said in words, but words have the ability to generate something
beyond the information. The process is one of dynamic engagement:

In the actual life of speech, every concrete act of understanding is
active: it assimilates the word to be understood into its own
conceptual system filled with specific objects and emotional
expressions, and is indissolubly merged with the response, with a
motivated agreement or disagreement. To some extent, primacy
belongs to the response, as the activating principle: it creates the
ground for understanding, it prepares the ground for an active and
engaged understanding. Understanding and response are
dialectically merged and mutually condition each other; one is
impossible without the other (Bakhtin, 282).

This theory of the dialogic in the novel gives some sense of what Lispector's
narrator is attempting to express through language. The expression of desire
has within it the activating principle of response: the engagement of the reader
as subject.

I'm still afraid to depart from logic because I fall into the
future: the invention of today is my only way of establishing the
future....Anyway, what harm is there in my departing from logic?
I'm dealing with primal matter. I'm after what's behind thought. It's
useless trying to classify me: I simply slip away not leaving,
categories pin me down no longer. (7)

The logic the narrator seeks to escape in the binary logic that engenders
paradox. The logic creates categories through binary inclusions and exclusions
(something either is or is not of a category). Yet the writing of desire demands
that such logic be escaped. Paradox must be allowed to limit the possibility of writing desire.

The language is already limited by an interpretive practice that assumes words to be information, rather than a medium for engagement with that information. As Ingarden noted, the cognition of literature includes an engagement with the textual space created by that information. If the need to fix the hard certainty of meaning becomes the purpose or reading, then the fluidity is lost.

"And here I force myself into the severity of a terse language, I force myself into the nudity of a white skeleton free of humors. But the skeleton is free of life, and while I'm alive I tremble all over" (7-8). The flow of life, the flow of its humors, is translated into the harsh rigidity of bone. Yet, the mind has the ability to engage with the humors implied by those bones. And therein lies the possibility of writing that trembling.

Language is dialogic. In dialogue, in the intersubjectivity that it implies, exists the possibility of engagement that goes beyond the seeming limitations of a cold language.

"Listen to me, listen to the silence. What I tell you is never what I tell you but something else. Capture this thing that escapes me, and I nonetheless live off of it and am on the surface of brilliant darkness" (8).
The "you" must read the desire that has been inscribed in the words of the text. The response of the reader is a necessary aspect of the intersubjectivity which is the engagement with a text.

"More than an instant, I want its flowing" (9).

This is the difficulty. The capturing of an instant, the writing of moment, would seem to negate the possibility of capturing its flow. Werner Heisenberg's uncertainty principle starts to make its presence felt. If the moment is captured, its flow cannot be known. If the flow is to be captured, the single moment cannot be known. Again, there is the paradox of binary logic. How do you put flow into language? How does a writer escape the binary logic? The writer writes into a different logic, one capable of sustaining the relationship which the binary logic terms paradoxical. In this logic paradox does not exclude the possibility of engagement. The human mind has the ability to read paradox. F. Scott Fitzgerald argues that a great mind has the ability "to hold two opposing ideas in mind at the same time" (69). I would argue that such minds merely escape from a cultural logic that cannot live with paradox and perform an act that all minds are capable of performing (and with more than two contradictory things at a time). The logic of mind is not the logic of the culture, although this relationship
is more complicated than this might make it seem (I will pick up on this issue of logic in the chapter on *Christopher Unborn*).

As Hélène Cixous points out "*Agua viva* is a text that can produce resistance and anguish in the reader because it is governed by a different order. One could say that from the point of view of classical order, it is completely disorganized. But as poets know and keep repeating, the law holds only through its name and by its name" (*Reading with Clarice Lispector* 11). Writers, poets, and artists (and a lot more other human beings than often get credit for it) have long realized that the mind is capable of more than the cultural logic (and its cultural interpretive practices) seem to allow.

It is necessary to escape from that cultural logic if desire is to be written. The reader must be able to read that desire in the cold words on the page.

"Whoever wishes may accompany me: the road is long, it's painful but it's lived. Because now I speak to you in earnest: I'm not playing with words. I embody myself in voluptuous and unintelligible phrases that spiral outward beyond words. And a silence arises subtly from the clash of sentences" (14). The intersubjectivity that is the result of the "lived" engagement with a text relies on the ability of the mind to receive the nuances of the words, the possibilities that lurk beyond the information content of those words.

Writing, then, is the way followed by someone who uses words like bait: a word fishing for what is not a word. When that non-word--the whatever's between the lines--bites the bait, something's been written. Once the between the lines has been hooked, you can throw the word away with relief. But there the
analogy ends: the non-word, in biting the bait, incorporates it. What saves you, then, is to write absent-mindedly. (14)

John Briggs argues that the creative mind must be allowed to wander undirected to various nuances. Frederic Jameson notes that misdirection leads to possibilities of engagement. Implicit in each of these is the idea that words are bait. The writing of desire is just such a baiting of the reader.

"I can have the freedom to write such as the following: 'Pilgrims, merchants and shepherds led their caravans toward Tibet, and the roads were hard and primitive.' With this sentence, I give birth to a scene, as in the flash of a camera" (15),

The writing of desire is a writing into the space of the text. It is created and lived in that space. The cognition of the text, the engagement with the text, relies on the space of text created by the words, a place of chaos and possibility, a place where desire can be engaged.

"I want the profound organic disorder that nonetheless triggers the intuiting of an underlying order." (19)

Only in the intuiting, only in that entry into the space of the text, is it possible to get at things which cannot be explained in words.

"Let me speak about nursing. They talk of the milk letting down. What does that mean? It wouldn't do any good for me to explain because the
explanation requires another explanation which would lead to another explanation and which would arrive again at the mystery. But I know about the it things of nursing children." (22-23).

The words can only be the bait for engaging the experience implicit in those words.

"This isn't a story because I don't know stories as such, but only know how to keep on speaking and doing: it's a story of instants that flash by, like fugitive tracks seen from a train window" (59).

This isn't a story, yet it is a story of instants. Once again there seems to be a paradox. Yet, the mind can read into paradox and engage this text.

"What I write you is a this. It won't stop: it continues on.

Look at me and love me. No: look at yourself and love yourself. That's what's right." (79).

The Reading of Desire

If these are the struggles of writers trying to write desire, what, then, is there in the reading of desire that compels these struggles. Certainly, one of the things that this writing has attempted to do is to challenge the older orders of
representation in which control and mastery of narratives was the goal of storytelling and storyreceiving. The writing of desire challenges that concept of writing and reading.

This writing of desire is the writing of the body: l'Écriture féminine. Such writing "advocates, and therefore valorizes, disorder and looseness instead of order and tightness which are... men's modes of writing" (Sherzer 157). The writing of desire demands a literature which is fluid and chaotic, capable of creating a space of literature which is not a moment of mastery, but is a moment of intersubjectivity. Desire is not something to be "understood," it is something to be engaged. "Focusing on women's experiences," these are texts "in which plot is almost nonexistent" (Sherzer 163).

This challenge and critique of the cultural logic of language reflects ideas raised in other poststructuralist writings. Fitz notes "how illustrative Lispector's work is of the critical investigations done by such theoreticians as Roland Barthes (Le Degré zéro de l'écriture), Maurice Blanchot (La Livre à venir), Jacques Lacan (Écrits), and George Steiner (Language and Silence), all of whom focus on the phenomenon of muteness in the literature of the post-World War II era" ("A Discourse of Silence" 421). The ability of writing to communicate the silence (a possibility explored earlier by Woolf, as well) requires a rejection of models of writing and language that rely on control and certainty.

Such a rejection turns the critique on the culture whose logic is at issue:
For what Lispector may be achieving by appropriating what is essentially phallocentric discourse and plaguing the discourse with narrative disruptions and inconsistencies is nothing short of an undermining of the dominant language of sexual indifference—the phallocentric language—which is responsible for the oppression of Brazil's Macabéas (and Lispectors, too) and for the failures of the linguistic sign" (Galvez-Breton 63).

The way in which culture uses language says more about the culture than about the human minds within that culture. The mind can read in ways that go beyond what the culture defines as "reading." We must therefore look closely the relation of language and culture.

Hélène Cixous talks of human economies:

We deal with economies said to be human—to take back the Freudian economic model—with libidinal economies, our own personal economies of affective and psychic investment, our ways of winning and losing, of possessing, of stripping away, of desiring, which all have more or less specific traits. When I speak of libidinal economy, I speak of the way in which we manage our existence, accept poverty, misery. I speak of the way in which we transform into poverty, misery, or wealth, the way in which we acquire goods. I speak of all the movements in our different ways of having or of acquiring. (Reading with Clarice Lispector 156)

Those economies are reflected in the literature of a culture. It is those economies which are under critique by the writing of desire.

Why has this critique been linked to the writing of (predominately French) women authors? "Despite similarities, it is undeniable that women bring a distinct perspective to the panorama of contemporary French writing. I am not claiming here that only women can write like Cixous, Duras and Wittig or that only women can write about certain topics. I am pointing out that women have
written about certain topics and men have not" (Sherzer 161). Duras and Lispector have written texts exploring the writing of desire. There are obvious sociopolitical reasons why this need to challenge the literature of the culture would particularly find its voice through women writers. As we see in *The Malady of Death*, as we have seen in so many other cultural critiques of recent decades, it is women who are objects in this culture and men who are subjects. Having been excluded from subjectivity by the logic of the culture, these writers have questioned the logic that empowers such a denial. "Between subjectivity on the one hand and the community on the other, these works influence the ways in which we understand the construction (or deconstruction) of 'woman in the text'" (Schiminovich 113).

This same argument can be extended to anyone whose subjectivity has been marginalized by the position of being Other in this culture. The logic which creates Other, the binary logic of categories, must be challenged so that subjectivity can find its voice. And that voice is an intense and urgent voice, as we have seen in the works of Duras and Lispector.

Susan Rubin Suleiman points out that this voice of critique is double-voiced. It belongs to the poststructuralist critique, and yet is a critique particular in its situatedness in a feminist ideology. She writes that a double allegiance characterizes much of the best contemporary work by women: on the one hand, an allegiance to the formal experiments and some of the cultural aspirations of the historical male avant-gardes; on the other hand, an allegiance to the feminist
critique of dominant sexual ideologies, including the sexual ideology of those same avant-gardes. (Suleiman xvii)

If there seems to be a contradiction here, it is because these writers are still being read into a cultural logic which is binary. In this logic, these writers must either be poststructuralists and critique the possibility of saying anything, or be feminists and try to challenge "real" problems in the sexual ideology of the culture.

These has lead some theorists, such as Judith Butler, to posit the need for provisional identities, from which political actions can be taken, even as those positions are recognized as problematic in a poststructuralist framework. Thus, we find ways to live and act within the contradictions.

We must extend this possibility of acting within contradictions to literature. The writing of desire that Duras and Lispector are exploring is not a return to full presence in literature. We know that "the representations within which we recognize ourselves are clearly manufactured elsewhere, at the point of the discourse's origin" (Silverman 197). We read into cultural practices that we know are founded in a discourse that is founded in a culture. There is no attempt to find a way to make room in the logic of the culture. It is an attempt to write into the gaps and holes in that logic, and thus to expose the inherent flaws of that logic.

Duras and Lispector seek to expose the desires that underlie the desire for stories, and therein recuperate for literature the ability to write desire. In
doing so, they enact a powerful critique of the emotional poverty of the culture that excludes desire from its writing (and/or from the interpretive practices it uses to engage with that writing). What emerges is a writing which can be engaged, because it is a writing which is human and written into all the possibilities of engagement that the chaos of the human mind opens into.

This working through of the possibility of the writing of desire points out a problem with the cultural logic of Western culture (or of late capitalism, in Jameson’s terms). In so doing, it points to other possibilities of logic that may be more in keeping with the chaotic nature of the human mind. Postmodernism is the place where such writing is explored and made more obvious, thus working to transform the logic of the culture.
Chapter VI

The Fuzzy Logic of Late Postmodernism:

Carlos Fuentes' *Christopher Unborn*

As I have indicated above, there is a need for postmodernism to be able to challenge psychological defenses (both personal and cultural) and to provide a means for examining the power relations inherent in the culture. Postmodernism constructs a practice that attempts to provide such a challenge by carnivalizing the old assumptions of the culture, thereby exposing the inconsistencies of the binary model of logic that underpins the cultural logic.

The binary opposition itself must be reconsidered. It may at first glance seem that this binary opposition in the culture has been discarded by insertion of deconstruction into the culture, but, in fact, it has only been displaced. Deconstruction is only one movement of a larger dialectic of art and culture. Deconstruction attempts to argue an idea of indeterminacy, but thus creates (as this dialectic always will) a new opposition. In this case it has been an opposition which sees meaningfulness being thrown out with determinacy. Deconstruction (and poststructuralist theories, in general) are perceived as presenting not a challenge to certainty, but an epistemology of uncertainty, that,
in its binary opposition to certainty, must lead away from meaning and toward
meaninglessness. Deconstruction, perceived as an opposition, rather than a
challenge has led to the cultural re-construction of an anti-deconstruction
backlash: the only binary response that the cultural logic can manifest.

The cultural logic is one constituted in binary oppositions and in control
that emerges out of the hierarchical nature of many of those oppositions. This
cultural logic has considerable power to maintain its foundation in classical
logical constructions of binary oppositions, reducing forces such as dialectical
interrogation to a series of binary moves, rather than dealing with what "series"
implies about the power of the non-binary aspect of the interrogation.

While the cultural logic has tried to marginalize and neutralize
deconstruction as a force of cultural interrogation, postmodernism (which in
certain ways is the cultural manifestation of the assumptions of
poststructuralism) has had to find a way to deal with the challenges of a
deconstructive artistic practice. Postmodernism has responded to the need to
enact deconstruction on/in the cultural logic by the creation of the idea of
provisional subject positions: deconstructed positions of political purpose.
These provisional positions accept the elusiveness of certainty that
deconstruction illustrates, while still trying to find a way to argue psychological or
political challenges. The category allows for a challenge that is always already
itself in the process of being challenged. What makes these positions hard to
convey, is that they are standing in relation to a cultural logic which cannot support them, for they violate its assumptions.

Perhaps it would be better for postmodern art to throw out the cultural logic entirely, since it is founded in binary logic. Instead, it might be better to think of the postmodern period as being defined by fuzzy logic, a branch of mathematical logic which restores the middle excluded by Aristotelian logic.

