

**‘EXPLORING HANDS ENCOUNTER NO DEFENCE’:
THE EPISTEME OF VIOLENCE AND CONSUMPTION IN
*THE WASTE LAND***

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In his 1909 short story ‘The Machine Stops’, E.M. Forster depicts a futuristic world where humans can only communicate through cinematophotes at a time when it is against the spirit of the age to travel across the surface of the earth. Describing the interior space surrounding the protagonist, the narrator underlines its self-sustainability through the uneasy ubiquity of machines:

There were buttons and switches everywhere—buttons to call for food for music, for clothing. There was the hot-bath button, by pressure of which a basin of (imitation) marble rose out of the floor, filled to the brim with a warm deodorized liquid. There was the cold-bath button. There was the button that produced literature and there were of course the buttons by which she communicated with her friends. (90)

The condition characterising the setting of Forster’s story is a construct of a map of machines. The machines of communication in the story, although ontologically prosthetic, come to assume an interiorized quality that overdetermines the structure of pure human sentience. Such overdetermination occurs through a discursive network of functions and reductions that problematize the borderlines between the interior and the exterior, the auditorium and the sensorium, in a manner characterizing the cultural climate of twentieth-century modernity. In their encounters with cognitive contingencies and epistemic fault-lines immediately preceding the First World War, Modernist texts often assumed notions of spatio-temporality that deliberately register their own incompleteness. Violence in the context of twentieth-century modernity was a phenomenon constituted not only by the destruction and demographic dislocations wrought by the First World War but also by the

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indeterminacies and excesses in an age of mechanical reproduction and hyper-information increasingly invading the nerves and mind of modern man. The epistemic exchanges between urbanity and velocity with their corresponding aesthetics of automatism and shock determined the haptic and scopic shifts of European modernity that saw ‘machines take over functions of the central nervous system, and no longer, as in times past, merely those of muscles’ (Kittler 17). The human body in modernity thus often became a metonymic signifier of the body of the metropolis with the structural and functional analogies between the discourse network of machines and the neural networks of information and impulses. The new modes of communication and visuality that emerged in twentieth-century modernity—characterised most prominently and popularly in the gramophone, the radio and the cinema—incorporated the anxieties of liminal locations and relocations through disembodied voices and spectral visions. The body as technological waste and the body as sentient excess both manifested their modes in production paradigms and consumerist cultures in an age of machines. As Tim Armstrong contends, through a complex convergence of excess and lack, the capitalist fantasy of modernity posits an ambivalence inasmuch as

it offers the body as lack, at the same time as it offers technological compensation. Increasingly, that compensation is offered as a part of capitalism’s fantasy of the complete body in the mechanisms of advertising, cosmetics, cosmetic surgery, and cinema; all prosthetic in the sense that they promise the perfection of the body. (*Modernism, Technology and the Body* 3)

The dissociated corporeality of modernity is thus a cosmetic construct not only of technologized mimetic excess but also of the anxiety of incompleteness that vacillates between its private and collective speculums. Studying the epistemic shifts in the discursive reformulations of space and time from 1880 to 1918, Stephen Kern concluded with a statement on the contingent condition of the temporal present in modernity:

In an age of intrusive electronic communication ‘now’ became an extended interval of time that could, indeed must, include events around the world. Telephone switchboards, telephonic broadcasts, daily newspapers, World Standard Time, and the cinema mediated simultaneity through technology. The sinking of the

Titanic dramatized it with S.O.S messages beamed across the entire Atlantic world. (314)

The intrusion of information about an act of violence (in this case, the sinking of the *Titanic*) became in itself a violent act precisely because of its spectacular and sensational success in transmitting the trauma of the actual passengers. In this hyper-reflexive circuit of violence, the technology of transmission became problematically proximate to the real act. The sensationalism of the report of violence through hyper-information induces a mass hysteria that, in its turn, authors violence in the collective imagination that receives its report. Thus the transmission through switchboards emerges as the metonymy of discourse networks that sought to standardize the maps and meanings in early twentieth-century modernity, while also violating such maps of standardized sentience through its ability to disseminate hysteria.