Umberto Eco, in *The Poetics of the Open Work*, argues that multivalued logics are now gaining currency, and these are quite capable of incorporating indeterminacy as a valid stepping-stone in the cognitive process. In this general intellectual atmosphere, the poetics of the open work is peculiarly relevant: it posits the work of art stripped of necessary and foreseeable conclusions, works in which the performer's freedom functions as part of the discontinuity which contemporary physics recognizes, not as an element of disorientation, but as an essential phase of all scientific verification procedures and also as the verifiable pattern of events in the subatomic world. (15).

Eco seems aware of the tense relationship of classical logic and postmodernism, although he seems to want to finally give the upper hand to classical logic, with indeterminacy relegated to the "stepping-stone" of the process leading to classically logical determinations—ignoring the series and concentrating on the steps. What Eco describes is multiple classical positions as opposed to fuzzy logic. Yet, Eco is right in asserting that "multivalued logics are now gaining currency." He is right because postmodernism takes as its logic fuzzy logic.

Of course, it is necessary to ask why postmodernism should challenge the cultural logic of Western societies. The cultural logic leads either to nostalgia
for a false certainty (in the rejecting of postmodern practices) or into a play of meaninglessness that is the opposite of that certainty (in the model of postmodern practices that can exist within the binary cultural logic). The fuzzy logic of postmodernism is neither of those things (although it can be either one, or even both). Before I construct this logic, I want to begin with a place where it comes to the foreground for me: Carlos Fuentes' *Christopher Unborn*. This a thoroughly postmodern novel with an urgent message. How is possible to have a postmodern urgency? Let's take a look at the novel.

Why *Christopher Unborn*? *Christopher Unborn* is about Mexico and a literature adequate to its tragedy and its desires:

The important thing is that the syntheses never finish, that no one save himself, ever, from the contradiction of being in one precise place and one precise time and nevertheless thinking about a time and place that are infinite, denying the end of experience, maintaining open the infinite possibilities for observing the infinite events in the unfinished world and transforming them into history, narrative, language, experience, infinite reading . . . (63).

Fuentes is seeking to construct a postmodern novel that will be adequate to the dual demands of Mexico's social situation and the elusive realities of the postmodern world in which that Mexico is situated. In examining this novel, I will try to construct some sense of the fuzzy logic that informs its practices.

A useful place to begin the analysis of *Christopher Unborn* might be one its (acknowledged) literature ancestors: Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*. *Tristram Shandy* is written prior to the co-opting of the novel by the logic of the culture. When this novel was written there were no assumptions about literary
practice that needed to be shattered, because the novel has not yet been defined within such a framework. It thus existed in a situation of narrative possibility. The similarities between this possibility of narrative and the postmodern narrative that Fuentes constructs illustrates that the logic of the culture is not the logic of the novel. The novel has possibilities beyond the binary reasoning of the culture, and it is an interpretative practice of the culture which reduces those possibilities, rather than a characteristic of the novel as an artistic form. This is not to say that the novel cannot be written within the cultural logic (or even that a postmodern novel cannot be written within the cultural logic), but rather to suggest that the novel (postmodern or not) has logical possibilities that enable it to exist as a critique of the culture.

*Tristram Shandy*, among its various other techniques, inserts images into the text and grants them a position within the act of the narrative, rather than as supplement to the narrative (these are not illustrations, but are narration of the events of the novel on the same level of narration as the words themselves). It is only when certainty (a cultural assumption) is made the measure of the act of narration that words are given a primacy in narration of literature and images are relegated to the sideline, to serve as supplements.

*(Tristram Shandy 576)* is not an illustration of a textual description of the flourish, but *is* the description of that flourish. Postmodern texts use such injections of image into text (e.g. the "Night Lessons" section
of *Finnegans Wake* discussed in an earlier chapter), but use them as a rupture of the conception of narrative that has come out of the binary cultural logic. The idea that postmodern texts use such images to rupture the ideas of order that dominate the interpretations of texts does not mean that such images necessarily are drawing upon a binary logic of opposition. In *Tristram Shandy*, the images are not oppositions to words, but, rather, both images and words are part of a continuum of signification. The logic of *Tristram Shandy* is fuzzy logic.

In *Christopher Unborn*, the rupture is not intended to question the very form of the narrative, for that questioning is now already implicit within the postmodern culture, so, if Fuentes is to do anything new with the rupture, he must go beyond the self-reflexivity of the postmodern image and enter a narrative beyond postmodernism which knows that question and yet wants to see what can then be done with that question. He does not make rupture the purpose of the image (for that simply opposes the cultural logic, and in opposing reinforces it), but instead reestablishes the image within the fuzzy logic of narrative possibilities that such images had in *Tristram Shandy*. Play with the text does not then become simply a challenge to order, but can instead become a play which enacts its own textual logic. Julio Ortega argues that Fuentes thus creates a narrator capable of both play and intensity:

> The narrator is possessed by his creative fury to such a degree that, even when he seems to become repetitive or excessive, he always recaptures the vivacity of the story thanks to the
naturalness of his spoken language....[The] freedom to express is also the freedom to remake language. Everything said here is resaid; it passes through plays on words, through the pun, in a systematic way....Here, however, we are dealing with a language broken loose from the interior of historical consciousness, in order to carnivalize its unrest, suture its wound, promote its transformation (287-288).

The transformation that Ortega describes is that next move in a cultural dialectic of chaos and order that allows Fuentes to use, and thus complicate, the chaos of postmodernism by writing into the logic of postmodernism.

Fuentes desires also take into account the changing of the culture itself: now that the contemporary postmodern culture has accepted chaos back into the logic of the culture, the chaos of postmodernism no longer looks chaotic. O. E. Rössler has written that "it could turn out, for example, that a universe that is chaotic itself ceases to be chaotic as soon as it is observed by an observer who is chaotic himself" (317). Thus, the purpose of the image is no longer the rupture, for the rupture is always already part of the constituted subject reading the text. The fuzzy logic of postmodernism has started to permeate the logic of the culture. Fuentes, then, is also writing into what he thinks is the emerging cultural logic of his time (even as he challenges the prevailing cultural logic with his postmodern text).

Noise is heightened by certain texts, such as Christopher Unborn, in ways that lead the reader into uncharted possibilities of meaning as the text skips through the nuances that allow whole new patterns of thought/meaning. This attempt to achieve new meanings (or even new definitions of meaning)
represents an important move in the ongoing dialectic of chaos and order in literature. Noise has the ability to generate meaning because, in the fuzzy logic of postmodernism, noise and signal are not binary oppositions with an excluded middle ground. The relation is not one of mutual exclusion, but of potential coexistence.

The reader of this textual move in *Christopher Unborn* must be aware of the previous moves, but Fuentes has obviously intended this novel for a specific audience that would have such knowledge, an audience aware of the questioning of the cultural logic that a postmodern text enacts. Christopher, the narrator, in attempting to articulate the idea of the novel he, as narrator, is writing describes his novel as

...a novel in which the possibilities of all the participants are comparable: the possibilities of the Author (who obviously has already finished the novel the Reader has in his hands) and those of the Reader (who obviously still doesn't know the totality of this novel, barely its first months), as well as those of the Author-Reader, that is You when you finish reading the novel, possessor of a knowledge the potential Reader does not have, the Reader who may one day read the novel or perhaps never read it, or who may know of it and intend to read it—just to distinguish the potential Reader from the kind who know it exists but who refuse to read it because they disdain the Author, are bored by him, and turn down his invitation to a ludic read, and also to distinguish the potential Reader from those completely ignorant of the existence of this book and who will never have this knowledge...(132-133).

Thus, Fuentes is directing this novel at a reader who is ready to make the next move in the dialectic of chaos and order in reading. Fuentes sees a need to articulate a literature for Mexico that will be adequate to a Mexico ready to
engage in the critique of its cultural logic (especially the influence of the logic of late capitalism that filters in from the United States). Beth Boehm, referring to John Barth, describes this as a trying to find a broader audience to witness the "performance literature" of postmodernism (102).

Certainly Fuentes, in making this move to the next order of the dialectic, recognizes that earlier orders (and earlier disorders) are implicit in whatever there is new about this novel (and constructs his practice out of this awareness). Thus, it is not surprising that much of the play of the text that Fuentes uses harkens back to the literary predecessors that he so clearly acknowledges in his text. Still, having acknowledged those predecessors, he is in a position somewhere past the advent of postmodernism where something new must be done with them.

He takes up Joyce's play with language. The "scherzerade" of Joyce is twisted still further by Fuentes into "scherazada" and "Chère Sade" (7). And the transforming play Fuentes creates — "your cherry jubilee in my hungry mouth, your scherezada from Tampique with its chilis and little beans which I'm digging up with my long finger, your cunt, your racconto, your ass chérie, your cherry ass, Chère Sade, flagellated by my furious whip here on the beach of Kafkapulco" — serves not to take the play of *Finnegans Wake* and use its "meaning", but rather takes the play and puts new spins on its motion.
(Tristram Shandy 576) is brought into Christopher Unborn (132), but Fuentes then allows the image, and its obvious resemblance to a spermatozoon, to enter into the engagement with the text. Thus, the flourish is opened up to multiple possibilities of meaning: it is at least a spermatozoan and a reference to Tristram Shandy as a literary predecessor of Christopher Unborn and a break from the progression of words on the page. Having thus created something plural out of this image, Fuentes does not attempt to pull back to a single determinant meaning, as he might have if his intention had been merely to achieve some artistic order out of the chaos that this image creates. The possibilities do not exclude each other in this plural text. There is a rupture of the text and an explosion of meaning, but there is also the possibility, perhaps the need, to engage with all those possibilities. The reader of this text, a reader already aware of the need for the rupture of order, is challenged to engage with that rupture without ignoring or neutralizing the importance of that rupture. The reader is asked to react to the image within a logic that is fuzzy.

The notion of injecting an image into a text of words is not the only way that image functions in a text. The way in which words are presented on a page can be used to create an image out of the text itself, thus illustrating the assumptions of signification of the linear progression of words on a page. Fuentes makes such a breakdown in the way in which a text is read by creating
the multi-column lists of pages 179-180, an image of text that cannot be read in the way words on a page are normally read. Here, as in the Night Lessons section of *Finnegans Wake*, the reader is forced to deal with the layout of the text as an aspect of the reading of that text.

While the structuring of the words on the page can create a certain textual image that challenges linear reading, it is possible to take this move a step further and place the words in such a way that they create a visual image which is obviously intended to call to mind a visual object. This type of text not only challenges the linear order of reading, but injects another level of meaning onto the words, as they carry the image of the object.

Fuentes uses just such a textual image in his attempt to create a new type of narrative, a narrative which embraces the chaos that image introduces to the idea of text. The mind is able to engage the text not despite that contradiction of image-as-text/text-as-image, but within the contradiction. The plurality is not the springboard for a choice of response to the representation, but is the means through which the representation is engaged. On page 461, Fuentes introduces a whole new code into the text by the way he presents the words as image on the paper. Fuentes leads into the image with "...the only source of my innate structure is my genetic information; that no matter how far back I go, I shall never find another source of what I am except that information; that my genes configure me" (461). Then he provides the passage in figure 2. This text that
The genetic diagram from Christopher Unborn (461).

Figure 2

I am your daddy and grandparents and great-grandparents and mom and all lineal diversified.
follows the lead-in is presented as an image in which the words, in their layout on the page recreate the uncoiling and splitting of the DNA molecule to prepare for transcription. The word plastic is off to the side, representing (in a layout drawn from a biology text) a nucleotide to be incorporated into the new DNA molecules. Finally, the word evolving runs up and down the opposite sides of a line, representing the complementary and oppositely-directed strands of the newly-replicated DNA molecule. Thus the letters call to mind a whole different means of coding information (genetics) and carry the weight of two codes (genetics and language).

In bringing in this other code and other layout of images, Fuentes is able to create a narrative which resonates with both its textual meaning and with a meaning borrowed from the cultural knowledge of the other code. The resonance opens up the text to multiple possibilities that seem poised to rupture the text. The reader is not asked to make a choice between words or images, but rather to confront the fact that words are images. This image is not either words or image, it is words and image. We read this text not as a choice, but as a plurality.

The blend of text and image works in such a way that each complicates the other. This complication allows Fuentes to engage the reader on a different level of reading which accepts the chaos of rupture that such an image represents, but which goes beyond that chaos to some even deeper
engagement in which words and image engage in a dialectical intertwining which forces the reading subject to accept all the possibilities. There is no easy order, but there is the possibility of gaining some engagement from the reader, which represents an order of sorts that can be drawn from the chaos of the postmodern devices of the text. Fuentes creates a site from which biology can be confronted always already multiply-coded.

Christopher Unborn, then, is an attempt by Fuentes to put in play words and images into a postmodern practice that can be adequate to his message (a message not defined by its opposition to noise). He constructs a postmodern text which engages its readers within its logic, even as its construction challenges the limitations of the cultural logic. It would be easy to argue that there is some kind of "well-managed" play at work here, but such ordering of the fragments would be a return to the modernist project. Fuentes is not attempting to achieve some order from the fragments, but he is attempting to situate the reader in a position from which it is necessary to recognize the dialectical nature of the act of reading, or to enter into Walter Davis' "hermeneutic of engagement." Chaos and order are positioned in this text in such a way that neither is privileged. Yet there is still some position from which the reader of this text can engage with it in a way that is not just play. The play refers the reader on to some meaning, which is not a determinate meaning that can contain the play, but an unstable meaning, which, as the only possible meaning available in
the postmodern world, can still force the reader into some confrontation with the existential needs that it has a subject.

Why choose to write a postmodern text to argue for the need for social critique? As William L. Siemens notes: "Eventually the reader must ask what result is to be expected from such a chaotic text, insistent as it is on even avoiding a straight line between words. The obvious point is that it constitutes another response to the cruel and hateful systems constructed upon the words of the authoritative voice" (215). In positing a logic outside of the cultural logic, Fuentes is able to challenge his readers to question the authority of the cultural logic.

And that authority needs to be challenged. Although Fuentes carnivalizes Mexico in this text, he asks some questions that must be answered, such as "What will my baby breathe when he's born?" (81). The answer is a vision of the ecological apocalypse of capitalism:

The pulverized shit of three million human beings who have no latrines.

The pulverized excrement of ten million animals that defecate wherever they happen to be.

Eleven thousand tons per day of chemical waste.

The mortal breath of three million motors endlessly vomiting puffs of pure poison, black halitosis, buses, taxis, trucks, and private cars, all contributing their flatulence to the extinction of trees, lungs, throats, and eyes...

Mashed shit.

Carbonic gas.

Metallic dust.

And all of it at an altitude of about one and half miles, crushed under a layer of frozen air, and surrounded by a jail of circular mountains: garbage imprisoned. (81-82)
This is an authority whose atrocities exact a toll on its citizens (robbing its children of the very air they breathe), and must be challenged. *Christopher Unborn* is not a retreat from this into postmodern play, but a recognition of the need for any critique to acknowledge that the world is already in play.

This book is about Mexico. Fuentes sees that Mexico is in dire need of critique:

The dripping sky is one of the constants in Mexico City; it rains incessantly, a black, oily, carboniferous rain that darkens the grandest neon signs; the sensation of a veiled dark sky in whose fogs fade the skeletons of the buildings, many of them unfinished, many just rusted steel beams, truncated towers, the temples of underdevelopment, skyscrapertemples, others mere canvas, like those of the entrance to Pueblo, others just cubes of cardboard dripping acid rain, but very few real, inhabited structures: the city lives by moving, permanence has become secret, only movement is visible, the stands along the old Paseo de la Reforma, fried foods, fruit stands, wilted flowers, black candy, sweetmeats, burro heads, pigs’ feet, maguey worms (perpetual humidity of the city, immense breeding ground for mildew, moss, rotten roe, peevish ants ready to be eaten), and the files of figures bent over devouring the tacos sold along Reforma in front of the tents illuminated by naked bulbs and burning mosquito repellent. But these details can only be seen with a microscope, because from above (the view our happy foursome had as they entered the D.F.) the city is an immense, ulcerated crater, a cavity in the universe, the dandruff of the world, the chancre of the Americas, the hemorrhoid of the Tropic of Cancer. (299)

And he tries to write a literature which will be adequate to posing such a critique, without a nostalgic retreat into old certainties. The critique must be as postmodern as the world it seeks to critique. The cultural logic will resist this critique, and "the sinister novel, its earthly function accomplished, may forever be out of print, out of circulation or excluded from libraries because of its
obscenity, its offenses against reigning good taste, or because of its political impossibility" (133). Fuentes needs to provide a postmodern response to this urgency, and recognizes that such a response will be suppressed by the cultural logic (or incorporated and contained and neutralized by insertion into the binary logic).

Why must he enact such a critique? The culture has built within it the ability to react against revolutionary action:

Today's weapons were no longer those of yesterday's revolution. Could Zapata have withstood a barrage of white phosphorus or napalm? But how did Ho Chi Minh survive it? How did the Sandinistas manage to topple Somoza? Because their societies were much simpler, much more black-and-white, less complicated, and with fewer complicities than the Mexico of 1992? With what weapons is it possible to fight today without exposing everyone to a useless death? With what weapons, without playing the game of the cynics who control power? With what weapons, so one could say to oneself: I haven't asked anyone to give more than what I am willing to give? (518)

Fuentes tries to find away to change the cultural logic rather than oppose it.

Opposition, in the sense Ross Chambers posits in Room for Maneuver, is a watered-down revolutionary response. The cultural logic of late capitalism is undermined by opposition, but, as Frederic Jameson argues, that cultural logic has within its constitution the ability to co-opt and contain opposition. Thus, it the logic itself which must be the place of response. Fuentes writes into the fuzzy logic of postmodernism, constructing a novel for Mexico that can exist within such logic.
The chaos of image and word in *Christopher Unborn* creates a new narrative situation through the postmodern construction of a chaotically received text. Image and word not only complicate each other, but they create a chaos of thought that opens up whole new possibilities. The notion of form as content is not rejected, but subsumed by a still-just-as-urgent-as-ever quest for some subjective engagement with the text. *Christopher Unborn* is not just some exercise in style, but attempts to confront its reader as a subject with certain imperatives of the world in which that reader lives, but confront them within a logic that is itself already situated in the chaos and order of thought.

With the postmodern reader it is possible to make that confrontation on levels that are chaotic and strange, but nonetheless intellectually powerful. To the subject always already constituted within a chaotic culture, the chaotic is more than just a challenge to order. It is not "a caricature, but a warning" (275). "Desire is necessary and it must run the risk of transformation" (500).

If we return then to the play of language in *Christopher Unborn* mentioned earlier, we can see that this is not the intellectual challenging of language seen in *Finnegans Wake*, but an attempt to enact some politics in the space of play created. The image play of letters on the page that Fuentes uses can be political as well as playful:

This . . . is . . . what we did . . . with . . . our . . .
Even as the words set in play the idea of policy going down the drain, the reader gets the sense of the bitterness toward the government and its oil company accomplices that created that drain and sent Mexico plunging into it. Meaning is not recovered out of the play, rather meaning is redefined to allow for the play of determinate possibilities that rejects certainty, but still leaves open a meaningful confrontation through language. This is, as Ortega suggests, Fuentes carnivalizing unrest, suturing its wound, and promoting its transformation.

The hunger of the Mexican people is likewise carnivalized in the creation of the "Inconsumable Taco" which "the more it is eaten, the more it grows back' (56). This can be accomplished by science by incorporating into the foodstuffs "a principle of reproduction that would be inherent in but separate from the object in question" (56). This Baudrillardian agriculture (based on a referral of simulacratization without end or beginning) is thus science's contribution to the "solution to Mexico's nutrition problems" (56). Even as he plays, Fuentes implicates the vaporous nature of scientific certainties of progress and solution in the tragedy of Mexico's inadequate food supplies.

The cultural logic, though, is resistant to a critique such as Fuentes', attempting to rob it of its possibility as site of critique:
my scepter is real in a revolution that is, after all, carnivalesque, a revolution of mad laughter, finally, my anarchic but idiotic nephew, finally? A horizontal Mexican revolution, everything for everyone and everyone for everything, here in the land of the vertical Aztec Empire followed by the vertical Spanish Empire, followed by the vertical, centralized, patrimonial, and pyramidal Republic, the inversion of hierarchy. (436)

The play of postmodernism can be turned into a quest for meaninglessness if the logic that confronts it is binary. If meaning is linked to certainty, then uncertainty implies meaninglessness. The critique is thus neutralized.

Computers do not reason as brains do. Computers 'reason' when they manipulate precise facts that have been reduced to strings of zeros and ones and statements that are either true or false. The human brain can reason with vague assertions or claims that involve uncertainties or value judgments: 'The air is cool,' or 'That speed is fast' or 'She is young.' Unlike computers, humans have common sense that enables them to reason in a world where things are only partly true. (76)

Thus write Bart Kosko and Satoru Isaka in an article on fuzzy logic. I might argue the idea that humans have common sense, but I think their idea is a useful place to turn this idea of how we read Christopher Unborn.

This takes on its political form in the notion of Pacifica, a better world of which a part of Mexico already belongs, the whole Pacific coast from Ixtapa north, the whole Pacific basin from California to Oregon, Canada and Alaska, all of China and Japan, the peninsulas, the archipelagos, the islands, Oceania: a basin of 108 million square miles, three billion inhabitants, half the world's population, working together, three-fourths of the world's commerce, almost all the world's advanced technology, the
maximum conjunction of labor, technical know-how, and political will in human history. (512-513)

This sounds utopian, but this is a postmodern novel and it cannot construct a stable utopia. Peter Koslowski notes that "there is thus general consensus that the ecological problems predicted by the second law of thermodynamics have now sealed both the end of man's 'unlimited' domination over nature and the end of the utopian aspirations of modern times. The 'exhaustion of utopian energies' points to the beginning of the postmodern epoch" (143). Utopias are absolutes and absolutes are always already in question in postmodernism. In the absence of a utopian wishfulness, Fuentes constructs a provisional utopia: a community.

This is still a site of hope and possibility, but not of guarantee:

We decided that all this was possible in a new community, not a utopia, because in Pacifica we never lose sight of the fact that we will never escape destiny, that was the West's madness, to think they had dominated destiny and that progress would eliminate tragedy (Nietzschevoice); that's how tragedy became a crime, by taking advantage of the dream of consciousness, sentencing tragedy to take refuge like a hunted animal in a concentration camp and to appear anonymous and bloody in historical massacres, without finding its place in the community and saying to history: there are too many exceptions to progress, happiness is capable of attacking itself (fe-derico!), we have to admit what it denies us in order to know we are complete, our face is that of the other, we don't know ourselves if we don't know what we aren't and admit it: we are unique because we are alike: in Pacífica we helped both the rapid advance of technology and the tragic awareness of like by taking seriously what a novel, a poem, a film, a symphony says: we decided that the works of culture were as real in the world as a mountain or a transistor, that there is no real life without a still life to compensate for it in art, no living present with a dead past, no acceptable future that does not allow exceptions to progress, and no technological progress that does not incorporate the warnings of art. (513-514)
To return again to Deleuze and Guattari: "Desire can never be deceived. Interests can be deceived, unrecognized, or betrayed, but not desire" (257).

The relationship of the real and simulacrum is not one of opposition, but of the fuzzy set, with life belonging to both the set of the real and the set of the simulacrum. Meaning resides not in opposition, but in play. Linda Hutcheon argues that

postmodern art works contest the 'simulacritization' process of mass culture—not by denying it or lamenting it—but by problematizing the entire notion of the representation of reality, and by therein suggesting the potentially reductive quality of the view upon which Baudrillard's laments are based. It is not that truth and reference have ceased to exist, as Baudrillard claims; it is that they have ceased to be unproblematic issues. We are not witnessing a degeneration into the hyperreal without origin or reality, but a questioning of what 'real' can mean and how we can know it. (*The Poetics of Postmodernism* 223)

Humans do not reason as computers do. Yet, classical logic has demanded that we do just that, that we reduce the chaos and complexity of thought into binary judgments (excluding the middles, as Aristotle would have it). The world of classical logic is a neat and tidy place, but it seems to have little to do with being human. For the human mind, fuzzy logic is a place of interesting possibility, because it reflects the way we think. Classical logic is an artificial manifestation of the desire for certainty; it is not the way we think. Yet, the cultural logic of late capitalist societies is a classical logic. The logic of postmodernism is the logic of the human mind.
The basic tenet of fuzzy logic is that truth and falsehood are not opposite binary terms (with one having a value of 1 when the other has a value of zero), but that something can be partly true and partly false. The middle ground of the logical relation is not excluded. The importance of fuzzy logic is in its relation to the human mind. We have fuzzy minds.

Fuzzy logic has been applied to controllers in mechanical systems where it is necessary to make distinctions such as "close enough to the train station." We might then consider that the obvious challenge to the binary in the postmodern culture reflects the fact that brain does not think in binaries, but in terms of fuzzy distinctions. We might then point out that the indeterminacy in the postmodern world does not render *Christopher Unborn* meaningless (since indeterminacy no longer includes the absolute negation of determinacy). Unfortunately this might be phrased badly into "*Christopher Unborn* is meaningful enough." The cultural logic can then dismiss this as a sloppy distinction. Yet, to the human mind, "meaningful enough" is the issue. *Christopher Unborn* may not be able to say anything certain, but it can say something meaningful because certainty and meaning are not defined in binary terms. While classical logic might force us into binaries, life is much too fuzzy for classical logic.

Fuzzy logic is not simply sloppy thinking, but rigorous application of non-binary logic. Truth statements are not defined by their truth, but by their
truthfulness. And the human mind, which operates within a play of chaos and order, is capable of making such "common sense" distinctions. In fuzzy logic, Ian Stewart notes, "you take the train of thought involved in assessing a truth value of a set of self-referential statements and convert it into a dynamic process" (112). And this is how the brain works, with a dynamic system of chaotic possibility decoded by the mind as a relationship of truth values (rather than as truth values themselves). Paradox no longer exists outside of the logic, for the logic itself has broken out of the binary conceptualizations.

Anthony Wilden, also wrestling with the problem of the paradox, uses the term symmetrization: "the collapsing of a hierarchic relation between levels into the equal and opposite sides of an opposition or paradox" (14). Wilden's distinction is a useful one for it points out the way binaries are related to hierarchies. In fuzzy logic, there is no privileged term, and thus no hierarchy can be built out its presumptions. Power structures are thereby deconstructed, without relations being lost. The fuzzy logic of postmodernism, then, represents a way of challenging the structures of power that escapes from the desires of the cultural logic, even as its retains the possibility of desire.

Rodolphe Gasché, in *The Tain of the Mirror*, makes the case for the need for critical theory to acknowledge what he calls the "quasitranscendentalism" demanded by Derrida's work. Fuzzy logic is quasitranscendental. Critical theory that is engaged in fuzzy logic can enter into the philosophical inquiry
demanded by Derrida’s work. The vacillation between determinate possibilities can be read as the place between 0 and 1 where fuzzy logic operates.

Postmodern practices can therefore operate in the vacillation of possibilities. And this is how the mind reacts to texts: within the chaos of vacillating possibilities, within the play of 0 to 1.

What then is possible for art in the fuzzy logic of postmodernism?

Frederic Jameson notes that:

In the most interesting postmodernist works, however, one can detect a more positive conception of relationship, which restores its proper tension to the notion of difference itself. This new mode of relationship through difference may sometimes be an achieved new and original way of thinking and perceiving; more often it takes the form of an impossible imperative to achieve that new mutation in what can perhaps no longer be called consciousness...to rise somehow to a level at which the vivid perception of radical difference is in and of itself a new mode of grasping what used to be called relationship: something for which the word collage is still only a very feeble name. (Postmodernism 31)

"Feeble" because the logic of the culture can only allow feeble names (such as fuzzy) for that which escapes its logic. "Interesting" because fuzzy postmodernism exists not in difference, but in the tension of difference. We can react to play of difference. Postmodern art can have a logic of its own, but it is logic of the human mind (not just one of Western culture).