The artistic reaction to the growth of the modern condition often comprised a convergence of ideological technophilia and technophobic nostalgia.¹ Similarly, the literary and cultural movements that informed what we classify as Modernism in literature and arts often incorporated an attitudinal ambivalence towards machines. Thus there was often the celebration of the machine and its modality of meaning. It reached its apotheosis in the Futurist Manifesto of 1909 that declared its love for machines and war against the historical past. Indeed, as Marinetti would go on to contend, the Futurist aesthetic was premised on the liquidation of the traditional norms of narrative and an appropriation of the velocity inherent in technology. Thus goes Marinetti's dictum in 'The New Religion Morality of Speed':

Victory of the self over the perfidious plots woven by our Weight, which wants to ambush and treasonably assassinate our velocity dragging it down into an immobile hole. Velocity = Scattering + condensation of the 'I'. All the distance covered by the body is condensed in that very body. (228)

Clearly advocating the automatism of the machine, Futurism looked to construct the culture of aeropoetry and immediacy. Despite the anarchic aesthetics that contributed to its ideological demise, Futurism was the first defined movement that sought to bridge the literary and the political-cultural through a violent vocabulary of machinic formations that later informed the discursive construct of the European avant-garde, its politics and praxis. As Marjorie Perloff states, 'The Futurist

Manifesto marks the transformation of what had traditionally been a vehicle for political statement into a literary, one might say, quasi-poetic construct' (81–82). The violence and velocity in modernity were ramifications of a culture that necessitated an increasing internalization of the vocabulary of the machine through the neural network of man that had to compulsively correspond to the traffic of the twentieth-century metropolis.² Although unequivocally different from the Futurist agenda of art and its promotions of technologized violence, the constructed quality of Eliot's early poetry was supported by its own manifesto of *difficulty* in order to be in dialectical correspondence with the epistemic shifts in sentience and the politics of shudder and cognition in twentieth-century modernity. This is voiced by Eliot in a profoundly provocative passage:

We can only say that it appears likely that poets in our civilization, as it exists at present, must be *difficult*. Our civilization comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results. The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning. (*Selected Prose* 65)

Eliot's statement of compulsory (and perhaps compulsive) difficulty assumes a complex significance in the context of its contemporary cultural climate. Essentially written to promote a particular genre of poetry, 'The Metaphysical Poets' is a profoundly political essay that traces the paradigm shifts in English poetry through its dialectics and dissociations. Particularly interesting in the essay is Eliot's use of metaphors of physical violence to narrate the rupture of sensibilities in post-Miltonic English poetry as well as to describe the compulsive difficulty that Modernist poetry would have to assume and appropriate in the rendition of its cultural climate. The heteroglossia and polyphony in *The Waste Land* can be read as symptomatic of the artistic reaction to the culture of classification and standardization in modernity by appropriating the episodic and the oneiric rather than the linear and the chrononormative.³ Seen in a more historical materialist light, the proliferation of allusions in *The Waste Land* is a deliberate violence against any homogenous reception and a negation of a 'pure' subject of utterance in a culture that saw the gramophone and the radio reify and re-play pure human voice endlessly. The consumption of 'pure' human

utterance in the map of machine modernity had featured in Eliot's Prufrock as well whose admitted inability to 'say' what he means had been followed immediately by the allusion to the performative magic lantern whose paradigmatic illuminations proposed a higher semiotic order than human utterance. The violence in modernity as depicted in Eliot's *The Waste Land* is a pervasive presence in the mutable cityscape as well as in the neural traffics overdetermined by the dialectic of prosthetic technology and its alienation effect.⁴ Along with Simmel's study of the metropolis and mental life and the nervous condition characterising modernity, the literature born out Modernist alienation is also resonant with the Russian Formalist *ostranenie* or the aesthetic of defamiliarization through a deliberate violence on language, syntax, structure, indeed on the spatiality of signs itself.⁵ Such an aesthetic of violence on the familiar in order to forge out a new semiotic structure and art form carries remarkable resonance with Eliot's own project and promotion of poetry that is deliberately difficult in the passage from 'The Metaphysical Poets'. It also offers an interesting subtext to Walter Benjamin's analysis of allegory in German tragedy.