This is not to suggest that this, then, is postmodernism in a nutshell: a replacement of the logic of the late capitalism with fuzzy logic. Postmodernism is a discursive practice that can exist only in motion. The issue of fuzzy logic is both an issue of how we respond to such works and a challenge to the cultural
logic. The former aspect is not of postmodernism, it is of the mind and of the way we can engage with any text (or work of art). Postmodernism's relation to this aspect is that it points out to us both what the mind is capable of doing and how the cultural practices have limited those possibilities. Postmodernism's challenge to the culture logic exists in more than one form. Some of the earliest postmodern texts were written to jar the reader, to rupture the textual assumptions of the culture. These texts challenge the binary logic of the culture, and so point to the fuzzy logic of the mind. Later postmodern texts write into the fuzzy logic, engaging the reader in postmodern terms. It is this late postmodernism that Fuentes writes into with *Christopher Unborn*.

Now, let us say for a minute that we live in a deconstructed world, where determinate meaning is no longer an acceptable psychological defense against the chaos. Is the alternative then meaninglessness? Not in the fuzzy logic of late postmodernist. Somewhere in the huge decentered space between those extremes is the range of the still meaningful. Fuentes makes this a very powerful political space. Its power comes not only out of its somewhat meaningfulness, but also out of its uncertainties (which prevent a regression toward a metaphysics of presence that cannot hold).

Postmodernism, then, can be constructed within fuzzy logic that plays out chaos and order. The chaos and order of the mind, which reasons in fuzzy logic, are reflected in/by/through postmodernism. For postmodern literature,
possibilities of engagement with narrative and language emerge out of this fuzzy
logic of postmodernism. The paradoxes that seem to be created by
deconstruction are eliminated by a change in the logic that engages the
literature. Cultural logic is not fixed (although it is resistant). Postmodernism
has started to transform the cultural logic (although that transformation may be a
part of the process of incorporating and neutralizing the challenge of
postmodernism). It is possible for a writer such as Carlos Fuentes, writing into
postmodernism, to write with a postmodern urgency that is both postmodern and
urgent, because it is situated within the domain of the non-excluded middle.
The seeming paradox of postmodern urgency becomes non-paradoxical when
the logic that confronts it is a logic undaunted by paradox.

To return to Christopher Unborn:

truth is partial because consciousness is partial: there is no
universality except relativity, the world is unfinished because the
men and women who observe it still have not finished, and truth,
unexhausted, fugitive, in perpetual motion, is only the truth that
takes all arbitrary positions into account and all the relative
movements of each individual on this earth. (529)
Chapter VII

J R: Reading in the Postmodern Space

—No, it isn't . . . water that I need. If you ladies, you . . . just for a moment, if you'll give me your undivided attention . . .
—We have no objection at all, Mr. Cohen. We're telling you everything we can think of.
—Yes but, some of it is not precisely relevant. (J R 5)

As the earlier Gaddis chapter indicated, information and noise each provide possibilities of meaning and engagement with a text. How then do we cognitively map our way into the textual space founded, not in the disruption of information by noise, but by the flow of information and noise together (or perhaps the space created when this distinction is deconstructed)? J R, where Gaddis takes the play of information and noise he began in The Recognitions and moves it to another space, might be the place to turn for an answer.

Postmodernism has often been constructed as an oppositional discourse or logic to the cultural logic of late capitalism (or, in the case of Frederic Jameson's work, as a discourse which has been coopted by its relation to late capitalism). It is a place of rupture. The cognitive space of postmodernism is perceived by Jameson to violate the way we cognitively map our movement in space. And this would seem to be a good construction of the reaction to early
postmodernism. An early work of postmodernism, such as *Finnegans Wake*,
might have been just such an unmappable space for its (early) readers. Yet, in
the fuzzy logic of late postmodernism a different way of mapping postmodernism
emerges.

John Johnston points out that in *J R* "Gaddis completely dispenses with
narrative and plunges the reader into a postmodern 'novelistic space' composed
almost entirely of fragmented conversations, interrupted mutterings and
stammerings, delirious harangues and jargoned doublespeak" (197). This is not
a narrative which is being ruptured, but a writing which is not narrative in its
traditional sense, but narrative as a flow that can be engaged (in the way in
which *The Waves* or *The Stream of Life* can be engaged). The flow here is one
of multiple streams of information (and noise), out of which a story is sensed
within the textual space of that flow. This is the postmodern space and Gaddis
translates that into his postmodern textual space. Johnston notes that

in thus seeking to render the flux and flow of contemporary life, *J R*
takes great risks, both in its method and 'message(s).' As we are
whirled from one node of connection to another--from an old family
house in Long Island to a local school, then to the local bank, then
to a Wall Street investment firm, and finally to an upper Eastside
apartment--it becomes clear that no overriding, stabilizing speech
will be heard, indeed could be heard, since no identifiable
consciousness could be in control or take it all in. For the novel
relentlessly demonstrates that it is not production or intelligible
purpose but the ceaseless movement and proliferation of useless
information and objects that define our world. (Johnston 198)
Yet, if this is our world, and our text, we somehow engage it. *J R* may be a difficult read, and one whose 726-page non-stop flow of information creates certain demands on the attention of the reader, but it is not an unreadable text.

One of the keys to engaging this text is the disruption of the two-step process that Ingarden ascribes to the cognition of the literary work of art. Rather than linear text creating a textual space where the mind engages that text, the reader is plunged into the engagement of textual flow, with linear "plots" or "stories" ordered from that chaos. While *The Recognitions* placed noise into a story to deepen the engagement, *J R* demands a deep engagement before the story can be understood. The textual space becomes less the place where engagement occurs, and more the place out of which it emerges.

The mind reads the chaos and then pulls orders out of the possibilities. Gregory Comnes points out that this forces the reader of *J R* to reconsider the chaos and how it is to be dealt with. He points out that:

> In presenting entropy as a 'thought fragment' which, when placed in a new context, can be understood as something other than an indication of absolute disorder, Gaddis is asking the reader to go beyond the confines of the deterministic action within the text, to stretch the reader's 'ability' to meet his 'need' and redeem an implausible order within an otherwise entropic novel. (Comnes 177)

Chaos here is not a challenge to orderly assumptions of textuality, it is the text. Michael Boccia points out that chaos does not mean meaninglessness: "What appears to be meaningless chaos turns out to be a complex system which
requires the reader to collect a good deal of information" (41). The reader orders the chaos of J R, in order to transform information into stor(y/ies).

Thomas M. Sawyer argues that this narrative technique is adopted by Gaddis to critique the culture in its own terms: "A comparison of Gaddis's work to that of the other unusual narratives reveals how Gaddis's narrative technique so effectively complements his vision of increasing chaos and miscommunication" (118). Gaddis writes a critique of the postmodern culture, but does so in postmodern terms. The proliferation of information in the culture is replicated in the text of J R, and the replication holds the culture up for inspection.

"Order is simply a thin, perilous condition we try to impose on the basic reality of chaos . . ." (J R 20). If, as Thomas F. Sawyer suggests, "Gaddis's J R is the cacaphony of chaos" (118), what does J R read like? Let's spend a few pages in it:

—If your ring isn't ready, your Wagner, what is there?
—My Mozart. She hung up the telephone and dialed again.
—No answer, I'll call and see if my visuals are ready . . . and she found her bun, washed in another bite with cold coffee and chewed into the mouthpiece, listening.

—gross profit on a business was sixty-five hundred dollars a year. He finds his expenses were twenty-two and one half percent of this profit. First, can you find the net profit?

—What's that? demanded Hyde, transfixed by unseeing eyes challenging the vacant confine just over his head.
—Sixth grade math. That's Glancy.

--percent this would be of the entire sales, if the sales were seventy thousand dol . . .
Sixth? That?
--Glancy. They're doing percents.

--merchant, and this merchant sold a coat marked fifty dollars at ten percent discount...

--Glancy reading cue cards. You can tell.
--Don't show them that, just Glancy writing on a blackboard.

--that this merchant still made a twenty percent profit, let's find the cost of the original...

--Try switching to thirty-eight.

--original cost of the... combustion in these thousands of little cylinders in our muscle engines. Like all engines, these tiny combustion engines need a constant supply of fuel, and we call the fuel that this machine uses, food. We measure its value...

--Even if the Rhinegold is ready it's Wagner, isn't it? But if the Mozart is scheduled the classroom teachers, they're ready with the followup material from their study guides on the Mozart. They can't just switch to the Wagner.

--the value of the fuel for this engine the same way, by measuring how much heat we get when it's burned...

--That's a cute model, it gets the idea across. Whose voice?
--Vogel. He made it himself out of old parts.
--Whose.
--Parts?
--Some of them might never even have heard of Wagner yet.

--No, the voice.
--That's Vogel, the coach.

--that we call energy. Doing a regular day's work, this human machine needs enough fuel equal to about two pounds of sugar...

--If they thought it was Mozart's Rhinegold and get them all mixed up, so you can't really switch.
--He put it together himself out of used parts.
--fuel in a regular gasoline engine, and converts about twelve percent into the same amount of real work.

--To forty-two, try forty-two.

--that the engine has an alimentary system just like the human machine. When you pull up at the gas pump and ask for ten gallons, the fuel is poured through an opening, or mouth, and goes into the gas tank, the engine's stomach . . . who earns a hundred and twenty-five dollars a month pays four percent of it to the Social Security . . .

--I said forty-two, try forty-two. I think Mrs Joubert has something.

--how much he's paid to the Social Security Board at the end of ten years, and . . . American Civil War, that was fought to free the slaves, and . . . in the carburetor, where the fuel is digested and . . .

--Omigosh! Miss Flesch erupted into the mouthpiece. Her free hand dug for a tissue --they're what? Over at the temple? Not the Rhinegold, the Wagner no, the . . . No m, m like Mary. O. Yeah like zebra . . . she wiped her mouth, --What do you mean will I play the piano the only prop I've got is a . . . no a book, a book . . . A book yeah so it looks like I'm reading from this book and don't forget the music for my singalong, I always sign off with a singalong . . .

--Go back to whatever that was about the Civil War, I think that's history . . .

--that we wouldn't like the taste of gasoline but luckily our car engine . . .

--Or Social Studies. (28-30)

This is the flow of information that is the text of J R. While the reader of J R may (and usually will) take all this information and map it into separate conversations, that move is subsequent to the reception of the text as flow of information/noise.
There is also an imagistic quality to this text. The "background" noise of the school's television broadcast is represented on the page as smaller print, thereby taking advantage of the ability of the image to signify beyond the meaning of the words themselves. In the postmodern world, the information comes through in the flow of words and and the flow of images, and Gaddis thus writes a text which enters into the play of word and image. While it is certainly one way in which the reader of *JR* is able to order the chaos, it is an unstable order, with the separated texts (conversation and television) each presenting a chaotic flow of undifferentiated information. "Gaddis directly confronts the potential entropy in the reader's minds. Neither books nor symphonies can be easily 'capsulized' to avoid the effort of reading intently or listening intently, and by avoiding almost any kind of narrative capsulization altogether, Gaddis has created an entropic narrative" (Sawyer 122). This narrative does not try to escape certainty through entropy, it assumes that chaos is the nature of engagement and forces certainty into a position of subsequent unstable ordering of that chaos. Gaddis reverses the assumptions of narrative, and places the reader into a different position from which to engage the text.

Anton Ehrenzweig argues that "creativity can almost be defined as the capacity for transforming the chaotic aspect of undifferentiation into a hidden order that can be encompassed by a comprehensive (syncretistic) vision. The, schizoid anxiety will turn into the manic elation of the undifferentiated oceanic
state" (127). *J R* takes advantage of the postmodern possibilities of an undifferentiated flow of words. Engagement occurs within the chaos, and that chaos has the possibility of generating many different plays of order.

Ironic juxtaposition, which is one of the ways in which *The Recognitions* works its comic effects, here becomes multiplied (as the flow of information has been multiplied in the intervening years. It is no longer a rupture of the orderly presentation of linear narrative, but becomes one of the ways in which Gaddis weaves his story. In the headlong rush of information, the sudden juxtapositions that surprise the mind with indirection (as Frederic Jameson puts it) are no longer startling interruptions, but are integral aspects of the flow of the text. The undifferentiated text has the ability to surprise the reader through juxtapositions, and use that surprise to generate some of the comedy of this satiric text.

In this world of noise and information, it becomes possible for meaning to arise from the juxtaposition of noises (the noise of the noise), in the following case the sounds of multiple channels of the school's educational television system:

---when the silkworm starts to spin it discharges a colorless . . . that happens in the large bowel before . . . billions of dollars, and the market value of shares in public corporations today has grown to . . . (46)

The bowels of the silkworm are linked to the public corporations, evoking the anal retentive desires that underlie such accumulation of wealth. This happens through the surprising juxtaposition of ideas within the undifferentiated flow of
information. The lack of differentiation renders the connection of the silkworm to bowel no more certain than the connection of bowel to corporate wealth. The ability of the flow to keep the reader off-balance blurs the distinction of noise and information. The possibility of meaning that emerges is one of the ways in which Gaddis is able to spin his satire on the cultural logic of late capitalism (Jameson's postmodernism).

*J R* does not make transitions from one action to the next. The text flows along, with perspectives being handed off by contact (physical or electronic) from one character to the next. Susan Strehle points out how this allows Gaddis to create a narrative which escapes the linearity of time, even as it preserves that linearity. "Refusing the narrow measurements by which his characters quantify time, the narrator emphasizes instead its continuous unfolding in open-ended cycles rather than closed circles" (119). The text flows, rather than progresses. "The novel uses a conventional linear chronology in an unconventional way: the narrator neither divides nor spatializes successive time as his characters do, but treats it as a flowing process" (Strehle 130).

One character calls another on the phone, and the site of the text becomes the cybernetic link of the telephone. The second caller receives an interrupting call, claiming the perspective as the new cybernetic link is established and then kept or passed on to the next character who has called. Jack Gibbs calls Tom Eigen (with perspective transferred from Gibbs to Eigen),
the call is interrupted by the call of Dave Davidoff to Eigen, and then the perspective is claimed by Davidoff as he hangs up and starts to speak with someone in his office (251-253). Perspectives flow into each other, making point-of-view an unstable possibility for coming to terms with this text.

"To emphasize the unified process of time, Gaddis rejects conventional forms of narrative divisions. Without chapters, sections, or even open spaces in the text, the two months spanned in the book flow unbroken" (Strehle 131). The text is thus one long (726 pages without any textual break) continuous flow of information. Rather than Clarice Lispector's paradoxical questing after both flow and moment (her defiance of Heisenberg), we have the flow of information in the postmodern world. Perspective in this flow becomes a matter of trying to hold still in a strong current pulling subjectivity along in the flow of subjectivities. This is the postmodern space. Subjectivity is diffused into the electronic ether. The subject is stretched outward with the flow of information. And the subject is confronted with "that even sharper dilemma which is the incapacity of our minds, at least at present, to map the great global multinational and decentered communicational network in which we find ourselves caught as individual subjects" (Frederic Jameson, Postmodernism 44). Yet, even as those subjectivities are stretched outward, the reader of J R is able to engage these characters. J R demands the reader's ability to map into the textual space of flowing information. Yet, it also warns of the danger of that flow, which, at its
most extreme, is the danger of repeating the fate of diCephalis, who it seems is translated into pure sound by Vogel's Teletravel device: "—Here sir, it's, there's a surface resemblance but I believe this is the wife of the parent company's personnel manager the man who's just been lost in, who's taking part in this Teletravel trial apparently he used his influence to her this position with an aid program to Ind . . ." (707). Of course, that warning is couched in the chaos, and has a very unstable character (is he lost in the Teletravel, or is there another thought abandoned in that undifferentiated flow of words?).

Plot and character (which are not rejected by this text, just resituated) are extracted from that flow of information, rather than information being configured toward plot and character. Michael Boccia points out that:

Because we feel compelled to construct the plot from the disordered elements of the novel, we are forced to solve a series of problems, including the nature and identity of the speakers, where the characters are, and even who they are--if we desire to comprehend events in the book in traditional cause and effect sequences or as continuous action. (Boccia 42)

We receive a chaos and engage characters out of that chaos. For example, the nature of Principal Whiteback's character must be extracted from the noise of toilets ("there was a succession of quick flushes"), which lets the reader "hear" the indication of one his neurotic quirks, even as that knowledge is made uncertain by its undifferentiated nature: "—Yes developed along the lines of your ahm, your body engine concept utilizing the ahm, the utilization potential of ahm . . . there was a succession of quick flushes —old parts, that is to say . . . he
raised his eyes, —structuring the material in terms of . . ." (174). Lacking a perspective and lacking the cues that would differentiate this sound, the reader can only have a vague sense from juxtaposition that this is Whiteback's neurosis.

Such hints, which were the ruptures of modernist cognitive mapping in *The Recognitions*, become the standard mapping of the space of *J R*.

--Poor must have been God damned nonexistent, all right you take ninety percent of that two point seven million get eighty percent of the difference back on taxes for hundred forty thousand add it up . . . here Tom, drop in on Mrs Schramm give her these . . . he'd reached under the bed, --still plenty of wear in them . . .

--What in hell is . . .

--Add it up, your asking price is four and a half million and four and half back on taxes you've got nine all you'd get anyhow, write off some of those accounts receivable as bad debts and you might cut off another half million, how's that.

--Yes in fact ah, it looks very interesting Mister Gibbs . . .

--Damned strong elastic too. God damned out of fashion hardly see them anymore right Beamish? Where the hell they came from must have been . . . (395-396).

Someplace in that flow of information is a pair of women's underwear found under the bed. It's presence makes its way into the discussion, without the text dividing it off from the main flow of the discussion. The reader does not get moments, does not get the controlling narrative perspective that provides the "important" movements in the progression of the plot. The reader gets flow.

What is it that "looks very interesting?" Gibbs clever tax maneuvering or the underwear? The impossibility of making a clear determination from the undifferentiated flow, leads the reader into having to accept more that one
possible order for arranging and understanding this text. There are not the kind of mutually exclusive possibilities that Jacques Derrida sees in the reading of "he war" in *Finnegans Wake*. If there were such possibilities, the choice of which one it is that is being referred to would order the conversation. Instead, there is a fuzzy range of possibilities in which truth is not a question of absolutes. The postmodern textual space is always already deconstructed, so there is only the vacillation within the fuzzy range of possibilities.

This postmodern world of *J R* reflects the fact that "a work of art has a beginning, middle and end, life is all middle" (486, among other places in the flow). This postmodern novel is all (non-excluded) middle because that is how postmodern art is mapped. An ordered text could not capture the postmodern world, because its orders would provide a center to a world that has been decentered. Any order must be a new level of order out of the chaos. *J R* can be ordered, as long as that ordering is provisional.

Gaddis manages to use that provisionality to enact his critique of the postmodern world. While *The Recognitions* sought to pull meaning out of a disciplined nostalgia, *J R* constructs a more provisional critique: there is something wrong in this culture, even if there are no certainties upon which to hang that sense of foreboding. Steven Moore provides some sense of this movement in Gaddis' art from *The Recognitions* to *J R* (and beyond):

I prefer to see the three novels as cultural soundings corresponding to the three stages of adulthood: youth and expansive idealism in *The Recognitions*; middle age and evasive
idealism under siege in *J R*; and the beginning of laconic old age with idealism lost in *Carpenter’s Gothic*. Even though each of Gaddis’ novels teems with characters of all ages, these three ages determine the principal moral viewpoint in each and the darkening pessimistic outlook. (William Gaddis 141)

If *J R* is written in the postmodern space, its darkness is not a reflection of moral center, but of a decentered morality.

The web of information, and its tight connectedness, point out that the unmappable cyberspace that Frederic Jameson describes is, in fact, not so diverse as to be unmappable, but is wound so tight and close around our subjectivity (and our pathologies) that it pulls us in at the same time that it is scattering us out into the ether of communicative electronics. It is this relation to the cyberspace that gets explored in Gaddis’ cybernetic conversations and transitions.

Understanding the conversations in *J R* can be difficult because Gaddis has included so much ‘noise’ in the narrative. The entropic leakage Jack Gibbs speaks of shows up in the narrative as the babble (or babel) of incomplete thoughts, unfinished sentences, and interrupted ideas, in other words, a kind of ‘noise pollution,’ partially from mechanical devices; the noise from telephones, tape recorders, televisions, radios, and dictaphones permeates *J R* so much so that many of characters talk to or into mechanical devices rather than people. (Sawyer 121)

As society becomes more cybernetic, its flow of information becomes mediated by machines. These machines are not merely a medium, since they are a place not only of mediation but of control. How and where the information flows is controlled not only by the physical and technological limits of the media, but also
by the societal forces that own/oversee the media. This is the danger of the capitalist ideology that permeates the cyberspace. The machines are not neutral since access to them and the sustaining of them are dependent upon the economies of the society. Even as they pull subjectivities outward, they allow those who control the economies in.

The information age allows the seeming interconnectedness of the urban dwellers of *The Recognitions*, who stumble in and out of circles of friends and acquaintances, to be translated into an international web that pulls J R's phantom company into a connection with General Roll and Triangle Industries and Typhon International: million-dollar companies whose owners and board members are united in a web of acquaintanceship straight out of *The Recognitions*. Even as the subjectivities spiral outward from their bodies, the controlling forces in the culture insert deeper into the subjectivities. The thing that makes the cyberspace "unmappable" is the inability of the lone subject to now see the ends of his/her subjectivity (because the society's ability to map the position of the subject is increasing). These people are bound by the force of information, without being able to encompass enough of the information to see the bond (exactly the trap Jameson describes).

*The Recognitions* was a novel more intent on breaking down the psychological defenses through chaos, to expose the psychopathologies of humans. It was a timeless work, in that its values (if not its methods) were
rooted in a transcendent desire for a "disciplined nostalgia." In *The Recognitions* it is possible to detect a moral center that lies behind Gaddis's desire to confront his reader with meaning. *J R* is more about the sociopathologies of its time, and thus turns away from challenging the modernist cognitive maps of a reading community (as *The Recognitions* did) and rather attempts to avail itself of the possibilities of the postmodern chaos. It attempts to lead its readers into a chaos that reflects a culture that reflects a chaos of the mind. Meaning is no longer generated by leading the culture through its pathology of information and back to a center of meaning. Meaning is redefined in fuzzy terms. The moral center of *The Recognitions* is decentered and diffused.

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I think that it might be useful to think of the narrative of *J R* as fractal narrative. The fractal is a means of defining the way geometric forms exist between dimensions (or, perhaps, is a measure of its "roughness"). A one-dimensional line can nearly fill a two-dimensional plane if it is "rough" enough. A river system, which approaches linearity, can drain a region, which can be considered as a finite plane (or even a finite solid, if depth is taken into account). Fractal geometry is a way of measuring the dimensionality of a shape
(e.g. where does the river lie between a line (dimension = 1) and a plane (dimension = 2)). The closer it lies to the higher dimension, the "rougher" it is.

Fractals have a self-similarity of shape that is replicated across scales of measure, and replication of complexity at ever smaller scales is what allows the line to fill the plane. Fractals are, in a sense, form filling shapes.

*J R* is fractal in the sense that the complexity of information in its overall narrative is replicated by complexities in smaller passages of the text, which are replicated by complexities at a smaller scale still. Now it might be said that *The Recognitions* is a fractal narrative, if fractal is perceived as "form-filling." *The Recognitions* is filled by systems of information whose complexity runs across scales.

Fractals, though, are only form-filling if the observation is that there is an empty form that is becoming filled. In this sense fractals are a way of watching complexity increase. If, on the other hand, it is not assumed that there is an empty space to be filled, then fractals are a measure of complexity based upon replication of complexity across scales. *J R* is fractal in this latter sense. *J R* does not fill an empty textual space with complex information. It is a textual space of complex information. That complexity reflects a dense flow of information at every level of engagement with the text. This fractal narrative is not measured in terms of its linearity, because the text exists within the realm between linear progression and "planar" textual space. *J R* is not mapped by
following its flow, but by mapping the space filled by that flow. The logic of
fractals is fuzzy logic (not "Is an object a line or a plane?", but "How linear/planar
is it?")

The flow of postmodernism is written into in $J \, R$, and out of that flow there
emerges a critique of the capitalism that has created the flow of information,
transforming worth from "silver dollars" to "paper money" to electronic transfer
(3). Such a critique can be enacted even within the chaos, since it is a critique
within the fuzzy logic of postmodernism. The mind can read meaning from these
postmodern maps of the culture.

Gaddis works much of his critique through the character of $J \, R$. From this
eleven-year-old boy we hear the incessant drone of capitalism. In the mouth of
such a young boy it seems a tragic loss of perspective and sense of importance.

—I know, I forgot to tell you how we got him, see I just read all
these job ads in the Times till I found one of this company which
sounded real professional see so I copied it and put in my box
number instead, this here Mister Piscator didn't you get this letter
from him? Because this is just this here carbon copy he sent me of
it when I told him on the telephone he should write all this stuff to
you at the office because you were handling it there for me like this
branch, you know? So when he says he can get all these figures
on Eagle Mills off their accountants for those ideas you got me off
that smartass broker with all the heads which hey I meant to tell
you, you know he said I'd never see a nickle on this Alberta and
Western debenture? Well right after they put out another one
called series C I got this here interest payment on series B if he's
so smart. And like he told you Ace was like toilet paper the price of
it just doubled right after this progress report that said they expect
to pay this dividend and they offered me twenty cents a share which I only paid ten for so I got this whole bunch more, I mean I'd like to know how many stocks he's got which their price doubles that quick boy. Anyway you didn't bring this here letter from Piscator? (297)

When it is pointed out to J R that there are real people whose lives are affected by his enterprises, he replies that "this isn't any popularity contest" (296). For him the information of capitalism is lacking in any meaning other than its play of numbers. Gaddis confronts society with what we are providing for our future. This novel, which revolves around a school and which is about "our piece of America" is just such a black comic tragedy—the postmodern space of critique.

J R's inability to appreciate life's pleasure's frustrates Amy Joubert (474). His total inability to listen to Bach frustrates Bast (654-655), who tells J R that he wants "—To make you hear! to make you, to make you feel to try to . . ." (658).

In J R we see the possibilities of a society founded in an unconsidered and unreflected upon flow of information. Postmodernism must be engaged by the subject, so that the subject will not become a passive receiver of information. It is the subject who gives meaning to information.

J R is not a denial of meaning, but, like Christopher Unborn, a repositioning of meaning within a different logic. "In contrast with Steiner's premise that the unconventional narrative mocks the reader, I would argue that Gaddis creates his 'unreadable' text to instruct the reader, to teach him through unconventional narrative how to understand in an unconventional way 'what's
worth doing" (Comnes, 162). That unconventional nature of narrative and instruction is a reflection of the decentering implicit in postmodernism. This book's critique comes through in the cost to the subjects who live within this capitalism. J R is the site of the critique. He is the budding capitalist, creator of a flow of information all his own, but one joined to the flow of the larger capitalist society. The pointing out of what's worth doing that the reader senses at the level of the character of J R is, by virtue of the fractal engagement of the narrative, reflected in the larger system of information of the text, and by extension to the larger system of information of the culture.

This is not only satirical postmodernism, but postmodern satire. The biting criticism of satire comes not through a referral back to a moral center (as in The Recognitions), but in an overall sense of tone that emerges from the specific flow of information Gaddis provides. It is not in the form of narrative statements, such as we get in Christopher Unborn. It is sensed somewhere in the space of J R. It cannot be mapped to specific sites in the text, because the fractal mapping of this text is a question of scale, not of position. The critique runs up and down from culture to subject and back, but it is not fixed to specific scenes.

Yet, the postmodern reader can map this space, can feel the tragedy of J R, can recognize the critique without a nostalgic return to old guarantees and certainties. As Carl Malmgren points out: "The reader, through diligence and
care alone, gives substance to the fiction by occupying narratival gaps and by reading through the blizzard of noise to the fictional reality which generates the noise" (Malmgren 10). That reading through is not a matter of eliminating the noise, but of learning how to listen to the noise and recognize its meanings. Even as information in our society plunges ahead of meaning, a considered postmodernism is recognizing that noise has the ability to generate meaning. It is toward that considered postmodernism that Gaddis writes *J R*. Gaddis recognizes that meaning is not being lost in the postmodern world, but that is being lost in a seductive flow of information and in an anxiety about that loss of old certainties (which were never really certainties as much as they were reassuring illusions of certainty). *J R* provides Gaddis with a way of writing into the postmodern world and still engaging his reader. "[T]hat's what any book worth reading is about, problem solving" (499). *J R* is worth reading, because its engagement can be a place of meaningful deepening of subjectivity.