In *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, Benjamin had defined the politics of allegorization in German theatre as a discursive praxis that entails the formation of a corpse. This for him is an imperative stage of allegory-formation in the construct of the *Trauerspiel*, one which sees the corpse as a form of life from the point of view of death, and thus carries images of corpses growing hair and fingernails, the dead matter that is cut off from the living metabolic body (Benjamin 217-20). *The Waste Land* dramatizes a darker allegory of the *Trauerspiel* of modernity with its image of the sprouting corpse, the human engine, the gramophone and the deathless Tiresias in one complex montage of violence and ventriloquisms. The violence in *The Waste Land* is both a signifier of the debris of the First World War as well as an externalisation of the melancholy and boredom that could be considered symptomatic of the hypertrophy in twentieth-century machinic modernity. The dialectic of violence in *The Waste Land* and the violence on the poem is historicized through its process of production through a network of fragments and excesses that were typed away in different typewriters at different points of time.⁶ Such a condition is constituted by—although by no means overdetermined by—Eliot's personal state, suffering from the effects of violence on the nerves. The violence on *The Waste Land* happens also through the polyphonic performance (shown by Eliot's initial choice of title for his poem, 'He Do the Police in Many Voices') that blurs the borderlines between high and low-culture, the deathless mythical and the consumptive historical, between bodiless

insight and embodied epiphany through a complex dialectic of ‘chiastic repetitions and reversals’ (Riquelme 24). Interestingly enough, in the ‘The Metaphysical Poets’, Eliot alludes to Jean Epstein, the French avant-garde filmmaker and theorist who argued for the correlation of cinema and the new poetry in the age of automatism, describing cinema itself as a relay between the nervous system of the audience and the auditorium and the cinematic persona of Charlie Chaplin as embodying photogenic neurasthenia (Epstein 240). The nervous energy that cinema showcased through its automatism and visual violence is perhaps most directly systematized in the discourse of the montage principle advocated by early filmmakers such as Sergei Eisenstein and D.W. Griffith. Essentially an editing technique that sought to deconstruct the seamlessness of cinematic narrative, the montage principle was a visual violence on the standardized mimetic principle of cinema. In its discursive thrust, the montage of early cinema bears an interesting resemblance to the Formalist *ostranenie* inasmuch as both sought to address attention to the self-reflexivity of the formative narrative. Eisenstein would go on to define the montage form ‘as a reconstruction of the laws of the thought process’ (‘Help Yourself’ 236). The jerks and cuts of the montage editing technique showcased a narrative that did not aspire to continuity but rather sought to make a spectacle of its own fractures and fault-lines. Eliot’s early poetry appears to appropriate similar strategies of construction through violent juxtapositions and slideshows of urban life. The automatism inherent in the process of poetry production is dramatized aptly in ‘The Metaphysical Poets’ by the aesthetics of creative formation of new wholes through ‘the noise of the typewriter or the smell of cooking’ (*Selected Prose* 64).

Two years before *The Waste Land* was published, Robert Wiene’s *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* was released and received massive critical acclaim, ushered in as the defining moment of German Expressionist Cinema. An unreliable narrative of mesmerism that assumed political overtones from the outset, *Caligari* was actually much less avant-garde than it was originally intended to be.⁷ But with its complex photoplay and angular architecture, *Caligari* was quick to become an allegory of the horror that was politically invested with the terror of hegemonic Fascism. The architecture of German Expressionist cinema achieved a remarkable resonance in the imagery and montage visuality of Modernist poetry, which also sought to address the urban ethnography in twentieth-century hegemonic technocracy. As Susan McCabe states in her fascinating study, the brokenness of the Modernist poetic image was in close correspondence with the montage principle of early cinema and the hysteria induced by the First World War:

The body of the Modernist poem gained new angles, line breaks, asymmetries, and synapses, shifting within and through the very technologies that disoriented the relationship of the human body, no longer framed or harmonized by Cartesian perspective, to time and space. More particularly, film's ability to repeat a series of movements, separated within time, effectively displaced any illusions of wholeness as either aesthetic or bodily principle. (3–4)

What is interesting in McCabe's argument is cinema's ability to deconstruct the Cartesian body, an aesthetic that is readily appropriated by the poetry of Modernism based on the debris of the broken subject after the First World War. Cinema enters Eliot's *The Waste Land* as a metaphor of visual violence that is further stylized by the disorder that is dramatized throughout the poem, by its images of sprouting corpses and the crowd of commuters cutting across the metropolis and its beats of clock time. The metropolis in *The Waste Land* appears through the visuality of a cinematic shot that is careful to convey the translucence of urban ethnographic formations: 'Unreal City/ Under the brown fog of a winter dawn' (60–61).⁸ Eliot's depiction of the city bears fascinating similarity not only to contemporary city cinema exemplified by Charles Sheeler's *Manhatta* (1921), Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin: The Symphony of a Great City* (1927) and Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) but also with the urban ethnography of his day. In his description of the early twentieth-century German city from a distance, the ethnographer Friedrich Ratzel had underlined the brownness of the modern cityscape:

The wanderer who approaches the city from the distance sees first of all the brown clouds of mist and smoke that lie over it, and underneath dimly the multi-stacked profile of the high pile of buildings and right angles, an image that may remind one of the silhouettes of a harsh rocky landscape. (qtd. in Frisby 135)

The brown mists that Ratzel describes are obvious pointers to the industrial smog and dirt that subsume the city in a way that conditions the characters in *The Waste Land* into exhaling their short and infrequent sighs:

I had not thought death had undone so many.
 Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,
 And each man fixed his eyes before his feet. (63–65)

The passage is a reflection on the violence and the hypertrophy induced by the procrustean metropolis on the human soul, consumed by the condition of post–War fractures and fault–lines which characterized modernity. The reference to Saint Mary Woolnoth and its dead sound at the stroke of nine carries obvious connotations of spiritual decadence, symptomatic of compulsive standardization of space and time. Such a condition reflects the numbness born out of the post–war shudder which the passer–by felt in the cosmopolitan crowd. The episteme of violence in *The Waste Land* is woven through a complex interplay of myth and history, allegory and personal narrative, wars and private shudder. Thus while the Battle of Mylae becomes an allegory of the war that had planted its corpses that would sprout, the historical presence of the First World War is rendered through snatches of conversation in a pub that weave in the misuse of pills, premature ageing and sexual decadence while also pointing towards the possibilities of infertility and infidelity. The episode in the pub is particularly important in the context of violence in *The Waste Land*. The premature ageing that the working–class Lil complains of at the age of thirty–one is the result of medicinal intake to prevent pregnancy, becoming in its turn the forced violence on the normal biologic body. The vocabulary of violence in this section is fascinating as it transfers the pain of bodily violence from the warring soldier to his prematurely ageing wife in the civilian urban space. Thus while Albert the soldier is back from the War and wants to have a good time, his wife Lil appears to embody the painful contraception that prevents her from being sufficiently sexualized. As the pub scene with its conversations suggests, the violence on the human body is a complex convergence of the military and the civilian spaces with the metropolis, emerging as an epistemic space for re–cognitions and re–configurations through medicine and technology. In its seemingly random traffic of trauma that is increasingly familiarized and ritualized in the post–First World War metropolis, moving from historical specificity to the meta–presence of unreality, *The Waste Land* appropriates what Eliot himself had classified in ‘Philip Massinger’ as ‘direct communications through the nerves’ (*Selected Prose* 160). The shudder of recognition with which ‘The Burial of the Dead’ ends constitutes an epistemic violence that underlines both the mythic (The Battle of Mylae) as well as the historical war Eliot’s poem emerges from. Such a shudder is characteristic of the nervous negotiations and reconfigurations in post–First World War

European modernity that contained the vocabulary of violence beneath the velocity of the machinic metropolis. In his analysis of the shudder in modernity, Theodor Adorno defined it as the moment of epistemic violence that emerges as ‘a memento of the liquidation of the I, which, shaken, perceives its own limitedness and finitude’ (245). The shudder in Eliot’s poem is followed immediately by the allusion to the sprouting corpse, itself a further pointer to the incomplete burial of the dead from the First World War, highlighting a scene that offers a double discourse of violence—one that causes bodily death and one that causes the incompleteness of ritual burial.