The mind can map the space of *J R*, because its chaos is of the mind. As the assumptions of the culture are challenged and forms of representation are reconsidered, literature must find a new way of engaging the subject. Engaging the chaos may be the means by which literature can find an expression adequate to engaging the subject in a postmodern world.
Conclusion

(Chaos of) Reading (Chaos)

The texts I have run through in this analysis, and the postmodernism that they enact, point to aspects of the act of reading that refer us back to the mind and the way in which we think. The play of chaos and order in the brain, the fuzzy logic of the mind (which is capable of engaging shades of meaning rather than binary distinctions of meaning), and the syncretistic reception of art all suggest that the way in which we map texts is not a matter of mastery (learning the paths), but of engagement (learning how to navigate).

Language itself is a place of chaos, as deconstruction has shown. Its range of determinate possibilities of meaning, reflects the play of chaos which underlies "meaning." The way in which language divides experience into those ranges of meanings (signification) reflects the way in which the mind constructs order out chaos (finding a best fit within the chaos). Joyce's carnivalization of language in *Finnegans Wake* leads the reader of that text to confront not what Joyce does to language, but what that flexibility and plurality of signification indicates about the way in which we usually think of signification. Joyce's play does not create new possibilities of language, but exploits the possibilities
which are already there because language emerges out of and enters into
chaos.

That awareness of the chaos of language plays itself out in the possibility
of translating the chaos of the mind into narrative. If language is a range of
possible meanings, then narrative is a complicated array of such ranges. This
would seem to render impossible the communication of (even indeterminate)
meaning in texts. That would be a valid conclusion if reader were the translation
of words back into chaos, that is, if words were received as ordered and that
order was then reinterpreted back into chaos. Reading however is not simply a
matter of taking words and placing them into patterns. Reading is also the act of
reading into a textual space where the play of meanings is received. It is in this
syncretistic reception of the space of the text that the text is engaged. The act of
reading is a complicated combination of the reception of words and of the space
that they create in their reception. Narrative, then, is not just telling, but a telling
of what is known. The reader is engaged by the known implicit in the telling.
Narrative—because of the chaotic engagement with a text—has possibilities
that transcend the limitations that interpretive practices often impose on
narrative. Those impositions of order are always defined by narrow parameters
of interpretation. At the limits of interpretation lies chaos.

This is not to suggest that there are no limitations in the ability of
language to write the seemingly untellable aspects of the mind, such as desire.
Desire is something which can only be felt, but yet must be told. Writers write both into the impossibility of that task and into the possibilities. Cultural limitations implicit in the practices of writing and narrative must be challenged to reach a writing whose logic does not falter in the face of such contradiction. Writing into the chaos can create ruptures and pluralities and possibilities that make it possible to write something of desire (and the desire to write all of desire runs into limitations of certainty that cannot be hurdled). "Something of desire" spins writing into a fuzzy logic that can deal with such distinctions and still provide a possibility of meaning and meaningful engagement.

The texts analyzed in this work construct a sense of postmodernism which leads through those critiques and into the logic of postmodernism. This is not to suggest that this is "Postmodernism," but that these works can illustrate for the reader some of the ways in which postmodernism can be constructed. Jean-François Lyotard argues that "the modern aesthetic question is not 'What is beautiful?' but 'What can be said to be art (and literature)?'" (75). I would append to that the question "What does it mean to engage a work of art?" The texts analyzed in this work ask that question.

Postmodernism has usually been constructed as oppositional discourse. Such a postmodernism wants to challenge and decenter the desires for order that underlie the logic of the culture. It provides a space that cannot be mapped with the cognitive maps that were used to navigate the textual space of what
Frederic Jameson calls "high modernism." Such maps assume that engagement with a text is mastery of its space. If we concur in this, we will have succeeded in imposing a high degree of order on a violently disordered section of the text. This may be a satisfying outcome, but our satisfaction will have been purchased at the price of too much of the text's interest. The text is more intelligible now, true, but less interestingly so than if we had allowed ourselves to entertain less total naturalizations, to build, if only provisionally, other possible worlds, to give full play to sheerly formal patterning, to dwell on the very tension between modes of intelligibility and the apparently unintelligible. (Brian McHale, 73)

McHale here is speaking of Gravity's Rainbow and the tendency of its critics to try to pull it together into a coherent package (a paranoid reading), even as the logic of the text seems to resist that ordering. The confrontation with postmodernism is the movement from a binary map to a fuzzy map. Those maps of high modernism are a cultural construct. That construction reflects not only the founding of the culture in classical logic, but also desires for control in the culture and in the academy that creates the interpretive practices we use to engage texts. The problem of this reading body which constitutes the interpretive community is, as McHale notes, that inevitably, the critics misread. Or perhaps it would be fairer to say that they under-read; that is, they fail to entertain the range of possible interpretations for any given instance of you, but instead opt for one of them—the one, obviously, that is most compatible with whatever general interpretive hypothesis they happen to be pursuing—supressing the other, perhaps equally plausible alternatives. (McHale 103)
The academy therein sets up practices that have little to do with how the mind engages with literature, and that is the site where the challenge of postmodernism is presented.

Still another extreme of the academy is the reclamation of chaos for the academy. If what the academy has missed is the chaos, then it will claim the chaos as its own. This manifests itself both/either in a deconstructive practice (that of deconstructive criticism rather than deconstructive theory) that spirals off into a revelling in clever pursuit of meaninglessness and/or those reader-response criticisms which argues that interpretive communities establish the access to that chaos. The former practice is a fun, but relatively unsatisfying, practice that reduces engagement with a text to a cold intellectual play. It makes mastery of meaninglessness a substitute for mastery of meaning. The latter practice is a reifying of the interpretive community. The text ceases to exist, and meaning is eradicated or relativized, rather than decentered. A postmodernism founded in either of these sets of assumptions is one that has not moved toward the fuzzy logic which characterizes the mind, but toward a logic which has tried to create the illusion of the fuzzy even as its restores classical binary oppositions. In either case, postmodernism gets a capital P (which also stands for presence).

It is not my intention to argue that postmodernism is that literature which has fuzzy logic. The fuzzy logic is a function of the engagement of reader and
This postmodernism then is an interpretation of a text. The interpretive engagement has a fuzzy logic. Postmodernism (unintentional capital "P") foregrounds that fuzzy character, but does not create it. Such foregrounding is a provisional quality of the engagement. The texts in this work are somewhat postmodern. That is not intended to be vague, but to suggest that the idea of postmodernism is itself fuzzy. The question is not "Is this text Postmodern?" but "Does this text seem postmodern?".

What underlies this idea of postmodernism is "a hermeneutics of engagement. Its ruling assumption is that our involvement in our own subjectivity is not a barrier to interpretation, but the circumstance that enables us to enter most deeply into a text" (Walter Davis, 4). If engagement with a text is the issue, then postmodernism is constructed toward discussing literature in terms of the engagement of the subject.

Of course, the subject here is not a presence and engagement is not a question of certainty. This leads to various challenges of postmodernism. Alexander Argyros argues that he does "not see how someone could care deeply about values that he or she knows to be purely contingent" (5). Argyros points out the difficulty of any politics which relies on a decentered subject position. He points out that "given his criticism of foundational theories, Derrida could not possibly maintain a theory of truth based on anything but cultural or historical relativity" (82, emphasis mine), but that, "like most of us, [Derrida]
knows that South Africa is evil." (83) Argyros thus sees a paradox in Derrida's reasoning, and its inability to be resolved within classical logic leads Argyros to dismiss Derrida on the basis of that irresolvable paradox.

F. F. Centore's critique of postmodernism is of the epistemology that he sees it creating within the culture. The absence of a universal truth leads to a relativism that leaves Centore uncomfortable:

The ethics based upon such an epistemology is an amoralism in which everyone must invent meaning for himself and herself, and will essences into existence. All decisions are now pragmatic and exploratory. The autonomous self reigns supreme, unless it voluntarily subjugates itself to some temporary leader within some wider social scheme. The autonomous self can justify doing anything so long as it is pleasing to the self and one is honest and sincere about it. My own will is the only standard of anything good, and anything that goes against it, such as objective rules of behavior, accusations of individual and personal guilt, personal punishment, and so on, it not only evil but the greatest evil. So, for instance, for the independent woman abortion is good because she freely wills it, while rape is evil because she does not will it. (6)

Centore's criticism is less a criticism of postmodernism, than of those postmodernisms founded in deconstructive or reader-response criticisms. Centore is right that there is a danger of relativism, but it is a danger specific to that interpretation of the postmodern which cannot escape from binary logic.

Centore's observes that postmodern critique "is a strange kind of critique, one bound up, too, with its own complicity with power and domination, one that acknowledges that it cannot escape implication in that which it nevertheless still wants to analyze and maybe even undermine" (4). In its
reference to strangeness, the remark establishes the character of postmodernism as something which exists outside the range of his logic.

Argyros' criticism of Derrida relies on a concept of truth as a binary distinction from falsehood. Both Argyros and Centore hinge their critique on a very valid fear of losing the ability to make what are such important distinctions. If we counter these arguments with the possibilities of meaning and distinction that fuzzy logic presents, then we have the ability to find a provisional subjectivity which is not a paradox. Fuzzy logic is not a denial of meaning, but a denial of its limitation by binary logic. Paradox is a function of classical logic, not a function of the human mind's ability to make moral distinctions. Evil does not have to have a fixed presence for Jacques Derrida (or Alexander Argyros, for that matter) to know that it is "evil." We have all seen how good and evil as moral distinctions break down when their limits are exposed. The inability of the human mind to accept such limitations is the reason for moral qualifiers such as "reasonable doubt" and "justifiable." The human mind does not match South Africa to some fixed definition of "evil" before making its judgments. It can, and I would hope it does, confront some rigorous consideration of South Africa within its fuzzy confrontation with the idea of South African evil. It is possible to have a postmodern subjectivity which is capable of moral judgment. Carlos Fuentes' *Christopher Unborn* shows us how such a subjectivity might confront its culture on ethical grounds.
A postmodern subjectivity is not a paradox, but its nature is a difficult one to articulate (to return to the limitations of translating knowing into telling). Paul Smith puts this face on postmodern subjectivity:

Resistance does take place, but it takes place only within a social context which has already construed subject-positions for the human agent. The place of that resistance has, then, to be glimpsed somewhere in the interstices of the subject-positions which are offered in any social formation. More precisely, resistance must be regarded as the by-product of contradictions in and among subject-positions. The subject/individual can be discerned but not by the supposition of some quasi-mystical will-to-resistance. What I propose, then, is that resistance is best understood as a specific twist in the dialectic between individuation and ideological interpellation. (25)

This leads us back to Davis' hermeneutics of engagement. Engagement is not a presence, but a process which cannot be understood without being considered within that process.

Smith thus proposes that

It would seem appropriate to talk instead of an overdetermination in the 'subject's' process of construction: such an overdetermination is the effect of a continual and continuing series of overlapping subject-positions which may or may not be present to consciousness at any given moment, but which in any case constitute a person's history. And a person's lived history cannot be abstracted as subjectivity pure and simple, but must be conceived as a colligation of multifarious and multiform subject positions. (32)

History is a construct here, but not a meaningless one. It has no certainty, but it can be engaged, confronted, and considered within the process of its play of uncertainty. This is not a denial of "what is at stake in theory's abstraction of
the 'subject,' and what is at stake in discerning the 'subject'" (Smith 160), but an awareness of how the older definitions of subjectivity which hinge on certainties are now no longer adequate. Thus, it becomes possible to have a site of playful political urgency, of postmodern politics.

McHale compares this provisionally constructed postmodernism to someone who is half-kidding, and thereby makes an important move toward the fuzzy logic which can break out of the binary systems in which postmodernism has been trapped. The fuzzy logic of late postmodernism allows a space where the text can mean something, without any absolute truth claims. A text such as Christopher Unborn carnivalizes the tragic and achieves something out of that half-positioning, which is less a choice of mutually exclusive possibilities (or the paradox of existing mutually exclusive possibilities) than a "half"-position where the truth value lies someplace between the 0 and 1 of traditional logic.

Fuzzy logic relies on the chaos of thought to allow its functioning. An orderly representation would necessitate a vacillating between the possibilities (much as the paradoxical drawing of the old woman/young woman requires a vacillation between orderly interpretations). The chaos of reception needs no such choice. Anthony Wilden proposes the need to talk about hierarchies rather than oppositions, and moves toward fuzzy logic (while emphasizing the power imbalances that result from binary logic).
Importantly, this fuzzy postmodernism can allow value distinctions, even without absolute truth claims (and value and truth are not the same thing).

McHale notes that

if all our stories about postmodernism, big or little, are strategic fictions, if all our categories are constructions, this does not mean that they are all equally good stories, equally sound constructions. It makes a difference which story or variant we choose to tell, and there are criteria for preferring certain stories or variants over others. Now our criteria of choice can hardly be criteria of objective truth, given that the 'object' about which the discourse may be said to be true (or false) has been constructed by that discourse itself. Rather, we must choose among competing constructions of postmodernism on the basis of various kinds of rightness or fit such as, for instance, the validity of the inference; internal consistency or coherence; representativeness of sample; appropriateness of scope; richness of interconnections; fineness of detail; and productivity, a story's capacity to generate other stories, to stimulate lively conversation, to keep the discursive ball rolling.

(26)

And then "Above all, we choose one story or variant over another for its superior interest. Minimally, we strive to tell stories that are at least relevant to our audience; optimally, we hope to make out stories compelling, if possible even gripping" (McHale, 26). In other words, there are stories that mean something (even as they lack determinate meaning). "This is not a story to pass on," Toni Morrison writes in Beloved, but, of course, it is a story that we must pass on.

There are things that must be said and confrontations that the subject must make and possibilities of that saying and that confrontation in literature that must be explored, even as the inability of language (and literature) to capture certain meaning are recognized. We still have stories that must be told, and we still, as
readers, must accept the need to allow our subjectivity to be interrogated. Postmodernism is not a denial of such engagement.

This leads us to a position that Judith Butler refers to in terms of its "strategic provisionality (rather than its strategic essentialism)" (19). In Butler's case this is way of finding a deconstructed political position, a place of opposition that does not rely on certainty for its possibility (or its power). We cannot allow this possibility to go unpursued because of some fear of paradox.

Such provisional engagement must be incorporated into the practice of literature and the practice of the interpretation of literature. Rodolphe Gasché points out the relation of literature to the epistemology of the postmodern culture:

Literature puts itself between quotation marks by opening itself to the absolute loss of its meaning, whether of content or of form. Literature becomes a radical interrogation of philosophy, and of most past literature as well, not only by refusing its foundation in a preceding and prior being of meaning but also by disclaiming any formal essence as concerns its substance of expression. (258)

Yet, those possibilities of interrogation implicit in postmodern literary practices require a criticism able to confront it on those terms. Gasché points out that "what is wrong with literary criticism, to refer to Heidegger once again, is that it experiences too little in the neighborhood of the work and that it expresses its already diminished experience too crudely and too literally" (Gasché, 267). Criticism must construct itself within terms of fuzzy logic, much as the literature has. Then postmodern criticism can become postmodern itself, and interrogate literature not in terms of Other to be mastered, but in terms of Other to be
engaged. "The contact between literary writing and criticism is established when the latter exhibits the phenomenologically unthematizable unities, that is, the nonsynthetic unities that organize and limit the conceptual differences that make up the critical discourse. It is here that one can glimpse what deconstructive literary criticism could be about" (Gasché, 269). That criticism would look much like McHale's provisionally-constructed discursive postmodernism. The desire to define the postmodern is suspended and the desire to engage its critique and possibilities moves out of the realm of resolution of paradox (What is the form of representation of postmodernism if representation itself is in question?) and into a logic which is not caught in the paradox.

If the epistemology of the culture is being reconstituted in terms of this fuzzy logic, how does the subject within that logic relate to the literature? It is no longer the point of rupture, but is the "representation" of the postmodern culture. Adorno wrestles with this relation of art to subjectivity in film:

Real life is becoming indistinguishable from the movies. The sound film, far surpassing the theater of illusion, leaves no room for imagination or reflection on the part of the audience, who is unable to respond within the structure of the film, yet deviate from its precise detail without losing the thread of the story; hence the film forces its victims to equate it directly with reality. (126)

This film watcher is being led to reconfigure the relation of art and reality in terms of a heightening of the false reality. This heightened false reality, tending as its does toward the contemporary plunge toward a hyperreality which reflects the spiralling off of deconstructive epistemology into the culture, would seem to
lead toward a question of the relation of art and culture (and reality and subjectivity) that lands in the lap of cultural critics such as Jean Baudrillard. Susan Rubin Suleiman points out that the hope of the postmodern culture is "that it is possible to find openings even in the monolithic mechanism of the culture industry; that is it possible for innovative, critical work to reach a large audience without passing through the 'upward and downward' cycle analyzed by Crow, where what reaches the mass public is always already 'evacuated cultural goods,' deprived of force and integrity" (199). If the logic of the reader is fuzzy (if the reader is postmodern) where is the critique of culture in the postmodern? How does the subject confront the contradictions of the postmodern epistemology without retreating to its difference from an older epistemology? I will pursue this issue further in the postconclusion to this work.

I have argued in this work that the mind is fuzzy and that brain is chaotic. I would like to return for a moment to these ideas. I think that the texts analyzed in this work point us toward this realization, but I think it would be a good idea to articulate the realization.

A place to begin might be an idea of what consciousness is and how it relates to the play of chaos and order than I have been describing. Colin McGinn argues that "Consciousness is not a diaphanous membrane; it is more like a pyramid only the tip of which is visible—a pyramid equipped with elaborate inner workings, scarcely imaginable from what is given" (The Problem of
Consciousness is a kind of manifest order that we make of the underlying play of chaotic connection which is the background noise of the conscious. It is the "sense" that we make of experience. I am being vague here because the unknowability of the mind (as both subject and object of this interrogation) makes the connections here rather indistinct. The conscious is not entirely the realm of language, but it is configured in part by language (and thus by the culture which configures the language).

This tenuous link of language to consciousness leads Gottlob Frege, confronting the phrase "some numbers," to note that: "the words cannot be taken together at all, and we must not ask for the meaning of this combination. We have here a grammatical pseudo-subject, similar to 'all men', 'no man', and 'nothing'—constructions in which language seems to have indulged in order to mislead logicians" (239). Language tries to make distinction, to divide experience into signs, but those signs partake of a logic that defies distinctions. Wittgenstein points out that "Language disguises thought. So much so, that from the outward form of the clothing it is impossible to infer the form of the thought beneath it, because the outward form of the clothing is not designed to reveal the form of the body, but for entirely different purposes" (Section 4.002). Thought is fuzzy and tries to engender a fuzzy language, but the language has a link to classical logic in its desire to make distinctions on the basis of "is" or "is not." That link is at least partly due that the fact that language is not only an
attempt at articulating thought, but is also a reflection of the culture (whose logic is classical).

McGinn confronts this problem of tying language to consciousness:

First there is the idea that the propositions expressed by sentences of natural language have a hidden form, not directly revealed in the apparent grammatical form of the sentences that express them: thus a surface/deep distinction applies to language. Second, the postulation of deep logical form is motivated, not by how sentences strike us phenomenologically, but by considerations of logical theory — the resolution of logical puzzles, the avoidance of baroque ontologies (Meinong), the need to exhibit logical relations between sentences. Third, the apparent form of sentences actively tempts us into certain kinds of logical and metaphysical error: the surface of language naturally generates various intellectual illusions, which can only be avoided by discounting or downplaying the appearances and acknowledging a level of hidden logical structure" (The Problem of Consciousness 93).

The hidden logic is a fuzzy logic that cannot quite be mapped to language, because the links and connections that play in the chaos of the unconscious are always already mediated by the link of consciousness to language. Therefore a theory of consciousness which recognizes the play of possibility of chaos underlying consciousness must "recognize that conscious states possess a hidden natural (not logical) structure which mediates between their surface properties and the physical facts on which they constitutively depend" and that "the physical governance of conscious states requires a hidden structure to connect them to abstract logical forms" (The Problem of Consciousness 100). This play of a unconscious chaos of possibility and a conscious order of understanding provides a frame for talking about the relation of brain and
consciousness. "Consciousness must possess a face that enables it to slot into the physical make-up of the brain, but it also presents a face upon which introspection gazes: and these are not going to be the same face. That is just the way consciousness is -- and indeed has to be" (McGinn, The Problem of Consciousness 123).

This is not to suggest that the unconscious is purely chaotic and that consciousness is orderly, but these are useful terms for the way in which a ground state of chaotic firing of networks of neurons and the ordering of that firing through a process of phase-locking that momentarily provides a single frequency can be connected to this distinction. The realm of possibility of frequencies within the chaos provides an unconscious space of play and connection and meaning.

Kristeva ties the unconscious back to the question of language by positing a chora which is not language but has the possibility of language. "Our discourse--all discourse--moves with and against the chora in the sense that it simultaneously depends upon and refuses it...The chora is not yet a position that represents something for someone (i.e., it is not a sign); nor is it a position that represents someone for another position (i.e., it is not yet a signifier either)"
(Revolution in Poetic Language 26). The chaos of the unconscious has a relation to signification, but makes connections that are outside language, that connect ideas and desires. This is not merely the launching area of language.
Chaos is not just the precursor of order. The importance of the chaos of the unconscious is its position of providing a site for a subjectivity which both precedes and eludes the Symbolic Order (although such a place could not be teased out into the Symbolic Order). As Kristeva points out:

According to a number of psycholinguists, 'concrete operations' precede the acquisition of language, and organize preverbal semiotic space according to logical categories, which are thereby shown to precede or transcend language. From their research we shall retain not the principle of an operational state but that of a preverbal functional state that governs the connections between the body (in the process of constituting itself as a body proper), objects and the protagonists of family structure. But we shall distinguish this functioning from symbolic operations that depend on language as a sign system--whether the language [langue] is vocalized or gestural (as with deaf-mutes). The kinetic functional stage of the semiotic precedes the establishment of the sign; it is not, therefore, cognitive in the sense of being assumed by a knowing, already constituted subject. The genesis of the functions organizing the semiotic process can be accurately elucidated only within a theory of the subject that does not reduce the subject to one of understanding, but instead opens up within the subject this other scene of pre-symbolic functions. (Kristeva, Revolution in Poetic Language 27)

This consideration of consciousness provides possibilities which models that privilege order might omit. There is a play here that transcends a combination of clearly ordered processes.

What might be said about this chaos? It is in some way of reflection of the chaos of the brain. The binary neurons are organized into complex circuits. Within those circuits are ranges of frequencies. A ground state chaos and a range of firing patterns limited only by the ability of the mind to "read" them
provides a place of immense flexibility and possibility in thought. Rodney J. Douglas and Kevan A. C. Martin point out that in considering the brain, "we need to consider large clusters of highly interconnected neurones, each performing fairly simple tasks and evolving a response over many milliseconds. The response of individual neurones then reflects not its own specific interest but rather the complex behaviour of a microcircuit containing many neurones" (291). Within that complexity is possibility. Thought is not an immediate resolution of that chaos. Rather, thinking increases the chaos before ordering (phase-locking) occurs. As M. Zak has discovered; "It appears that chaotic states of neurons activity are associated with higher level of cognitive processes such as generalization and abstraction" (343). The mind thinks in chaos, not just out of chaos. The randomness of this play of chaos provides the ability of the mind to make novel connections, to think creatively and to entertain new possibilities, as well as to find connections that might be excluded by combinations of orders. "A chaotic attractor creates a certain flexibility of the behavior due to random change of 'initial conditions' which provides a ground for adaptation" (Zak, 350).

Postmodern texts may create new interpretive strategies, but they have not created chaos in the brain. The mind, then, is a reflection of the brain, but is also constructed by other societal and interpersonal forces that change its
relation to chaos. The possibilities of chaos in the brain are thus engaged in ways that are at least somewhat culturally determined.

Reading postmodernism points us toward possibilities of the mind that are not limited to the engagement of these texts. The reading of any text has the possibility of engagement. The chaos of reading is not just the reading of chaotic texts. It is also a way of understanding the encounters with all texts. Whether or not these encounters are foregrounded, or even acknowledged, does not change the possibility of that chaos. Reading is chaotic because the mind is chaotic (because the brain is chaotic?).

Before concluding this work, I want to spend a moment turning back on what it has constructed. I began this work by hanging my points on an apparently binary concept—dialectics—to explain the relation of a binary opposition—chaos and order. I placed those terms at the beginning of this work as a provisional starting point of this discussion, but I think that they merit a closer examination, since their nature seems to contradict what I have developed out of them.

While the logic of the dialectic is traditionally thought of as a reflection of classical binary logic, with oppositions being used to generate the next move of the dialectic, the dialectic as constantly referring interrogation is not antithetical to fuzzy logic. While fuzzy logic is not founded in either/or distinctions, but in ranges of possibilities, its rigorous application within that range of possibilities
makes it a useful tool for the dialectic. If the purpose of the dialectic is to interrogate meaning, and then to refer that interrogation on to still further interrogation, then the fuzzy logic of a work such as *Christopher Unborn* can be dialectically examined and used as confrontation with the reading subject.

Classical logic is not the opposite of fuzzy logic. It is a matter of selecting a binary scale and then looking at human systems within that scale. Fuzzy logic points out the limitation of the scale classical logic has chosen. Dialectics, then, has a relation to classical logic, because classical distinctions are a subset of fuzzy distinctions. The need of referral implicit in dialectics is a struggle with the same limiting scale of logic that fuzzy logic is struggling with. Thus, a fuzzy dialectics does not represent a contradiction, since its logic is put in play by contradiction, rather than arrested by it.

The binary opposition of chaos and order is an arbitrary one that I have chosen, because its coinage has a certain rightness of fit for the discussion. To say that the brain is a play of chaos and order does not deny the range of the play, as it establishes the polarities of chaos and order. Chaos is a relative term, usually applied to a system that does not behave as the person discussing the system had expected it to. Chaos theorists usually talk of higher orders, such as strange attractors, which can be used to provide a rigorous examination of the system from a different perspective. Implicit in that formulation is Benoit
Mandelbrot's caveat that scale (or parameters) are necessary to any such discussion.

The brain then does not oppose order and chaos. Order is that term which we give to how we make manifest the range of chaos (or how we signify language or how we tell what we know in narratives). Behind those terms, the mind works as it works. As the site of the discussion (or introspection) the mind is always, as Douglas Hofstadter suggests, unknowable (if knowledge = certainty). Chaos and order, then are terms we can use to discuss the workings of the brain (as neurochemical system) and the mind. Fuzzy logic reflects the fact that binary neurons in complicated networks are able to reason in approximating terms that make classical logic (a logic of neurons) a relatively limiting idea for thinking about thinking.

Yet, in the need to make distinctions that enable us to tell what we know, classical logic is a useful cultural construct. The changing of the postmodern culture to a more fuzzy logic does not deny the utility of classical logic. The limitations of that logic must always be taken into account (the scale must be accounted for) in its application. This does not deny the possibilities of control in classical logic that must be rejected by postmodernism. The dangers in fuzzy logic and the resilience of the societal dedication to and worship of classical logic are both complications of this discussion of postmodernism. I think some of the
complications have been addressed within this work, but some are addressed by the postconclusion.

The cultural logic of postmodernism does not reside within its literature. The literature, as Fuentes suggests in *Christopher Unborn*, is always a reflection of and into the culture. In pointing out how the mind works in the engagement with texts, the postmodern writer illustrates for the reader the assumptions of earlier texts, and the possibilities of mind that reside there, whatever cultural limitations were seemingly imposed on the texts. The act of reading is a reflection of the ordering of chaos into the text and the reception of that text as both chaos and order. The postmodern reader (the reader who reads into the logic of the postmodern texts) is aware of the implicit critique of the classical logic of earlier texts, of how that critique arises out of an understanding of the engagement of mind and text, and of the fuzzy logic of that critique and of that mind.
Post(Modern)Conclusion

The Postmodern Reader

or

Does Someone Have a Legend For These Maps?

Benoit Mandelbrot--in answering the question "How long is the coastline of Great Britain?"--suggests that all maps are dependent on scale for their validity as analytical instruments. As a result, I think it might be useful to provide something of a legend for this map (a tentative and provisional metanarrative) that establishes something of its scale.

*Post(man)*

Neil Postman, in his book *Technopoly*, argues that technology has exerted an influence on the way our minds perceive reality. He sees a grave danger in this influence, when it is unconsidered and unmediated by some kind of introspection. As he puts it: "Our task is to understand what the design is--that is to say, when we admit a new technology to the culture, we must do it with our eyes wide open" (7). We must be aware of the technology and consider how its presence might alter our subjectivity. This is a useful warning because
postmodernism, with its link to the image, has a certain immediacy and speed that seem to leave little room for reflection.