A number of social theorists, including Georg Simmel, have read modernity as primarily a nervous condition induced and overdetermined by the system of shocks the metropolis was capable of inflicting, with its traffic signals and street corners. The historical growth of *The Waste Land* from Eliot’s own nervous breakdown and experiences at Lausanne is well known.⁹ But what is more significant in the context of my argument is the way that human nerves and the technology of transmission establish a dialectical correspondence that both implicates the individual agency of percipience as well as the violence in the fault-lines of larger semiotic structures. The dialectic of death and painful deathlessness is dramatized across the landscape of *The Waste Land* with allusions to bodily violence through the figures of Ophelia, Philomela, Sibyl, Hieronymo and Tiresias. However, as Hugh Kenner notes, the theme of death in *The Waste Land* is most strongly voiced by a vocabulary of violence born out of an impasse across the desire for expression in an increasingly standardized space and time. Analysing the thematic correlation between the figures of Tiresias and Hieronymo in their locations in the politics and praxis of time, Kenner asserts:

He [Tiresias] is often the prophet who knows but withholds his knowledge, just as Hieronymo, who is mentioned at the close of the poem, knew how the tree he had planted in his garden came to bear his dead son, but was compelled to withhold that knowledge until he could write a play which, like *The Waste Land*, employs several languages and a framework of allusions impenetrable to anyone but the ‘hypocrite lecteur’. (144)

The body of Tiresias, with its shrunken female breasts, becomes the metonymic signifier of the violent amalgamation of the mythic and the machinic in twentieth-century modernity. Emerging as a helpless and

deathless overseer as well as a reified recorder of human violence and loss, Tiresias in *The Waste Land* embodies organic blindness as well as a technologized visual excess. Blindness in Modernist texts often emerges as an aberration of the human eye as well as the performance of a special scopic vision. Both entail violence on the body biologic as well as the body textual and, as Tim Armstrong contends, ‘At times the blind man simply flickers through modernist texts as an index of visual disruption’ (*Modernism: A Cultural Study* 102). In his remarkable study of intertextuality and film, Mikhail Iampolski describes *The Waste Land* as a film of modern life and reads the figure of Tiresias in Eliot’s poem as enacting a mode of vision that is also a mimetic memory that ‘sees the fragmented images of the world around us, images that its vision tries to arrange within the vast labyrinth we call culture’ (4). The violence in *The Waste Land* is not only enacted by the rhetoric of uncanny urbanity and nervous breakdown in the poem but also in the syntax and order of the words in page. In its curious juxtaposition of decadent neural economy and disseminated signs across the page, *The Waste Land* premises its vectors of violence that constitute the failing human body through the spatial arrangement of the words on the page. This is most directly and immediately demonstrated by the following passage from ‘A Game of Chess’:

‘My nerves are bad tonight. Yes, bad. Stay with me.
 Speak to me. Why do you never speak? Speak.
 What are you thinking of? What thinking? What?
 I never know what you are thinking. Think’.

I think we are in rat’s alley
 Where the dead men lost their bones.

‘What is that noise?’

The wind under the door.

‘What is that noise now? What is the wind doing?’

Nothing again nothing.

‘Do

‘You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember
 Nothing?’ (111–23)

The effect of violence on the human nerves manifests itself in violence on the syntax of communication. It is transferred over to the array of printed signs across the page as a moving metonymy of the alphabetism

of the age and its neurotic vocabulary. The spatial juxtapositions and aberrations across the printed page emerge from a performance in typing on a typewriter through a deconstruction of its standardized spatial grammar. The violence on the typewriter thus employs the vocabulary of the nerves that reflects back on a cognitive chaos. Thus this discursive traffic between the human nerves and the typewriter comes to signal the disorder of the cultural condition that consumed the body of modernity.