Our minds, then, in Postman's view, are being reconstructed within the postmodern culture (which, in order to stress its dangers, he dubs Technopoly). In an argument that parallels Henry Adams fin de siècle observations of the transformation of thought by quantum physics, Postman argues that we no longer think the way our predecessors thought.

If [the culture] makes sense to us, that is because our minds have been conditioned by the technology of numbers so that we see the world differently than they did. Our understanding of what is real is different. Which is another way of saying that embedded in every tool is an ideological bias, a predisposition to construct the world as one thing rather than another, to value one thing over another, to amplify one sense or skill or attitude more than another. (13)

We have different ways of thinking and different ways of responding to art, but this reconstruction of thought is occurring within a cultural logic whose ideology cannot be excluded from the transformation.

Postman then moves to set up a certain valuation within this transformation:

On the one hand, there is the world of the printed word with its emphasis on logic, sequence, history, exposition, objectivity, detachment, and discipline. On the other, there is the world of television with its emphasis on imagery, narrative, presentness, simultaneity, intimacy, immediate gratification, and quick emotional response. Children come to school having been deeply conditioned by the biases of television. (16)
Here, Postman seems to argue that media themselves have a certain hierarchy. If we refer this back to his earlier desire that this transformation be a considered one, it is possible to see that the image tends to work against such reflection.

This argument is often extended in our culture to assume that the image and its speed are a danger to our culture. Children have lost their attention spans. While that may be true, it does not necessarily deny the possibility of the construction of a postmodern ethics that can engage the image. Postmodernism can have a politics.

Yet, Postman states the danger well:

In Technopoly, the trivialization of significant cultural symbols is largely conducted by commercial enterprise. This occurs not because corporate America is greedy but because the adoration of technology pre-empts the adoration of anything else. Symbols that draw meaning from traditional religious or national contexts must therefore be made impotent as quickly as possible— that is, drained of sacred or even serious connotations. (165)

While the possibility of a postmodern ethics exists, it will not necessarily arise from nowhere. The critical edge of the postmodern must be kept in place, or the play can lead away from subjectivity and into a shallowness that flows with the culture without considering what it is that is flowing.
Mark Poster takes us a step further into this issue, not simply arguing that a transformation is occurring (has occurred), but probing into its character.

In the postmodern culture, we have moved into the "mode of information."

What the mode of information puts into question, however, is not simply the sensory apparatus, but the very shape of subjectivity: its relation to the world of objects, its perspective on the world, its location in that world. We are confronted not so much by a change from a 'hot' to a 'cool' communications medium, or by a reshuffling of sensoria, as McLuhan thought, but by a generalized destabilization of the subject. In the mode of information the subject is no longer located in a point in absolute time/space, enjoying a physical, fixed vantage point from which to rationally calculate its options. Instead it is multiplied by databases, dispersed by computer messaging and conferencing, decontextualized and reidentified by TV ads, dissolved and materialized continuously in the electronic transmission of symbols.

In the perspective of Deleuze and Guattari, we are being changed from 'arboreal' beings, rooted in time and space, to 'rhizomic' nomads who daily wander at will (whose will remains a question) across the globe, and even beyond it through communications satellites, without necessarily moving our bodies at all.

The body then is no longer the effective limit of the subject's position. Or perhaps it would be better to say that communications facilities extend the nervous system throughout the Earth to the point that it enwraps the planet in a noosphere, to use Teilhard de Chardin's term, of language" (Poster 15).

Subjectivity has been decentered not merely because centers have been deconstructed, but because the subject has been diffused. The deconstruction of the self has taken away the metaphysics of presence upon which old notions of subjectivity where based. The diffusion of the self has expanded the range of determinate possibilities through which that decentered subjectivity vacillates.
Further complicating that diffusion are the mechanical/electronic media that are a part of that diffusion. The decentered subject, whose boundaries are moving outward at (nearly) the speed of light is integrated into a subjectivity that encompasses the machines with which it interacts (and which serve to mediate not only its interactions with other subjects, but even with itself).

The Lacanian moment of recognition in the mirror, with its sense of self as distinct object, is now mediated by the camcorder. My son (and perhaps my other children, unnoticed by me) passed not through the mirror stage, but through the video tape stage. His recognition of self was in the viewing of his image and the hearing of the sound of his voice and the reflection not of his mirrored present actions, but of mirrored remembered actions of moments earlier. His earliest formation of himself as a distinct subject was mediated by these machines.

In my own case, my computer has become an extension of my own memory (a supplement where I can store things my own hardware might not store as efficiently).

The mode of information brings us into a confrontation with the cyborg as aspect of our subjectivity. As Donna Haraway notes: "No longer structured by the polarity of public and private, the cyborg defines a technological polis based partly on a revolution of social relations in the oikos, the household. Nature and culture are reworked; the one can no longer be the resource for appropriation by
the other" (175). So this transformation of subjectivity is an irreversible loss of old oppositions (with their firm and comforting centers and certainties), and an insertion of the subject in a space of subjectivity with fuzzy boundaries.

There is still another twist to this transformation. As Jean Baudrillard notes: "In this sense one can speak of the fractal subject, which--instead of transcending into a finality beyond itself--is diffracted into a multitude of identical miniaturized egos, multiplying in an embryonic mode as in a biological culture, and completely saturating its environment through an infinite process of scissiparity" ("Rituals of Transparency" 40). The diffusion of subjectivity which Poster notes has as one possible outcome, the filling of the space "outside" the body (the site of old subjectivity) by a fractal subjectivity. The "Other" becomes permeated by the subject in ways that make the sense of subjectivity something very different from old conceptualizations of subjectivity.

Frederic Jameson points out one of the dangers of this diffusion of the subject into the mode of information: "the incapacity of our minds, at least at present, to map the great global multinational and decentered communicational network in which we find ourselves caught as individual subjects" (Postmodernism 44). The ability of the subject to enact a critique of the culture becomes threatened by the inability of the subject to map the space into which it is being diffused.
And, beyond that, there is the electronic complication of this issue. Jean-François Lyotard points out that "we can predict that anything in the constituted body of knowledge that is not translatable in this way will be abandoned and that the direction of new research will be dictated by the possibility of its eventual results being translatable into computer language" (Lyotard 4). Subjectivity may be reduced into terms which can be electronically transmitted. If the subject has not mapped its way into a possible critique of this limitation, the subject may be translated irreversibly and something may be lost in the translation.

I am reminded of an interview in which Lou Reed laments the fact that the digitized sound of compact disks was made by translating music into digital terms which were unable to reproduce all of the information in the music. Some of the music was eliminated (20 bytes of information condensed into 16) in order to make it possible to digitally encode the music. I am using the past tense here, since criticism such as Reed's has led Sony to try to restore the lost music to the compact disk. The ability of artists to critique this loss of art to computer requirements reflects back on the needs for vigilance implicit in Postman, Jameson, and Lyotard. The transformation of subjectivity within the modes of information does not deny the possibility of a considered and reflecting subjectivity (even if there is a seductive pull away from the confrontation with subjectivity).
Post(structuralism)

So why not retreat into something more certain? Those old certainties served well enough for thousands of years (a fuzzy redemption of classical logic?). There are certainly those (e.g. Alexander J. Argyros) who would argue that poststructuralist arguments are passing fads of the avant garde, where the contrariness and radical challenging are transformed into critical practice. Logical holes are punched in the philosophies of Jacques Derrida (to pick a common target). "Truth" is recovered because of its seeming importance to any real ethical confrontation with subjectivity.

Mark Poster responds:

While the caveats about deconstruction or even about poststructuralism generally may be partly justified, in some cases they are fueled by an assumption even more dangerous than they position they attack: the detractors of poststructuralism may be ignoring changes in the social world by which it has become constituted in part by simulacra, by copies with no originals, by an unending proliferation of images, by an infinitely regressive mirroring of word and thing, by a simultaneity of event and record of the event, by an instantaniety of act and observation, by an immediacy and copresence of electronically mediated symbolic interactions, by a language that generates its meanings to a large extent self-referentially. Time and space dimensions in our culture are undergoing vast, massive, and profound upheavals. (Critical Theory and Poststructuralism 9)

I would add to that argument the possibility that the mind's logic is fuzzy rather than classical. A restoration of classical logic would be a cultural regression, rather than a subjective one. Poststructuralism represents a (re)turn to fuzzy logic. As such, it accounts for the possibilities of the chaos of the mind. The
culture is transforming into something fuzzy, and there exist possibilities for subjective engagements within that logic that would be lost in a return to the cultural assumptions which poststructuralism has challenged.

*Post(modernism)*

How do these changes in subjectivity reflect in the engagement with art? If consciousness itself is being transformed by postmodern culture, how is postmodernism encountered? If the subject is still grounded in the cultural logic which precedes the logic of postmodernism, then postmodernism is a challenge to that logic. It is perceived as a rupture in the representation of art. Reading postmodernism for these subjects is disorienting because, as Brian McHale notes, their "habits of reading have developed in response to texts radically unlike *Gravity's Rainbow*, while the habits that would enable us to read texts like *Gravity's Rainbow* adequately are still scarcely conceivable" (112). In these terms, "the postmodern looks for breaks, for events rather than new worlds, for the telltale instant after which it no longer the same...for shifts and irrevocable changes in the representation of things and of the way they change" (Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism* ix). This construction of postmodernism is one that takes into account postmodernism as a challenge to the cultural logic.

Yet, if that challenge is having any effect, than those habits of reading that McHale suggests are scarcely conceivable may be becoming the habits of
reading of subjects in the postmodern world. The breaks in representation that
Jameson describes might be becoming a part of representation. Postmodernism
is transforming the culture (and the subjects in that culture). As Andreas
Huyssen notes, "the boundaries between high art and mass culture have
become increasingly blurred, and we should begin to see that process as one of
opportunity rather than lamenting loss of quality and failure of nerve" (ix).

Perhaps as a means of looking at postmodernism as representation, it
would be useful to turn to a place where high and low culture seem to be
blurring: the June 21, 1993 issue of *Time* magazine where Kurt Anderson
(obviously not writing exclusively to the members of the MLA) points out that "A
strain of cerebral artiness is suddenly proliferating in the mainstream, a funny
autodeconstruction that in the past decade has moved from European literature
(Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*), to West End theater (Michael
Frayn's *Noises Off*), to quality American pop: it is at the core of *The Larry
Sanders Show* on HBO, MTV's *Beavis and Butt-head* and the new Arnold
Schwarzenegger vehicle, *Last Action Hero*" (75). In these examples, and in
MTV and (some of) the music videos it broadcasts, we can see reflected the
incorporation of postmodern representation into pop culture. As N. Katherine
Hayles points out: "What are these videos telling us, if not that the
disappearance of a stable, universal context is the context for postmodern
culture" (*Chaos Bound* 272).
Postmodernism is constructed here not as a particular artistic movement in a chronological flow of movements, but as a reflection of and on the changing world view. Umberto Eco describes the postmodern not as "a chronologically circumscribed tendency but a spiritual category, or better yet a Kunstwollen (a Will-to-Art), perhaps a stylistic device and/or a world view." (Eco & Rossi, 242)

Post(modern Reader)

I would like to move forward then to try to construct a postmodernism engaged by the postmodern reader, a reader already reading within a postmodern world view. To return a moment to Brian McHale and Gravity's Rainbow, we can see how this reader might differ from the one described in the section above: "Metareaders, we no longer seek solutions to the cruxes of Pynchon's fiction, but rather metasolutions, accounts of the range of possible solutions and of what is at stake when any one particular solution is preferred over the others" (McHale 113). Postmodern texts challenge the earlier reader, but they also construct this postmodern reader (and perhaps demand this reader). The postmodern reader reads these texts not for certainty, but for engagement. The truth value of the text is not absolute, but its truthfulness is nonetheless engaging (the logic that confronts truth here is fuzzy). The postmodern reader can react, can feel, can understand, without certainty. That
is the reading strategy of the postmodern reader and the one which is asked of her/him by the postmodern text.

The earlier reader changed in/with the face of modernism (and earlier readers, too, changed in/with the face of the culture of their times): "If then we suddenly return to the present day, we can measure the immensity of the cultural changes that have taken place. Not only are Joyce and Picasso no longer weird and repulsive, they have become classics and now look rather realistic to us" (Frederic Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society" 124). If that reader is challenged by postmodernism, there is a postmodern reader, for whom Pynchon looks rather "realistic." Representation becomes slippery and uncertain, but the reader reads into those qualities of the text.

Since certainty's loss means a loss of the desire to control a text, the text then becomes a place where meaningful subjective engagement can be played out. Walter Davis argues that "consciousness must be internally constituted such that it is forced to mediate the difference it encounters in the world in order to develop its own inherent mediation of identity and difference" (357).

Postmodern readers can map postmodernism into their cognitive chaos and find a way to enact a postmodern "inwardness" (a problematic term, since "in" and "out" lose their stability). "The only end possible for a dialectic of inwardness and existence is an explicit appropriation of the full subjectivity evolved through the dialectical process as the basis of a praxis which projects awareness upon
history" (Davis 342). History here not being that essence toward which we finally turn, but that construct against which we pit our provisional mediation of that which is meaningful. This is not a question of relativism—a text means whatever I want—but a position of deconstructed subjectivity with a fuzzy logic that enables the subject to be aware simultaneously that something has meaning, but that the meaning is inherently unstable. This is not paradox, this is the fuzzy logic of postmodernism.

Post(script)

"In the world of the simulacrum, I have a real father who is dying."

At the Twentieth-Century Literature Conference in Louisville, Kentucky in 1992, a participant made this statement. It was made somewhat apologetically: in postmodern theory still grounded in binary cultural logic, "real" fathers seem to contradict the critique of presence implicit in postmodernism. In the fuzzy logic of postmodernism, this contradiction ceases to be a contradiction. "Real" fathers exist, even if their "reality" is no longer absolute. A postmodernism which denies the possibility of grief for dying fathers is a postmodernism impossible to reconcile with being human. A breakdown of old certainties means a need exists for a logic which can incorporate that breakdown with the demands of subjectivity. The statement above puts in play such a logic: we should neither reduce its critique (of the simulacra), nor its need (the real father). We can
engage that statement within its play and confront what it means for our subjectivity.
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