In a fascinating passage in *One-Way Street*, Walter Benjamin reads the overabundance and excessive dissemination of the printed sign in modernity as the scripted signifier of violence whereby ‘printing, having found in the book a refuge in which to lead an autonomous existence, is pitilessly dragged out onto the street by advertisements and subjected to the brutal heteronomies of economic chaos’ (62). The collapsed communication corresponding to the neurasthenic condition in *The Waste Land* is rendered through typographical and spatial aberrations that collectively become the signifier of the violence and contingency in modernity. The spatial randomness of words across the page thus becomes an allegory of an internalised vocabulary of violence on the subject of modernity through the body of the typewriter. As the borderline as well as the material bridge between the scopic and the haptic, the typewriter as a machine was endowed with an ability that could assume the spirit of semiotic production as well as become the constructor of chaos through an automatic and endless dissemination of signs. Friedrich Kittler’s brilliant study demonstrates how the term ‘typewriter’ meant both the machine for typing as well as the female agent that enacted the typing process, a tool as well as a machine for word production that increasingly nullified the human hand in a post-industrial world. Kittler defines the typewriter, emerging as a writing machine after the American Civil War, as

a discursive machine gun. A technology whose basic action not coincidentally consists of strikes and triggers...in automated and discrete steps as does ammunitions transport in a revolver and a machine-gun, or celluloid transport in a film projector. (191)

In its incorporation of trigger-technology and the automation of ammunition, the typewriter appropriates the vocabulary of violence in its very mode of writing. *The Waste Land* further problematizes the protracted violence on the typewriter with the image of sexual violence on the body of the female typist by the carbuncular clerk. The *locus delicti* also contains the presence of the deathless Tiresias in a complex

mixture of myth, history and body that ends with the abused female body appropriating the indifference of the automaton and resorting back to the automatism of the gramophone, enacting two complex rituals of consumption. The typist assumes the automatism of the typewriter during the moment of her own consumption, which is also a moment of violence. In effect she *becomes* the typewriter, positing indifferent submission to the hands that consume her body. Thus the encountering hands of the carbuncular clerk that seeks to explore the body of the typist receive no resistance. Appropriately enough, the vocabulary of violation here is also that of violence:

Flushed and decided, he assaults at one;
Exploring hands encounter no defence;
His vanity requires no response,
And makes a welcome of indifference. (239–42)

The use of the transitive verb *assault* here is interesting as well as appropriate, as it serves to convey the violence on the body of the typist committed by the clerk. In an era in which typewriter and typist were often conjoined in commercial vocabulary, the clerk's assault on the typist carries resonance with the violence on the writing machine itself, corroborating Kittler's analogy of the typewriter and the machine gun. The automatic hand of the typist that puts a record on the gramophone at the end of the ritual of violence becomes symbolically synchronic to the hand that changes the lever of the typewriter carriage after the completion of a page in order to embark on another repetitive ritual that appropriates the automatism of the writing machine. In its move to consume the reified human voice via the gramophone, the automatic hand of the typist becomes metonymic of machinic modernity, connoting the praxis of typewriting in modernity in a way that evokes what Benjamin describes as the over-dissemination of the printed sign.

The typewriter with its technology of triggers and strikes fired away like automatic ammunition in a culture of mechanical reproduction where decimation and dissemination often occupied the same plane. The act of typing and the act of violating thus become coplanar in *The Waste Land* as the human body becomes the machine in a closed space where the typist is consumed by the clerk. The typewriter and the typist, the agent and the act, merge into one single symbol of violation and consumption through the 'automatic hand' that puts the record on the gramophone after the departure of the assaulter. The automatic hand thus connects the typist and the clerk whose exploring hands on the typist's body consume through loveless libido. The passage from *The Waste*

what Benjamin defines in *The Arcades Project*, in a section entitled ‘Boredom, Eternal Return’, as ‘the index to participation in the sleep of the collective’: it is a numbness born out of the compulsive and convulsive condition that characterised the dweller of the modern metropolis (108). The female typist in Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, by being a signifier of consumption and violence, becomes the Benjaminian dialectical image through its vacillations between agency and allegory in a culture of commodity and scopophilia in machinic modernity. The gramophone on which the poem zooms in directly after the sexual act is a further symbol of machinic modernity in all its prosthesis and aesthesis, being a machine that could store, play and reproduce sound without any concern for meaning. As Maurice Renard’s 1907 short story ‘Death in the Shell’ shows, the phonograph as an acoustic machine was capable of a new erotic constructs through its affective aesthetics that could stimulate the human nervous system through a systematized violence ‘under the [dual] conditions of gramphony and telephony’ (Kittler 56). In *The Waste Land*, however, the gramophone becomes an index of post-coital passive consumption addressing an increasingly ruptured human sensorium in an interiorized space.

The violence in Eliot’s poem contains bodily as well as epistemic dimensions in its showcasing of a metropolis that emerges as a meta-space of urban rituals, law and loss. More problematically, as this essay has attempted to show, the epistemology of such a vocabulary of violence incorporates the very text that contains it, and the body of *The Waste Land* emerges as analogous to the ruptured liminal landscapes of the metropolis it describes with its machines and human wreckage. As the ‘time’s chief poet of the alarm clock, the furnished flat, the ubiquitous telephone, commuting crowds, the electric underground railway’, Eliot highlights the automatism of modernity in its episteme and aesthetic of shock (Kenner *The Mechanic Muse* 25). *The Waste Land*, despite its heavy editing and erudite endnotes, remains a poem about the violence and the violations of cultural modernity, a violence that not only extends to the discourses of consumption and the praxes of a fractured culture after the First World War, but also to the act of writing itself. Eliot’s poem is about the contingent location of art itself in an era where the machine that writes is characterized by technological principles analogous to that of machines that annihilate. The body of *The Waste Land* thus emerges as a bruised tissue of texts torn from their auratic locations and forced into contingent economies of meaning, appropriating both the indirectness and the difficulty that Eliot advocated as principles for Modernist poetry. The episteme of violence in Eliot’s poem—set in post-War Europe and characterized by complete losses

and incomplete oblivions, collective heteroglossia and private hysteria, technologized stimulation and nervous boredom—is increasingly relevant to the cognitive complexities across the virtual spaces and discursive multiculturalism(s) we live in today.

NOTES

¹ Anxiety over and resistance to the culture of machines was a prevalent theme in the nineteenth-century imagination as well, especially in the works of Ruskin and Carlyle. However, what distinguished the twentieth century from earlier epochs was its formulaic production techniques, the construction of a compulsive metropolitan intelligence that bred its decadent boredom, and the increasing internalization of the vocabulary of automatism and immediacy induced by machinic culture. It was the movement from prosthesis to aisthesis that characterized the early twentieth-century sensibility and its ruptures in the human sensorium. See Danius 25–34.

² For a fascinating study of the growth of modern urban architecture and its network of streets on the model of the human neural network see Sennett 324–32.

³ See Schwarz 37: ‘The structure of the poem is prelogical consisting of images and statements, pronouncements, juxtaposed without interconnecting logical syntax, just as in a dream’.

⁴ Siegfried Kracauer describes the condition of modern existence as a dialectic of boredom and shock, determined exponentially by such technologies of perception as the radio and cinema, and having the potential to depict a ‘fragmented sequence of splendid sense impressions’ (*The Mass Ornament* 326).

⁵ For an interesting parallel between Russian Formalism and the poetry of Baudelaire which defamiliarized the episteme of loss in modernity, see Flatley 6–7.

⁶ For a noteworthy study of the various models of typewriters used by Eliot for the composition of *The Waste Land*, see Rainey 1–70.

⁷ For a detailed history of the conception of *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari*, and its eventual ideological compromise in depicting the entire plot as a madman’s narrative at the end, see Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler* 69.

⁸ All quotations from *The Waste Land* are from Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*.

⁹ See Ackroyd 109–30 and Gordon 183: ‘In the sanatorium in Lausanne, Dr. Vittoz saw Eliot for half-an-hour each day when he would place his hand on a patient’s forehead to determine the agitation of what

he believed were physical brain waves. The cure was to concentrate on a simple word with a view to “calm” and “control”.... The final part of *The Waste Land*, written at one sitting at the Hotel Ste Luce, carries out this meditative exercise, choosing to focus on “water” to the point when agitation is dissolved in “calm”, “beating obedient/ To controlling hands”.

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